



WEST SUSSEX SUPERFAST BROADBAND CONNECTION VOUCHER SCHEME

Guidance for Applicants

The purpose of the Connection Voucher Scheme is to assist Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in West Sussex to meet the capital costs of a superfast (>30Mbps) broadband connection to their premises where they are not covered by the planned BDUK superfast rollout. The Scheme is funded by Coast to Capital (C2C) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) under their Growth is Digital project.

West Sussex County Council is the delivery body for this scheme. They are assisted by the Rural West Sussex Partnership, Gatwick Diamond Initiative, the Coastal West Sussex Partnership and the South Downs National Park Authority.

The scheme runs from **18 August 2016 to 1 February 2017** or until the available budget has all been allocated, whichever is sooner.

All capital works must be completed and paid for before 31 March 2017 in order to qualify for the grant.

The voucher can provide capital funding of £3000 or up to 40% of the total project cost **whichever is lower**. For projects involving clusters of businesses we require that each business is invoiced individually and the same limits apply.

We will not consider applications which result in a voucher value of less than £1000 (i.e a total project cost of less than £2500) due to the administration requirement.

The voucher scheme will only fund eligible capital expenditure [as defined by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)]. Simply, this will involve the acquisition, enhancement or creation of capital assets which have a useful life of at least 12 months. Your match funding can be either capital or revenue but must be clearly tied to the same project.

Payment is **in arrears** – you must pay the supplier invoice and then reclaim the value of any voucher awarded.

This guidance contains information on who is eligible to apply and how the process works.



The West Sussex Superfast Broadband Connection Voucher Scheme is unable to recommend suppliers, however we suggest you either research this yourself via online search engines or contact the industry trade association INCA for a list of members, see:

<http://www.inca.coop/westsussexvouchers-listing>

1. Am I eligible to apply?

To be eligible for funding under the Connection Voucher Scheme:

- i. You must be a Small or Medium Sized Enterprise (SME) as defined by the European Commission.

Registered charities, social enterprises and sole traders that meet the SME criteria below are welcome to apply.

- You are a sole trader or employ between 1 and 249 persons AND
- You have an annual turnover not exceeding €50 million AND/OR
- You have an annual balance sheet total not exceeding €43 million.

Businesses which are owned by another business or who own other businesses may be able to apply, but should check the guidance about linked enterprises.

If you are unsure if you meet the SME criteria then see: :

http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition/index_en.htm

- ii. Your business property must be located within the County of West Sussex.
- iii. The property to be connected must be outside the planned BDUK Superfast roll out and cannot already have a superfast connection.

You **must** check your postcode with West Sussex Better Connected to make sure that you are in an eligible area – e-mail your postcode to: broadband@westsussex.gov.uk

You will need to provide the response as evidence of eligibility.

The address must be the registered office or trading address of your business. If you work from a residential property as your main business base you can still apply. You **cannot**



apply if you are employed by a business based elsewhere and work from home.

- iv. The proposed connection must meet the requirements for Next Generation Access (NGA).

The preferred supplier **must** confirm that the new/improved connection will meet NGA requirements as defined at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/379762/State_aid_-_Guidance_-_Technology_Guidelines.pdf

- v. If you are a tenant of a business park or a commercial property landlord, you must also have the approval of your landlord to proceed with the work. As a tenant you must also have a minimum three year lease – if this is not the case then contact the programme team.

2. What other conditions apply?

- i. You must not have already received public sector funding to improve the broadband connectivity to your business premises/ property.
- ii. You or your business/organisation must have no outstanding debts to the Local Authority at the time you apply.
- iii. You must confirm that you have not already received de minimis aid that, together with this voucher, would exceed the threshold of €200k over a three-year fiscal period. You will have been issued with a letter by any schemes that grant de minimis aid telling you how much aid you have received. You can find more guidance at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-aid-a-beginners-guide-guidance-notes>

or see the full EU de minimis Regulation at

Commission Regulation (EC) No 1998/2006 of 15 December 2006 on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the Treaty to de minimis aid, L 379/5, OJEU, 28 December 2006,

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:379:0005:0010:en:PDF>

Businesses in certain sectors are not eligible for de minimis aid or are eligible but with different financial limits. If your business/organisation is active in the fisheries, agricultural or coal sectors, or if you are unsure of your entitlement to benefit from de minimis aid, it is recommended that you seek professional advice before participating in the scheme.



- iv. Your organisation is not a public sector organisation or is not (i) a school funded by DFE (ii) a privately funded school operating over the ages of 3-18 or (iii) an organisation solely involved in offering provision under the requirement for young people to remain in education or training until their 18th birthday.
- v. Your business must be financially viable at the time you apply.

3. What's the process?

You start by asking West Sussex Better Connected to check your postcode in order to ensure you are in an eligible area. Only complete the application once you have confirmation that you are in an eligible area

If you wish to apply as part of a group of businesses in a building, site or area then each business must complete individual applications and be invoiced separately. Ensure you discuss such 'cluster' projects with the programme team.

If you are eligible, you need to get a valid quote from a supplier. If the total cost to you is £10,000 or less, then one quote is acceptable. If the project cost is £10,001 or above then we require three quotes to the same specification.

When we receive your form we will check your eligibility, check that the supplier quote is appropriate for the kind of connection that you have requested and, if ok, we will send you an email or a letter confirming that you have an offer of a Connection Voucher and confirm the value of that voucher.

If you have provided estimates rather than firm quotes, you will need to send us the firm quote once the supplier has completed their survey before we can confirm your voucher offer. **Any spend ahead of this offer is at your own risk.**

Once you have your voucher you have up to 28 days to place your order with your chosen supplier. Please make sure you complete the process in that time. We may withdraw your offer if you do not place your order quickly. **You must let us know when you have placed your order.**

When the connection is made, you need to make your claim and send us a copy of the supplier invoice. The form contains a declaration that the new service has been installed and is performing as expected. You must pay any VAT due to the supplier and any costs not covered by the voucher direct to the supplier. Once they have checked your claim West



Sussex County Council will pay you the value of the voucher.

If you are registered for VAT then project cost will be paid net of VAT therefore all costs listed in the claim must exclude VAT as these are recoverable. If you are not VAT registered then project cost included in claims will be paid gross, therefore all cost included in claim should include VAT.

We then send you a letter to say how much grant you have received from the Connection Voucher Scheme.

The Connection Voucher Scheme has a final end date of **31 March 2017** for claims. Hence you must ensure that your supplier can complete installation and invoice you before **31 March 2017** in order for West Sussex County Council to process your claim.

4. Monitoring and audit

A condition of the voucher scheme is that you agree to participate in follow-up monitoring of the economic impact of the Voucher Scheme if you are successful in obtaining funding.

The Coast to Capital Local Growth Fund monies are aimed at promoting job creation and economic growth and this must be evidenced to Government.

The follow-up survey will comprise a short on-line survey (using Survey Monkey or similar) which will take around 15 minutes to complete. This will be actioned 1-2 years after the voucher is issued.

If you are awarded a connection voucher then it is also important that you retain all documentation for at least three years for audit purposes. **Failure to meet monitoring requirements may result in a claw back of some or all of the grant awarded.**

If you need help, please contact: grants@c2cbroadbandgrants.org.uk