Dear Damian,

Thank you for inviting me to appear before your Committee on 8 May 2019. I would like to thank you and the Committee for the support you have shown for the proposals in the Government’s Online Harms White Paper, which have been informed in part by the Committee’s work. I look forward to ongoing dialogue with the Committee on this issue, and to building consensus around how to deliver the measures set out in this White Paper as quickly as possible. There were a number of points raised in the session on which I committed to provide further information.

**Full fibre broadband in rural areas**

A question from Rebecca Pow raised the current situation with Gigaclear’s full fibre rollout plans as part of the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) programme. A number of contracts were awarded to Gigaclear, through an open procurement process, at the end of 2016. Over the course of the detailed design stages, it appears that delivery will be more challenging than originally envisaged by Gigaclear, from both an engineering and cost perspective. Since the issues were presented, the CDS team have been working closely with both the supplier and BDUK to find a suitable solution to ensure the situation can be remedied, and the best outcome achieved.

My officials in BDUK have taken a number of steps to ensure the CDS team are supported through this. This has included detailed work with HM Treasury to secure an extension to the central government funding window for the contracts. This enables drawdown of funding post March 2020 - the original end date of government capital funding under the superfast programme. This decision is subject to Spending Review approval but has allowed time for CDS fully to explore engineering options with the supplier. BDUK have also been involved in a number of workshops with the CDS team, both in London and locally in Taunton. This close engagement is to ensure all potential avenues are explored.
I understand that the current work being undertaken by the supplier relates to a full remodel, using revised engineering methodologies, of one of the contract areas. This contract represents 13,000 of the 47,000 premises currently under contract for delivery. This is due to be presented to the CDS team this summer with the aim of the supplier providing us with confidence that a workable solution and roll-out plan is deliverable. If so, this could be extended to all contract areas.

As you would expect, other options are being pursued in parallel. The CDS team is currently undertaking a review to get a clearer picture of what commercial activity has taken place since the contracts were awarded in the event that the current contractual position cannot be remedied and further procurement activity is required. This will allow them to assess how some of the suppliers active locally have extended, or propose to extend, their networks.

There are also options to tactically use central government funded vouchers and Community Fibre Partnerships to quickly tackle those areas most impacted. For these, Openreach work with a local community to build a solution to bring fibre broadband to homes and businesses. They put a joint funding arrangement in place, which means they contribute some of the costs and the community funds the rest. Vouchers are used to contribute towards the costs and therefore reduce the cost to the community.

The £67 million Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme provides businesses with funding up to £2,500 and homes with £500 towards the installation of gigabit-capable infrastructure. By suppliers working with communities to stimulate demand, vouchers can be pooled together into a single project. This potential option is being extended further through the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Programme voucher scheme which has just launched and increases the voucher values to £3,500 for SME’s and £1,500 for homes.

BDUK continues to work closely with the CDS team as the situation develops, and I have asked them to stay in close contact with Rebecca, and other interested parties in the area.

**Women on sports governing bodies**

Julie Elliott raised the issue of women on sports’ governing bodies and the action DCMS is taking in this area. In October 2016, UK Sport and Sport England published a Code for Sports Governance which applies to any organisation seeking funding from Sport England or UK Sport, regardless of size and sector, including national governing bodies of sport, clubs, charities and local authorities. The Code expects the highest standards of good governance from organisations requesting the largest public investments.

Tier 3 (the top level of mandatory requirements in the Code), which applies to those bodies where a significant public investment is being made, includes a target of at least 30% gender diversity on boards. Sport England and UK Sport are currently finalising their report on diversity on sports boards which is due to be published shortly. We want to see the Code fully embedded, with organisations that we invest in continuing to strive for the highest standards, improving their diversity and decision making.
Ms Elliott also asked more specifically about the FA and their compliance with the Code. The Code sets out five requirements which relate to Councils. These requirements focus on the rights of a Council, the ability of the Council to appoint Board Directors, and the terms of office for individuals on a Council.

The Code sets out three requirements which relate to diversity. One of the diversity requirements sets out the need for an organisation to adopt a target of a minimum of 30% of each gender on its Board. This is a target and not a quota. It is important to recognise that even where an organisation falls short of the target it can still be assessed compliant, as long as it has the target within its diversity action plan and can show evidence of actively trying to achieve the target. It is also important to note that the Board diversity composition is taken across the whole board (regardless of the route of the individual onto the Board - i.e. nominated, ex-officio or independent). The diversity target is for the whole board which allows flexibility for the organisation to reach the target through any of the routes to the Board.

The FA Board comprises ten members, consisting of the Non-Executive Chairman, the Executive Director, three National Game representatives, three Professional Game representatives and two Independent Non-Executive Directors. At present, there are three female members on the Board (two are independent NEDs, and one is a Professional Game representative). The FA Board is therefore compliant with the Code’s requirement for a minimum target of 30% representation by the minority gender, and has reached this target in line with the Code requirement.

Copyright infringement of Premier League Football broadcasts

The Committee also raised the issue of beoutQ’s illegal broadcasts of Premier League football and what the Government is doing to resolve this issue. This matter is being discussed through diplomatic channels with the Government of Saudi Arabia.

The Government takes copyright infringement very seriously, and is committed to protecting the intellectual property of our world leading Creative Industries. Piracy is a global issue that requires international co-operation. It is important the Saudi Arabian Government upholds commitments undertaken through the World Trade Organisation’s Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and in the EU-Gulf Co-operation Agreement. I want to reassure you that the Government will continue to press their counterparts for an early resolution to this problem.