



**Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme
Supplier Bulletin #44
4th February 2021**

Introduction

This Bulletin provides you with the key messaging you may need when talking to residents and SMEs across the UK about the end of the RGC funded voucher and the beginning of the UK Gigabit Programme funded voucher, as well as updating you on the Covid amendments made at the beginning of 2020.

PRP Transfer Preference Forms and Ofcom Area 2 Impact

In Bulletin 43, sent on the 27th January 2021, we committed to sending all suppliers a document which set out the expected impact of the proposed changes to eligibility to their current published PRPs. We can confirm these have now all been issued with a response due on the 19th February 2021. If you haven't received yours please check the email address registered with the Scheme and then get in touch with LFFNsuppliers@dcms.gov.uk.

Please follow the link below for guidance on which postcode sectors are in Ofcom Areas 2 or 3. These are part of the WFTMR consultation and are subject to change once the consultation is finalised by Ofcom.

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/file/0031/186448/schedule-2-wla-postcode-sectors-by-geographic-market.csv

Please note it is the postcode sector so the postcode sector SW5 4 would be SW54 on the dataset, please make sure you are not just checking the first part of the postcode.

Messaging to Beneficiaries/Residents

We understand that residents and SMEs are very keen to make use of the funding provided by the Government to remove the costs associated with gigabit capable broadband connections and that the announcement of closure may have caused some concern. We are providing the following bullets as a set of recommended points to remind residents and SMEs of should you have any questions:

- Whilst Projects (PRPs) funded by the RGC budget will close to new submissions on the 19th February, suppliers can continue to request vouchers against published PRPs until the 31st March and issued vouchers retain their 12 month validity from the date of issue.



- We expect the UK Gigabit Programme voucher to go live in April 2021 to provide continuity to gigabit broadband delivery via voucher projects and where possible, BDUK will share more details with Suppliers, residents and SMEs as soon as we can.
- BDUK is working with Suppliers to transition PRPs, where possible, so that residents do not miss out on the opportunity for government funding to provide access to gigabit capable connections.
- The proposal to remove Area 2 postcode sectors from eligibility is designed to ensure that vouchers continue to support premises in the hardest to reach areas to access gigabit capable connections.

Covid Amendments

Cancellation of Vouchers from before 31st May 2019

In accordance with the notification given in Bulletin 42, we have now begun cancelling vouchers issued on or before 31 May 2019 which have not been delivered and claimed.

In Bulletins 29 & 30 we advised that ‘we would not cancel vouchers that were not claimed within 12 months of the date of voucher issue and that clause 10.2 of part B of the Scheme terms and conditions is suspended’.

With effect from Monday 15th March 2021, we will be reinstating our automated voucher cancellation process. When a voucher remains unclaimed for 17 months, a notification will be issued to the supplier advising that the voucher will be cancelled 4 weeks later, unless it is claimed. Any voucher still left unclaimed at the 18 month point will be cancelled.

You can see the date on which a voucher was issued by using the “Download My Vouchers” function when signed in on the website. This date is contained in column AB of the downloaded file.

Unvalidated Claimed Connections

In Bulletin 42 we advised vouchers which had been claimed but not validated would be placed at risk. This process has now commenced and impacted suppliers will have received notice last week that the validation should be completed by 28/02/21 after which time vouchers will be cancelled.

We are currently reviewing all Covid amendments and will advise you when any further changes are to be introduced.

Additional Funding - Top Up Funds



This is a reminder that the additional funding available through Top Ups increases the **maximum** available vouchers for Residential and SME beneficiaries only and is not the guaranteed voucher value. BDUK will only grant Top Ups to vouchers when the standard funding is not sufficient to provide the amount of funding required for the PRP. This allows for Top Ups to be used to extend builds to the hardest to reach areas when additional funding is required due to geography or engineering difficulties. The use of Top Up funding should be fully justified by Suppliers as part of their PRP application by clearly demonstrating that the standard funding wouldn't be sufficient based on the expected take up of their project and the numbers of vouchers available. The financial benefit of vouchers, including where additional funding is used, must demonstrably be passed on in full to the relevant Beneficiaries. This must be able to be demonstrated at the PRP application and cost audit stages.

Please note the publication of PRPs does not guarantee access to funding, including where top up funding is used. Payment will only be made for vouchers issued by the Authority as part of PRPs once connections are delivered to Beneficiaries. If the Top Up budget is utilised before vouchers are issued on a PRP then the voucher value for those PRPs will revert back to the standard levels, should you wish to progress with the project.

Text Messages to Beneficiaries Alongside Emails

We have listened to Suppliers feedback about how we could improve our validation process and as a result we have been trialling functionality to allow us to send reminder SMS messages to beneficiaries. These will remind beneficiaries to validate their voucher at issue and claim stage. This means they will now receive up to 4 text messages as part of the voucher process, 2 at voucher issue stage and 2 at voucher claim stage.

It is important you collect beneficiaries' mobile numbers as part of their consent to use vouchers to enable text reminders to be sent.

Broadband Upgrade Fund

All suppliers who submitted Areas of Interest to the Broadband Upgrade Fund have now received access to the potential beneficiaries who were willing to share their details in order to discuss potential projects. We understand that the deadline of 19th February for new PRP submissions does not leave a lot of time for detailed discussions with communities however the details provided to you by residents may still be useful when designing projects in the future for any new interventions.

As these projects progress and become PRPs, please use the check box on the PRP application form if a PRP you are submitting was a result of the Broadband Upgrade Fund. This will allow us to monitor the performance of the Broadband Upgrade Fund pilot.



For a broader overview of BDUK's work, please also see this webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/building-digital-uk>

The Digital Connectivity Portal here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/digital-connectivity-portal>

Other useful information and updates can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/resources-for-communications-network-providers>

If you have any questions about the Scheme please contact us using the Support function when signed into the website.