



The Rural Services Network

National Rural Conference 2024

Delivering for Rural – Unlocking rural prosperity

Tuesday 17th September

Rural Connectivity Session



Rural Connectivity



Rural Connectivity

There remains 3% of indoor premises in rural areas that have no coverage from **any** operator of 4G services.



Source: Ofcom - Connected Nations Spring 2024 Interactive Report

Only **47%** of rural premises (commercial and residential) have Gigabit capability.



Source: Ofcom - Connected Nations Spring 2024 Interactive Report

11% of rural premises in England still cannot access a superfast broadband connection.



Source: Ofcom - Connected Nations Spring 2024 Interactive Report

A greater proportion of the working population work from home in rural areas of England than in urban. And for many, digital connectivity will be an essential element of their work.



Source: Statistical Digest of Rural England, Connectivity and Accessibility, 2021 & June 2024 analysis of ONS, Labour Force Survey

Everybody deserves reliable digital connectivity.

In rural areas, this reliable digital connectivity is crucial for businesses to compete and expand, fostering economic vitality and job creation. For residents, it simplifies access to services, mitigating rural isolation.

The rural/urban digital divide intersects with other forms of disadvantage faced by rural communities, such as lower economic productivity, lower levels of education, and fewer employment opportunities, all of which contribute to digital exclusion.

Rural Connectivity

First 18 months

Deliver improved rural connectivity through: the effective delivery of **Project Gigabit**; and creating a clear road map and government funding for connecting very hard to reach premises as soon as possible.
As part of this, the broadband USO model should be comprehensively reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose, including raising the 10Mbps minimum which is out of date and inadequate for rural needs. Consideration should be given to how alternative technologies such as fixed wireless access or low earth orbit satellites can provide solutions.

Protect rural residents from digital exclusion by delivering the Shared Rural Network; ensuring 5G regional innovation funding is focussed on rural areas and use cases.

Ensure high quality coverage and delivery of TV and radio, supporting the viewing requirements of rural consumers.

First 3 years

Address the growing digital divide through a fully funded Digital Inclusion Programme, so no one is left behind due to their lack of online skills or their inability to pay for basic equipment and connection charges.
This should be a national approach with a local delivery programme involving statutory, private, and voluntary sector organisations working in partnership.

Develop new systems and methods of recycling of IT which benefits both communities and the environment.

Create a digitally savvy, innovative rural workforce by providing accessible training, appropriately funded for rural communities.