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By email

Lord Carter
Minister for Communications, Technology and Broadcasting

12th March 2009

Dear Lord Carter

Digital Britain consultation response

Kent County Council in partnership with and on behalf of other stakeholders has taken an aggressive approach to the promotion and implementation of broadband across the region since 2004. This has included investment in telephone exchange enablement, grant funding for third party resolution of 'Not Spots' and leverage of public service ICT contracts to encourage private sector infrastructure development where lack of commercial return mitigates against investment.

The council has capitalised on the availability of broadband by the introduction of services able to exploit the capacity including; web casting of all council meetings; KentTV a broadband community television channel; Telehealth and Telecare installations in the homes of some of the most vulnerable individuals in the community; Video links to enable family contact to be maintained with children placed out of county in secure accommodation.

Digital infrastructure has also been at the centre of initiatives for public service integration and efficiency. KCC with all Kent's District Council's, Medway Unitary Council, Police, Fire and Rescue and schools have created a joint public service broadband network to aggregate demand and share costs. From March 2009 this aggregated solution will be used by all of Kent's local authorities for secure connection to central government agencies, significantly reducing overall cost to the tax payer and promoting further opportunities for multi agency partnership to improve service.

Despite Kent's south east location, shortcomings in telecommunications infrastructure east of London have been apparent from the outset leading to the following concerns:

- Lack of market competition
- Unacceptably low levels of capital investment in rural areas
- Correlation between deprivation levels and remote communities
- Extent of not spots and low capacity broadband

- Disproportionate occurrence of digital exclusion outside of metropolitan areas

The broader vision for the future outlined within Digital Britain is considered a key component to the transformation and success of communities within the region and should be seen as a solution, not impediment for some of the most deprived groups within our communities. Public and private sector partners are determined that Kent will be at the forefront of digital implementation and through initiatives such as Digital Britain identify and resolve the obstacles to this vision.

Consequently the publication of the interim Digital Britain report has been eagerly awaited and the council welcomes the opportunity to comment. Please find attached our response and an appendix containing information about Kent.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex King', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Alex King

Kent County Council's response to Digital Britain consultation

Direction and Objectives

The relevance of digital information and communication is appropriately identified as the cornerstone of the future wealth, prosperity and sustainability of communities and citizens throughout the UK.

Government must not only be effective in discharging its responsibilities as the guardian of national resources but also ensure that:

- Framework and incentives are in place to promote development of core infrastructure
- Safeguards are instigated to ensure availability as an equitable universal service to all parts of the community
- All public policy interests reference the knowledge economy and that this in turn is reflected in digital policy
- Implementation strategies assure alignment and delivery from policy, through infrastructure development to community outcomes

The focus, objectives and approach are entirely endorsed and should be adopted across all levels of government to ensure a consistent response and maximise benefits realisation. The very invasiveness of the technology and the way it impacts on all aspects of day to day activity makes Digital Britain the ideal vehicle for community engagement and transformation.

Delivery of this vision requires comprehensive engagement from both top to bottom and across government as well as private and third sector stakeholders. The well developed technology networks and relationships offer the unique potential to progress this model.

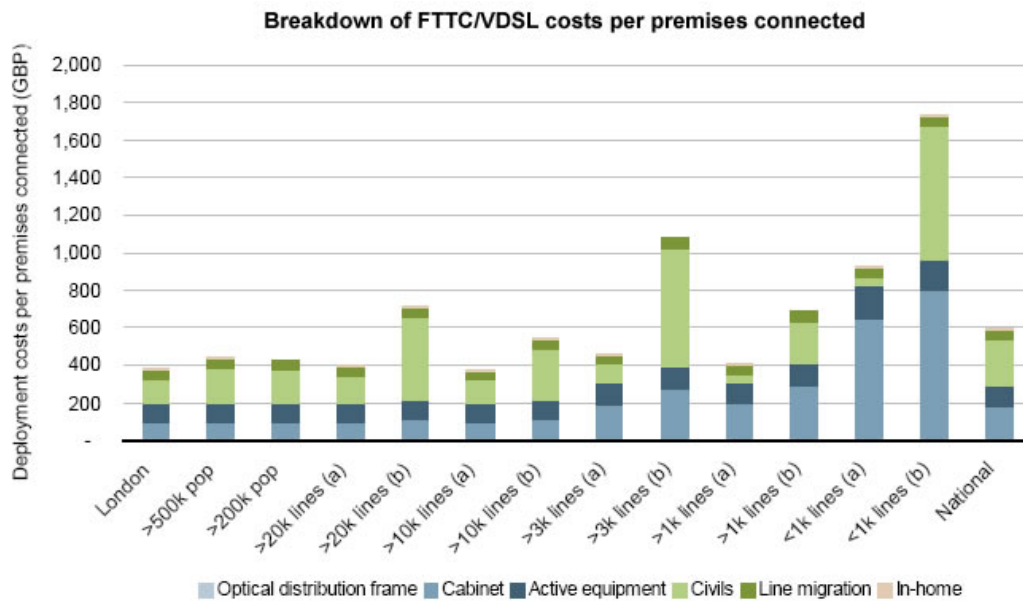
Challenges and Obstacles

As highlighted in the introduction, based on the experience of the roll out of current generation infrastructure the concern is that while the interim *Digital Britain* report proposes a number of actions to accelerate the roll out of Next Generation Access Networks, it appears to under-estimate the challenges faced by non metropolitan areas. The cost of deployment is significantly greater in rural areas, and was highlighted by a recent report for the Broadband Stakeholders' Group¹ which stated:

"However, the costs of deploying in more sparsely populated areas will be significantly higher, making the prospect of commercial deployment to the last third of UK households much more difficult."

The report also produced a chart showing that the cost per household for fibre to the cabinet deployment was significantly higher in rural areas (columns labelled b) compared to equivalent sized urban areas (columns labelled a) –

and for the small rural communities in Kent, where most such communities have less than 1,000 properties, the cost per household was nearly three times the national average.



Kent County Council has carried out surveys of the public regarding Internet access and broadband penetration over the past four years, and tracked broadband availability across the county from BT's own database.

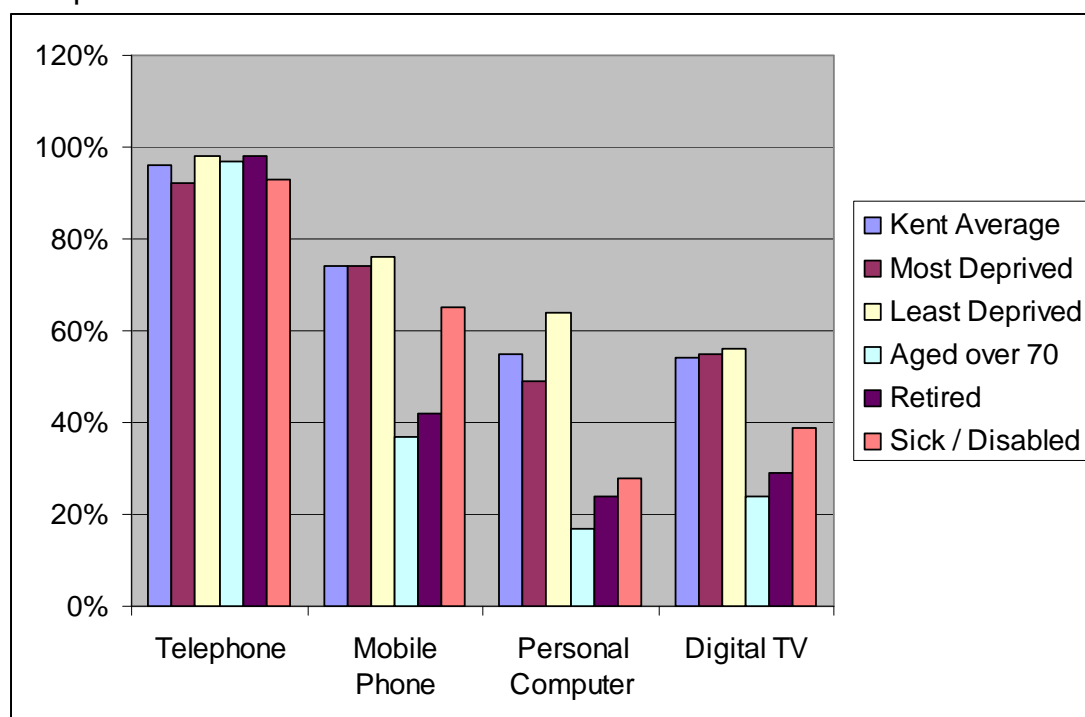
This data shows that *Digital Britain's* assumption around the level of coverage (set out in section 4 of the report) significantly over-estimates coverage in regard to Kent:

Level of coverage	256Kb/s	512Kb/s	1Mb/s	2Mb/s
<i>Digital Britain</i> availability / un-served households	99%	98.5%	97.9%	93%
Kent availability / un-served households ²	250,000	370,000	510,000	1,750,000
	98.75%	97.66%	90.22%	82.99%
	9,500	17,850	69,500	120,918

In addition, a KCC survey of 6,818 residents in July 2007 showed that there were wide variations in access to the Internet, and broadband, across the county – and that access at work was a significant issue:

Access to the Internet																
	Total	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Gravesham	Maidstone	Sevenoaks	Shepway	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	KCC	Medway	KCC & Medway
Yes from home	69%	75%	68%	72%	64%	62%	71%	72%	68%	64%	60%	73%	73%	68%	67%	68%
Yes from work	29%	29%	23%	33%	27%	27%	28%	24%	23%	26%	19%	39%	36%	28%	26%	27%
Yes (NET)	72%	77%	71%	75%	67%	67%	72%	75%	74%	69%	63%	76%	77%	72%	70%	71%
Internet Users with Broadband connectivity																
Yes	87%	87%	90%	91%	84%	92%	85%	86%	82%	87%	75%	85%	88%	86%	88%	86%

A KCC survey of 4,602 households in 2004³ looked at ownership of Internet-capable devices. It showed significant variations according to age and level of deprivation:



¹ Analysys Mason: *The costs of deploying fibre-based next-generation broadband infrastructure*, Final report to the Broadband Stakeholders' Group, 8 September 2008.

² Broadband data provided by Intercai Mondiale via SEEDA for June 2008.

³ Public Internet Survey December 2004, by BMG on behalf of KCC.

As a sub region of the south east the perception is that Kent is well provisioned in terms of digital infrastructure. Despite the most remote part of Kent being no more than 70 miles from London, this view is frequently at odds with actuality on the ground.

To achieve the limited objective of Universal Service Commitment, even at the limited capacity of 2Mb/s, by 2012 will require significantly more effort than

may be anticipated in the interim report. It is strongly recommended that there is regional representation covering the requirements of non metropolitan areas in the on going development of Digital Britain.

Policy, Infrastructure and Outcomes

The council has been particularly interested in the Power of Information Taskforce Report of February 2009 and has delayed responding to Digital Britain until it was in a position to reference this second document.

The combination of Digital Britain with its over arching view of the knowledge economy and the digital infrastructure required to develop and sustain this, combined with The Power of Information Report, recommending the actions required to fully exploit technologies in the delivery of public services, is a very powerful combination for delivery of policy.

It also suggests that this would be an ideal opportunity to incorporate a further tier of policy through correlation with Local and Multi Area Agreements. This addition would provide a direct link between the application of digital solutions and the value added to service outcomes within the community.

The themes identified by the Kent Partnership www.kentpartnership.org.uk , the countywide local strategic partnership made up of representatives from the private, public, voluntary and community sectors are reflected across the strategic objectives of the regions public agencies are:

1. Economic success that is shared by all
2. Learning for everyone
3. Healthy lifestyles
4. Modern social and healthcare services
5. A better environment
6. Communities that feel safe and secure
7. Kent communities
8. Keeping Kent moving
9. Enjoying life in Kent

An assessment of the impact and contribution of digital technologies to each of these themes is currently underway with a draft report due for publication at the beginning of April 2009 prior to consultation with the wider group of stakeholders. This is intended as the foundation for cross referencing digital futures with the wider portfolio of public policies and strategies, so that they might realise the benefits of digital infrastructure and in turn inform future direction of digital strategy.

Integrating this work with Digital Britain and Power of Information reports will establish a prime exemplar and implementation model to demonstrate the journey from national strategy to local outcomes through consistent, joined up public policy across all tiers of government.

Delivery of Digital Britain

Pilots, proof of concept, beacon status and trailblazers are the techniques frequently employed to demonstrate the viability of public policy and initiatives. Successful delivery of Digital Britain will demand no less. Kent County Council and Medway Council as the regions strategic authorities, consider that the stakeholders with Kent region are uniquely placed to contribute to the development of Digital Britain.

The geographical make up of the region is representative of the areas of greatest challenge for Digital Britain. The stakeholders in Kent are already working to address the shortcomings of first generation broadband, having identified the importance of digital infrastructure to both national and local economies. As with other excellent local authorities, much of our success can be attributed to our willingness to look beyond our boundaries for both inspiration and a desire to contribute to the wider agenda. The opportunity for more extensive involvement in the development and delivery of Digital Britain would be welcomed across the region.

Appendix - About Kent

The rationale outlined in the response makes the case for aligning digital strategies within regions with Digital Britain and nominates Kent as a role model for development of this approach.

A few key facts and figures that give a snapshot of the county as it is today:

- Kent is divided into 12 local authority districts and the neighbouring unitary authority of Medway
- Kent has 18 towns, one city, and more than 300 parishes
- 77% of Kent people live in urban areas and towns and 23% in rural areas
- Kent is known as the “Gateway to Europe” and has the longest shoreline of any English county
- More than half the UK’s goods pass through Dover
- Kent is a popular choice for tourists and visitors, with tourism valued at nearly £1.6 billion a year
- Kent has two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 22 International Wildlife Sites, 102 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 10 Special Landscape Areas
- Kent has two stretches of heritage coast, more than 18,000 listed buildings and more than 500 Conservation Areas
- Agricultural land makes up 70% of Kent
- Kent has seven main natural character areas – the Greater Thames Estuary, North Kent Plain, Kent Downs, Wealden Greensand, Low Weald, High Weald and the Romney Marshes
- Kent is one of the largest counties in the UK with a population of 1.7 million
- Black and Minority Ethnic people make up 3.5% of Kent’s population
- Over the past 10 years there has been an 11% increase in the number of households due to population rise and migration into Kent. Over a quarter of these households are home to one person
- Three-fifths of Kent residents have lived in the county for more than 21 years
- Kent is home to some 13,000 rare and threatened species of plant and animal
- 13.5% of Kent’s working population commutes to London and a further 17% to other areas outside Kent (mainly Surrey and Sussex)
- 60% of residents have said they are “very satisfied” with Kent as a place to live, citing low levels of crime, clean streets and road/pavement repairs as most important
- Average household income in Kent is lower than in the rest of the south east
- Kent is below the regional average for skills – 28% of the working population have no qualifications
- Kent has a comparatively low unemployment rate of 1.8% (it is 2.4% for the rest of the UK) but this is above the regional average of 1.4%
- 17.2% of the population is over 65 (and rising) and 20.2% is 15 or under (and falling)
- Kent residents produce 1.25 tonnes of waste per household a year (and rising)

- 30% of household waste is recycled and composted
- 51% of us say we are “too busy” to get involved in community activities (MORI)
- Rail travel to parts of east Kent from London can take longer than it takes to travel to Yorkshire
- Kent’s cars together drive more than 16 million miles on a typical weekday.
- 10,000 foreign lorries per day travel through Kent to get to the Continent
- The average Kent household makes 1.2 shopping trips a year across the Channel by ferry or tunnel
- Turn out at the 2005 local elections was 46%

Digital Activity

The region maintains a strong national profile:

- Secretary to National Education Network Technical Strategy Group
- Two of Kent’s local authorities are represented on the Local CIO Council
- Regional representative on CTO Reference Group
- Local Government representative on Strategic Supplier Board
- Member SOCITM Futures

Local Partnerships -

- Kent local authorities, Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue have strong and effective technology partnership:
 - Kent Public Services Network (KPSN) Common network linking over 1100 public sector sites
 - Aggregated GCSX connection for partners
 - Shared DR Strategy
 - Portal of portals for multi agency working
 - Single hosting/data centre solution being developed
 - Alignment with Higher & Further Education via Super Janet

Innovative, technology enabled programmes -

- Telhealth/Telecare Whole System Demonstrator Site
- Kent Card – Direct payment solution making use the existing VISA system, avoiding requirement for public sector systems development, reducing transaction costs where deployed as a purchase card and an effective policy tool in delivery of self directed support and personalisation
- Gateways - A customer-focused service offering residents convenient physical access to frontline customer advisors from a wide range of public services, in a modern retail setting. [Gateway concept](#)
- KentTV – Community TV www.kenttv.com
- Access Kent. Multi agency programme to consolidate access for ALL public services across ALL channels, footfall, voice and electronic.