



Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

Freedom of Information Team
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

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FOI2021/02163

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Dear Mr Vernon,

Thank you for your correspondence of 28 January, in which you made the following request for information:

Rural Gigabit voucher scheme

Can you advise what the split in payment category for each month the scheme has been in place. For example residential /sole trader , business

Can you give detailed figures of those claims audited. What was the outcome. How many payments were reduced as result of change from Sole Trader to Residential.

For payment purpose what do you classify as payment as a sole trader ?

Do you have specific figures for Fibrus Ltd and Fibrus Networks Ltd. b4b networks

We have dealt with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). I can confirm that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) does have information within scope of your request. Please see our responses below.

1.

	Resident Number of vouchers paid	Resident Value of vouchers paid	Business Number of vouchers paid	Business Value of vouchers paid
June 2019	0	0	2	£3,000
July	0	0	1	£3,000
August	13	£19,000	5	£15,500
September	33	£49,500	11	£36,000
October	66	£99,000	28	£95,500
November	79	£117,500	32	£108,000
December	113	£169,500	37	£115,500
January 2020	124	£185,000	50	£166,000
February	194	£292,582	49	£171,000
March	218	£326,924	86	£291,921
April	172	£250,937	74	£251,093
May	190	£277,246	55	£182,462
June	300	£442,992	114	£381,502
July	597	£885,669	211	£719,472

August	530	£786,391	210	£697,379
September	619	£916,228	229	£773,175
October	1182	£1,754,325	313	£1,055,019
November	950	£1,449,785	289	£1,022,992
December	974	£1,470,084	243	£899,252
January 2021	554	£832,039	153	£536,336

- Between June 2019 to 31 December 2020 674 site visits were carried out for rural vouchers. From April 2019 to date, 549 cost audits have been completed.
In carrying out site visits and cost audits, as well as other checks, there are often multiple queries that are raised throughout the voucher lifecycle. These can result in voucher values being reduced and therefore it is not possible to separate out those where a change occurred only as a result of a voucher being changed from the beneficiary being a sole trader to a resident.
- Sole traders are entitled to business vouchers provided they meet the SME criteria. SME eligibility is set out in Schedule 2 of our [Supplier Terms and Conditions](#).
- We consider this information to be exempt from disclosure under section 43(2) (commercial interests) of the Act. Section 43 applies to information where its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it). When this exemption applies, we have to consider whether the public interest in favour of maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in favour of releasing the information. The factors we took into account in carrying out the public interest test in relation to section 43 of the Act are set out below.

Public Interest Considerations in favour of disclosure:

In favour of disclosure we considered the public interest in transparency of, and proper scrutiny of, the expenditure of public money. Both transparency and scrutiny help ensure that public money is used effectively. We also considered the importance of demonstrating that value for public money is obtained and that public contract processes are conducted in a fair, open and honest way.

Public Interest Considerations in favour of maintaining the exemption:

We have considered the information requested and on balance whether it is in the public interest to provide any further information, specifically details of the payments, against the commercial interests of the organisations captured by your request. We considered whether the information requested reveals commercial information about the internal workings of the organisations concerned and whether this information has the potential to damage their commercial interests. We considered whether this information, if disclosed, could damage these organisations' relationships with their partners and undermine confidence. In addition, release of such information could undermine public confidence in these organisations. We believe that this is not in the public interest.

It is also important that organisations can expect confidence to be maintained around market-sensitive information held by government departments such as DCMS.

Disclosure of further details of payments made to the organisations captured by your request could undermine confidence in DCMS and deter organisations from engaging in schemes, such as the Gigabit Voucher Scheme, for fear their commercially sensitive information will be shared publicly. This is not in the public interest.

Yours sincerely,

Freedom of Information Team
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Complaints and comments

As is customary in our replies, I should explain that if you are dissatisfied with any aspect of our response to your request for information, and/or wish to appeal against information being withheld from you, please send full details within two calendar months of the date of this response to: foi@dcms.gov.uk. You have the right to ask the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to investigate any aspect of your complaint. Please note that the ICO is likely to expect internal complaints procedures to have been exhausted before beginning an investigation.