Frequently asked questions

Next Generation Broadband

Q. Who is providing Next Generation Broadband infrastructure across Argyll?

BT Openreach are providing coverage to parts of Dunoon, Helensburgh and Oban through their commercial rollout, without public sector intervention these would be the only communities to have any access to next generation broadband services. To address this there are three publically funded projects which will also benefit Argyll.

Within the Bute and Cowal, Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands, and Oban, Lorn and the Isles area the Highlands and Islands project is being led by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. It is anticipated that, in combination with the commercial coverage, 83% of the premises within this area will have access to next generation broadband.

Within the Helensburgh and Lomond area, the Rest of Scotland project is being led by the Scottish Government's Digital Scotland team. Together with the commercial coverage rollout in this area is expected to connect in the region of 92% of premises to next generation broadband infrastructure.

Not all exchange areas currently have a planned solution, you can find out what the plans are for your exchange area by searching at www.digitalscotland.org/whereandwhen.

For communities which are outside the reach of the projects, Community Broadband Scotland can help to develop a next generation broadband solution led by the community.

Q. Next generation broadband is planned for my exchange area; does that mean I will definitely get it?

Unfortunately not as the plans will vary across each exchange area. In most communities, the current plan uses a Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) solution which will mean that new green cabinets – known as a digital subscriber line access multiplexer or DSLAM - will need to be installed and connected to existing green communication cabinets. These are most suitable within communities where there are approximately 50 or more premises within around a kilometre from the new cabinet.

Detailed surveys commence around six months before deployment and confirmation as to which premises can access next generation broadband will be available once the service goes live.

Q. How do I get next generation broadband?

In most cases new green cabinets – known as a digital subscriber line access multiplexer or DSLAM - will need to be installed within communities to deliver a Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) solution. Once the infrastructure is in place the customer will need to order the new service from their internet service provider.

Q. Will there be additional green cabinets?

All communities receiving a Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) service will need to have a new green cabinet – known as a digital subscriber line access multiplexer or DSLAM – installed. In communities which are connected directly to the exchange – known as Exchange Only – they will also require a new Primary Connection Point (PCP) cabinet. It is not possible to confirm where all the new cabinets will be.

Q. *Can we influence where cabinets go?*

The cabinets will usually be placed where they can maximise coverage for the surrounding community. In most cases this will be close to the existing Primary Connection Point (PCP) cabinet.

Due to the budget constraints associated with the projects it is not possible to request additional cabinets.

Q. Can you purchase cabinets?

No, public funding is being used in the first instance to connect as many premises as possible to the new infrastructure.

Q. How do we know which premises are being covered? More detail would be useful

The Digital Scotland Interactive Map - www.digitalscotland.org/whereandwhen - shows exchange areas where coverage is planned and, once fibre services are available within an area, will confirm whether the cabinet you are connected to is fibre enabled.

It is not possible to confirm further details at this stage as the information is based on computer modelling and detailed surveys on the ground need to be undertaken to confirm that the plans can be implemented. The detailed surveys will usually start around 6 months prior to fibre first being made available within an area and

confirmation as to which premises are connected will be available once the service goes live.

Q. How does a household know if it is going to be served by fibre optic?

The majority of premises within Argyll and Bute will get coverage – 85%. Details of which exchange areas are planned for coverage can be found on the Digital Scotland Interactive Map - www.digitalscotland.org/whereandwhen - but users should be aware that not all premises within an exchange area are guaranteed a connection to the new infrastructure.

Q. Why is nothing happening in 2015 - everything seems to be pushed back to 2016?

The initial maps which indicated the planned rollout showed no areas being deployed within 2015 however this does not mean that there is no activity. There is a considerable amount of work to be done building the backhaul network ready for rolling out the infrastructure to local communities. The subsea cables were laid during 2014 but cables on land and new technology within exchanges is required to be built.

It is also worth noting that the indicative timescales are changing as the project progresses and we now expect to see deployment within the Lomond, Dunoon and Campbeltown areas during 2015. Visit the Digital Scotland Interactive Map - www.digitalscotland.org/whereandwhen - to get the most up to date information for your area.

Q. In Dunoon, the DSLAMs have been erected and the fibre is in the ground, why will we not have broadband until "early 2015"?

The rollout in Dunoon was planned to be delivered through the BT Commercial rollout but they will take advantage of subsea cables which have been laid as part of the Highlands and Islands project, this has resulted in delays to the rollout.

Even when the new DSLAM cabinets have been erected delays can be experienced because of the need to secure electrical connections or blockages elsewhere on the network, you can read more about the issues involved in rolling out next generation broadband at http://www.digitalscotland.org/superfast-broadband/deployment-story/.

Q. Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) relies on the existing copper cables from the PCP (Primary Connection Point) cabinet however for a large number of homes this will have been there a number of years, will this reduce the signal and will that copper have to be replaced?

The length and quality of the copper cable will make a difference to the speed of broadband received however the next generation broadband projects will not be replacing or upgrading the existing copper cables.

If you have an existing problem with your line you should report this to your service provider.

Q. Why is wireless not being used as a solution?

A fully wireless solution is not currently offered by BT Openreach on a commercial basis to internet service providers (ISPs) and it will not therefore be part of the commercial, Highlands and Islands or Rest of Scotland programme at this stage. BT may use wireless technology to communicate between cabinets.

Q. What is a Point of Presence?

A Point of Presence allows businesses to link via high speed lines into the exchange and therefore receive a better broadband service. The Highlands and Islands currently have very few Points of Presence which can make them expensive for businesses to connect to as tariffs include a distance related element. The new Points of Presence being constructed as part of the next generation broadband projects will be closer to more businesses and therefore available at a lower cost.

Q. Would a local survey of broadband use and coverage have any importance in the siting of new green DSLAM cabinets?

Information from local surveys can help to demonstrate demand in the area however the principal concern in relation to the location of cabinets will ensuring that it maximises coverage to local premises.

Where telecommunication cabinets already exist in a settlement, the new DSLAM cabinet will be located as close as possible to the existing cabinet however the location of the DSLAM will also be influence by road safety requirements, other existing structures, access to an electricity supply and planning considerations.

Community Broadband Scotland (CBS)

Q. What costs are associated with community projects?

Communities are taking the initiative to provide broadband but also need to take responsibility for costs. CBS will pay the development costs for a community (subject to maximum amounts) and will contribute up to 89% of the capital costs for the project. CBS are looking for at least a 7 year business plan for a community looking to deliver fast broadband and longer if they are moving to superfast (i.e. 24+ mbps). The project should be self-sustainable.

Q. Does a company have to be set up to go down that line?

In most cases a community company would be set up but is not required at the start of the process. Projects developing a community-led superfast solution would be taken out of the BT programme but would need to keep up with the UK standard for broadband over the long term.

Q. If in 20 years along something different is available would you be able to opt back in?

Unfortunately details of future programmes cannot be confirmed.

Q. Why should some communities have to pay when in a big city or town they have don't to pay for it?

Unfortunately the funds available are not sufficient to cover all premises within Scotland. Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) has been set up to help those that do not get connected to the next generation broadband network. They will pay the development costs for a community (subject to maximum amounts) and will contribute up to 89% of the capital costs for the project.

All subscribers to next generation broadband will have to pay for the service they receive but the issue for small rural communities is that the subscriptions may not be sufficient to cover the operating costs for the scheme. CBS can help communities to develop a business plan to address this.

Q. Where does Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) get its funding?

CBS has been allocated £7.5 million from Government. CBS is a partnership between the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands

Enterprise, COSLA, Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Group, Carnegie UK Trust, Cairngorms National Park Authority and Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority.

Q. What is the cost for a typical community?

Some communities deliver a solution within a cost of approximately £30,000-£40,000 on a 'do it yourself' basis. Others, such as Giga Plus Argyll, are looking to get a commercial internet service provider (ISP) involved to cover more than 1,000 premises and this will have a much greater cost.

Q. Are 1,000 premises required for community broadband solutions?

No, 1,000 premises is thought to be the minimum number to attract a commercial internet service provider (ISP) but smaller schemes of around 50+ premises can be progressed. The key is developing a business model which ensures the project is sustainable.

Q. Are Community Broadband Scotland working with any communities that have people 500 yards one side which will get superfast broadband while others have no broadband?

Yes, it is the nature of the technology that there will be differences between neighbours as to the speeds they receive or even whether they can access next generation broadband. Connection and proximity to a new green cabinet – known as a digital subscriber line access multiplexer or DSLAM – will be key.

Even if your community isn't benefiting from the main programme rollout, the availability of fibre connections nearby could help you obtain the required backhaul for a community project.

Q. What technology will be used?

Fibre connections will be the first choice for community projects followed by wireless or wireless to the cabinet options. The final choice will be satellite, this can offer good broadband speeds but has issues in terms of latency and it therefore not suitable for all applications.

Q. Can community groups access backhaul to connect their projects?

Yes they can purchase backhaul the way any other provider would.

Q. How do communities form a broadband group?

Individuals can make enquiries to Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) via their website – www.communitybroadbandscotland.org – or by telephone 0800 917 3688 and CBS can help them to develop their propsoals.

Q. Will there be a BT product that we can legally resell?

Unfortunately we cannot confirm what products will be offered.

General

Q. Does the Council have this information on an interactive website?

The Council provides information on its website at www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/superfast-broadband which includes links to the projects which will deliver digital infrastructure upgrades across Argyll. The website is not interactive but there are links to other interactive sites such as the interactive map maintained by Digital Scotland at http://www.digitalscotland.org/whereandwhen which provides the most up to date picture of the rollout across Argyll.

Q. What do you think communities should be doing?

Communities could lobby their MP and MSP for increased funding to be made available to develop next generation broadband further.

Communities will also have a key role in developing community broadband projects, where appropriate, and in helping their communities get online.

Q. A lot of the general public are not aware of the situation and how going to impact on individual households, what can be done to raise awareness?

The Council maintains information on its webpage – www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/superfast-broadband - and provides updates through press releases and via its weekly newsletter. Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Digital Scotland, BT and Community Broadband Scotland also make information available.