Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme
Rural Gigabit Voucher - Further Guidance
6 June 2019

Introduction

Supplier Bulletin#15 published on 20 May introduced higher value Rural Gigabit vouchers as part of the scheme. Bulletin#16, published on 23 May provided some initial guidance about the operation of rural vouchers. This note provides further guidance for suppliers about preparing and operating Project Pre-Registered Packages (PRPs) supported by Rural Gigabit Vouchers and includes a set of questions and answers.

Nothing in this guidance changes or updates the scheme's formal terms and conditions - currently, version 5.0.

Eligibility

Suppliers have asked a number of questions about eligibility. The following summarises the key eligibility factors you must consider when preparing projects which aim to access Rural Gigabit Voucher funding on behalf of your customers:

- **Project PRPs only** - The only way in which customers can benefit from the rural voucher values, is as part of a Project PRP. Project PRPs are delivered in a defined geographical area and are required to identify in advance the estimated total eligible costs incurred to deliver qualifying connections in that location **and** specify the number of anticipated beneficiaries. Guidance about existing PRPs and rural vouchers, was provided in Bulletin#16.

- **Beneficiary** - there is no difference regarding the eligibility rules for beneficiary types between the existing voucher scheme and rural vouchers. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), including sole traders and not-for-profit organisations, are eligible as SMEs. We will often require you to provide trading evidence to confirm that the beneficiary is a legitimate trading entity, and will nearly always do so in the case of sole traders. The type of beneficiary determines the maximum voucher contribution.

- **Location** - only premises which are only able to obtain speeds less than 30mbps **and** in which are in rural locations qualify for the rural voucher values. Places where there is planned public investment to deliver connectivity are excluded from the scheme. We have created an online checker to help you develop projects. More information about the checker is set out below. We will permit Projects which include premises which are eligible for both rural and non-rural voucher support in the same application.

Further Guidance - Q&A

How do you define "rural"?

We have used the formal definitions and associated postcode lists produced by the Office of National Statistics or its equivalent for that part of the UK. The formal definitions and access to the source data is available from links we have published on the scheme website.

Is eligibility for a beneficiary based on the premise or the postcode?

It is based on the premise. Currently, our online checker is only able to provide information at a postcode level.

How can I check what speeds are available at an individual premise?

Ofcom's broadband checker will provide this information and we use this data to check eligibility. https://checker.ofcom.org.uk/broadband-coverage

Can I download a list of all postcodes eligible for the rural voucher in the UK?

Unfortunately, our agreement with the data providers does not permit us to make a full download available; we can only provide an answer about individual postcodes at this time.

How do you determine what broadband speeds are available?

We use the information provided by Ofcom. This information is supplied to them by network owners and contains only information about existing structures. It is updated every 3 months. We encourage all network builders to provide this information to Ofcom to prevent our scheme from over-building your network.

Will the checker only say a postcode is eligible for the rural part of the scheme if all of the premises in that postcode are eligible?

No. The checker will say that the postcode is eligible if <u>any</u> premise in that postcode is eligible for the rural part of the scheme. You must check that the premises for which you request vouchers are eligible before requesting the voucher.

Can I request a Project PRP for a location where not all of the premises in a postcode are eligible for the rural part of the scheme?

Yes, you are able to do this, BUT if your project PRP is agreed, you must <u>only</u> request vouchers with a value above the current maximum for the main part of the scheme for those <u>premises</u> which meet the rural eligibility criteria. You are reminded that our agreement to a PRP means only that you may request vouchers *at risk,* it provides no guarantee of funding neither does it confirm that any vouchers will be issued.

What does "available" mean?

We mean that the customer cannot order a broadband service from any supplier without incurring a cost of connection greater than £500.

What should I do if I believe that your data is incorrect about the availability of broadband at a postcode?

We will not agree a rural Project PRP for any postcode where our data says that there are no premises where speeds above 30 mpbs. If you believe this to be incorrect, you will be asked

to provide evidence from one or more relevant infrastructure providers to support this claim and speed test evidence.

What should I do if I believe that Ofcom's data is incorrect about the availability of broadband at a specific premise?

When you request vouchers for a rural PRP, the request confirms that you believe the premise to be eligible for the scheme *in all respects.* We will carry out further checks (state aid, speed and rurality) and if we reject on the basis of the speed available, you can only appeal this decision by providing evidence that the speed currently available at the premise concerned is less than 30mpbs. This evidence should be either from the Ofcom premise level checker or a speed test carried out at the premises.

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Another useful tool which maps rural/urban areas in England:

https://ons.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=20467878cc20410d961a3f71d

(Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2018)

Review of PRP Applications

We are experiencing a high volume of project PRP applications, so reviews are currently taking longer than usual. We are taking steps to address this. In the meantime, we thank you for your patience.

If you have any questions about the scheme please contact us using the Support function when signed in as a user.