23 APRIL 2021

PC3-21 | RURAL BROADBAND

Summary

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has recently launched a consultation into improving broadband connectivity to very hard to reach places. The government wants to ensure that long-term, long lasting gigabit solutions are made widely available across the UK. There is currently a DCMS consultation on the proposals which will close in mid-June. The main consultation document can be downloaded [here](#) .

Context

Through this call for evidence, the government wants to hear views and experiences of consumers' broadband connectivity in rural and remote areas of the UK. Additionally, DCMS would also like to receive information on both the known benefits of broadband services and the current barriers to deployment and take-up around the country.

The evidence gathered will enable DCMS to assess the options available for delivering improved connectivity to areas where the costs of delivering better digital infrastructure have so far proven to be a barrier to deployment. The government is also seeking contributions from organisations that represent groups which have a direct interest in rural broadband.

NALC's current policy positions

The following paragraphs outline NALC's current policy positions, account of which will steer the response which we are likely to make to this consultation:

- **We also ask as a related issue that new build houses and businesses need to be provided with in-built infrastructure to enable connection to fibre-optic broadband.**
- **We support the Rural Coalition's call for infrastructure which reaches rural areas, so the rural economy can grow and create quality jobs.**
- **We also firmly believe that landscape impacts are a planning issue. The visual impacts of any rollout of broadband to remote rural areas need to be kept to a minimum.**

Other NALC Views:

- **Rural broadband is critical to residents in all parished rural communities across England – as is the need for a strong, reliable, affordable and sustainable connection. We therefore think that the government should direct the Office of Communications (Ofcom) to conduct an urgent review of the universal service obligation (USO), focusing on what minimum commitment would be needed to sustain and support rural businesses and communities.**

- **"Not spots" that still do not have any/very poor broadband connections also need to be given top priority before further 5G connections are introduced.**

- **Local (parish and town) councils should be given the legal power to promote, contribute towards and/or run electronic communications networks and services for the benefit of their local communities.**

- **DEFRA, ACRE, BDUK and other partners in principle should offer support to local councils who are seeking to develop broadband improvements in their communities.**

Consultation Questions

The main consultation questions NALC will be responding to in this consultation are as below and NALC seeks the views of county associations and member councils in response to these questions to help inform its own submission to MHCLG:

Section 4: Topic A: Demand or improved broadband in very hard to reach locations

Q1. What is the average household size in your council area (estimates are fine)?

Q2: What types of devices and services do residents in your parished area use (typically)?

Q3: What broadband services do your council's residents tend to use most and typically what might they cost (estimates again fine)?

Q4: What are the average broadband speeds in your local council's area (on average) and are they what residents were expecting on the whole?

Q5: How reliable is the overall service residents in your council's area receive and do they tend to be satisfied?

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Q6. Which broadband speed do residents in your area typically require (estimates are fine)?

Q7. How much would residents in your local council area typically value an improved connection speed?

Q8. To what extent do you have access to and use mobile data alternatives to fixed broadband services?

Q9. Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your needs for broadband/ digital connectivity?

Section 5: Topic B: Benefits of improved broadband in very hard to reach locations

Q10. How would access to improved broadband benefit you in particular?

Q11. Have you ever used or been offered a virtual health service, such as an online GP session? How would you rate this service based on your experience?

Q12. Have households in your council area made use of virtual / tele education?

Q13. Do residents in your council area have access to the below mentioned services?:

- **Online libraries;**
- **Online medical appointments;**
- **Online learning;**
- **Online banking?**

Q14. How do you think better broadband in your local council area would affect the lives of your residents regarding the below:

- **Keeping touch with friends and family;**
- **Access to online entertainment;**
- **Access to support services;**
- **Ability to work at home?**

Q15. How do you think residents in your council area being able to access the above services online would affect their health and wellbeing?

Section 6: Topic C: Barriers to delivering or accessing improved broadband in very hard to reach areas

Q16. If residents in your council area do not use a broadband service, why do you think this might be?

Q17. Do you think residents in your council area have had to change their browsing behaviour or use of applications as a result of limitations to their broadband service?

Q18. Have residents changed their package, supplier or technology as a result of constraints with their broadband service in this remote location?

Q19. If residents in your council area changed technology to improve broadband, which technology did they typically change from and to?

Q20. Have residents explored the use of fixed wireless in your council area?

Q21. Have residents in your council area typically looked into the use of satellite services for broadband?

Q22. Has your local council:

- **Explored new broadband services that are expected to arrive in your area?;**
- **Explored a community broadband scheme (such as a Community Fibre Partnership)?;**
- **Applied for a broadband connectivity voucher (from the UK government or your principal authority)?; &**
- **Been advised (in writing or otherwise) that you are potentially eligible to request an improved connection through the Broadband Universal Service Obligation (provided by BT or KCOM [Kingston upon Hull only])?**

Your evidence

Please email your responses to this consultation to chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk by 17.00 on Tuesday 25 May 2021. County associations are asked to forward this briefing onto all member councils in their area.

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