Media Contacts:
Margherita Certo
margherita.certo@techuk.org
07462107214

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Industry sounding board UK SPF releases new spectrum sharing report

- *Spectrum sharing should be a spectrum policy priority, says UK SPF*
- *The report lists six recommendations for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Ofcom to meet growing demand*

London, 27 January 2022 - The industry-led sounding board to UK Government and Ofcom, UK Spectrum Policy Forum (UK SPF), is today releasing a new piece of research in collaboration with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on how current shared spectrum access is creating the conditions for new players to provide innovative 5G services.

'*SPF Cluster 3 – The Future of Spectrum Sharing in the UK*' provides a summary of the Cluster 3 workshops on spectrum sharing held between 18 June 2021 and 30 September 2021 and lists six key recommendations for the UK Government and Ofcom on how to improve spectrum sharing in the UK.

The workshops and research programme were undertaken as a review of spectrum sharing in the UK and the extent to which current shared spectrum access is creating the conditions for new players to provide innovative 5G services. Sharing has been identified as playing an important role in the market expansion model for mobile and has benefited from recent shared access licence options introduced by Ofcom.

Today's report provides a helpful snapshot of the current state of play and spectrum sharing in the UK and the importance of spectrum sharing in delivering innovative services for SMEs and industry verticals, such as the utilities sector. Demand for sharing is expected to increase in the coming years, unlocking new use cases as 5G technology matures, and delivering key benefits and innovation across the UK's economy and society.

The research has found that the UK has made good progress with the introduction of the Ofcom spectrum sharing schemes, however, there is a risk that if a future spectrum sharing roadmap is not actively worked on by DCMS and Ofcom, the UK could lag behind other countries prepared to move faster on the introduction of automated sharing.

Development of such a roadmap to maintain the momentum so far achieved in the UK should be a key spectrum policy objective. The report also examines the potential for Dynamic Spectrum Access (DSA) to be introduced in the UK in either the current shared access bands or in other bands.

As such, UK SPF has shared the below six recommendations for the UK Government and Ofcom:

1. DCMS and Ofcom should continue to develop an understanding of communications use cases that might require shared spectrum (especially but not exclusively based on 5G) through feedback on Testbeds and Trials and ongoing dialogue with industry and others.

2. There should be an increased focus on facilitating solutions for provision of indoor network capability and the authorisation regimes required to support these. (e.g. streamlining the Shared Access Licence application process, possible light licensing or general authorisation of low power 26 GHz indoors if that would be compatible with higher power licensed 26 GHz systems).

3. Concerns about neutral host solutions suggest that Ofcom should study industry concerns and provide greater clarity on regulatory and licensing issues.

4. Ofcom should publish a scope and implementation timetable for automation of shared licence applications. Also KPIs should be developed for the application process to provide greater commercial certainty to licence applicants.

5. Ofcom should address and provide solutions to the issues raised in Section 2.2 on technical matters and restrictions applied to licences.

6. DCMS should evaluate the merits of the three approaches emerging from the workshops, the counterfactual of the existing Ofcom SAL approach and research on the introduction of Dynamic Spectrum Access (DSA) to determine the best approach (i.e. just move to DSA, follow a pragmatic roadmap, no need for DSA).

Dr Abhaya Sumanasena, Chair of the UK Spectrum Policy Forum Steering Board, said:

"Network Operator's requirement for more spectrum to meet the ever-increasing data demand, coupled with the increasing challenge for regulators to find usable frequency bands, is forcing the industry to evaluate alternative options. Spectrum sharing is increasingly viewed as a realistic means to help address the demand/supply imbalance.

"We are delighted to see the outcome of Cluster 3's spectrum sharing work, which captures the latest thinking from the industry. We hope the outcome and the recommendations of this work will help policymakers to further develop spectrum sharing as a viable solution to spectrum scarcity."

ENDS

Notes for editors

This report was drafted by spectrum consulting agency Plum Consulting.

The UK SPF's Cluster 3 group examines the contribution of spectrum in growing UK economic and social welfare, and increasing spectrum efficiency. The Cluster is chaired by Tony Lavender of Plum Consulting.

You can download the report here.

About the UK SPF

Set up at the request of government and Ofcom the Spectrum Policy Forum (SPF) acts as a pro-active industry-led 'sounding board' to UK Government and Ofcom on future policy and approaches on spectrum and a cross-industry 'agent' for promoting the role of spectrum in society and the maximisation of its economic and social value to the UK. We do this by

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exchanging news and views on developments in using spectrum, drawing on our industry expertise from around the world.

UK Spectrum Policy Forum (UK SPF)