

Innovation key for very rural broadband – Deputy Minister

Due to the complexity of reaching some areas, fibre rollout will not be suitable for all the remaining premises. Other solutions include communities coming together with the assistance of the Welsh Government's Access Broadband Cymru vouchers and the use of different and innovative technologies.

The Deputy Minister visited a scheme in Llanddewi Rhydderch, near Abergavenny, which is delivering faster broadband to residents as well as showcasing its potential for other areas. It uses TV white space, which is the unused TV channels available following the switch to digital.

TV white space also has the potential of connecting the "internet of things", making a connected home or work space a reality by offering a broadband signal capable of handling multiple devices.

The scheme, managed by Monmouthshire Council, has benefited from the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

The Deputy Minister also visited Michaelston y Fedw which now has access to some of the fastest broadband speeds in the UK. They achieved this by pulling together and taking advantage of the Welsh Government's broadband voucher schemes to build their own network.

The project, thought to be the first of its kind in Wales, also came top in the European Broadband Awards in 2018.

Lee Waters said:

"We have come a long way in Wales, with over 95 per cent of premises now able to access superfast broadband, compared with under 50 per cent when we began Superfast Cymru. This progress is largely as a result of our intervention as private companies had no plans to rollout the infrastructure in large parts of Wales.

"Despite this progress we want to reach the remaining five per cent. Many of these will be in very rural areas and while we are investing over £22m in a further fibre rollout it will not be possible to reach all of these through this technology alone. We need to look at innovative solutions, as part of a package of measures, which includes fibre, to make a difference in all communities.

"Different technology such as TV white space and other emerging wireless developments will have a greater role in the mix of

delivering faster speeds to those in very rural areas, and the scheme near Abergavenny shows what can be achieved.

“The community of Michaelston y Fedw have also shown how community effort backed by our voucher schemes can make a real difference, with speeds of 900Mbps now enjoyed there.

“There is no one size fits all solution to reach the remaining premises, and in the absence of a planned commercial rollout, we are using and assessing a variety of ways to reach very rural areas.”

The Welsh Government is already investing £22.5m to reach 26,000 of the remaining premises through fibre broadband, as part of a suite of measures. This is in addition to the £200m invested in the Superfast Cymru scheme which has connected more than 733,000 premises in areas where commercial companies had no plans to go.