



Public Accounts Committee

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Improving Broadband and Gambling Act review

Thank you for giving evidence to the Committee of Public Accounts on 29 June, on the progress you have made on Project Gigabit and the Shared Rural Network, and on the latest status of the Gambling Act review.

Improving Broadband and the Shared Rural Network

The Committee was encouraged to hear of the progress that has been made in the rolling out of gigabit-capable broadband to 85% of premises in the United Kingdom by 2025. We also welcome the effort that your department, working with the NAO, has put into improving transparency around reporting on progress.

We note, however, your view that you continue to consider the delivery of this target challenging. We also note that, to date, only 2% of premises have been reached by interventions attributable to government, with the remainder of progress achieved by private sector roll-out.

In addition, there remain a number of key areas which this Committee will be monitoring closely over the coming years. We are especially concerned that you do not intend to publish a plan on how you will provide gigabit-capable broadband to the 15% of premises which you define as hard to reach until the summer of 2023. We are also concerned by your failure to commit to a date when you will set out your plans for reaching the very hardest to reach premises.

I would be grateful if you could now write to the Committee with information on the following areas related to the roll-out of gigabit-capable broadband:

- **On the cost-of-living crisis:** we discussed your plans for promoting the social tariff, but also the relatively low take up of this. Please share with us your plans for promoting greater take up of the tariff (including how you will



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work on this with other government departments, such as the Department for Work & Pensions) and how you will monitor progress in the take up of the social tariff. Please also share with the Committee any plans that you have for increasing the information that is available to households about the speed and cost of broadband packages they are able to purchase to enable better consumer choice.

- **On the take up of gigabit vouchers:** we are concerned at the low take-up of vouchers, especially in areas like Blaunau Gwent. We would be grateful if you could write to the Committee providing your assessment of the reasons for low take-up overall, your plans for remedying this, and how you intend to monitor future take-up of gigabit vouchers. We would also be grateful if you could share information on the make-up of the 2% coverage achieved by BDUK so far and the extent to which this is as a result of the voucher scheme.
- **On further improving overall transparency around rolling out gigabit-capable broadband:** please provide the Committee with information on how many premises are taking up the gigabit-capable broadband that is available to them, as opposed to how many premises are “passed through.”
- **On providing transparency to households in areas not yet reached by gigabit-capable broadband roll-out:** there is a risk that households living in areas not covered by the 85% target are unaware of when they will receive gigabit-capable broadband. Please write to us setting out how you plan to give households sight of roll-out plans in their areas. This should include a particular focus on plans for those living in very hard to reach areas, setting out as a key first step precisely where you define those areas as being located.
- **On your plans for maintaining gigabit-capable broadband after roll-out is complete:** please share with the Committee your plans for what occurs when government-subsidised gigabit-capable broadband has been rolled out in local areas. This should include clarification of where risk will sit overall, where responsibility will sit for maintenance of gigabit infrastructure, and



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contingency plans for the action you will take in cases where providers are unable to maintain this.

- **On the risk of provider failure:** please share with the Committee any plans that you have in place for how to maintain broadband access to consumers in the event of any providers ceasing to trade, for example, as a result of inflationary pressures.
- **On the Shared Rural Programme:** please provide the Committee with details of the locations of “total not-spots” in the United Kingdom; which is the government-funded part of the programme.

Gambling Act review

As we discussed in our evidence session, the Committee was concerned by the length of time it has taken for the government to provide a response to its consultation on the review of the 2005 Gambling Act. This is particularly the case given the severity of the impact that problem gambling can have on individuals and families. We do note, however, that you received a substantial volume of responses to the consultation, and you also told us that further actions have been taken by the Department and the Gambling Commission outside of the review. We would be grateful if you could write to us, once the white paper has been published, setting out:

- **a full and up-to-date timeline of the implementation of the Gambling Act review and reasons for delay; and**
- **what plans DCMS has for dealing with such a volume of responses in any future consultation, to ensure that future responses will not be as delayed as this one has been.**



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The National Lottery

In the week of our evidence session the High Court ruled that the Gambling Commission could move forward with transitioning to Allwyn to operate the licence for the National Lottery from 2024. Please also include in your correspondence to the Committee:

- **clarification of the likely costs of legal proceedings and how you intend to meet them; and**
- **any plans you have for learning from this judgement that you will take into future competitions.**

I would be grateful for a reply by October 2022. I am copying this letter to the Comptroller & Auditor General and to the Treasury Officer of Accounts. A copy will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts