

**Issue Date: Tuesday, July 13, 2010**

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## **Broadband funding opportunity for communities in rural Aberdeenshire**

Groups in rural Aberdeenshire can now apply for funding to improve broadband in their area and invest in new communications technology.

The Scottish Government has announced funding of more than £800,000 to enhance Broadband provision across rural Scotland through the establishment of the Rural Broadband Challenge Fund.

Rural groups, community organisations and business partnerships will be able to apply for a share of the Challenge Fund by submitting an application to the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme.

The final decision on applications will be made by a panel created by the government to consider submissions from across the country.

James Knowles, Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER LAG Chairman welcomed the Broadband initiative and invites groups to apply to the one-off, short-term scheme.

“The funding available through the Challenge Fund presents an opportunity for community groups to submit applications to enhance Broadband in their local area,” he said.

“We are keen to hear from rural groups who have poor Broadband provision in their communities, and who are able to submit strong applications which demonstrate enhanced broadband provision that will serve their local community.

“We expect a range of technologies to be considered by groups, for example, improvements to telephone exchanges where practicable, or new provision through satellite or fibre optic solutions.

“Applications will be considered by the Aberdeenshire LAG before bids are forwarded to the Scottish Government in September to be considered under the Challenge Fund.”

Vicky Thomson, Aberdeenshire LEADER Co-ordinator, added: “We are aware there is a relatively short timescale to submit applications. The deadline is Friday, August 27 and we hope to be able to provide support to applicants so

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their proposals represent value for money and best use is made of available technologies to enhance broadband provision.”

For guidance on the Broadband funding application process, please contact the LEADER Office on 01467 628383 or e-mail:

[vicky.thomson@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:vicky.thomson@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

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## Notes for Editors

Rural communities will be able to bid for a share of a million-Euro fund to bring enhanced broadband to their areas.

The new investment is being delivered by the LEADER scheme which supports small-scale, community driven projects in rural areas and is aimed at improving coverage and bringing faster broadband rural communities.

Rural Secretary Richard Lochhead said:

“The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that as many people as possible have broadband access and have already carried out a significant amount of work in this area.

“With it being used by more and more households as standard, I hope that this new challenge fund will further enhance Scotland’s broadband infrastructure and help rural firms gain a level playing field at a time when they need it most.

“Fresh investment through LEADER will bring faster speeds, improved coverage or simply research to identify the digital needs of an area.”

## **Background**

Presently €1 million equals just over £800,000. The €1 million amount is fixed, regardless of exchange rate. The deadline for bids to the Scottish Government is September 24, 2010.

Broadband in Scotland:

- As a direct result of Scottish Government intervention, broadband availability in Scotland is over 99 per cent.
- Following broadband projects delivered by the former Scottish Executive and successful completion of SG’s Broadband Reach Project in March 2010, basic broadband coverage, defined as 512 kbps (kilobits per second), is now generally available throughout Scotland.

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- The Broadband Reach Project, which was completed in March 2010, is now providing a basic, affordable, broadband service to over 2,400 households and businesses, many located in rural areas, previously unable to get broadband due to distance from the exchange.
- In a separate project, BT is investing £3 million in a programme of upgrades to 81 rural and remote exchanges located throughout Scotland, by agreement with the SG. The exchanges are all experiencing capacity issues. The programme is now two thirds complete; the remainder will be complete by the end of November 2010.
- This latest announcement means that communities will have the opportunity to define their broadband needs and, develop a project which meets these needs. It will then be for the LAGs to assess the merits of these applications and bid for funding to the Challenge Fund.

LEADER aims to increase the capacity of local rural community and business networks to build knowledge and skills, and encourage innovation and co-operation in order to tackle local development objectives. LEADER accounts for 5 per cent of the total SRDP allocation (around £38m). An additional £19.2m Convergence Funding has been awarded to seven Local Action Groups LAGs in the Highlands and Islands in recognition of its previous status as a disadvantaged and remote area. Funding is awarded by LAGs who take decisions on projects which are community driven and have a wide community benefit. These LAGs are a partnership made up of representatives from:

- The local council
- Local Enterprise Company
- Business people
- Other public agencies
- Voluntary action groups
- Community groups

For further details contact:

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**endsnotes**