

Digital connectivity in Kirklees

Why is connectivity important for Kirklees?

It has great potential economic, social and environmental benefits for our area:

Economic: productivity growth, attract and keep business, improved home-working productivity, increased labour force participation (carers, disabled etc).

Social: integral part of modern life, individuals, families and communities; online shopping, reduced household costs, staying in touch, tele-health, skills and employability, education attainment, influences property choices.

Environment: reduced commuter and business travel, enables smart energy monitoring, encourages home working.

(Extracted from UK Broadband Impact Study November 2013)

What is our ambition?

To support our economic and health and wellbeing strategies and ensure Kirklees can benefit from all of the potential positive impacts.

We want Kirklees to have a world class digital infrastructure. Our ambition is:

- All our business will have access to world class business grade fibre.
- Our town centres will have free to access public wifi.
- Our residents will have access to superfast broadband in their homes.
- Our tenants will have access to affordable broadband services.
- 4G mobile data coverage across Kirklees.
- Our public sector services and partners will have high performance and future proof infrastructure on which to join-up, innovate and deliver.

Background:

Access to affordable and reliable broadband is necessary for Kirklees residents, businesses and visitors to take advantage of the growing digital economy and 'digital by default' services. Access to broadband infrastructure provides the foundations for, amongst other things:

- Economic prosperity - workforces that are digitally-literate enables business to thrive.
- Digital literacy – digital literacy and skills increase employability and people can exploit the internet for transactional, social, entertainment and learning purposes.
- New services – digital delivery can lower costs and provide innovative public and health services more conveniently.

The Government's target is that by the end of 2017, 95% of all premises should have access to superfast broadband (24Mb or more) and all premises should have access to a basic broadband service of at least 2Mb. It is estimated that around 88% of all premises in Kirklees currently have access to superfast broadband provided by either BT Openreach or Virgin Media.

Openreach has just completed a commercial rollout programme of superfast broadband and this means 75% of all premises in Kirklees can access their superfast offer. Superfast broadband from Virgin Media is available to 55% of all premises in Kirklees.

Of the 22,000 premises that do not have access to superfast broadband, it is estimated that around 2,600 premises cannot receive a useable level of service.

The demand for and take-up of broadband services depends on many factors. Customers of BT and Virgin Media services usually have to rent a telephone exchange line and commit to at least a 12 month contract. These requirements can often exclude many residents from taking broadband services.

How will we achieve it?

By taking as many complimentary approaches as we can to attract commercial companies and support value for money proposals.

We want Kirklees to attract investment in this highly regulated area. We are doing this in a number of ways including:

- **Privately funded schemes;** working with communities and suppliers to raise funds to pay commercial providers to resolve specific issues.
- **Commercial investment;** working with commercial companies such as BT, Virgin and the Councils own network providers on our issues and ambitions and their business opportunities.
- **BDUK Government scheme;** a matched funding government initiative aimed at rural properties where we are working to deliver a deal for Kirklees that enables us to ensure any funding we commit allows specification of our priority areas and timescales. We now believe we have achieved this in BDUK Phase 2 and we are currently working with them to secure European funding to support it.
- **Super-Connected cities scheme;** this is the urban scheme between Bradford and Leeds that enables business in our bordering areas to access 'vouchers' contributing towards the costs of broadband installation.

Background:

Privately Funded Schemes

The Council has worked with a number of community groups to encourage suppliers to invest in specific areas. So far, these potential schemes have not been successful, as the communities have not yet raised the funds to invest.

Commercial investment

We speak to potential investors in our area to raise awareness of our issues and their business opportunities. Currently without additional individual or business funds there are no known commercial plans from Openreach or Virgin to extend coverage in the area.

The Council has recently awarded its own Public Services Network connectivity contract to a company called Easynet. Easynet will be working with BT, Virgin and a company called CityFibre to provide this. CityFibre have subsequently looked at Kirklees and determined it is the next place they want to invest.

BDUK scheme

Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), run through the Department for Culture, Media & Sport is the Government's initial broadband programme to get superfast broadband coverage to 90% by 2015. Kirklees remained part of this scheme, targeted at rural areas, throughout committing resources to support the demand stimulation and other activities, however as we could not specify priorities or timescales we have not committed capital funds.

Phase 2 is now underway and we are much more confident this will address our specific needs in Kirklees and with the matched European funding will represent value for money for us. We are now pursuing this option and working to obtain European funding. This would allow us to facilitate the broadband priorities of 2,500 premises in South Kirklees and to move us to over 95% coverage.

Super Connected Cities

Super Connected Cities is aimed at key cities throughout the UK to improve broadband. A joint bid between Leeds and Bradford was successful. As part of this scheme businesses within the defined area can access a voucher for £3,000 towards the cost of installation of broadband. This scheme will now reach five miles across the borders into neighbouring authorities. As such this voucher scheme will become available to some businesses in North Kirklees.