

Next Steps for the Broadband Stakeholder Group

April 2004



At a reception for the members of the Broadband Stakeholder Group at the House of Commons on April 5th 2004, Stephen Timms, the e-Minister, asked the BSG to continue its work to the end of September 2004 and to set out a plan for the launch of a new stakeholder body in October 2004.

Thanking the BSG for its work Timms said, "You have made an immense contribution towards achieving Broadband Britain. ... your recommendations have been extremely helpful in formulating policy... but it is by no means the end of the story. There is a great deal more to be done."

The government is currently reviewing targets across Whitehall for the period 2006/8. The DTI, prompted by BSG is looking at the nature and scope of a possible future target for e-business and broadband, within the context of making the UK a leading online economy. In particular they are considering the economic and social outcomes that broadband might support for the UK to be successful on an international basis.

"We value enormously the work that the group has produced. So I am very pleased that we have agreed that DTI will fund the BSG for another six months, whilst we finalise the target setting process and agree a new mandate with stakeholders", said Timms. On the basis of this new mandate, it is the intention to launch a new stakeholder group in October 2004, with a revised mission, a new Chairman and Executive and a new working structure.

The BSG was established in April 2001 to advise the government on the development and implementation of a strategy to achieve the government's target to have the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005. In the period between April 2001 and April 2004, the BSG made more than 50 individual recommendations to government through a series of reports. The BSG has also monitored implementation of these recommendations and measured progress against the target. Broadband take-up has increased from less than 100,000 connections in April 2001 to more than 3.5 million today, with broadband availability rapidly approaching 90 per cent of households.

Although it was originally intended to close the BSG on completion of its remit in April 2004, over recent months it has become apparent that there is a strong appetite on the part of both the industry, government and the membership for a continuation of the stakeholder approach to the next phase of the broadband journey, to try and achieve a further step change in the UK's progress. The widespread adoption and sophisticated use of increasing broadband capabilities is key to improving UK business productivity and competitiveness according to Timms.

Commenting on the success of the BSG Timms said, "You have drawn on a wide range of expertise to develop your recommendations. The advice has always been constructive, framed around the target as a point of reference. The Group has managed to embrace a wide range of views – operators, equipment vendors, corporate and government users, and the new phenomenon of the broadband community group. Inclusiveness and diversity have been key to your success." Other parts of DTI are now considering the value of the BSG format as a way of achieving effective consultation in complex or technical policy development. ".....as you know, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery", said Timms.

The new organisation to be launched in October will take forward the knowledge network that is the BSG today. It will continue to be independent, open to all, and dominated by no one stakeholder. It will focus on helping achieve the UK's *Broadband Vision* for 2010. The BSG will continue to act as an independent 'knowledgeable critical friend of government' in achieving this goal. In this next phase, the BSG will strive to focus on achieving outcomes (i.e. the sophisticated use and exploitation of broadband-enabled ICT, content services and applications), as well as on the technology and infrastructure inputs.

In the interim period it has been agreed that the existing BSG will continue to operate through to the end of September and we have received funding commitments from the DTI and a number of major industry players from across the broadband value chain to enable the BSG to function through this period. The BSG Chairman, Executive and Secretariat will be working over the next few months to deliver this new organisation. If you would like to contribute to this progress, please contact Antony Walker, CEO BSG (antony.walker@intellectuk.org).

References:

Stephen Timms MP, speech, House of Commons 5th April 2004

Keith Todd, Chairman BSG, speech, House of Commons, 5th April 2004