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LONDON SW1A 0AA
All-Party Parliamentary Group for Broadband and Digital Communication

Bridging the Digital Divide: A Comprehensive Broadband Manifesto for National Inclusion

In the fast evolving landscape of digital connectivity, the UK must have robust broadband infrastructure that leaves no one behind. This broadband manifesto integrates key considerations to address the need for universal access, efficient project execution, and adaptation to emerging challenges.

This manifesto, drafted by the APPG for Broadband and Digital Communication recognises broadband access as a fundamental right, essential for economic prosperity, and UK competitiveness.

Our Key Proposals for the next government

Promote universal coverage in the UK

- The UK Government should recommit to Project Gigabit
 - BDUK has made good progress so far, with over £1bn already awarded. But with much of the country still stuck on slow and unreliable broadband, there is much work still to be done. The next government needs to remain fully committed to the BDUK programme and speed up deployment. Speeding up deployment in some areas may require new infrastructure, including telegraph poles, to be installed. It will be essential for all stakeholders to find the right balance between community interest and the wider societal benefits of better broadband.
 - We call on BDUK to reaffirm their policy of technology neutrality as hybrid solutions will help address the shortfall in coverage in the hardest to reach areas.
 - We should recognise the long term potential of satellite and wireless solutions to ensure broadband coverage even in the most remote areas.

Reinforce consumer choice and competitiveness in the market

- Preserve customer choice in the market
 - Encourage the participation of both large and small firms in delivering innovative connectivity solutions to people, businesses, and communities.
 - The APPG recognises that competition will drive take up of gigabit broadband.
- Ensure that infrastructure competition thrives
 - The UK has made huge strides in gigabit capable digital infrastructure rollout, going from 7% to 76% coverage in just a few years. This has been driven by creating competition in the sector – not only has this led to more companies rolling out their networks to more people, it has sparked investment from the more established companies – bringing the UK into the digital fast lane at last. A new government must commit to protect and promote this competition, to ensure that nobody misses out.

Advance greater digital inclusion and skills

- Develop a national Digital Inclusion Strategy
 - This will only help to bridge the digital divide, empowering deprived communities, promoting social cohesion, and fostering economic growth by ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital revolution.
- Foster greater digital literacy



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- Enhance digital literacy initiatives to include education on the use of broadband in in hard to reach communities and inner cities. We believe that digital hubs are a practical vehicle to help people to use the internet and upskill.
- Addressing broadband on the rail network
 - We recognise the changing patterns of work and social life following the pandemic, however given the growing demand in rail travel, we believe there should be minimum standards for connectivity on the network. This will enable commuters to work effectively on their journeys, leading to greater productivity.
- Maintain well publicised social tariffs
 - Continue to champion social tariffs, recognising their importance not only for fixed broadband but also for mobile broadband solutions, including those on trains.
 - We however recognise that there are some households where even a social tariff is unaffordable and Government may need to intervene in some cases to ensure Broadband can be provided.

Allow consumers to switch away from unfair contract conditions

- Price increases during contracts, lengthy agreements with steep cancellation fees, challenges in changing service providers, and deceptive information are all failing consumers. The next Government, in collaboration with Ofcom, need to address these problems to ensure consumers are knowledgeable, capable, and empowered to select the most suitable option for themselves and switch to it effortlessly.
- The APPG believes that customers should be able to switch providers when they deem necessary which will lead to greater competition and consumer choice.
- We call on mobile providers to cease charging people for handsets once they have paid them off, and call on the Government to introduce regulations to retrofit procedure.

Introduce a government communications campaign on the infrastructure developments

- Customers nationwide need to be educated about the PSTN switch off, the installation of full fibre and the 2025 copper network switch off.
 - This is a once in a generation change that people are simply not properly educated about. We believe a government backed communications campaign should be promoted, one that is simplified so people know how to future proof their homes and businesses against the discontinuation of ISDN and PSTN telephone services.
 - The transition in the telephone network needs to be included in any campaign to ensure a joined-up approach about the wider implications of this switch off, and the transition to fibre.

Conclusion

This manifesto, produced by this cross-party group of Parliamentarians seeks to inform policymakers that we are aligned on what solutions are needed to boost connectivity in the UK.

Great strides have been made to bridge the digital divide in the UK, however this must be accelerated through the continuation of Project Gigabit. We look forward to continuing our work to champion connectivity on behalf of our constituents.