



Department for
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The Rt Hon Sir Hugo Swire KCMG MP
House of Commons
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17 November 2017

Our ref:
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Your Ref: HS458733

Dear Hugo,

Thank you for your letter of 19 October on behalf of a number of your constituents, regarding the speed of broadband in your constituency.

Broadband is a modern necessity and the Department is working hard to ensure that everyone in Britain has the connection they need to be involved in our digital society. The Government has invested £1.7 billion of public money to support vital improvements in broadband services across the UK. This funding has created more than four million new superfast connections to date. Almost 94% of UK premises are now able to access superfast speeds and we are on track to reach our target of 95% by the end of the year.

The Government has invested heavily in Devon and Somerset with over £34.7 million of central government funding with local government and European funding also making significant contributions. As you raise, on the ground, delivery is managed on a day-to-day basis by Connecting Devon and Somerset (<https://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk>) our local delivery partner.

I would like to thank you for your positive engagement with Connecting Devon and Somerset. It is heartening to have MP's engage with their local project, and I would recommend you keep up the dialogue. I am sure that you would agree with me that Connecting Devon and Somerset have done an amazing job, granting access to superfast speeds to almost 85% of premises in Devon, up from under 20% in 2010. I am aware that this is still not 100% coverage, and my officials in BDUK are working closely with the local team in the Council and will continue to monitor, and encourage, progress on this matter and monitor rollout in the six lots that Connecting Devon and Somerset are procuring in. These lots see further procurement from alternative providers, and should provide some of the competition in the broadband market you seek.

Regarding a contingency option, Connecting Devon and Somerset have chosen a number of local initiatives outside the BDUK programme. A local connection voucher scheme is one of these, and is managed entirely by the local government organisation. More information is available on <https://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/cds-broadband-voucher-scheme/>. This scheme has paused for new applications, but could open for further rounds, or alternatively Connecting Devon and Somerset could agree to revert to the national Better Broadband Scheme which could provide this stop gap. When



you meet with Connecting Devon and Somerset again you might like to discuss these options with them.

Connecting Devon and Somerset are working through additional procurement to drive superfast coverage further. Because of the importance of take up of superfast broadband and to support the work and further procurement of Connecting Devon and Somerset, I would ask that you encourage your constituents to upgrade their connections to superfast, if available. Many people are unaware of the need to upgrade their connection to Superfast, and as take up is lower than availability from the current phase of rollout there is potential for many more to upgrade. The more people that take up a superfast connection, the more money is returned to the project to support additional superfast rollout. This results in the consumer getting a better service, and their neighbours getting a superfast connection.

With regard to competition in the supply of telecoms services in the Exmouth area, it is not possible to be definite without looking into individual addresses, but in an urban area there will typically be more than two competing retail broadband providers in addition to BT Retail. These will be using the Openreach network but delivering their services using local loop unbundling.

It is the choice of the other providers, based on commercial considerations, whether or not to provide services from a particular exchange, not BT/Openreach's decision. Of course, in areas served by Virgin Media, there will be an alternative infrastructure provider. Virgin's £3 billion Project Lightning, intended to connect around four million more UK homes and businesses to broadband speeds of 152Mbit/s or more. Other recent developments in the delivery of broadband infrastructure show that competition is growing; and not just in our big cities. This includes CityFibre's £90 million investment in a national fibre network and Gigaclear's raising of £111 million in new equity funding to help make their 1Gbit/s capable FTTP network available to 150,000 premises in UK rural areas by around 2020.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours ever

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Hancock', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Minister of State for Digital