



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

4th April 2024

Dear Catherine,

RE: DIGITAL EXCLUSION

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns about digital exclusion. I have read your comments with interest.

First, thank you for your kind invitation to attend the Westminster Hall debate on digital exclusion held on the 28th February 2024. Unfortunately, owing to prior, longstanding diary commitments, I was unable to attend, although please rest assured that I will continue to follow the issues raised closely.

Digital skills are vital at all levels, from the basics people need to make the most of online connectivity, to skills needed in every job, to the high-level skills for the growing number of specialist jobs in the economy. Although we live in an increasingly online world, a significant part of the population remains digitally excluded. I welcome the Government's commitment to help elderly people in particular acquire basic digital skills, as part of its broader strategy to reduce digital exclusion.

The Government is working to remove barriers and ensure that online services are as inclusive as possible by making public sector websites accessible to as many people as possible. The accessibility regulations ensure that websites and mobile apps are designed to be perceivable, operable, understandable and robust. Furthermore, assisted digital support services aim to increase digital inclusion for those online users who lack digital confidence, digital skills, or access to the internet.

Additionally, to support low-income households, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology has negotiated a range of high-quality, low-cost broadband and mobile social tariffs for households in receipt of Universal Credit and other means-tested benefits. Mobile and broadband social tariffs are available in 99 percent of the UK, from a range of providers, including BT, Virgin Media, Sky and Vodafone, from as little as £10 per month.


The introduction of the digital entitlement means that since August 2020, adults with no or low digital skills can undertake new Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs) up to Level 1, free of charge. EDSQs are a new qualification type, based on new national standards for essential digital skills, which provide adults with the digital skills needed for life and work.



Lack of connectivity is a root cause of digital exclusion. The Government has committed £5 billion to support the roll-out of gigabit-capable broadband to the hardest-to-reach areas of the UK. This funding will be used to ensure that hard-to-reach premises will get access to 1,000mbps-capable broadband along with the rest of the UK. It is encouraging that 80 percent of UK premises now have a gigabit-capable connection - a huge leap forwards from just over one in twenty in January 2019. Furthermore, the Government is working with industry to achieve 85 percent gigabit-capable coverage by 2025, with the ambition for nationwide broadband coverage by 2030.

More broadly, the involvement of the voluntary and community sector is crucial, and support can be most effective where providers are able to tailor their support to local needs.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,


TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE