

**All-Party Parliamentary Group for Broadband and Digital Communication
Meeting Minutes: Levelling Up Agenda
19/05/2021**

Opening

The meeting of the APPG for Broadband and Digital Communication was called to order at 14:00 on Wednesday 19 May 2021 by Chair Selaine Saxby MP. The purpose of the APPG meeting is to explore how the rollout of fibre broadband and 5G can impact the government's Levelling Up Agenda.

Industry speakers

- James Blagden, Onward: The UK is a geographically uneven country in terms of productivity and incomes; a constellation of many details (digital connectivity an important part); aggregate benefits of upgrades to 5G and gigabit broadband—jobs, productivity—decrease of digital divide by accessing more services online such as job-seeking. Policy interventions that will aid “Levelling Up” include fibre in new build homes, wayleave reforms and subsidies and business rates relief for digital infrastructure build.
- Patricia Dooley, Ericsson: Opportunities in Levelling Up Agenda dependent on rollout of 5G, fibre and digitalisation; importance of high-speed and reliable networks as work shifts to the home. Digitalisation can impact all aspects of levelling up—increasing digital skills as an example, should not be dependent on where you live. A digital structure should underpin the build of all infrastructure (roads, schools and hospitals).
- James Fredrickson, Gigaclear: as an exclusively rural full fibre operator, Gigaclear understands the impact of fibre broadband for businesses who are able to remain in rural areas as they have access to reliable and fast services, and for those businesses to attract talent who may otherwise move to urban areas. From a policy perspective, the market cannot wait for demand in rural areas to match cities and towns: reforms to the Code will help, as well as targeted subsidy intervention and fibre in new build developments.

Questions and panel discussion:

- What else can impact the Levelling Up Agenda?
 - A holistic approach is recommended, with digital and connectivity a key part, tying together service provision (such as public transport)
- On easing the process to build mobile infrastructure, to support the rollout of 5G:
 - Educating local residents near to mobile mast sites (which need to be taller to deliver 5G coverage in certain areas) about the benefits that type of infrastructure will bring, connecting with the wider benefits of digitalisation.
 - Important for new build developments to build in infrastructure for fibre, rather than a more basic level, there have been improvements in the past two years on this issue.
- Is the government doing enough to tackle misinformation about 5G?

- Online conspiracy theories are always a challenge to tackle: government, industry and Ofcom prioritised working closely in a concerted effort to tackle those around 5G (which is a similar technology to 3G/4G and spectrum band) such as highlighting benefits. Fixed operators have been impacted by 5G myths too.
- How can we ensure that full fibre is an inclusive technology and that everyone can benefit?
 - Government should maintain focus on incentivising rollout to areas where fibre build is most expensive; Effective use of subsidies can also help with keeping cost-to-build low.
- Why is there a focus on 5G?
 - Many services that 5G offers could also be delivered by 4G. However, the new services (that are more reliable) by 5G and fibre could be more beneficial to consumers, with longer-term resilience across the UK.
- How can areas such as North Devon catch up?
 - The setting up of a local connectivity board could help by coordinating different authorities and holistically administering processes such as land access, planning and design of rollout.
- Is satellite broadband a viable option?
 - In the hardest to reach areas—those that are extremely remote—satellite broadband services could be helpful, but currently not comparable with fixed and mobile options. It is a viable option if delivered in a cost-effective way with a smooth customer journey.

Please follow the APPG on Twitter here: <https://twitter.com/AppgDigicomms>. Meeting was adjourned at 15:00 by Selaine Saxby MP.

Attendees

Name	Company
Gulistan Ladha	Broadband Stakeholder Group
Gabi Hatfield	BT
Heather Mullins	Cellnex UK
Matthew Waugh	Cellnex UK
Nicole Day	Cellnex UK
Peter Hayne	Cellnex UK
Emma Shearer	CityFibre
Sarah Lee	Countryside Alliance
Dean Bubley	Disruptive Analysis
Patricia Dooley	Ericsson
Sam Winterbottom	Gamma Telecom
James Fredrickson	Glgaclear
Alistair Milton-Seall	Hawthorn Advisors
George Dibley	House of Commons
James Middleton	House of Commons
Liz Saville Roberts	MP for Dwyfor Meirionnydd
Jane Hunt	MP for Loughborough
Selaine Saxby	MP for North Devon (Chair)
Jonas Helyer	Office of Dr Ben Spencer MP
Stuart Crow	Office of Flick Drummond MP
Mike Knuckey	Office of Mel Stride MP
David Willis	Office of Paul Howell MP
Will Frost	Office of Selaine Saxby MP
Jonathon Foster	Office of Dr Daniel Poulter MP
Bethan Davies	Office of Virginia Crosbie MP
Gareth Alston	OneWeb
James Blagden	Onward
John Okas	Real Wireless
Julian McGougan	Real Wireless
Bronagh McCloskey	TalkTalk
Adrien Sella	techUK
Julia Ofori-Addo	techUK
Sophie James	techUK
Jo O'Riordan	UK Spectrum Policy Forum
Jo	(No information)