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# New guidance for tech companies to protect people online

- Government issues guidance to help tech companies better protect users online
- Advice for businesses will provide a ‘one stop shop’ on child online safety
- Comes after research shows smaller companies are less confident of measures needed

Safety by design guidance, published by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), will help businesses such as start-ups find the information they need so they can build safe products from the development stages right through to the user experience.

Research has shown small companies are less confident in their ability to find information on child online safety compared to medium and large companies.

The guidance advocates putting safety at the heart of platform design to minimise the risk of online harm occurring. It advises companies about providing an age-appropriate experience for children using tools such as age assurance and age verification methods.

This includes encouraging adults to set services’ safety measures to high by default so they can’t be changed by children, recommending that firms make it easier for users to report harmful content or behaviour, and for companies to block high-risk search terms – for example around illegal terrorist content.

A ‘one stop shop’ with child safety advice will also help bosses implement crucial safety measures for children users ahead of the government’s forthcoming Online Safety Bill. Under the bill tech firms will be required to assess the risks posed to people using their services and provide safer environments for users. The guidance is targeted at companies whose online platforms are used by children, such as social media or gaming platforms.

It includes advice on how to protect children’s personal data, address abuse and encourage positive behaviour online, and how to tackle child sexual exploitation and abuse. It also recommends applying and actively enforcing minimum age limits and reporting child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Firms will be able to use technologies being developed by the UK’s growing safety tech sector which is pioneering new solutions to the challenges of keeping people safe online. It is a UK success story and expanded by 43 per cent last year, created 500 new jobs and saw its revenues reach £314 million.

Digital Minister Caroline Dinenage said:

> We’re helping businesses get their safety standards up to scratch before our new online harms laws are introduced and also making sure they are protecting children and users right now.
>
> We want businesses of all sizes to step up to a gold standard of safety online and this advice will help them to do so.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- Read the Safety by Design guidance and the One Stop Shop guidance.
- The guidance is separate from Ofcom’s future regulatory codes of practice. We expect to update the guidance as we know more about what is likely to be in the codes of practice and as we learn more about Safety by Design and its capacity to reduce the risk of online harms.
- We recently published new figures on the strength and growth of the UK’s safety tech sector.
- The draft Online Safety Bill was published in May.
- The Online Safety Bill will require tech companies to properly protect users – particularly children – or face tough fines or even have their sites blocked.
- Under the new laws, social media, websites, apps and other services which host user-generated content or allow people to talk to others online will need to tackle the spread of illegal content such as hate crime, terrorist material and suicide content.
- They will also need to protect children from harmful content and activity online, such as cyberbullying, and online pornography.

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# Business Rates Revaluations

# Consultation Launched

News story

The businesses rates system in England will be made fairer and more streamlined with more frequent property revaluations, under proposals unveiled by the government today.


- Government launches consultation on making business rates revaluations more frequent
- Proposals designed to make system more streamlined and fair would see revaluations take place every three years – instead of five
- Consultation announced as part of the Fundamental Review of Business Rates which will conclude in the Autumn.

The businesses rates system in England will be made fairer and more streamlined with more frequent property revaluations, under proposals unveiled by the government today.

Under the plans, revaluations of non-domestic properties would take place every three years instead of the current system of five – ensuring they better reflect changing economic conditions.

The proposals were today (29 June) set out in a government consultation that will form one part of its Fundamental Review of Business Rates, which will be published later this Autumn.

**Financial Secretary to the Treasury Jesse Norman said:**

> As our economy is recovering, we are supporting businesses to build back better.
>
> Proposals set out in this consultation would mean that valuations

more quickly reflect how the economy is performing, making the business rates system more accurate and responsive, while balancing the burden for ratepayers.

The Local Government Finance Act 1988 introduced 5-yearly revaluations. The first modern revaluation was implemented in 1990. The revaluations since then have been implemented in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2017. The government had previously undertaken to move to more frequent revaluations, having introduced legislation to bring forward the next revaluations to 2021 – based on 2019 property values. Due to COVID, and to help reduce uncertainty for firms, this was delayed, with the next revaluation set to take effect in 2023 – based on 2021 values.

The Fundamental Review of Business rates, launched in July 2020, conducted a call for evidence which found more frequent revaluations to be a priority for respondents. The government has therefore set out specific proposals through this consultation on how a sustainable system of revaluations every 3-years might be achieved.

**Notes to editors**

See the consultation

Published 29 June 2021

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# UK Singapore joint statement on the launch of negotiations on a Digital Economy Agreement

News story

Joint statement from the UK and the Republic of Singapore on the launch of negotiations on a UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement.

1. The UK and Singapore are pleased to announce the launch of negotiations on a UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement (DEA). Our two countries already share deep and historical ties, with multifaceted cooperation spanning diverse areas such as security and resilience, economy and trade, research and technology, and climate and sustainability. This was reaffirmed in our March 2021 Joint Statement on the Singapore-UK Partnership for the Future.

2. The UK-Singapore DEA will further strengthen our close partnership and build on the momentum of the UK-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which came into force in February this year, to address new and emerging issues in the fast-growing digital economy. Digitally-delivered services made up around 70% of UK-Singapore services trade in 2019.

3. COVID-19 has accelerated the pace of digitalisation across the global economy as businesses and workers seek to address new challenges arising from the pandemic and take advantage of potential opportunities going forward. As forward-looking and digitally advanced economies, the UK and Singapore recognise that digitalisation and digital connectivity will underpin the next phase of growth and transformation for the global economy. The launch of negotiations on the DEA reaffirms our commitment to uphold open and connected economies, not just in traditional areas of goods, services and investment, but also in the flows of data and e-commerce.

4. To that end, the DEA will be a model for global digital trade rules, allow our businesses and people to harness new opportunities in the digital economy and support a digital environment that safeguards consumers and businesses. For instance, the DEA will establish forward-looking rules to facilitate trusted cross-border data flows, prohibit unjustified data localisation, and maintain high standards of personal data protection. It will champion the role that digital technologies can play in facilitating trade, encourage interoperability in our digital systems, connect the thriving innovation ecosystems in the UK and Singapore, and explore the use of emerging and innovative technologies. In addition, the DEA will explore potential cooperation on innovative financial services, given the synergies between the UK and Singapore as

financial hubs. To build trust and confidence for a secure and resilient digital economy, the DEA will also strengthen our cybersecurity cooperation.

5. As the first digital economy agreement between Asian and European countries, there is an opportunity for the DEA to serve as a pathfinder for common frameworks, digital rules and standards between our regions. The DEA will also strengthen the linkages between the UK and Singapore and allow both countries to function as twin digital hubs in our respective regions. This will enable UK and Singaporean enterprises of all sizes, especially small and medium enterprises, to access a greater range of opportunities in our combined digital markets.

6. The UK and Singapore hope that the DEA will also contribute to establishing global digital trade norms for a more open, connected and secure digital environment. We envisage that the agreement will add to and complement our continued cooperation on the digital economy at the WTO and other multilateral fora. This includes the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce.

7. We look forward to expeditiously concluding the DEA as soon as possible, enabling our people and businesses to reap the full benefits of the digital economy.

Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations, Singapore, S Iswaran

Secretary of State for International Trade, United Kingdom, Elizabeth Truss

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# Rural Scotland to see significant boost in 4G coverage

- Boost to 4G mobile coverage will see 74% of Scotland covered by all four mobile operators
- 91% of Scottish landmass will be in range of a 4G signal thanks to £1 billion UK Government deal
- Highlands and Islands to see largest 4G boost out of all UK regions with coverage from all four operators increasing from 26% to 68%

People in rural Scotland will enjoy the biggest uplifts in mobile coverage under the UK government’s world-first £1 billion programme to level up digital connectivity across the UK.

The Shared Rural Network (SRN) will see EE, O2, Three and Vodafone build and upgrade phone masts to end so-called partial not-spots: areas where only some, but not all, mobile network operators (MNOs) provide 4G coverage. These not spots mean local people cannot connect unless they are signed up with a provider who has coverage in the area.

This scheme is a major part of the government’s plan to level up all parts of the UK and will bring economic and social benefits for people no matter where they live.

It will help those who live and work in rural communities enjoy the benefits of improved connectivity and seize the benefits of technology, such as using a 4G phone signal for work video calls as well as shopping and streaming TV shows online on the go.

New maps and figures published today show Scotland will benefit the most from the SRN. Coverage from all four MNOs to be delivered to three quarters (74 per cent) of Scotland’s landmass. This is an increase of a third and up from 42 per cent currently.

The deal will see 4G coverage from at least one operator reach more than 91 per cent of every electoral region in Scotland.

The Highlands and Islands will see the largest uptick in coverage with a 42 per cent rise in areas with coverage from all four operators – the largest increase seen anywhere in the UK and bringing coverage from all four MNOs to 68 per cent. 4G coverage from at least one MNO will reach 91 per cent of the region’s landmass.

Regions with higher proportions of rural areas benefit the most. Areas with coverage from all four operators will dial up by 26 per cent in South Scotland, 23 per cent in West Scotland and 20 per cent in North East Scotland.

UK Government Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

> In today’s interconnected world, access to fast and reliable mobile coverage is not a privilege but a necessity, so I am delighted that our plans will bring a huge uplift in connectivity to many rural areas in Scotland.
>
> This will bring new opportunities to work remotely, improve people’s ability to stay in touch with family and friends, and stream entertainment on the go.
>
> Once the network is built, no government will have done more to amplify 4G coverage in Scotland. It demonstrates loud and clear how our plan to build back better is delivering for every part of the UK, no matter how rural or isolated.

UK Government Minister for Scotland Iain Stewart said:

> From Dumfries and Galloway to the Highlands, and from Skye to Shetland, this UK Government investment will improve access to fast, reliable 4G coverage for people in every corner of Scotland.
>
> The UK Government is working hard to level up digital connectivity, ensuring that people and businesses right across the country can enjoy the social and economic benefits of next-generation broadband and mobile coverage.

The SRN, brokered by ministers in March last year, will bring an additional 280,000 premises and an additional 16,000 km of UK roads in range of a 4G signal – increasing total geographic 4G coverage to 95 per cent of the UK by 2025.

This year the SRN programme has also kicked off work to end ‘total not spots’ – areas which have no coverage from any operator. It has begun searching for, acquiring and building publicly funded masts to be shared between all four MNOs.

The UK Government has today launched a consultation with the telecoms industry to identify any existing infrastructure which can be utilised to end total not spots. It wants to reduce the need to build new phone masts and help make sure public funds are used effectively.

The focus of the consultation is in Scotland where the majority of coverage improvements will take place and which will need significantly more infrastructure compared to other home nations.

In a further boost to connectivity in Scotland, the Scottish Government has confirmed it can continue to provide up to £5,000 extra funding to top-up the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme. This is in addition to the £1,500 available to rural homes and £3,500 available to rural small to medium-sized businesses.

The UK Government continues to actively work with the Scottish Government on gigabit deployment through their Reaching 100% (R100) programme. The scope of the final R100 contract will be confirmed in the Summer.