

Digital
Infrastructure
Strategy
2020-2025

**2021-2022
Update**

Foreword

Digital infrastructure, both fixed line and mobile connectivity, is increasingly critical for all residents and businesses in Cumbria. Since launching in November 2020, we have been progressing our Digital Infrastructure Strategy and currently broadband services of at least 30Mbps are available to 94.3% of properties in Cumbria and 4G mobile services from at least one mobile networks are available across 89.8% of Cumbrian geography. Whilst significant improvements have been made, continuing to improve our digital connectivity will be essential over the coming years so that Cumbria is not left behind other parts of the UK.

“Improved digital infrastructure remains a top priority given the significant economic and social benefits for Cumbria and I am delighted with the progress we have made over the last year. The importance of resilient connectivity has been further highlighted by both Storm Arwen and the coronavirus pandemic. As we continue to recover, access to fast, reliable internet connectivity is no longer a luxury; it is a basic necessity for residents, local businesses and the delivery of public services.”



Cllr David Southward
Cumbria County
Council's Cabinet
Member of Economic
Development and
Digital Champion

“Cumbria County Council is committed to working to help Cumbria develop the futureproof infrastructure our businesses and communities need in tandem with ensuring that all places catch up with the rest of the UK. Digital connectivity will play a central role in supporting economic growth and greater social inclusion to all local businesses and residents in Cumbria.”



Angela Jones
Executive Director
Economy and
Infrastructure and
Digital Champion

Introduction and Background

Providing digital infrastructure, either through supporting commercial deployments, or working with central government to secure funding where intervention is required, is a key enabler to facilitate delivery of the Council Plan. Digital infrastructure in this context includes fixed line gigabit capable connections, the availability of mobile 4G services and ensuring that Cumbria is able to benefit from new services enabled by 5G technology as it develops. In November 2020, Cumbria County Council committed to the Digital Infrastructure Strategy 2020-2025 to maximise deployment of full fibre and mobile infrastructure, in order to support:

- **Economic growth of our businesses.**
- **Digital inclusion so that no resident or business is left behind.**
- **Delivery of more effective and efficient provision of local public services.**

Our objectives are aligned with the UK Government's ambitions and Cumbria County Council is working to support the UK Government's two main programmes to deliver its commitments in relation to digital connectivity:

- **UK Gigabit Programme – Public investment to deliver gigabit connectivity to the most challenging 20% of UK properties (F20) and stimulation of commercial investment into the remaining 80% of the UK.**
- **Shared Rural Network – A combination of commercial and public investment to deliver 95% geographical 4G coverage across the UK from at least one mobile network operator.**

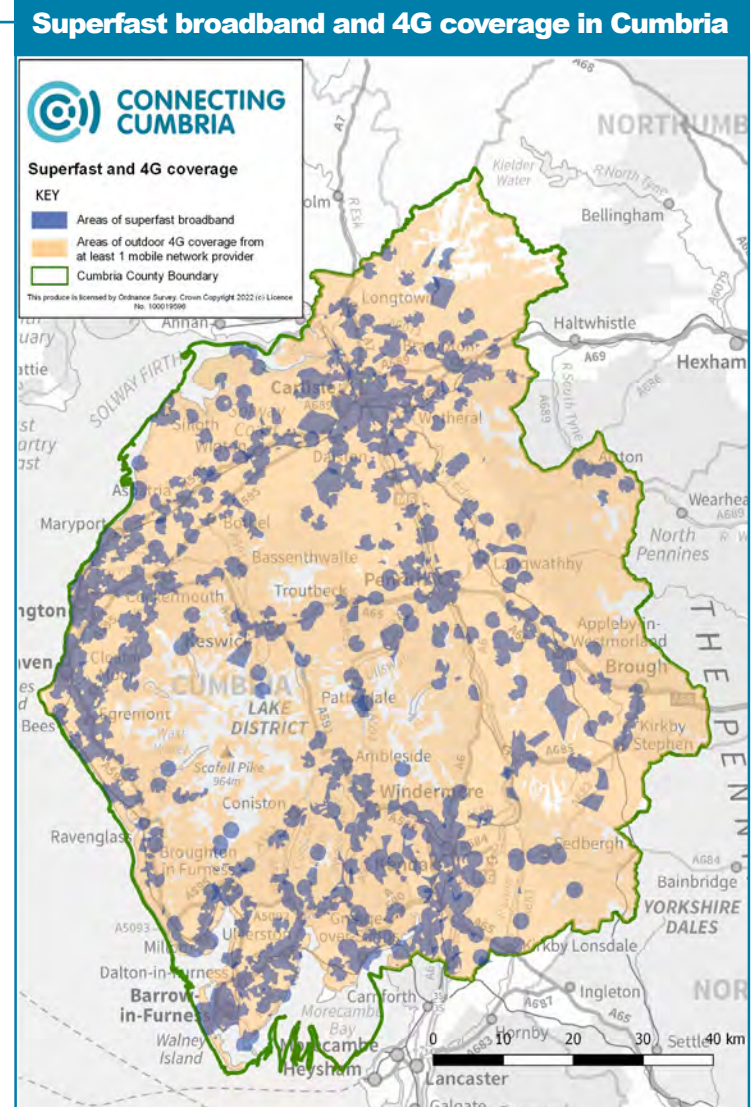
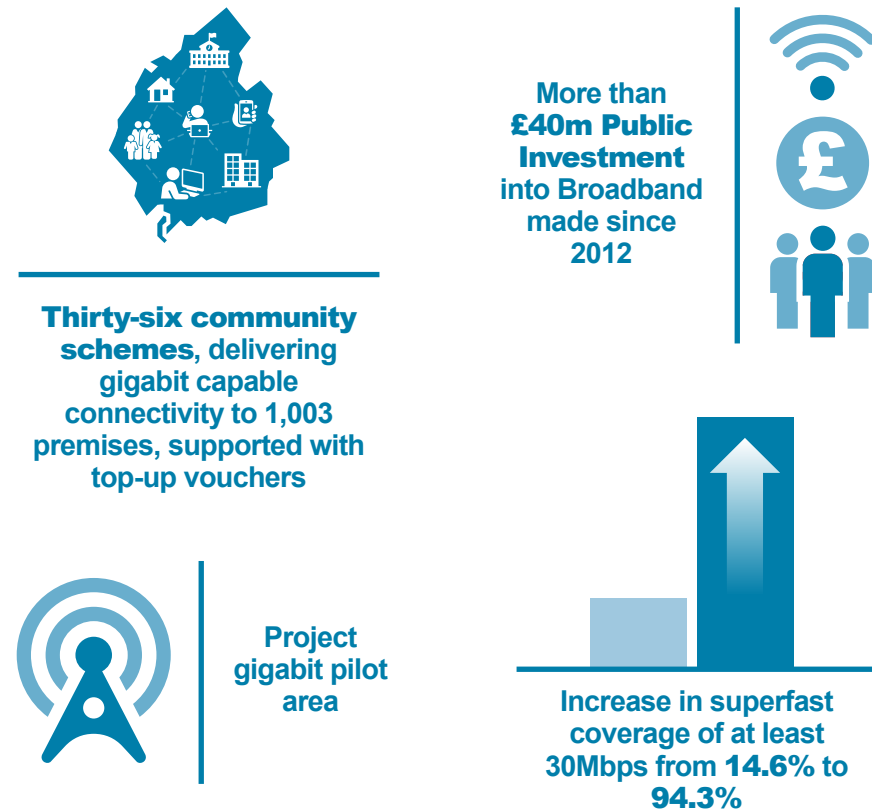
We are working closely with the Borderlands Partnership, recognising that digital infrastructure is a shared challenge and opportunity for the region's economy. Through the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal that was signed in March 2021, there is the commitment to invest in digital infrastructure (Borderlands Site borderlandsgrowth.com) that supports delivery of the Council's Digital Infrastructure Strategy.



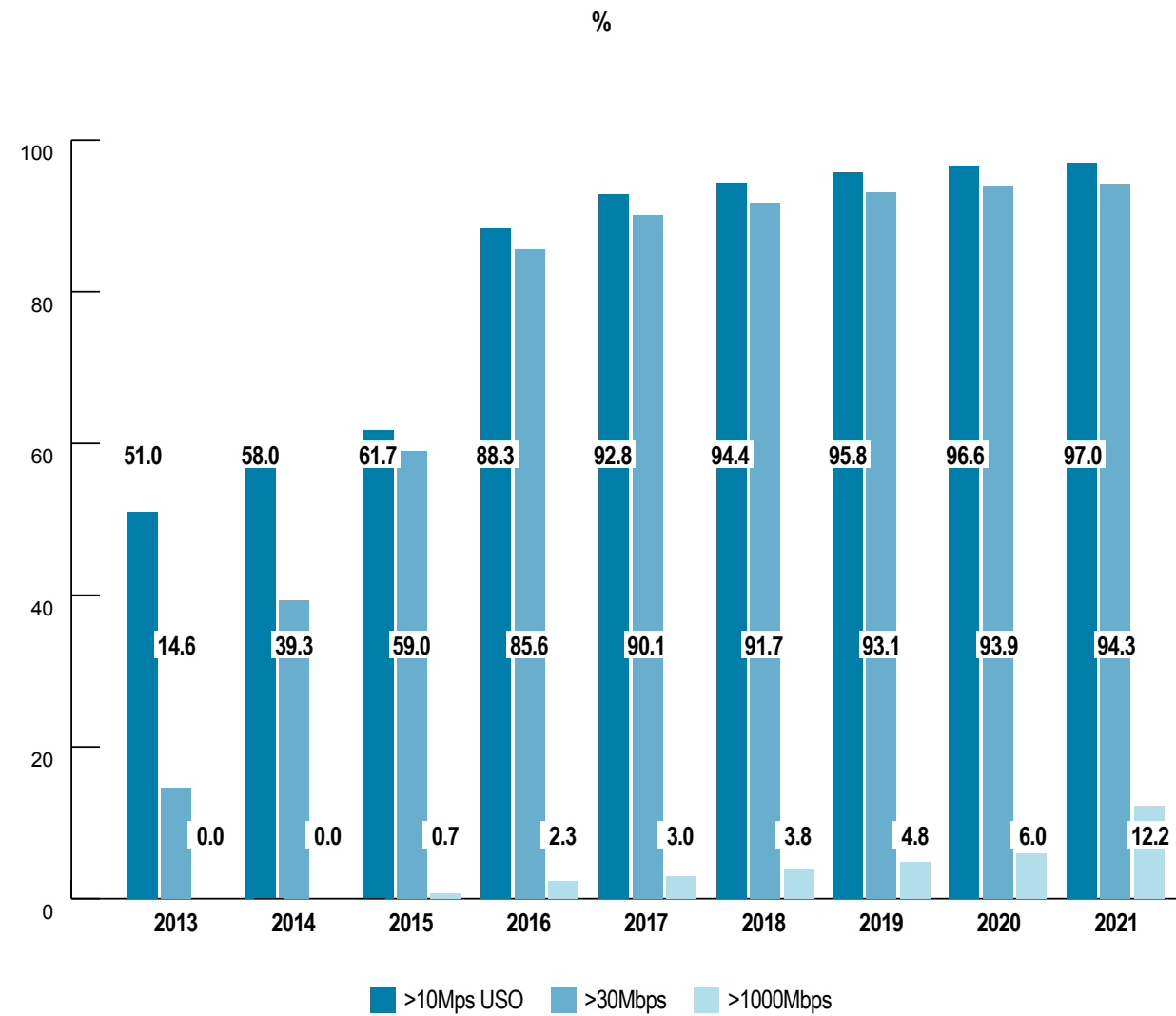
Action Plan Progress

A lot of progress has been made in just over a year with the Cumbria County Council's Digital Infrastructure Strategy as summarised in Figure 1:

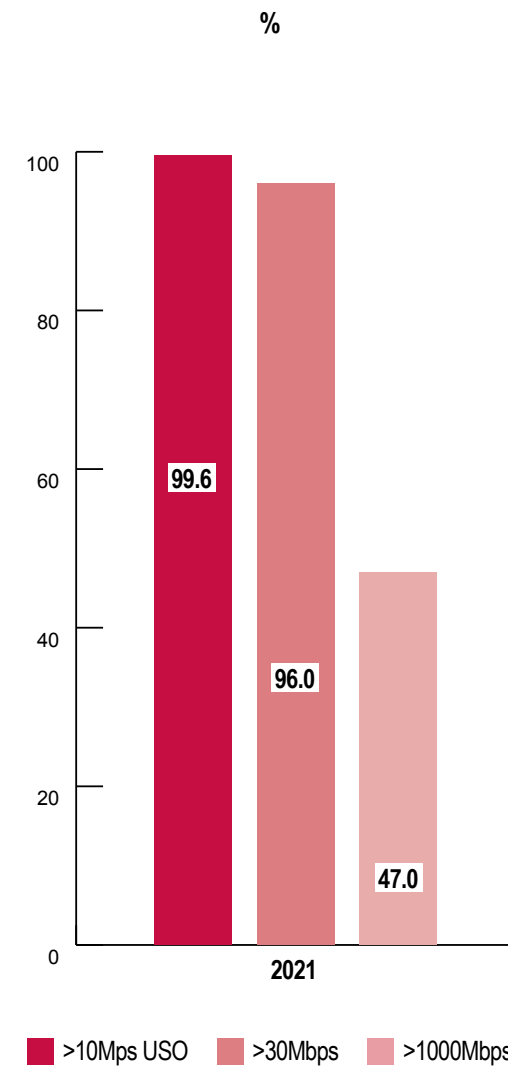
Figure 1: Achievements in 2021/22



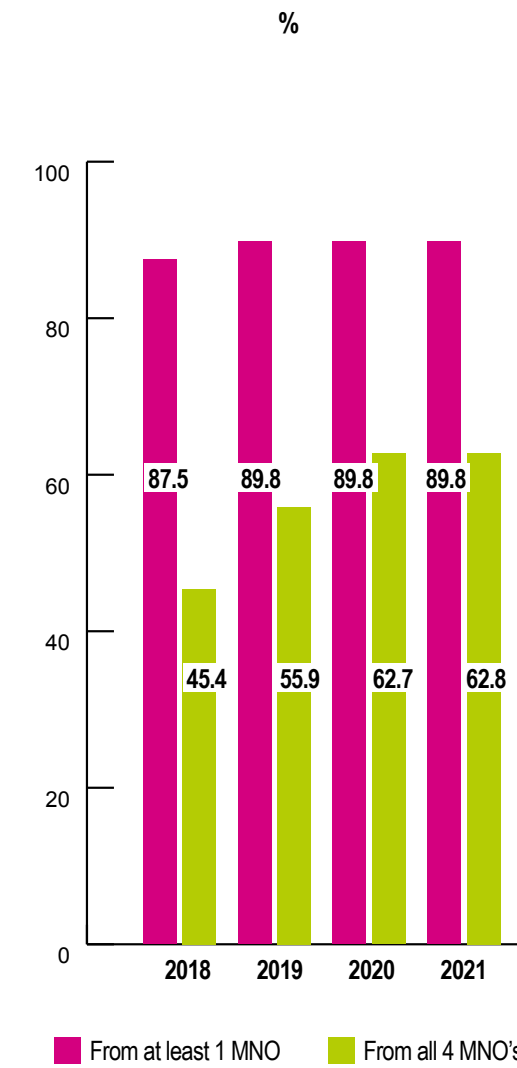
Fixed Broadband Coverage Cumbria



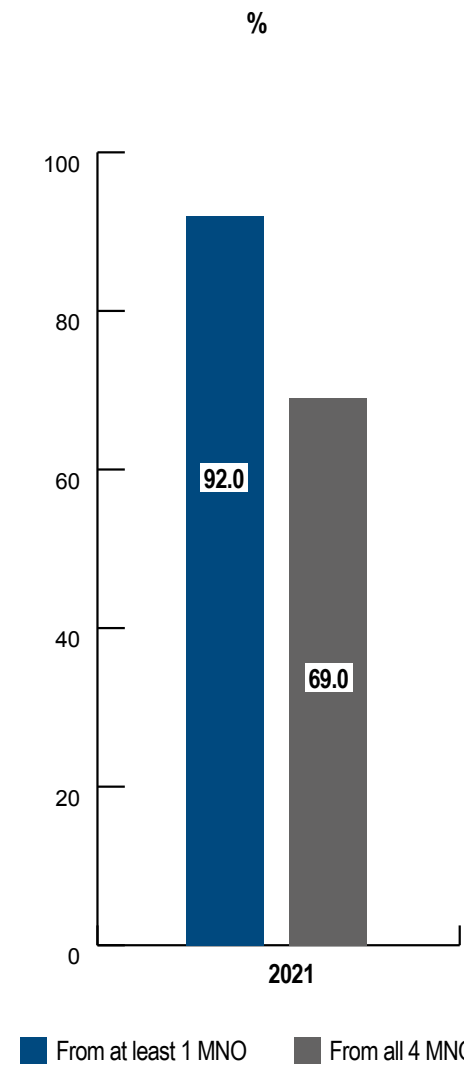
Fixed Broadband Coverage UK



Mobile 4G Geographic Coverage Cumbria



Mobile 4G Geographic Coverage UK



Digital Connectivity coverage levels in Cumbria started behind those in the wider UK, challenging geography and sparseness of our population has historically attracted lower levels of commercial investment than more urban areas, however Cumbria has caught up considerably over the past few years. Public investment in Digital Infrastructure programmes and work to encourage commercial investment means that currently Cumbria levels of superfast coverage of at least 30Mbps and mobile 4G geographic coverage from at least 1 Mobile Network Operator (MNO) are only a few percentage points behind UK levels. There is still a lot of work to do to catch up further and to ensure that digital infrastructure in the county keeps pace with the levels that businesses, residents and visitors expect.

Action Plan Progress on Full Fibre

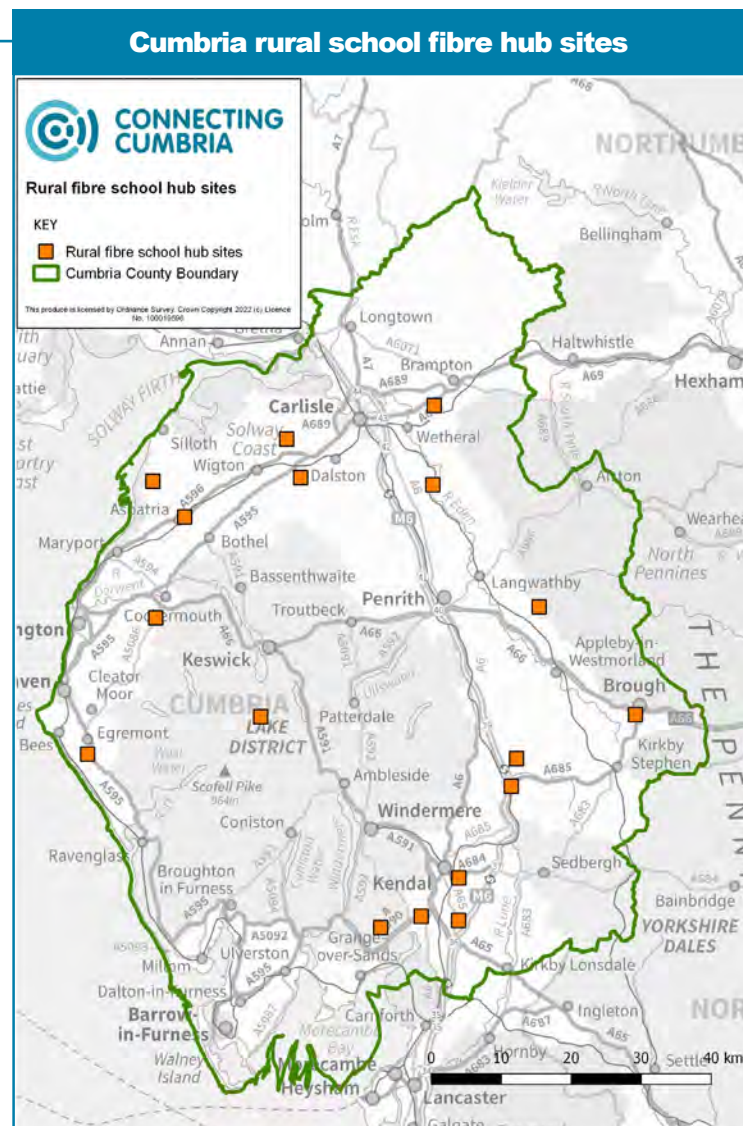
Progress on each of the actions in the Digital Infrastructure Strategy is summarised in the following update.

The Digital Infrastructure Strategy committed to...

Facilitate gigabit capable connectivity to public sector premises and to hub sites such as schools and GP surgeries. Such connectivity will then support expansion to other local residential and business premises, potentially supported by voucher schemes.

Progress so far...

Seventeen schools in Cumbria such as Borrowdale Primary School now have access to full fibre broadband connections which is helping to deliver learning outcomes. Many of these connections have supported further deployment of full fibre to the broader community using vouchers, including Digital Borderlands top-up. The Council is also developing a 'golden voucher' scheme to connect digital village hubs to full fibre and so facilitate the deployment of full fibre elsewhere in the community.



The Digital Infrastructure Strategy committed to...

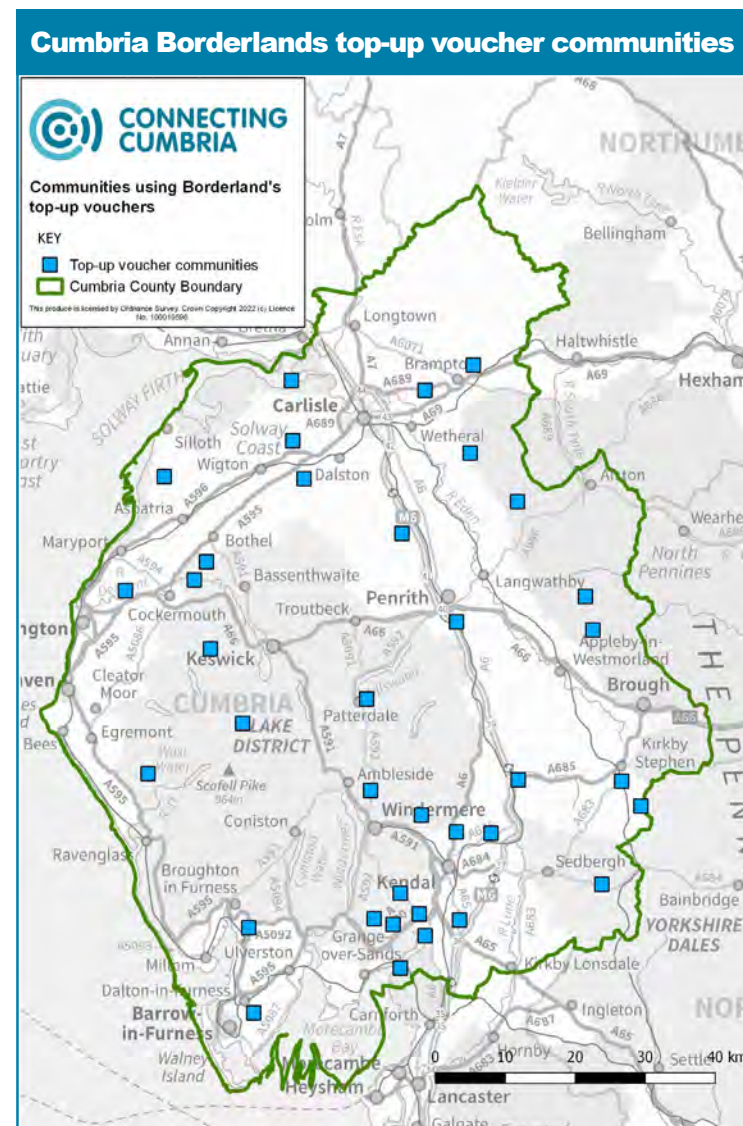
Through the Digital Borderlands voucher top-up scheme provide up to £1,500 for residential premises and £3,500 to business premises to provide gigabit capable connectivity to communities in the last 5% to 6% of superfast not-spots. This funding works with the UK Rural Gigabit Connectivity scheme vouchers giving a combined funding of up to £3,000 for residential premises and £7,000 to business premises.

Progress so far...

This Digital Borderlands Voucher Top-Up scheme was launched in June 2020 as one of the first projects under the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, providing top-up funding to rural communities in superfast not spots who are seeking to use UK Government Rural Gigabit Connectivity Vouchers to install gigabit capable infrastructure.

Thirty-six voucher top-up community schemes in Cumbria have delivered gigabit capable connectivity to 1,003 premises. The scheme has been extremely popular with the £4m budget now allocated, of which over £1.8m was spent in Cumbria, and further communities remain keen to apply for similar support.

The Council is planning to launch a Cumbria specific voucher top-up scheme in 2022 providing £2m of further funding to support residents and businesses.



The Digital Infrastructure Strategy committed to...

Work with UK Government to secure funding for gigabit capable connections in line with the policy of providing £5bn of subsidy for the hardest to reach 20% of premises across the UK and to ensure that Cumbria is not left behind. UK Government targets completion by 2025.

Progress so far...

Cumbria is the pilot area in the UK Gigabit Programme and has been allocated a budget of up to £109m to extend gigabit capable connections to some of the hardest to reach premises that won't benefit from commercial deployments. Stage 1 of the procurement, the Supplier Selection Questionnaire has now concluded, and selected suppliers were invited to tender for a contract in February 2022. The contract start date is planned for 07 September 2022. This will commence in Autumn 2022 with planning and survey work before build starts around March 2023. Build is expected to run to the end of 2025.



The Digital Infrastructure Strategy committed to...

Work in partnership with planning authorities and other bodies to ensure provision for gigabit capable digital connectivity is strongly encouraged at the planning stage for new developments.

Progress so far...

The Council continues to work with district authorities, The Lake District National Park and The Yorkshire Dales National Park to encourage the submission of a broadband plan in all planning applications and in particular for applications of more than one property. For example, South Lakeland District Council now insists on a high-speed broadband statement in planning applications.

Action Plan Progress on Mobile

The Digital Infrastructure Strategy committed to...

Work with the UK Government Shared Rural Network mobile programme, which is seeking to deliver 95% geographical 4G coverage in the UK from at least one Mobile Network Operator by 2025, to maximise investment in Cumbria.

Progress so far...

Shared Rural Network targets 80% 4G geographic coverage from all four Mobile Network Operators by 2025 in Cumbria and 95% from at least one. This work will be accomplished by combination of commercial investment in areas with partial coverage and £500m of public funded investment into areas with no coverage from any operator (total not spots). The Council has worked to engage with Digital Mobile Spectrum Limited, who are delivering the Shared Rural Network programme, to seek to understand how they will be delivering their commitments in Cumbria and how we can encourage prioritisation for the county.



The Digital Infrastructure Strategy committed to...

Secure funding and mobilise the Digital Borderlands 4G infill scheme that aims to go beyond existing UK 4G targets through the deployment of 5G ready infrastructure.

Progress so far...

Work through the Shared Rural Network will still leave a number of total not spot areas in Cumbria which may not have many premises but could be particularly important to the tourist economy and agriculture. The Digital Borderlands 4G Infill scheme aims to address these total not spot areas. Funding has been provisionally allocated for this through the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal. Further analysis will be undertaken during 2022 to identify post Shared Rural Network areas that require more investment in order to maximise the potential benefits.

The Digital Infrastructure Strategy committed to...

Work with partners on 5G research and development to build a toolkit that can be used to create trials in Cumbria and the broader Borderlands region subject to further funding. It should be noted that this project is not about the roll-out of 5G, but Digital Borderlands will work within the consortium to access the toolkit and understand how rural 5G might be rolled out in future.

Progress so far...

Cumbria County Council, on behalf of the Borderlands, is a member of the 5G New Thinking consortium. This project is looking to provide a toolkit of solutions to allow 5G technology to be tested in rural areas. This consortium, led by Cisco Systems and the University of Strathclyde, received £5m of funding from UK Government in 2020 to develop this toolkit. Cumbria County Council, in partnership with Digital Borderlands, is planning to develop use cases to test in the region, for example a mixed reality application for a visitor attraction or an agri-tech focused project. Funding will be sought for these use cases once the business cases are more fully developed.



The Digital Infrastructure Strategy committed to...

Facilitate the engagement between digital infrastructure providers and planning authorities and securing the necessary wayleaves to ensure that mobile infrastructure can be deployed where appropriate and enable maximum mobile coverage.

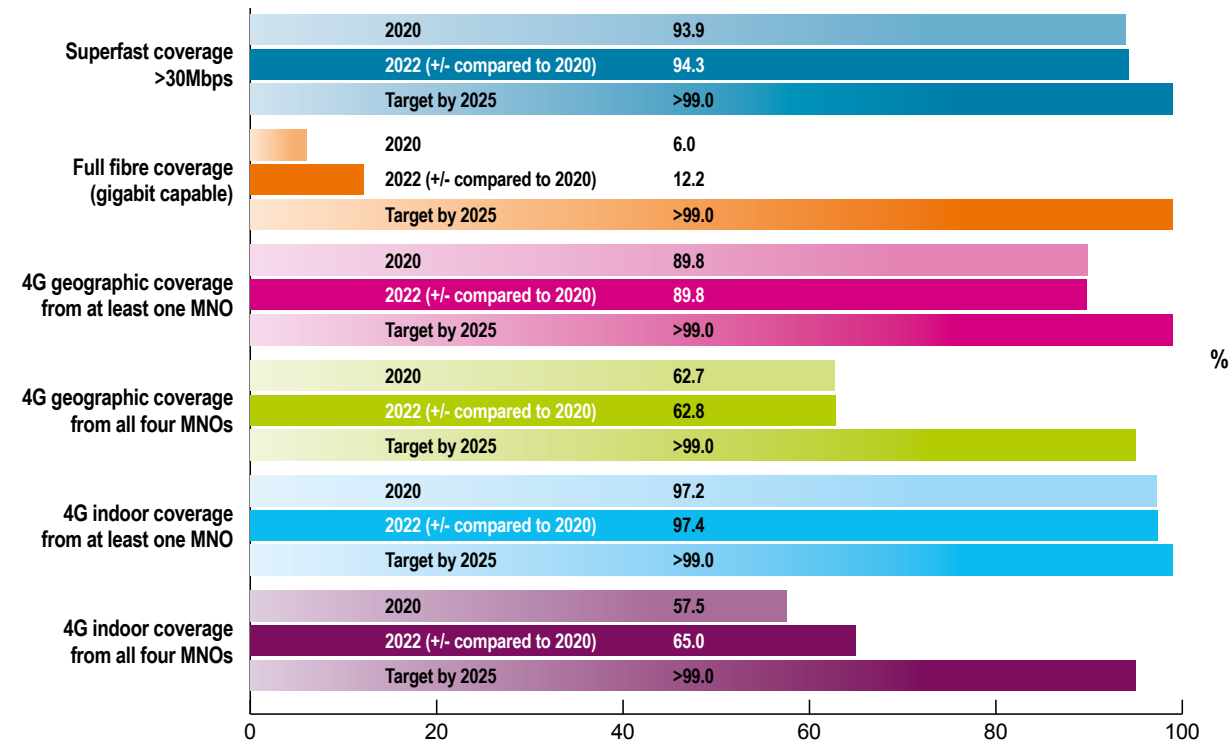
Progress so far...

Cumbria County Council continues to liaise with district planning authorities and National Parks to support planning requests for additional mobile infrastructure, where appropriate, while recognising the sensitivity of such deployments in rural areas. This policy aims to ensure that no one is left behind and looks at various deployment options for infrastructure. Engagement also takes place with landowners such as Forestry England and the National Trust to facilitate the granting of wayleaves where mobile infrastructure needs to cross private land.

Measuring Our Success

We are making good progress with the delivery of the Digital Infrastructure Strategy, but there is still a great deal to do. Figure 1 below illustrates performance against some of the key metrics:

Figure 1: Current digital infrastructure footprint and target coverage of Cumbria



We and our partners have a lot of work to do to achieve our vision of delivering our targets and world class digital connectivity in Cumbria. As each aspect of our action plan is further developed we will share more detail and updates on our website and via County Council publications.



Further information can be found using the following website link:
www.connectingcumbria.org.uk



