

Connecting Devon and Somerset

Briefing Note, October 14, 2022

Project Gigabit and the CDS programme



Introduction

This briefing sets out the current position in Devon and Somerset with the Government's national Project Gigabit and the local Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) programmes, the differences between them and how they interact including the Gigabit Voucher Top-Up and Gigabit Voucher Schemes in the CDS area.

Project Gigabit background

Project Gigabit is the Government's £5 billion programme to deliver gigabit-capable* broadband networks to a minimum of 85% of UK homes and businesses by the end of 2025 with the remainder connected by 2030 "where it is value for money to do so."** The intention is to provide access to gigabit-capable broadband to premises in areas which will not be connected by network providers under their commercial plans or by subsidised contracts operated by local programmes such as CDS. *Download speeds of 1000Mbps i.e. 1" gigabit". **[DCMS Accounting Officer Assessment](#)

Delivery of these targets will be achieved through subsidised contracts with commercial providers. The setting of contract areas, contract procurement and management will be undertaken centrally by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), an executive agency of the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). There is no requirement for local government funding contributions.

The delivery of gigabit-capable networks is not an automatic upgrade for homeowners and businesses. As with any subsidised network build people will still need to order and pay for the actual service from a commercial internet service provider (ISP).

Project Gigabit in Devon and Somerset

BDUK has divided the country [into potential contract areas or "lots"](#). Devon and Somerset, including Bath and North East Somerset, Plymouth, North Somerset and Torbay, is in "Lot 6".

BDUK currently estimates there are 159,600 premises in the region they believe will not be connected to gigabit-capable networks by commercial providers. BDUK has given an indicative value of £198 million to £337 million for the Lot 6 contract(s). It should be noted that premises may already have access to superfast broadband (30Mbps).

BDUK has begun a [Public Review \(consultation\) for Lot 6](#) to help identify areas in Devon and Somerset "that may be suitable for future public funding for gigabit-capable broadband."

The agency has published a proposed [map](#) of eligible areas and says it wants to hear from all relevant stakeholders including the public, businesses, ISPs and broadband infrastructure companies.

The consultation closes on November 4, 2022. BDUK currently anticipates launching contract(s) procurement in April, 2023, with contract award January to March 2024.

CDS and Project Gigabit

CDS intends to make a formal submission to the Public Review. However, CDS has already expressed a view, based on local experience, that Government expectations about the amount of gigabit-capable broadband to be delivered commercially in rural areas may be optimistic.

CDS has indicated to BDUK its strong wish to see Project Gigabit adopting an “outside-in” approach to its roll-out to ensure very-hard-to-reach areas are not left behind and for the earliest possible start. CDS believes further subsidised gigabit-capable network build must play a critical role in levelling up rural and coastal areas struggling with poor economic growth and deprivation.

In May 2021, in [response](#) to DCMS’ Project Gigabit pre-launch consultation, CDS welcomed confirmation of further Government investment in digital connectivity in Devon and Somerset and said: “In terms of when would we like the procurements to start – assuming there is no overlap intended with our live contracts delivering gigabit capable solutions, we would say quickly to support our economy and communities.”

CDS believes that locally focused **top-up voucher schemes** can provide vital in-filling and empower hard-to-reach communities. CDS is keen to work with BDUK on developing more of these solutions as it is already doing in the Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Mendip and Sedgemoor areas (see below).

Given the delivery pressures affecting all providers in the industry generally, CDS also believes it is of key importance that Project Gigabit does not over-stretch the capacity and resources of infrastructure providers and their supply chains. Therefore, it will be important for BDUK to take account of market conditions and capabilities.

CDS has created a Project Gigabit information webpage [here](#).

CDS local contracts

CDS is a local government-led local programme, the largest in England. CDS has six live subsidised contracts underway in Devon and Somerset with Airband, Openreach and Wessex Internet to deliver full fibre (gigabit-capable) broadband networks to over 46,000 homes and businesses by the end of 2024.

The contracts are with and managed by CDS. The accountable body is Somerset County Council.

The contracts are supported by investment from CDS partner councils, the Heart of the South West LEP and the Government.

In the Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Mendip and Sedgemoor areas, CDS is re-investing over £2 million into a Gigabit Voucher Top-Up Scheme managed by BDUK and which is now up and running. CDS’ local authority and LEP funding has been reinvested from the termination of the [Truespeed contract](#). See **Gigabit Voucher Top-Up Scheme, page 3** for more detail.

To date, more than 315,000 premises have been connected through the CDS programme, more than any programme in England. The majority are superfast connections, although increasingly new and upgraded connections are gigabit-capable.

There are no plans for further local programme contracts. Future gigabit-capable broadband networks will be delivered commercially or via Project Gigabit through subsidised contracts or voucher schemes.

Gigabit Voucher Top-up Scheme (BaNES, North Somerset, Mendip, Sedgemoor)

CDS is piloting a voucher top-up scheme in Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Mendip and Sedgemoor jointly with BDUK. CDS local authority partners for those areas and the Heart of the South West LEP have agreed to reinvest over £2 million of their funding from the terminated Truespeed contract to enable more homes and businesses to get gigabit-capable broadband through the national Gigabit Voucher Scheme.

It means that the value of BDUK vouchers in [Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset](#) has been increased to £2,500 for home connections and £4,500 for businesses.

In the [Mendip and Sedgemoor](#) areas the value of BDUK vouchers for home connections is enhanced to £4,500 and to £6,500 for businesses. The additional value in Mendip and Sedgemoor is made possible by the contribution from the LEP whose coverage area includes those Districts.

In liaison with BDUK, CDS officers are working with local broadband providers to identify a short-list of suitable communities that could quickly benefit from participating in the top-up scheme.

BDUK has agreed to accept all valid applications for enhanced vouchers up until the point the agency sets its intervention area(s) for its Lot 6 Project Gigabit contract(s) which is expected to be in March 2023. Once accepted by BDUK, top-up voucher schemes will be treated as “Voucher Priority Areas” (VPAs) and can proceed to completion unaffected by the Project Gigabit procurement process.

Except for voucher schemes already accepted, a BDUK moratorium on vouchers will be in operation from the point the Project Gigabit intervention area is set through to contact(s) award in early 2024. CDS and BDUK will apply learning from the pilot to develop future top-up schemes.

Gigabit Voucher Scheme

CDS continues to support the delivery of BDUK’s general [Gigabit Voucher Scheme](#) through publicity, help and advice to local communities and financial support from the [CDS Challenge Fund](#), where appropriate. As with the Voucher Top-Up Scheme, a BDUK moratorium on vouchers will be in operation for those premises included in the Project Gigabit intervention area through to contact(s) award in early 2024 except where schemes have already been accepted.

BDUK has informed CDS it is planning changes to the Voucher Scheme, subject to Treasury approval, “to help drive delivery in those areas most hard to reach” and “better aligns to existing commercial coverage and build plans”. We will provide more information when we get it.

Mobile Boost Scheme

CDS operates the Mobile Boost Scheme, funded through the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership’s Growth Deal, which is upgrading indoor 4G mobile phone coverage in rural areas. The initiative has helped over 1,105 small businesses and homes which have inadequate coverage, or only have access to one provider and are struggling with connectivity. Businesses and households in Somerset, Devon, Torbay and Plymouth can apply for a voucher of up to £1,200 towards the cost of a mobile signal booster from a registered supplier. The value of the voucher is dependent on the type of technology most suitable for the premises.

For further information please contact Peter Doyle, peter.doyle@devon.gov.uk, 07971 545286 or visit [Connecting Devon and Somerset](#).

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