

Local Government Association Briefing

Rollout of superfast fibre broadband

House of Lords

27 October 2016



KEY MESSAGES

- Access to fast and reliable digital connectivity is a necessity for households and businesses in the UK. Councils have continually raised on-going concerns over residents' lack of access to fast and reliable broadband especially in rural areas.
- The LGA's '*Up to Speed*' campaign aims to ensure that every resident and business has access to faster broadband.¹ It also highlights a number of success stories of how local authorities have developed their own broadband delivery frameworks. *Up to Speed* has received national media coverage and led to the Government clarifying that broadband speeds will keep pace with consumers' needs, a key request of the LGA.
- Local authorities are best placed to understand the digital needs of local areas and have supported the extension of the Superfast Broadband Programme. Almost £750 million of the £1.7 billion invested in this Programme has come from local government.
- Many councils are aiming to extend provision beyond the Programme's target of connecting 95 per cent of premises and, in some places, are hoping to achieve closer to 100 per cent by using funding from claw-back clauses in supplier contracts. Despite this, there will inevitably be some premises, mainly from remote rural areas, that will not be reached by the existing programme.
- The Government's proposed creation of a broadband Universal Service Obligation is a step in the right direction for creating a safety net to residents and businesses not connected. The Government must remain resolute in implementing the USO and ensure it keeps pace with national average speeds and the expectations of households, provides consistent upload speeds and obligates providers to fix faults with connections within appropriate timescales.

Briefing

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Digital connectivity

Access to fast and reliable digital connectivity is a necessity for households and businesses in the UK. Councils have continually raised on-going concerns over residents' lack of access to fast and reliable broadband especially in rural areas.

Broadband is a vital element in our everyday lives as we shop and pay our household bills online, access our bank accounts and stay in touch with distant friends and relatives. Excellent digital connectivity is also a major driver behind growth, jobs and the emerging creative industries.

Without high quality broadband services, residents will be increasingly cut off from

¹ [LGA 'Up to Speed' campaign website](#)

digital local and central government services, including major transformation programmes like Universal Credit and the Government's aspiration to make the NHS paperless by 2020. Fast broadband services are also an essential utility for all rural businesses, enabling them to reach their full potential and compete online.

Councils and the rollout of the Superfast Broadband Programme

Councils are best placed to understand the digital needs of local areas and have strongly supported the extension of access to fast and reliable connectivity through the Superfast Broadband Programme. The Government defines superfast as speeds greater than 24Mbps.

In England each County Council or Local Enterprise Partnership is leading the broadband roll-out in their area. Councils have played a big role in the extension of digital connectivity to households through the Superfast Broadband Programme and around £740 million of the £1.7 billion invested in this has come from local government.² Many councils are aiming to beat the Government's national target of 95 per cent coverage of premises by December 2017.

Many local authorities are aiming to extend provision beyond the Government's national target of 95 per cent coverage of premises by December. In some places, councils are hoping to achieve closer to 100 per cent by using funding from claw-back clauses in supplier contracts. Despite this, there will inevitably be some premises, mainly from remote rural areas, that will not be reached by the current programme of work. Councils are working to find solutions to extend provision to those in the final five percent.

Over the next five years, commercial roll outs in our towns and cities (such as Virgin Media's Project Lightning) will almost certainly see national average download speeds rise sharply. By 2020, it is likely that over 60 per cent of residents will be able to access services of 300Mbps and faster, with over 95 per cent of premises being able to access at least 30Mbps.

The Government's proposed creation of a broadband Universal Service Obligation is a step in the right direction for creating a safety net to residents and businesses not yet connected. The Government must remain resolute in implementing the USO and ensure it:

- Keeps pace with national average speeds and the expectations of households, especially at peak times.
- Provides consistent upload speeds; and
- Obligates providers to fix faults with connections within appropriate timescales.

The LGA's 'Up to Speed' campaign

Our *Up to Speed* campaign aims to ensure that every resident and business has access to faster broadband. The <http://www.lgaupertospeed.org/> website provides an online resource which enables people to test the broadband in their area, maps local broadband speeds and provides further information on how to make the best broadband accessible. *Up to Speed* has received national media coverage and led to the Government clarifying that broadband speeds will keep pace with consumers' needs, a key request of the LGA.

² [LGA media release, 'Councils urge Government to reaffirm its Broadband Commitment', July 2016](#)

The *Up to Speed* campaign highlights a number of success stories of how local authorities have developed their own broadband delivery frameworks, for example:

- **Broadband for the Rural North (B4RN)** was launched in December 2011 by a local volunteer group when it became clear that many homes and businesses would lie outside the areas identified to receive superfast broadband. B4RN relies almost entirely on local investors in the community – by 2015 the community had raised £1.5 million in shares and £1 million in loan capital to get the project off the ground. Community members can contribute by buying shares, subscribing to the service, volunteering time and skills, offering access to their land, attending meetings, and helping to spread the word with fliers, posters and stickers. A total of 1,500 residents are now connected to superfast broadband through B4RN broadband in Lancashire, North Yorkshire and Cumbria.
- **Superfast Essex** is one of 44 Broadband Delivery UK projects across the country, aiming to provide 95 per cent of premises in Essex with superfast broadband by 2019. As part of the programme, councillors from Essex County Council and Epping Forest District Council have launched the Superfast Essex Rural Challenge Project in a pilot area to bring faster connectivity to some of the hardest to reach rural areas, in partnership with ultrafast broadband provider Gigaclear. Gigaclear has invested £5.5 million in the Rural Challenge Project with £2 million of public funding from Essex County Council, BDUK and Epping Forest District Council. Gigaclear is now installing its pure fibre cable network directly to over 4,500 homes and businesses, providing internet speeds of up to 1000Mbps: 1,000 times faster than currently available in the area and 40 times faster than the UK average.
- **Berkshire's** six unitary councils and Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) joined together to work on a government-backed project 'Superfast Berkshire' with the aim of connecting the whole region to superfast broadband. To connect the last nine per cent of hardest to reach homes and businesses, Berkshire's councils are using a mix of private and public sector funded projects to drive superfast broadband coverage to the area. Superfast Berkshire identified businesses struggling because of poor broadband access, then engaged with high-speed internet provider WarwickNet, who initially provided a range of broadband solutions to three sites across Berkshire, with further plans to extend their network to an additional 60 industrial estates and business parks across the county.