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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Plan to help improve mobile connectivity in Wales

An action plan to help create the right environment to encourage further investment in mobile infrastructure and to promote innovation in mobile technologies in Wales has been published by the Welsh Government.

Thursday 05 October 2017

Although mobile connectivity is the responsibility of the UK Government, the Welsh Government is looking at the powers it has in order to ensure a series of actions are implemented to facilitate improving the service in Wales.

The plan sets out how the Welsh Government will work together with the mobile phone industry and the regulator to improve connectivity.

There are particular challenges in boosting mobile connectivity in Wales. For example, data from Ofcom on television masts show that because of the country's topography Wales needs 67 masts to reach one million people, while in England to reach the same amount of people 12 masts are required, in Northern Ireland it is 25 and Scotland 45.

The series of actions follows a Mobile Roundtable held by the Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James, with mobile providers and the regulator earlier this year. The plan has been developed in consultation with those at the meeting and others including farming unions, landowners and business organisations.

It focuses on nine key areas where the Welsh Government can use the levers at its disposal and its influence to help improve connectivity and capacity. The areas include:

- Planning – Research has been commissioned, due to be completed in the Autumn, to inform changes to permitted development rights for telecommunications equipment to improve mobile connectivity. Planning Policy Wales (PPW) will be refreshed to highlight the positive relationship between telecommunications and the economy. A revised PPW will be published for consultation by Spring 2018. We will also work with mobile network operators to revise and update the code of best practice and Technical Advice Note (TAN19)
- Non-domestic rates – Where evidence suggests that a reduction in non-domestic rates would encourage investment the Welsh Government will consider providing non-domestic rates relief on appropriate mobile mast sites.
- Innovation and emerging technologies – The Welsh Government and mobile network operators will work together to identify opportunities to develop and test innovative technologies in Wales, including 5G. There have already been success stories in Wales in this field, such as the Welsh Government working with EE in the Teifi Valley to extend coverage using small cell technology.

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- Major events and special projects – Build on work already done at the Royal Welsh Show where collaborative working has resulted in a permanent mast at the showground. The Welsh Government will facilitate relationships between mobile network operators and major event organisers

The Mobile Action Plan will be reviewed regularly and updated as the actions are carried out and progress recorded.

Minister for Skills and Science Julie James said:

"Mobile phone connectivity is becoming increasingly important for both residents and businesses. We know there are challenges in Wales and that the service needs to be better.

"This plan outlines what we as a Welsh Government can do to help create the right environment to further improve connectivity in Wales.   I have to be clear that we do not have the main levers as these rest with the UK Government and Ofcom, and it is important to emphasise there is not one single solution to boosting mobile connectivity.

"Wales' topography presents many challenges and we need to ensure we strike the right balance between the local economic benefits of improved mobile coverage with the need to safeguard our sensitive landscape.

"We already have good examples of where we have worked with mobile operators to bring about innovative solutions to rural areas, and Wales will continue to play an important role in the support of emerging technologies within the mobile communications sector.

"I'm pleased this plan has come together with the co-operation of the mobile providers and stakeholders. It is by looking at various options and working together that we can all do this.

"We are already improving connectivity across Wales with the rollout of Superfast Cymru which has to date provided over 653,000 premises across the country with access to superfast broadband. While we do not have all the powers to improve mobile connectivity it is only right that we look at what we as a Welsh Government can do.

"I look forward to reporting back on the progress made on this plan. I intend the first review to take place at the turn of the year."

Hamish MacLeod, Director of Mobile UK said:

"Mobile UK is pleased to see the publication of the Welsh Government's Mobile Action Plan, which rightly recognises the urgent need for reform and identifies barriers to effective deployment of mobile infrastructure.

"The Mobile Action Plan commits the Welsh Government to work with the mobile industry, Ofcom and others to deliver effective reform. The challenge now is to realise this ambition and implement the proposals promptly."

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