

PE1931/H: Improve the R100 rollout by prioritising properties who currently have speeds of less than 5 Mbps

Scottish Government written submission, 13 November 2024

Thank you for your email of 18 October 2024, seeking an update on the petition referenced above, particularly with regards to the adequacy of the Reaching 100% Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (R100 SBVS).

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of good quality digital connectivity in all aspects of our lives, which is why we made our commitment to extend broadband access across the whole of Scotland, regardless of location or rurality, through the Reaching 100% (R100) programme. Through the three strands of activity that make up the R100 programme – the £600 million R100 contracts (North, Central and South), our R100 SBVS and the ongoing expansion of commercial coverage, including newly emerging technologies such as Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite connections – that commitment has been met.

The R100 SBVS was designed to ensure that anyone who could not access a superfast broadband connection – either through R100 contract build or commercial coverage – would be able to do so. Through the combination of the subsidy of up to £5,000 (to cover capital costs associated with equipment and installation) and the affordability threshold of £56.20 per month (guaranteed for 12 months), we believe that the scheme offers an affordable and accessible means for eligible properties to secure a connection.

As of October 2024, over 4,600 connections have been delivered as a direct result of R100 SBVS vouchers since its launch in September 2020 – each delivering superfast speeds of 30 Megabits per second (Mbps) or above – and there are over 1,000 further potential connections in the pipeline. With around 40 registered suppliers, there is a good mix of technology available, including fixed wireless, 4G mobile, satellite and even fibre services. Indeed, of those connections delivered to date, almost a quarter utilise fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) technology – a much higher percentage than envisaged when the scheme launched.

With regards to take-up of vouchers, the R100 SBVS actually performs favourably when compared to other publicly-funded demand-led interventions. For example, by way of contrast, the UK Government's current broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) scheme – which only guarantees speeds of 10Mbps or above – has had minimal impact in Scotland, with just 111 USO orders being placed for around 600 premises connected since its launch in March 2020 (as per Ofcom's last published annual Connected Nations report for 2023 - <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-and-broadband/coverage-and-speeds/connected-nations-2023/nations/>).

For a more detailed breakdown of these figures, the Data Insights page on our website at <https://digitalconnectivity.campaign.gov.scot/data-insights> now provides

regular updates on how many connections have been delivered through both the R100 SBVS and the three R100 contracts. This information is broken down and provided at contract lot, Scottish Local Authority and Scottish Parliamentary constituency levels.

The R100 SBVS remains available for those eligible, and further information – including on how to apply for a voucher – can be found on our website at <https://digitalconnectivity.campaign.gov.scot/sbvs>.

I trust that this information proves useful to the Committee.

Digital Connectivity Division