Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

7th March 2019

Collaborating for digital connectivity

Government is committed to supporting investment in high-quality, reliable digital connectivity so that communities can benefit from faster economic growth and greater social inclusion. It is essential to keep pace with growing demand for internet bandwidth and mobile data from local businesses, residents and those who visit our communities. As outlined in the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review, the Government would like to see nationwide full fibre coverage by 2033. We would also like the UK to be a world leader in 5G, with the majority of the population covered by a 5G signal by 2027. We are writing to ask for your help in supporting the investment necessary to achieve these objectives.

Recent years have seen substantial investment in mobile and fixed digital infrastructure across the UK. In 2016 the Gross Value Added from the digital sector was £116.5 billion, which equates to 6.7% of the UK economy, so the benefits for individuals and the UK as a whole are substantial. While mobile coverage across the UK has been significantly improving, there are still too many areas where coverage is poor. The UK has now achieved 95% superfast broadband coverage but still only 6% full fibre coverage.

We need to create the market and policy conditions necessary to support the large-scale commercial investment required to extend and future-proof digital connectivity. A key part of this is making it easier for operators to deploy infrastructure. To help to achieve this, the Government recently reformed the Electronic Communications Code - the statutory framework which underpins agreements between communications network providers and those in both the private and public sector who can provide sites for the installation of network equipment. The purpose of the reforms was to make it easier and more cost effective for communications network providers to deploy and maintain digital infrastructure.

Local authorities have an essential role to play as site providers. As Chief Executives, you can support investment in digital communications infrastructure by ensuring your organisations have policies and procedures in place that promote effective engagement with the digital communications industry and minimise barriers to deployment.

We have published guidance for local authorities and network operators on areas such as digital leadership, considerations for the local planning authority, streetworks, and on making local authority assets available to network operators for the installation of networks. This advice follows on from the Digital Infrastructure Toolkit, which was published in 2018 and provides advice for central government and network providers regarding access to government sites.

We welcome the efforts that some local authorities have already made to enable network deployment. In future, the Government intends to publish information on how effectively local authorities are engaging with industry and adopting the principles outlined in this guidance. We would, therefore, ask you:

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL LU/393/22/TEL

1. To ensure your teams are aware of, and using, the guidance the Government has provided to improve broadband and mobile connectivity in their areas.
2. If you have not already, identify a Digital Infrastructure Champion within your organisation and share these contact details with local.connectivity@culture.gov.uk, and
3. In particular, to ensure your teams are granting access to your assets and infrastructure effectively to support the rollout of full fibre and mobile networks.

I hope you agree that we should work hand in hand to support the significant new investment in digital infrastructure that can benefit our communities. With this in mind, Government will give significant weight to the extent to which local authorities have adopted the principles contained in our guidance when allocating funding for future DCMS projects aimed at boosting investment in fibre or mobile networks.

If you or any of your colleagues have any questions, please contact DCMS at [redacted]

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.