

## WHAT IS PROJECT GIGABIT?

1. On Friday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021, the Government, through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) launched Project Gigabit - the strategy to deliver a minimum of 85% gigabit-capable coverage across the UK by 2025.
2. Through Project Gigabit, funding is being made available to ISPs through three main routes:
  - a. **Regional Suppliers.** Regional suppliers will deliver large procurement areas (70,000 to 150,000 properties) in a phased approach.
  - b. **Local suppliers.** Local suppliers can propose specific small procurement areas on a case-by-case basis (1,000 to 8,000 properties).
  - c. **Voucher Scheme.** A new voucher scheme has been launched, following the success of the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Programme (RGC), with £210m in funding available.
3. The B4RN model does not fit with the conditions placed upon Regional and Local suppliers through Project Gigabit – B4RN needs to work flexibly and be led by community demand and therefore we will continue to deliver supported by the voucher concept within the current scheme.

## HOW WILL B4RN BE AFFECTED BY THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS?

*The results of procurement process, as currently planned, will force B4RN to cut short our build programme.*

4. When Project Gigabit was launched, we were assured that communities where B4RN plans to build in the next five years will be marked as 'Conditional White' and will be available for B4RN and other ISPs to build through voucher funded projects until the Regional Suppliers have completed build in uncontested areas - ensuring pace of build is optimised across the region.
5. It is apparent that a large proportion of B4RN's planned 5-year build programme has been included in the initial procurement, including many areas where B4RN is already actively engaged with communities and where planning for a voucher funded build is well underway.
6. If the intervention area is upheld as shown, it will drastically and unnecessarily cut short B4RN's build programme in the region whilst guaranteeing larger commercial suppliers a well-funded pipeline of work for at least the next five years.
7. **Moving areas where B4RN is actively engaged with the community, and planning is underway, into a 'Conditional White' procurement status would ensure B4RN can continue to contribute to connecting deep rural properties - resulting in better pace, coverage, and value in the region.**

*The procurement process itself, as currently planned, is going to significantly, and unnecessarily, disrupt our build programme over the next year.*

8. Currently when B4RN starts building in a community we agree a Pre-Registered Package (PRP) with DCMS which defines the properties eligible for voucher funding within a community and the total voucher value available to these properties.
9. We have been given a deadline of 24<sup>th</sup> September 2021 for individuals to register for vouchers within our project areas in Cumbria, Northumberland, and Durham before the PRPs are suspended during the regional supplier procurement process, which we have been told may take up to a year.
10. For a project to be deemed viable we will therefore need enough registrations by 24<sup>th</sup> September 2021 to meet the PRP cap. If we do not hit this target, we may have to put projects on hold – even though we could be confident of hitting the target if registrations were allowed to remain open as we built the project.
11. **Moving approved PRPs into 'Conditional White' procurement status and allowing them to remain open during the procurement process would ensure better continuity of build - resulting in better pace, coverage, and value during this phase of Project Gigabit.**

