

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

2nd August 2019

Dear Prime Minister,

100% full fibre coverage requires a 100% full commitment from Government

On behalf of the telecommunications sector, we would like to congratulate you on your election as leader of the Conservative and Unionist Party, and appointment as Prime Minister.

We welcome your campaign's focus on improving digital connectivity. The nationwide rollout of full fibre broadband is an ambitious challenge, and requires a mix of leadership, pioneering spirit and Government support to be possible. The industry stands ready to rise to this challenge, but we need a Prime Minister who can provide the direction, idealism and commitment to fulfil this ambition. We call on you to give a full commitment that your Government will give us the tools we need to deliver future-proof connections across the UK.

Our associations represent the broadest reach of the industry: from large infrastructure builders, to challenger brands and those providing services over these connections, our members are committed to connecting homes, businesses, and communities across the UK. Broadband connectivity is the backbone of the digital economy, and, as one of the UK's most valuable assets, it underpins the wider economy, drives productivity and enriches lives.

We have come together, at this critical juncture, to stress to you the scale of the country's connectivity challenge. We fully support your vision for a full fibre Britain, and the considerable private investment in the sector shows this ambition is being matched by industry. However, ambition alone is not enough to overcome the scale of the considerable task ahead.

Our members are ready and waiting to take on this considerable engineering challenge. They are building ambitious business plans, ramping up investment and training thousands of engineers, but this must be supported by a fully coordinated cross-Government strategy, championed by yourself as Prime Minister. A sustained and active focus will be needed at all levels of Government to drive this forward.

While the £3-5bn of public funding indicated by Government will be crucial to deliver connectivity to the hardest to reach areas, a concerted effort is needed from Government to remove significant regulatory barriers in the immediate term. Removing these barriers will

enable better use of private and public investment to roll out fibre further and faster. There are four key policy areas that require urgent attention:

- **Fibre Tax:** Fibre cables are still taxed as if they were business buildings. Significant reform to this fibre tax would provide an immediate boost to the industry and significantly unlock more ambitious rollout plans.
- **Wayleaves:** Plans to allow telecommunications providers access to buildings and land to deliver broadband services where landlords are unresponsive need to be implemented as quickly as possible – too often unresponsive landlords delay rollout in urban and rural areas.
- **New builds:** Too many new build homes are still being developed without fibre connectivity as a standard and plans to mandate fibre to all new builds should be pushed forward.
- **Skills:** National fibre rollout is one of Britain’s greatest engineering challenges. Investment in digital and engineering skills needs to be prioritised and our members need to be able to compete for global talent to fill the ever-increasing skills gap.

As you yourself have written, “it cannot go on like this”. Nationwide full fibre coverage is not a can that can be kicked down the road, and these issues need to be resolved by your Government within the next 12 months to ensure that industry can continue to accelerate rollout. As you said on the steps of Number 10 as you began your Premiership: “let’s start now.” Industry is ready and willing to work with yourself, your Government and the new Digital Secretary to ensure that Britain’s connectivity is fit for the future. But that work needs to start now, and 100% fibre coverage requires a 100% commitment from Government.

Yours Sincerely,



Andrew Glover
Chair
Internet Services Providers’
Association



Itret Latif
Deputy Chairman & Interim CEO
Federation of Communications
Services



Malcolm Corbet
CEO
Independent Networks Co-
operative Association



CC: The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport