



## THE BENEFITS OF MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS

Mobile telecommunications, which were regarded as a luxury only two decades ago, are now ubiquitous, and vitally important to individuals, to communities, to businesses, and to the wider economy. Local authorities have an important role to play in enabling access to mobile communications for their communities.

There are now more than 81 million mobile connections in the UK as a whole, and last year, more calls were made on a mobile phone than on a landline, while the average person in the UK sent 50 texts per week.<sup>1</sup> However, people are no longer simply making calls and sending texts: mobile is fast becoming the Internet access medium of choice, fuelled by the growth of smartphones, tablets, and laptop and dongle. According to recent research carried out by YouGov, well over half (58%) the mobile phones in the UK are smartphones, allowing internet access; one in five (20%) adults now has a tablet computer; and one in ten (11%) has a dongle to access the Internet via a traditional PC<sup>2</sup>.

And while tablet or smartphones ownership is higher among the better-off, mobile connectivity is important in preventing social exclusion. People in socio-economic groups D & E are even more likely than the better-off to live in a mobile-only household, or to access the Internet using a mobile connection than they are to have just a landline or to access the web through a fixed connection.<sup>3</sup>

Connecting to the Internet via a mobile device allows people to access a wide range of central and local government services; to do research for a school project or apply to university; to manage their bank account and pay bills; to apply for a job; or to buy groceries. Shopping online can save the average family around £560 a year.<sup>4</sup>

Most local authorities' services are now available online, and many councils have recognised the growth of smartphone use and introduced mobile phone applications to provide instant access to services, or to allow residents to report litter, dumped rubbish, pot holes and road repairs, or anti-social behaviour. The health services also benefit from good mobile connectivity. The advantages of being able to summon the emergency services using a mobile phone is obvious, but simply sending text messages to patients means fewer missed appointments, and saves the NHS both time and money.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ofcom, Communications Market Report 2012

<sup>2</sup> YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,504 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 7th and 11th September 2012. The survey was carried out online. All respondents were mobile phone owners. The figures have been weighted and are representative of UK adults (aged 18+)

<sup>3</sup> Ofcom, Communications Market Report 2011

<sup>4</sup> PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2009) The Economic Case for Digital Inclusion - .  
[http://www.parliamentandinternet.org.uk/uploads/Final\\_report.pdf](http://www.parliamentandinternet.org.uk/uploads/Final_report.pdf)

Good mobile connectivity is also vital to the business sector. Research cited by the OECD suggests that a 10% increase in household penetration of broadband boosts GDP by up to 1.3%.<sup>5</sup> At the level of the individual firm, the Boston Consulting Group has found that across G20 countries, SMEs with an Internet presence see 3-year growth rates up to 22% higher than those with no Internet presence.<sup>6</sup> Nor is this just for firms in the high-tech, 'new economy' sectors. Takeaway pizza isn't a high-tech sector, but e-commerce now accounts for over half of Domino Pizza's sales for delivery<sup>7</sup>.

Local authorities have an important role to play in enabling access to all these services for their communities. Mobile phones, dongles, and tablet computers cannot work without a network of base stations (masts), and so local planning authorities should actively support the expansion of the electronic communications networks, including telecommunications and high speed broadband. That will be even more important as new 4G mobile services - bringing superfast mobile broadband at speeds roughly equivalent to those you would expect from your home broadband connection - are rolled out.

The operators will work responsibly to develop their networks – the annual Rollout Plans are part of their commitment to do so - and to keep pace with customer demand; but we also need the help of decision-makers to create the right climate for investment. We are also asking local authorities, MPs and members of the Devolved Parliaments and Assemblies, along with other stakeholders to sign up to the following statements to show their support for bringing the benefits of mobile communications to as many people as possible:

1. Mobile connectivity brings major benefits to individuals, communities and businesses across the UK.
2. These benefits should be extended as far as possible.
3. For this to happen we need a national network of masts – local authorities should approve appropriate planning applications from mobile operators and make their own land available to build on.
4. Operators should have fair access to land (through a reformed Electronic Communications Code) so that they can maintain a consistent service.
5. Government should make enough Radio Frequency Spectrum available for the operators to provide the best service possible.

Further information on the issues in this paper can be found on our website, at - [www.mobilemastinfo.com](http://www.mobilemastinfo.com) - or by contacting us at: [info@ukmoa.org](mailto:info@ukmoa.org).

---

<sup>5</sup>Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, 3rd Report, 2012 (Session 4) Broadband Infrastructure in Scotland: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/48856.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Boston Consulting Group: 'The Internet Economy in the G-20: The \$4.2 Trillion Growth Opportunity'

<sup>7</sup> Anh Nguyen Computerworld UK 27 July 2012: 'Domino's Pizza sales boosted by online and social media'