

Digital
Infrastructure
Strategy
2020-2025

**2022-2023
Update**

Foreword

Digital infrastructure, both fixed line broadband and mobile connectivity, is increasingly critical for all residents, businesses and visitors in Cumbria. Since launching the Digital Infrastructure Strategy in November 2020 the County Council has made significant progress in delivering our action plan to date. This builds on investment of over £40m of public funding through the Connecting Cumbria contract with BT Openreach. As a result of activity led by the Council, broadband services of at least 30Mbps are now available to almost 95% of properties in Cumbria, with more than 31% of properties able to access gigabit capable services. In addition coverage of 4G mobile services from all four major Mobile Network Operators is available across almost 64% of Cumbrian geography.

Whilst this is a significant achievement, continuing to improve digital connectivity will be essential over the coming years so that Cumbria can at least match or exceed the coverage in other parts of the UK. The County Council is pleased to be transferring ownership of the successful Connecting Cumbria programme to Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness Councils from 1st April 2023 in the knowledge that the Connecting Cumbria programme is in good shape and will be able to continue the great work with partners to deliver the Digital Infrastructure Strategy across the county for the benefit of residents, businesses and visitors.

“Improved digital infrastructure remains a top priority given the significant economic and social benefits for residents and businesses and I am delighted with the progress we have made over the last year and to see the increase in take-up of broadband services. The job is not yet complete and continued effort is required to achieve the goal that no one and no place is left behind. As Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness Councils pick up the baton, I am sure we will continue to see further improvements in our digital connectivity in the next couple of years so that Cumbria has access to fast, reliable internet connectivity to support residents, local businesses and the delivery of public services.”



Cllr David Southward
Cumbria County
Council's Cabinet
Member of Economic
Development and
Digital Champion

“Connecting Cumbria has been successfully working to help Cumbria develop the futureproof infrastructure our businesses and communities need in tandem with ensuring that all places as a minimum catch up with the rest of the UK. Digital connectivity will play a central role in supporting economic growth and greater social inclusion to all local businesses and residents in Cumbria and this will continue through the commitment of both Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness Councils.”



Angela Jones
Executive Director
Economy and
Infrastructure and
Digital Champion

Introduction and Background

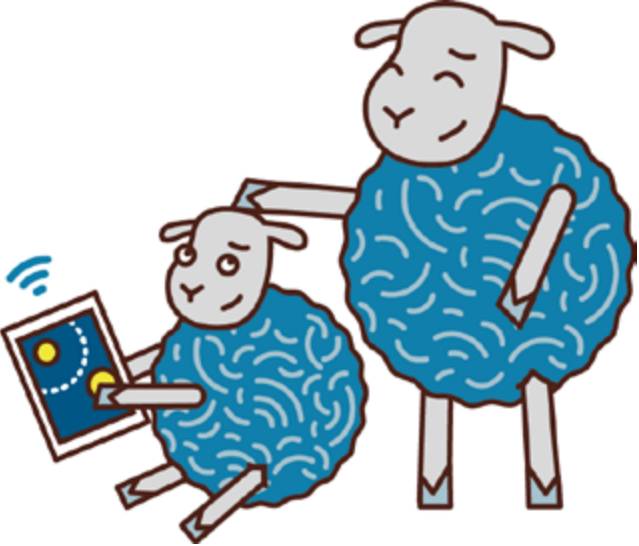
Providing digital infrastructure, either through supporting commercial deployments, or working with central government to secure funding where intervention is required, is a key enabler to facilitate delivery of the Council Plan. Digital infrastructure in this context includes fixed line gigabit capable connections, the availability of mobile 4G services and ensuring that Cumbria is able to benefit from new services enabled by 5G technology as it develops. In November 2020, Cumbria County Council committed to the Digital Infrastructure Strategy 2020-2025 to maximise deployment of full fibre and mobile infrastructure, in order to support:

- **Economic growth of our businesses.**
- **Digital inclusion so that no resident or business is left behind.**
- **Delivery of more effective and efficient provision of local public services.**

Our objectives are aligned with the UK Government's ambitions and Cumbria County Council is working to support the UK Government's two main programmes to deliver its commitments in relation to digital connectivity:

- **Project Gigabit – Public investment to deliver gigabit connectivity to the most challenging 20% of UK properties and stimulation of commercial investment into the remaining 80% of the UK.**
- **Shared Rural Network – A combination of commercial and public investment to deliver 95% geographical 4G coverage across the UK from at least one mobile network operator.**

We are working closely with the Borderlands Partnership, recognising that digital infrastructure is a shared challenge and opportunity for the region's economy. Through the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal that was signed in March 2021, there is the commitment to invest in digital infrastructure (Borderlands Site borderlandsgrowth.com) that supports delivery of the Council's Digital Infrastructure Strategy.

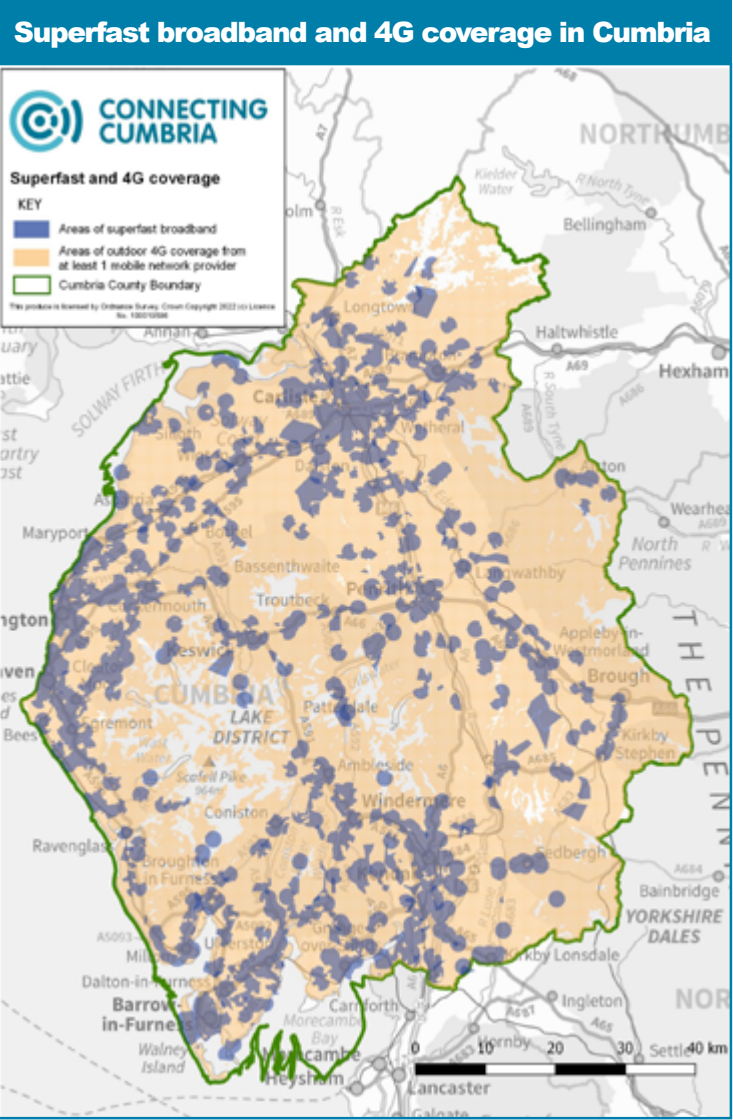
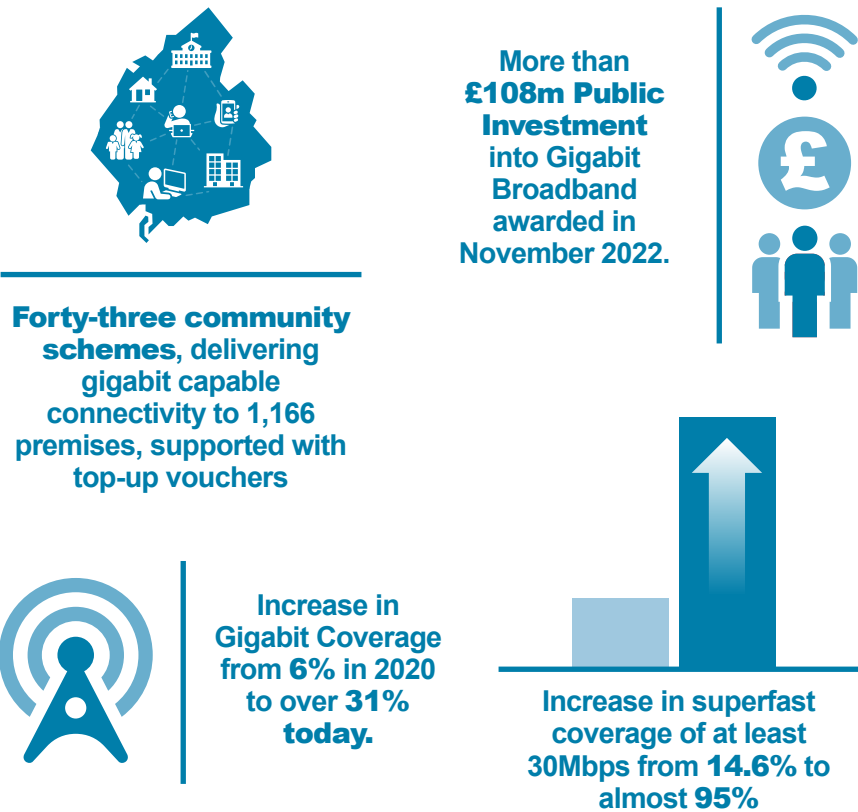




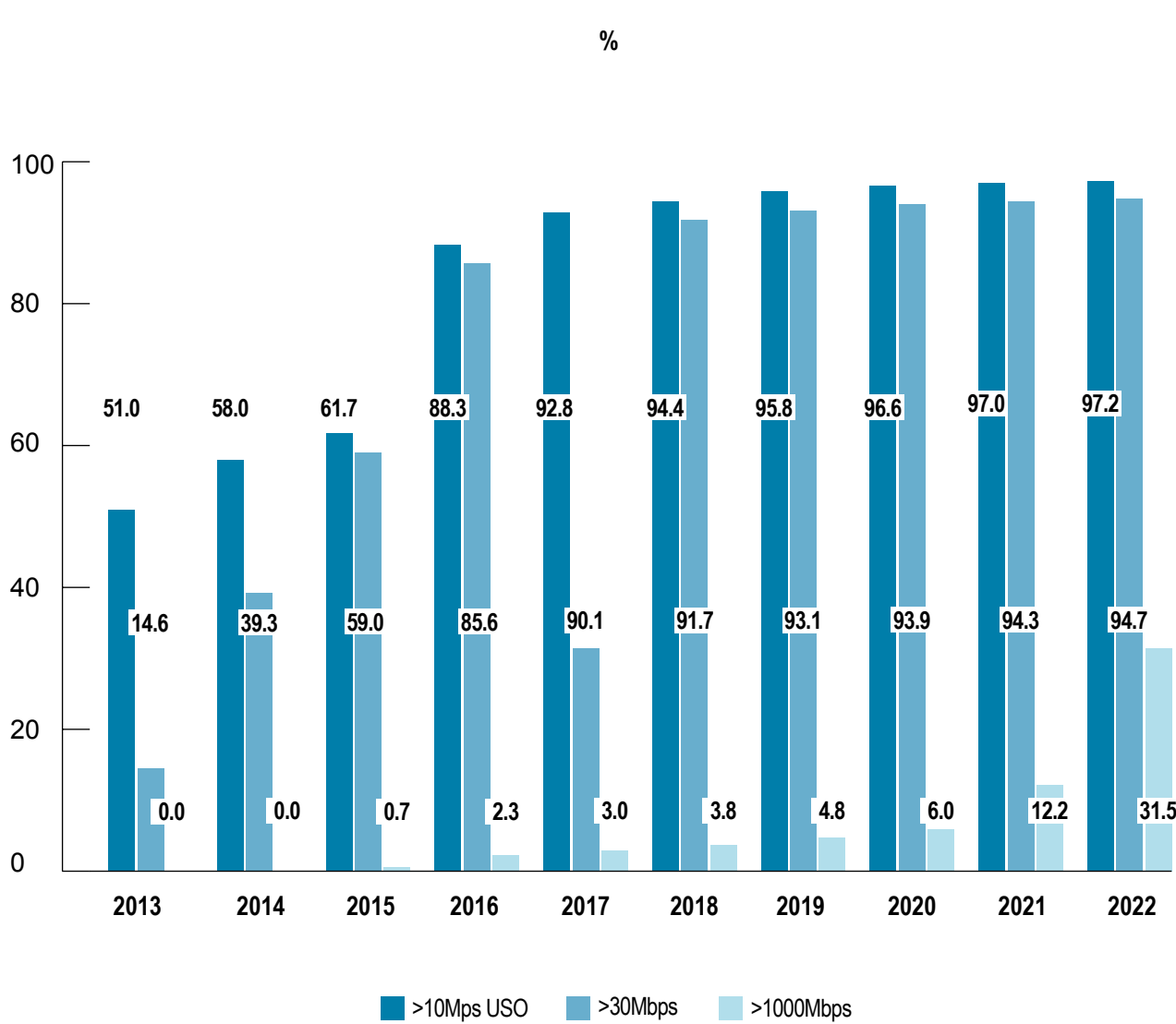
Action Plan Progress

A lot of progress has been made in just over a year with the Cumbria County Council's Digital Infrastructure Strategy as summarised in Figure 1:

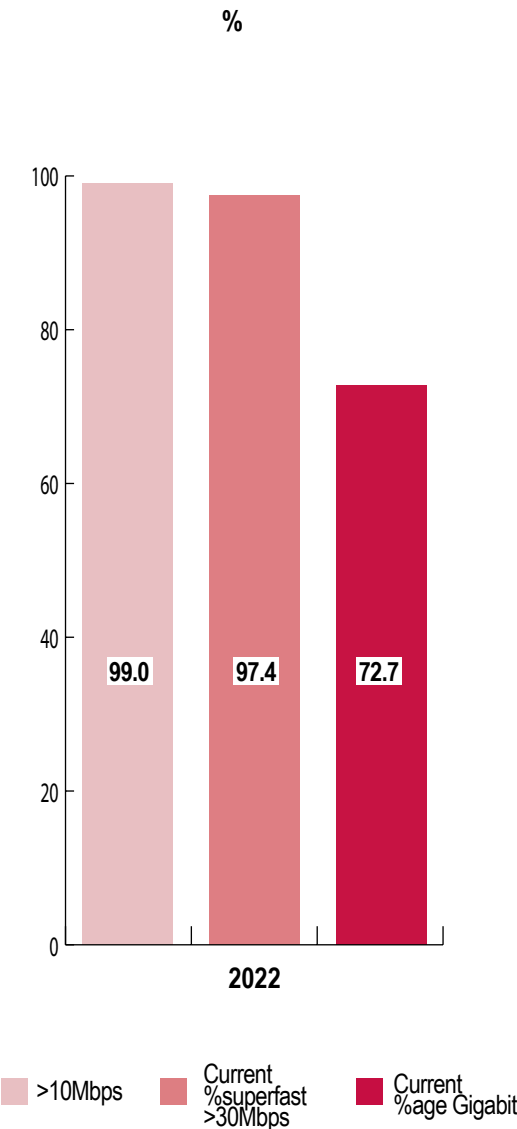
Figure 1: An updated infographic summarising achievements in 2022/23



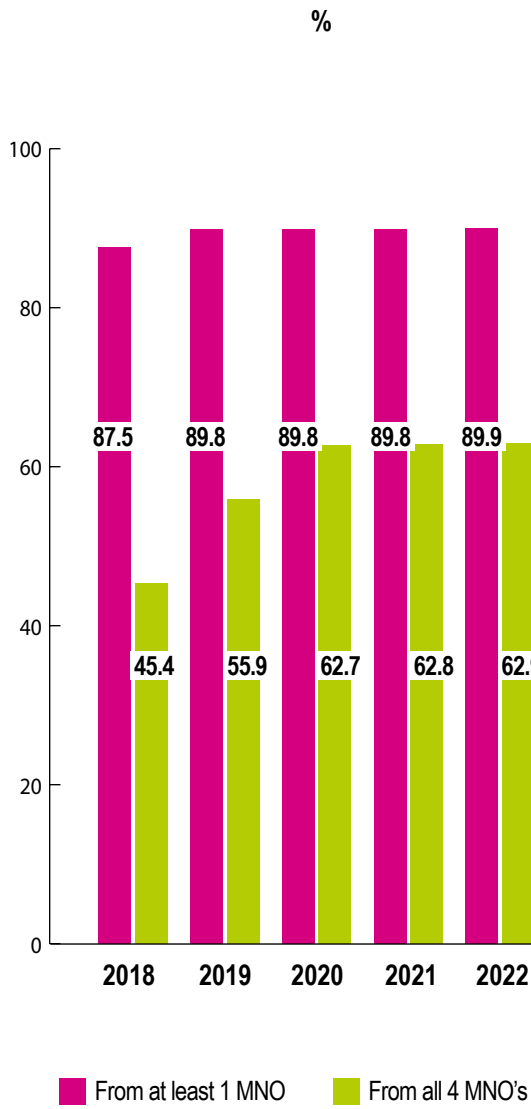
Fixed Broadband Coverage Cumbria



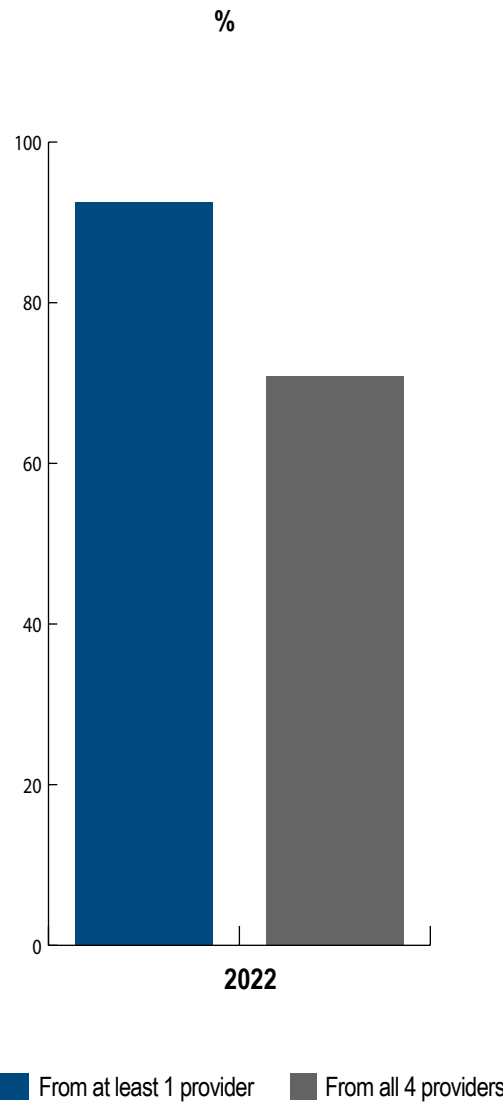
Fixed Broadband Coverage UK



Mobile 4G Geographic Coverage Cumbria



Mobile 4G Geographic Coverage UK



Digital Connectivity coverage levels in Cumbria started behind those in the wider UK, challenging geography and sparseness of our population has historically attracted lower levels of commercial investment than more urban areas, however Cumbria has caught up considerably over the past few years. Public investment in Digital Infrastructure programmes and work to encourage commercial investment means that currently Cumbria levels of superfast coverage of at least 30Mbps and mobile 4G geographic coverage from at least 1 Mobile Network Operator (MNO) are only a few percentage points behind UK levels. There is still a lot of work to do to catch up further and to ensure that digital infrastructure in the county keeps pace with the levels that businesses, residents and visitors expect.



Gigabit Capable Infrastructure

Progress on each of the actions in the Digital Infrastructure Strategy is summarised in the following update.



We said the Council would...

Through the Digital Borderlands voucher top-up scheme provide up to £1,500 for residential premises and £3,000 to business premises to provide gigabit capable connectivity to communities in the last 5% to 6% of superfast not-spots. This funding works with the UK Rural Gigabit Connectivity scheme vouchers giving a combined funding of up to £3,000 for residential premises and £7,000 to business premises.

Progress so far...

This Digital Borderlands Voucher Top-Up scheme, one of the first projects under the Borderlands Growth Deal, ran from June 2020 to May 2022. This funding supports 40 voucher top-up community schemes in Cumbria and to provide gigabit capable connectivity to 1,064 premises through its £4m budget; of which over £2m was spent in Cumbria.

Communities continue to need support and so in September 2022 the Council launched a Cumbria specific voucher top-up scheme; providing £2m of further funding to support residents and businesses.

So far 3 community schemes have been allocated support through this further funding with more than 100 residential and business premises expected to benefit.

In December 2022 the UK Government announced changes to the UK rural Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme and work is in progress to review the Cumbria top-up to maximise support for Cumbrian communities



We said the Council would...

Work with UK Government to secure funding for gigabit capable connections in line with the policy of providing £5bn of subsidy for the hardest to reach 20% of premises across the UK and to ensure that Cumbria is not left behind. UK Government targets completion by 2025.

Progress so far...

Cumbria was the pilot region in the UK Gigabit Programme and in November 2022 was the first area to have a regional contract awarded under Project Gigabit to extend gigabit capable connections to some of the harder to reach premises that won't benefit from commercial deployments. This contract, valued at £108.5m and benefiting up to 60,000 properties, has been awarded to Fibrus by Building Digital UK (BDUK) who are overseeing the delivery of Project Gigabit. Works under this contract have commenced, with the initial properties expected to be able to order services before the end of spring 2023, and all delivery is targeted to be complete before the end of 2026.

Works delivered through this contract will be available on a wholesale basis, allowing consumers to choose between internet suppliers, through Hyperfast GB, a part of Fibrus, and more information can now be found at <https://hyperfastgb.com/cumbria/>. As part of this contract Fibrus, and their delivery partner Viberoptix, have committed to create at least 90 apprenticeships through their Newton Rigg training academy near Penrith by 2026.

Cumbria is also a pilot area for the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). The Alpha Trials are using Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite connectivity to connect some of the very hardest-to-reach premises in the UK. The focus of this trial, which will run for up to two years, will be the Mountain Rescue post in Wasdale. In parallel, the Connecting Cumbria team is engaging with DSIT to look at a range of solutions for reaching the most challenging of properties in the UK to ensure no one and no place is left behind.



We said the Council would...

Work in partnership with planning authorities and other bodies to ensure provision for gigabit capable digital connectivity is strongly encouraged at the planning stage for new developments.

Progress so far...

The Council has continued to work with district authorities, The Lake District National Park and The Yorkshire Dales National Park to encourage the submission of a broadband plan in all planning applications and in particular for applications of more than one property.

New building regulations came into effect on 26 December 2022 mandating that developers deploy gigabit capable connectivity to the nearest distribution point to new dwellings, new buildings and when existing buildings are subject to major renovation works.



Mobile Infrastructure

We said the Council would...

Work with the UK Government Shared Rural Network (SRN) mobile programme, which is seeking to deliver 95% geographical 4G coverage in the UK from at least one Mobile Network Operator by 2025, to maximise investment in Cumbria.

Progress so far...

SRN targets 80% 4G geographic coverage from all four Mobile Network Operators and 95% from at least one by 2025. This work will be accomplished by a combination of commercial investment in areas with partial coverage and £500m of public funded investment into areas with no coverage from any operator (total not-spots). The Connecting Cumbria team has continued to engage with Digital Mobile Spectrum Limited, who are delivering the SRN programme, to seek to understand how they will be delivering their commitments in Cumbria and how we can encourage prioritisation for the county.

The Connecting Cumbria team have also worked with the Home Office, whose Extended Area Scheme is seeking to deliver in the most rural total not-spots and will contribute to the SRN programme, to maximise the availability of consumer services.



We said the Council would...

Work with partners on 5G research and development to create trials in Cumbria and the broader Borderlands region subject to further funding.

Progress so far...

Cumbria County Council, on behalf of the Borderlands, was a member of the 5G New Thinking consortium. This project developed a toolkit of solutions to allow 5G technology to be tested in rural areas and this has now been published at [https:// toolkit.5gnewthinking.org/](https://toolkit.5gnewthinking.org/).

The Connecting Cumbria team are working with universities, including University of Cumbria and Lancaster University, to develop student projects to investigate opportunities and use cases for 5G as well as a range of other aspects of digital connectivity. Students from Lancaster University are currently looking at the potential benefits to businesses and communities if 5G was to be utilised to support the Windermere Ferry.

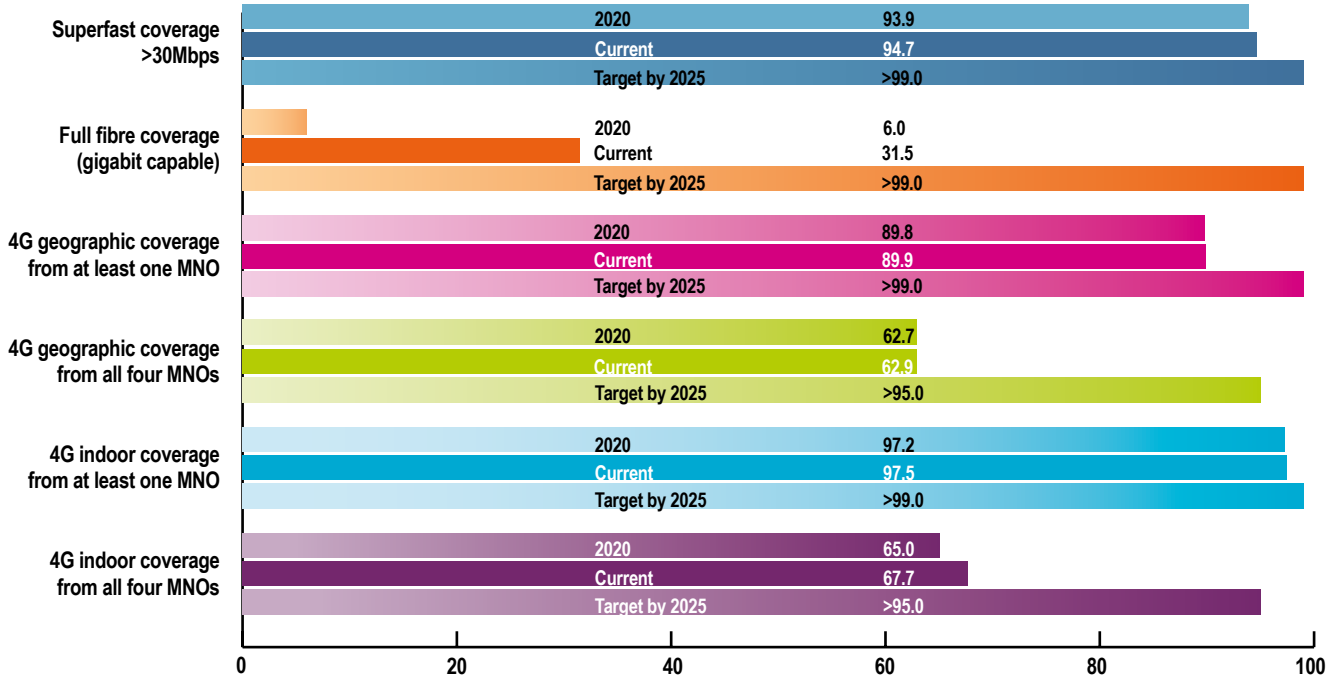
Through membership of the 5G Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) Early Adopters Group, the Connecting Cumbria team has been seeking to understand more about the 5G market and opportunities to encourage investment by making public sector assets such as building and street lights available to support 5G infrastructure. Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)



Measuring Our Success

We are making good progress with the delivery of the Digital Infrastructure Strategy, but there is still a great deal to do. Figure 1 below illustrates performance against some of the key metrics:

Figure 1: Current digital infrastructure footprint and target coverage of Cumbria



We and our partners have a lot of work to do to achieve our vision of delivering our targets and world class digital connectivity in Cumbria. As each aspect of our action plan is further developed we will share more detail and updates on our website and via County Council publications.



Further information can be found using the following website link:
www.connectingcumbria.org.uk



