



HOUSE OF LORDS

SELECT COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS

Will superfast broadband meet the needs of our “bandwidth hungry” nation?

CALL FOR EVIDENCE

The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications, chaired by Lord Inglewood, is announcing today an inquiry into the Government’s superfast broadband strategy. The Committee invites interested organisations and individuals to submit written evidence as part of the inquiry.

Written evidence is sought by Tuesday 13 March 2012. Public hearings are expected to be held in March, April, May and June. The Committee aims to report to the House, with recommendations, before the summer recess. The report will receive a response from the Government and may be debated in the House.

Consumer demand for bandwidth has increased significantly in recent years and is certain to continue to rise with the increased take-up of internet services and their ever increasing applicability. Superfast broadband enables high-bandwidth content to be delivered quickly across the network, enabling users to access a range of services such as telemedicine, improved video conferencing and the streaming of HD or 3D video content. In addition, the development of the UK's broadband infrastructure will determine what opportunities UK innovators and entrepreneurs have to develop a thriving ecology for the creation and exploitation of new services. The depth of penetration of superfast broadband infrastructure into communities is therefore of strategic importance: it is a key factor in ensuring no community is left behind, and that innovation and competition are stimulated in the provision of local access and in the development of new services.

In December 2010, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published the Government’s broadband strategy, *Britain’s Superfast Broadband Future*, which aims for Britain to have “the best superfast broadband network in Europe by 2015”. The Government have committed £530 million to help stimulate private investment in those locations where the commercial investment case is weak; the Government’s ambition is to provide superfast broadband to at least 90% of premises in the UK by 2015 and to provide universal access to standard broadband with a speed of at least 2 Mb/s.

BT and Virgin Media have led the way with their investment in superfast broadband networks. At the same time, a range of other players, often with innovative business models, have been developing their own networks. Some of these run on fixed-line (primarily fibre optic) cable, others on mobile and satellite platforms. The resulting infrastructure is as complex technologically as it is economically and in terms of regulation. In addition, despite the progress that has been made, given that consumer demand for bandwidth is growing by around 60% a year and given the critical importance of superfast broadband to innovators, entrepreneurs and ultimately economic growth, speeds of 1Gb/s may be needed by 2020 and current investment looks unlikely to be sufficient to deliver this.

The Committee would welcome written submissions on the Government’s superfast broadband strategy and related issues. Questions the Committee will consider include:

- What is being done to prevent a greater digital divide occurring between people who can access superfast broadband and people in areas where the roll-out of superfast broadband may not be commercially attractive? How does the UK communications market vary regionally and what is the best way to connect the areas that the market alone cannot reach? Is a universal service obligation necessary to avoid widening the digital divide?
- The Government have committed £530 million to help stimulate private investment – is this enough and is it being effectively applied to develop maximum social and economic benefit?
- Will the Government's targets be met and are they ambitious enough? What speed of broadband do we need and what drives demand for superfast broadband?
- In fact, are there other targets the Government should set; are there other indicators which should be used to monitor the health of the digital economy? What communications infrastructure does the UK ultimately need to remain competitive and meet consumer demand over the next 20 years?
- How will individuals and companies use cloud services for distributed storage and computation? What network properties are required to enable efficient provision and use of such services?
- To what extent will the advent of superfast broadband affect the ways in which people view, listen to and use media content? Will the broadband networks have the capacity to meet demand for new media services such as interactive TV, HD TV and 3D content? How will superfast broadband change e-commerce and the provision of Government services?
- Will the UK's infrastructure provide effective, affordable access to the 'internet of things', and what new opportunities could this enable?
- How might superfast broadband change the relationship between providers and consumers in other sectors such as content? What aspects of this relationship are key to enabling future innovations that will benefit society?
- What role could or should the different methods of delivery play in ensuring the superfast broadband network is fit for purpose and is as widely available as possible? How does the expected demand for superfast broadband influence investment to enhance the capacity of the broadband network?
- Does the UK, for example, have a properly competitive market in wholesale fibre connectivity? What benefits could such a market provide, and what actions could the Government take to ensure such a market?
- What impact will enhanced broadband provision have on the media and creative industries in the UK, not least in light of the increased danger of online piracy? What is the role of the Government in assuring internet security, and how should intellectual property (IP) best be protected, taking into account the benefits of openness and security?

You need not address all these questions. The Committee would also welcome any other views of which stakeholders think the Committee should be aware.

14 February 2012

Evidence should be submitted in an editable electronic form as a Microsoft Word document, or as plain ASCII text, by e-mail to holcommunications@parliament.uk. Please do not submit PDFs. If you do not have access to Microsoft Word or to the internet you may submit a paper copy to Select Committee on Communications, Committee Office, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW, fax 020 7219 4931. The deadline for written evidence is **Tuesday 13 March 2012**.

Short submissions are preferred. A submission longer than six pages should include a one-page summary.

Evidence sent in paper form must be clearly printed or typed on single sides of A4 paper, unstapled.

Paragraphs should be numbered. Evidence should be dated, with a note of the author's name and status, and of whether the evidence is submitted on an individual or corporate basis. All submissions will be acknowledged promptly.

Evidence becomes the property of the committee, and may be published by the Committee at any stage. Once you have received acknowledgement that the evidence has been received, you may publicise or publish your evidence yourself, but in doing so you must indicate that it was prepared for the Committee. Parliamentary privilege will not apply to your own publication.

Personal contact details supplied to the committee will be removed from evidence before publication. However, personal contact details will be retained by the Committee Office and used for specific purposes relating to the committee's work, for instance to seek additional information or to send copies of the committee's report.

Written evidence will normally be published online and deposited in the Parliamentary Archives.

Persons who submit written evidence, and others, may be invited to give oral evidence. Oral evidence is usually given in public at Westminster, broadcast in audio and often video format on the internet, and transcripts are published online. Persons invited to give oral evidence will be notified separately of the procedure to be followed and the topics likely to be discussed.

Substantive communications to the Committee about the inquiry should be addressed through the clerk or the Chairman of the Committee, whether or not they are intended to constitute formal evidence to the Committee.

This is a public call for evidence. Please bring it to the attention of other groups and individuals who may not have received a copy direct.

You may follow the progress of the inquiry at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/communications-committee/>.