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County Council adds £1million to rural broadband scheme

Worcestershire County Council is reinvesting up to £1m of funding to step up its drive to get high-speed broadband out to the most rural parts of the county.

The funding will 'top-up' the Government's existing Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, to help people in hard-to-reach locations get a fast, reliable broadband service.

The County Council's Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure, Councillor Ken Pollock, said: "Nearly 97% of Worcestershire can now access superfast broadband with speeds of at least 24Mbps (Megabits per second).

"This is a fantastic achievement; however, we are not stopping there. This is why we're adding £1m from the previously invested £8.5m towards the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme to target so-called "broadband not-spots" in the county.

"This is a great opportunity for Worcestershire, as we have already worked with over 100 communities and managed to secure more than £2.2m worth of vouchers".

In some cases, the voucher amount was not enough to pay for the infrastructure upgrade. This top-up funding means many more schemes can be funded, providing this future-proofed connectivity to thousands more homes in the most rural locations which are otherwise unlikely to get it for many years.

Digital Infrastructure Minister, Matt Warman, said: "This government believes access to fast and reliable broadband is essential to modern life and should be available to all, which is why I'm delighted to see Worcestershire County Council joining forces with us in our mission to deliver next-generation speeds to the most remote areas of the country.

"I hope this welcome boost to our programme will encourage even more people in Worcestershire to join the digital fast lane."

Having access to reliable, fast broadband is even more important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Being digitally connected is key to staying in touch with loved ones, working from home, and helping to stabilise local businesses. The top up scheme is a great opportunity to get high-speed broadband to areas currently without adequate service.

The funding for the vouchers in the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme with Worcestershire County Council's Top Up will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis until the end of March 2021, when the scheme will close.

To qualify for the scheme, residents must live in a rural area, be unable to get broadband speeds of 100Mbps or more, not be in an existing government-funded plan for a broadband upgrade, and apply as a group of two or more premises.

The Government's £200m Gigabit Broadband Vouchers Scheme (GBVS) currently provides up to £3,500 funding for eligible businesses and up to £1,500 for eligible residential properties to install gigabit-capable connections.

The extra £1m made available will be used to match the level of funding available under the GBVS, so that eligible businesses can now apply for up to a maximum of £7,000 and eligible residential properties up to £3,000.

Residents and businesses can visit the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme website at <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk> to find a list of suppliers in their local area. A list of frequently asked questions is also available www.superfastworcestershire.com/#faqs (FAQ28).