

Government wants all Scots to have access to high speed broadband

Deputy First Minister John Swinney is calling on the UK Government to implement a Universal Service Obligation (USO) for broadband services.

In a letter to the UK Minister for the Digital Economy, Ed Vaizey, Mr Swinney called for the introduction of a specific broadband obligation that would ensure everyone in Scotland can access affordable, high-speed broadband.

The UK currently has a telecoms USO, which entitles every property in the UK to a telephone line. However, this doesn't contain any meaningful provision for broadband.

A broadband USO, working alongside significant Scottish Government investments, would help address the digital divide and ensure that everyone in Scotland can access broadband services regardless of where they live.

Deputy First Minister John Swinney said:

"The Scottish Government has set an ambitious digital policy agenda aimed at ensuring that all of Scotland can access world class digital connectivity by 2020 and we are taking forward a range of activity and investment to deliver this.

"Broadband is something that everyone in Scotland should have access to – it's a vital service in today's world. That is why I am pressing the UK Government to introduce a broadband Universal Service Obligation, which would set out access as an entitlement.

"The introduction of a USO for broadband with an appropriate speed requirement, as introduced by Finland, Malta and Spain

in recent years, would be a way of ensuring that no-one is excluded from the benefits of this integral technology.

“This government is prioritising investment that will play a key role in driving fibre broadband to non-commercial areas. With our partners we are investing £410 million through the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband programme to extend fibre broadband infrastructure to areas where the market would not otherwise go. This will ensure that 95 per cent of premises across Scotland will have access to fibre broadband by the end of 2017.

“We should make more use of regulatory levers such as USOs, alongside the substantial investment that the public sector has made in digital infrastructure in recent years, to ensure access for all and to maintain a competitive environment. Ofcom’s forthcoming Strategic Review of Digital Communications will be an opportunity to consider how best to do this and the Scottish Government looks forward to working with the UK Government and Ofcom as part of the new enhanced role recommended by the Smith Commission.

“I believe that a broadband USO could make an important contribution to our digital ambitions for Scotland and I call on the UK Government to take this forward.”