

**Digital Britain: National Interim Report 2009  
Key Opportunities and Issues for Shropshire**

**Response to Government 11<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

*For the attention of the Digital Britain Team, Department for Business  
Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR)*  
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**1. Commentary**

Shropshire Council welcomes the recommended action (Action 19) to appoint a Digital Inclusion Champion, and would urge that this Champion be tasked with rural proofing such actions as may be developed for the final report, and with identifying and disseminating best practice and good practice at national and international level, particularly in France, Germany and the Netherlands.

Shropshire Council requests that this response be recorded as a formal register of interest, in order that the Council may be involved in further discussions on development, implementation and execution of the Government's plans for a Digital Britain.

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*(Currently, until 1 April 2009, Senior Policy Officer, North Shropshire District Council)*

## 2. Key issues for Shropshire

These have been set out for ease of access against the five measures outlined in section 6 of the interim report by BERR.

Measure	Issue
<p><b>a. Achievement of universal connectivity:</b> through delivery of a universal service commitment and world-leading participation rates</p>	<p>The only way currently envisaged for this to be achieved in rural areas would be via some type of wireless/radio solution.</p> <p>The mobile phone operators estimate that getting wireless broadband within the reach of all but about 50,000 of the nation's remotest homes will cost almost £400m and involve building 1,000 additional masts. Closing the gaps in the fixed-line infrastructure to get everyone up to 2Mb per second - enough bandwidth to download a film, as Lord Carter wants - could cost as much as £3.5bn.</p> <p>In addition, local planning permission would be required for the new masts. However, such planning permission is far from guaranteed. Many people and communities object to the erection of masts near to their homes/schools/care centres etc. due to concerns that they have regarding health issues. There is therefore no guarantee that the required additional masts would receive planning permission.</p>
<p><b>b. A set of digital networks (wired and wireless):</b> that are delivering next generation access services to businesses and homes</p>	<p>The report refers to the current state of play in other countries with regard to next generation access networks. An issue for Shropshire and other rural authorities would be how such countries are approaching rural access issues, and which countries are most closely aligned to Britain in terms of topography and settlement patterns and homeworking levels, and therefore the most appropriate to learn from or share with on pilot studies.</p> <p>Another issue for Shropshire is the vital role that local radio, including community radio, plays in supporting communities across the area and giving them a voice: Action 6 and 9 with regard to wireless radio</p>

	<p>therefore need to give sufficient regard to the need for inclusive household coverage.</p>
<p><b>c. A digital economy:</b> that has become one of the leading destinations for inward investment in the digital and knowledge economy</p>	<p>Concerns over current availability and reliability of broadband for rural businesses, and risk of a lack of inward investment in rural areas, where consistently high quality broadband is not in place, have already led to planned research in the county.</p> <p>Shropshire Council is undertaking research with around 1,000 of Shropshire's businesses regarding internet access, limitations, impact on their businesses etc. This is in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the county's business Broadband issues and needs.</p> <p>The results will provide a good evidence base for future intervention in addressing Broadband issues, and baseline for measuring progress. If appropriate, the county may be in a position to act as a pilot area.</p> <p>The county has already developed and instigated practical solutions such as Broadplaces, through the successful Switch on Shropshire initiative, and Telly Talk, as well as being a rural pathfinder authority. However, these solutions and measures require public sector investment and ongoing revenue funding, and are themselves a response to the lack of an acceptable personal and business network in rural areas.</p>
<p><b>d. Compelling programmes and online content:</b> that domestic audiences value; and whose quality and innovation is recognised and generates value internationally</p>	<p>Concern here is that rurality issues will not receive due coverage in considerations of and obligations regarding content, or may not receive impartial coverage.</p> <p>As a result national and international coverage may be lower, leading to perceived lack of value being placed on the countryside, and lack of recognition of the role played by rural businesses and rural communities in maintaining the fabric of the countryside. This may lead in turn to</p>

	<p>risk of reduced tourism and other inward investment, and to reduced viability of rural settlements as people may choose to leave or feel that they have to leave.</p>
<p><b>e. Public service transactions:</b> delivered in the majority by digital means, giving easier access, greater choice and significantly lower cost for the public, as users and taxpayers</p>	<p>An issue for Shropshire would be to see the commitment at Action 21 carried out regarding Public Service Delivery. The commitment refers to elderly and disadvantaged households, and to the “vital” role of the third sector. Given that the voluntary and community sector play a vital role in whole communities disadvantaged by their rurality, the issue here is to involve the sector in the discussions alongside the public sector and business sector, and to achieve agreed clarity on definitions of digital disadvantage and actions that may be taken to reduce such disadvantage.</p> <p>The report refers to a Child Internet Safety Strategy to be published in spring 2009, which it links to the media literacy action proposed as Action 22. An issue for rural areas is for there to be equitable access to the National Media Literacy Plan, effective links with the UKCCIS as forum leading on the Strategy, and inclusive involvement of rural and urban schools and Children’s Trusts.</p>