



Northumberland County Council

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

21 JANUARY 2021

iNORTHUMBERLAND UPDATE

Report of: Director of Information and Technology

Cabinet Member: Councillor N Oliver

Superfast Broadband Rollout

The NCC contract with BT to rollout superfast broadband across the county came to an end during 2020 and has seen around 94% of properties in Northumberland able to access superfast speeds (30 Mbps or above). Take up of services by residents/businesses across the county is 73.24% which is significantly higher than the original expectation of 20-30%, resulting in over £4m being returned to date to Northumberland County Council to be re-invested in further fibre roll out.

Rural Gigabit Voucher Funding – ends March 2021

In line with national policy, our priority now is to connect as many properties across the county to gigabit capable broadband connections (1,000 Mbps or above). The team are currently working with almost 40 local communities to help them get full fibre connections via Openreach or one of the other 7 fibre suppliers currently active in Northumberland.

Funding is available to rural properties with connections slower than 100 Mbps via the national Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme and, for those with speeds lower than 30 Mbps, there is top-up funding available through the Digital Borderlands voucher scheme (part of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal). Both these funds have a commitment deadline of 31st March 2021, so it is vital that as many registrations as possible are completed during January and February. Once vouchers are committed, suppliers will have up to 12 months to deliver the service.

	 GIGABIT BROADBAND VOUCHER SCHEME		 Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal		Total Available Funding
Business	Up to £3500	+	Up to £3500	=	Up to £7000
Residential	Up to £1500	+	Up to £1500	=	Up to £3000

If members are aware of any communities that may want to benefit from this funding please get in touch with one of the iNorthumberland team.

Northumberland was one of 4 areas chosen to take part in a pilot campaign to raise awareness of funding for Broadband and to encourage new suppliers to come to Northumberland. At the end of October there were over 2000 properties who registered interest. The team is working through the data and liaising with suppliers to help communities progress to delivery.

Local Full Fibre Network

Following on from the Rural Schools pilot that saw fibre broadband installed in 18 rural schools across the county, gigabit capable fibre broadband is being rolled out to over 260 public buildings across Northumberland.

The project will install full fibre broadband to schools, libraries, NHS buildings, and more. The contract was awarded to BT and will be delivered in 6 phases, the first having been completed in December 2020 and the sixth delivered by March 2022.

In parallel, work is underway to ensure homes and businesses surrounding these buildings can benefit from the installation of fibre to these locations.

Future funding

DCMS is continuing to develop plans for the next stages of fibre roll out across the UK. An announcement in early December, following the Chancellor's Spending Review, reduced the national target for gigabit capable coverage to a minimum of 85% of properties by 2025, and the Government has committed to investing £5 billion to bring gigabit coverage to the hardest to reach areas.

This investment is expected to include three key areas of relevance to Northumberland:

- **Vouchers** – building on the existing voucher schemes
- **Public sector hubs** – building on work such as LFFN and the need for the Council to re-procure its Wide Area Network in the near future
- **Outside In procurement** – DCMS is looking to allocate funding via a competitive procurement process currently known as 'Outside In'. This mechanism will launch in 2021 and will build on lessons from the Superfast Programme.

Northumberland County Council is currently involved in discussions with DCMS as to how to shape these programmes locally. Further details will be made available when known.

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