



East of England All Party Parliamentary Group

Co-Chairs
Vice-Chairs

Peter Aldous MP and Daniel Zeichner MP
Rachel Hopkins MP, Jonathan Djanogly MP, Julie Marson MP,
Giles Watling MP, Baroness Janet Cohen

Secretary
Treasurer

Clive Lewis MP
Dr Dan Poulter MP

Matt Warman MP
Minister for Digital Infrastructure
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament St
London
SW1A 2BQ

21st December 2020

Dear Matt

We are writing to you following our recent meeting of the East of England APPG which reviewed announcements in the Spending Review and discussed digital infrastructure priorities in the region. Attendees asked that we as Co-chairs write to you to emphasise the particular importance of improving digital connectivity in the region, which is very rural with many dispersed communities.

The lockdown has exposed large areas of poor digital connectivity in the East of England. The move for many people to working from their own home has shown the importance of having first class, and ideally full fibre, broadband connectivity installed as widely as possible. It has at times been considered a luxury for communities to have first class broadband, but as working from home became the new normal, businesses will increasingly regard it as a necessity in the future.

At the meeting, the APPG welcomed the Government's commitments to provide £5 billion to support UK-wide gigabit broadband roll-out, a Shared Rural Network extending 4G mobile coverage to 95% of the UK and £250 million to ensure resilient and secure digital networks. However, there were requests for further clarity about the precise allocation of funding that will go to the East of England and when 95% 4G coverage will be reached across our region.

Additionally, concerns were shared on the increasing rate and scale of digital exclusion in the East of England. The groups disproportionately affected by this digital divide are vulnerable people, low-income groups, the elderly and the more marginalised communities. Especially as healthcare is fast becoming digitalised also, it was pointed out that there is a need to work to reduce the digital divide for vulnerable people in the region and to decrease the risk of exacerbating health inequalities.

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The East of England APPG wants to see communities and constituents with the right skills to adapt to the digital age. If we are to continue to develop our local economies and recover from the Covid pandemic, we also believe that there is a need to see more commitment from the Government to roll out further and better digital infrastructure and connectivity in the region.

We trust you will consider the points made above and look forward to receiving a response in due course.

May we also extend an open invitation for you to attend and speak at an APPG meeting in 2021, for example the first of the year which is scheduled for 10am on Wednesday the 10th of February. Please ask your officials to liaise with Steve Barwick, who provides the Secretariat for the APPG and has sent this letter on our behalf, if you have any questions or to confirm your availability.

Yours sincerely

Peter Aldous MP
Co-chair

Daniel Zeichner MP
Co-chair

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