

News release

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Broadband roll-out faces its toughest hurdle

The Scottish Government achieved its initial target to provide fibre broadband access to 95 per cent of premises. Its more recent 'Reaching 100 per cent' ambition will be more difficult to realise.

A new report today from the Auditor General looks at public sector spending to reach areas not covered by commercial providers. Up to 31 March 2018, £259 million had been paid to BT for broadband roll-out. Lower costs and higher take-up is expected to enable around 60,000 more premises to be reached than originally planned.

People's experience of broadband speeds is often lower than those claimed, depending on technology and the package chosen. Overall speeds have increased across Scotland, but rural homes and offices still lag behind urban areas - around a quarter cannot receive 10 Mb/s.

The "Reaching 100 per cent" programme says every home and business will have access to superfast broadband (speeds of 30 Mb/s or more) by the end of 2021.

The Scottish Government has committed £600 million initial investment to deliver superfast broadband to 147,000 premises, with contracts to be awarded early next year. Further investment may be required to reach all premises.

The report also points out that Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) did not deliver on its anticipated benefits. CBS was set up to back local initiatives but only 13 of the 63 it helped finance have proved successful.

Community groups say this has undermined their confidence in the Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to support rural broadband. The report says lessons need to be learned from this.

Fraser McKinlay, Audit Scotland's Director of Performance Audit and Best Value, said: "Fast, reliable internet access is now considered an essential part of everyday life.

"Good progress has been made to date but the toughest hurdle remains - to extend the benefits to everyone, particularly remote and rural communities.

"As well as being the toughest hurdle, it is not yet clear how the Scottish Government is going to fulfill its pledge to deliver superfast broadband to everyone by the end of 2021."

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Notes to editors

1. This report updates our two previous audits on broadband progress in [2015](#) and [2016](#). A factsheet at the back of the report aims to clarify some of the confusing technical jargon around broadband.

2. In 2013, the Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) separately contracted BT to help deliver access to the fibre broadband network across the country. The contracts were intended to provide access to 95 per cent of premises by December 2017. BT also committed to providing 77 per cent of premises with access to speeds of more than 24 Mb/s.

3. The Scottish Government set up Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) in 2012 to bring broadband to rural communities not covered by either the two BT contracts or commercial plans. Its main role was to provide financial support and advice to communities. These are some of the most remote and difficult to reach communities which are less attractive to commercial suppliers. CBS was funded by the Scottish Government and administered by HIE.

4. The Scottish Government announced its 'Reaching for 100 per cent' (R100) programme in May 2016 to deliver its commitment that every home and business in Scotland will have access to superfast broadband by the end of 2021. This is a key element of its vision for a world-class digital infrastructure. As part of this, it has changed its definition of superfast broadband from speeds greater than 24 Mb/s to greater than 30 Mb/s. This is consistent with Ofcom's and the EU's definition of superfast.

5. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

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