



# Briefing Note

Briefing Note: **High Speed Broadband: An Update for Lot 1  
(Bath & North East Somerset and North Somerset)**

**29b**

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## Connecting Devon & Somerset

Most people will be aware that there is a Government-funded programme to develop high-speed broadband in areas that are not covered by commercial schemes. It is organised nationally by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) and locally by councils or groupings of councils. In this area, the local delivery organisation is 'Connecting Devon & Somerset' (CDS) which is administered by Devon County Council. B&NES and North Somerset Council both contribute financially to CDS and have a seat on its Board.

The aim of the CDS programme is to provide 'superfast' broadband, defined as a download speed of more than 24 megabits per second (Mbps), to all premises in the CDS area by 2020. Phase 1 of the CDS programme was intended to serve more than 277,000 premises in line with the Government's target of 90% of premises being connected by 2017.

CDS have now changed their website to include premises level information on availability (both actual and planned). The previous system of Postcodes and large scale maps has now been superseded and information is now provided at a detailed level and can be accessed from <https://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/line-checker/> where you enter your postcode initially but then select individual property.

## Phase 1

Phase 1 relied on a contract with BT Open Reach using a technology called 'Fibre to the Cabinet' (FTTC) which involves running fibre optic cables from the exchanges to roadside cabinets (green boxes) and then using existing telephone lines (twisted copper or aluminium cables carried by overhead poles or underground ducts) to connect to houses and business premises.

In order to receive a 24Mbps service (download speed) the line length from the fibre enabled cabinet to the premises needs to be a maximum of approximately 1,000m. Premises beyond this see line speeds drop significantly and are considered outside of the scope of a high-speed broadband service.

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**Working with ACRE in South Gloucestershire,  
Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset and Bristol**



In mid March 2017 CDS announced that the Phase 1 programme was complete.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Voucher Scheme**

For people receiving broadband speeds of less than 2 Mbps, there has been a voucher scheme offering a grant of £500 towards connection, by means such as 4G, satellite, wireless or a wired connection, from a list of approved suppliers. Solutions requiring groups of users (such as wireless schemes) have to be organised by the users themselves in voluntary arrangements, because of State Aid rules. It is interesting to note that although some 4,600 CDS vouchers had been approved by 14<sup>th</sup> March 2017 only 850 installations had taken place.

The CDS voucher scheme closed to applicants on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016, although vouchers already issued can now be used until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The scheme is currently under review by CDS and BDUK and it may resume to new applicants later in the year, but CDS are keen to establish first where there are gaps when the Phase 2 programme is finalised, as the voucher scheme is only intended to be a 'safety net'.

### **Phase 2**

Phase 2 of the CDS Programme is organised in 6 'Lots'. Lots 2, 3, 5 and 6 have been awarded to Gigaclear which is promising a true fibre to the premises (FTTP) service with symmetrical download and upload speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second (1,000Mbps). Lot 4 (north Devon) is in the final stages of due diligence checks of the preferred supplier and it is expected to be announced shortly.

It is interesting to note that Gigaclear will be providing two thirds of the required funding for its contracts, compared with 19% provided by BT Open Reach for Phase 1 of the CDS programme.

The Bath & North East Somerset and North Somerset area (together known as Upper CDS) are in Lot 1 and there has been a legal challenge to the tendering process for Lot 1 which will delay progress. CDS expect the legal challenge to be resolved and an announcement to be made shortly, however they cannot commit to a timescale without knowing how the court procedure is going to progress and then the subsequent due diligence.

The identity of the preferred contractor is not known at this stage, nor is the source of the legal challenge (presumably an unsuccessful tender).

West of England Rural Network (WERN) have completed an analysis of the data provided as part of the Phase 2 tender process and have identified premises that are

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ispreview.co.uk/index.php/2017/03/devon-somerset-complete-phase-1-bt-fibre-broadband-rollout-contract.html>

considered to be 'target' or premises that must have access to Superfast Broadband as a contractual condition. This data will be share on a Parish by Parish basis prior to the workshops so each Parish will be able to carry out a check for errors and anomalies.

## **Conclusions**

A 'broadband workshop' is being organised by WERN (and will be announced when a selected supplier is announced for Lot 1) so that consultations can take place with Parish Councils and district councils about local priorities and local involvement in the roll-out of Phase 2 of the CDS programme in the Lot 1 area.

If residents of the Lot 1 area have not benefited from Phase 1 or do not expect to benefit from Phase 2 of the CDS programme, CDS officers advise that they may be able to offer some other options to secure high-speed broadband connections in the future. These options which we will help Parishes with include:

1. 'Gainshare' money due to be returned to CDS by BT (because the take-up of high-speed broadband exceeded expectations) will have to be spent and will be used to infill and upgrade areas that have been left out.
2. Further funding that has been secured from European Funds can be invested in broadband infrastructure.
3. CDS may re-open its voucher scheme to allow premises that missed out in Phase 2 a safety net for some type of connection (e.g. wireless or satellite).

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***This briefing note is based on an initial summary report prepared by Roger Daniels for Burrington Parish Council on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2017 but with subsequent updates***