Charities and broadband providers unite to call for new approach to ensure nobody is priced out of connectivity

Joint statement agrees that broadband is now so essential that government should work with providers and charities to deliver targeted, deeper support for lowest-income households.

12/11/26 - Major broadband providers and charities have come together in a joint statement to call for targeted support from the government for the UK's lowest-income households as cost-of-living pressures put essential connectivity out of reach.

As banking, healthcare, work, education, government services and television increasingly move online, broadband is becoming an essential household service rather than a discretionary purchase. Those unable to afford a connection risk being excluded from services and opportunities that others take for granted.

UK broadband prices compare well to other countries, and around half a million households already benefit from fixed-line broadband social tariffs, provided on a voluntary basis by the biggest telecoms providers.

Meanwhile, new research from Professor Simeon Yates of the University of Liverpool, finds that 400,000 households offline today would be unable to afford even the cheapest social tariff. And many more families already struggle to pay for broadband alongside the rising cost of food, heating and other essentials.

The challenge is therefore to ensure that no one is priced out of essential connectivity. The organisations are calling for government, industry and civil society to develop a new approach to affordability, recognising that even competitive prices and existing social tariffs cannot meet everyone's needs.

The joint statement, coordinated by The Connection Project and supported by organisations including BT, VodafoneThree, Age UK, Citizens Advice and Good Things Foundation, marks an important agreement between industry and civil society on the need for a different approach.

The signatories say the new settlement could be a voucher scheme, discount or allowance which is targeted at homes least able to pay, so nobody is priced out of the digital world. They highlight the strong case for government funding for this support, and that as a minimum the service should be reliable enough to support essential activities for modern life – such as accessing online public services.

The call comes as government seeks to ease cost-of-living pressures while also digitising more public services. The signatories argue that universally affordable broadband should underpin that agenda, with any new approach ensuring all households can access essential services, including banking, healthcare, government services and public service television over the internet.

Alex Towers, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, BT Group, said:

“BT has led the industry in providing affordable broadband and phone services for people on low incomes, helping hundreds of thousands of customers through special discounted tariffs and giving those people the connectivity and confidence they need to participate fully in a digital household.

“We won’t fix this problem alone and we think it’s now time to work with government and charities on a plan for more sustainable interventions that get targeted support to all those households most in need.”

George Robinson, Head of Government Affairs, VodafoneThree, said:

“We’ve spent years working to make connectivity more accessible and affordable, from becoming the first major provider to offer social tariffs across mobile and broadband to providing free connectivity and digital skills support. We’ll soon go further with a new 5G mobile broadband social tariff.

“But we know there are still people for whom even the most affordable tariffs are out of reach. This needs a wider solution, and we want to work with government, industry and charities to make sure no one is priced out of essential connectivity.”

Natalie Ceeney CBE, Chair, The Connection Project, said:

“Broadband has become an essential part of everyday life. It's how we bank, access public services, keep in touch, work and watch television. Yet around a million households still cannot afford it.

“Government is rightly focused on making life's essentials affordable. Connectivity needs to be part of that conversation. Competitive prices and social tariffs help, but there's no single price that every household can afford.

“What’s important about today's agreement is that broadband providers and charities have come together to recognise the problem and offer to work with government on a solution. We need targeted support that helps the people who need it most, while preserving choice and competition.”

The Connection Project will continue working with its industry and civil society partners to develop practical proposals for a new approach to broadband affordability, including how support could be targeted at the households most in need.”

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director, Age UK, said:

"At Age UK we hear from lots of older people about how disadvantaged they feel because they are not online. When they are on a low or modest fixed income they often also tell us how hard it is for them to afford the basics like food and fuel, meaning they are in no position to consider expanding their budgets to cover another significant regular outgoing. If we are serious about giving everyone in our society the chance to be digitally included, this issue about the cost of broadband must be faced head on.

“We wholeheartedly agree with the Connection Project that a minority in our society, including pensioners like these, will need targeted financial support if they are to get broadband and keep it - an essential gateway to them being digitally included."

Peter Grigg, Executive Director of Partnerships and Advocacy, Citizens Advice, said:

“Nobody should be priced out of the internet. A life offline can leave someone shut out of education, employment and essential services, and sadly that’s exactly what’s happening to some low-income households right now.

“For those on the brink of being excluded, too often we see people cutting back or going without other essentials to keep their internet.

“It doesn’t need to be like this, but the current approach to broadband social tariffs has failed. What people across the country need is for the government to bring in a voucher scheme, as a simple, lasting solution to make sure nobody gets left behind.”

Vicki Sellick MBE, Chief Executive Officer of Good Things Foundation, said:

“Every day in communities across the UK, we see the devastating cost of being locked out of the digital world, with people unable to access healthcare, pay their bills and find the best deals. As Professor Yates’s research starkly shows, hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable families cannot afford even the lowest social tariffs currently on the market.

“Good Things continue to call for a reliable safety net that guarantees affordable access for everyone, but we can’t do it alone. If we are serious about building a modern, inclusive society where no one is left behind, government must join industry and civil society to deliver deep, targeted support that makes essential connectivity a reality for every household.”

The full joint statement is available at:
https://www.connectionproject.co.uk/post/broadband-providers-and-charities-unite-to-call-for-new-approach-to-affordability

ENDS

About The Connection Project
The Connection Project is a not-for-profit coalition working towards a UK in which everyone can participate and thrive in a digital society.

It brings together leading organisations from connectivity, banking, broadcasting and civil society to develop practical solutions to the challenges of digital participation. As more essential services move online, its work focuses on ensuring that connectivity, support, assistance and alternative ways to engage are designed in from the start.

For more information
Will Guyatt, Director of Media, The Connection Project
will.guyatt@connectionproject.co.uk
07799 334994