

Press release: Reforms to boost Wales' digital infrastructure

People in areas of Wales and the rest of the UK with poor mobile coverage will soon get a significant boost to their connections thanks to UK Government action to speed up the rollout of mobile and broadband services.

Reforms made today to outdated legislation will reduce the costs of housing phone masts and other communications infrastructure on private land. This opens the way for faster and more reliable broadband and mobile services, particularly in rural areas.

Changes to the UK's Electronic Communications Code will:

- bring down the rents telecoms operators pay to landowners to install equipment to be more in line with utilities providers, such as gas and water;
- make it easier for operators to upgrade and share their equipment with other operators to help increase coverage;
- make it easier for telecoms operators and landowners to resolve legal disputes.

UK Government Minister for Wales Guto Bebb said:

I welcome the changes made today as they enable rural areas of Wales to keep pace with the digital transformation happening across the UK.

Faster broadband and mobile service seeks to benefit everyone; from local businesses looking to boost productivity and capacity, to residents who want continuous, superfast coverage.

The UK Government is committed to speeding up service and investing in new communication infrastructure, strengthening the Welsh economy. Thanks to reforms like these, the journey to digital transformation is well underway for all communities in Wales, regardless of how rural they are.

Matt Hancock, Minister of State for Digital, said:

It's not good enough that many people are struggling with poor mobile and broadband connections which is why we are improving coverage across the UK.

We want everyone to benefit from the growth of digital services. Removing these outdated restrictions will help promote investment in new technologies such as 5G, and give mobile operators more

freedom to improve their networks in hard-to-reach places.

By the end of the year all mobile operators are required to deliver coverage to 90 per cent of the UK and 95 per cent of all homes and businesses will be able to get superfast broadband, but more needs to be done.

These reforms will help to drive investment and stimulate the continued growth, rollout and maintenance of communication technology infrastructure, an increasingly significant area of the UK's economy.

Hamish MacLeod, Director of Mobile UK said:

The Electronic Communications Code is an important piece of the puzzle alongside further planning reform that will help mobile operators to overcome the challenges they face with expanding their networks, while also developing innovative services for customers.

Good mobile connectivity is no longer an optional extra. It is essential infrastructure as core to modern economic activity as broadband, electricity and other essential services.

Mark Talbot FRICS, Chair of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Telecoms Forum Board, said:

RICS recognises the critical role that a modern, efficient and equitable digital infrastructure has on the future development of the UK economy. RICS has worked closely with our colleagues in DCMS to ensure that the new Code enables investment in our national digital infrastructure whilst balancing the needs of the public and private property owners.

With high speed internet seen by many as the fourth utility service the public and businesses expect access to digital services when they want and as they want, and RICS believes that the reformed Code is a great step forward towards this ultimate goal.

The old Electronic Communications Code was originally enacted in 1984, and became out-of-date as technology evolved, making it difficult for landowners and network operators to reach agreements and resolve disputes when rolling out modern digital infrastructure.

The Government reformed the Code through the Digital Economy Act, which received Royal Assent in April. The supporting regulations laid in Parliament today will bring the new Code into force, which is expected to take effect in December 2017.

ENDS

Notes for Editors:

1. The Government has today laid draft regulations in Parliament needed to commence reform of the Electronic Communications Code. The changes will help ensure network providers achieve the coverage and connectivity targets set by government to reach the hardest-to-reach places in the UK.
2. The Electronic Communications Code (the Code) is the legislative framework that enables electronic communications network providers to construct electronic communications networks.
3. The Code was reviewed by the Law Commission in 2012 which recommended reform, and the Government has carried out extensive consultation with all stakeholders before bringing forward the amendments to the legislation.
4. For further information on reform of the Electronic Communications Code: