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Ofcom - using UPRNs to help deliver superfast, universal service obligations and mobile coverage

Good communication is vital in our lives. Ofcom makes excellent use of Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) in Address-BasePremium and AddressBaselands to ensure its policy analysis is dependable and authoritative.

Ofcom shares the widely-held view there is a significant, positive relationship between broadband investment (and penetration) and the economic growth of a nation. High-speed broadband is crucial to the successful planning of smart cities and the Internet of Things.

However, to realise ambitions for a thriving, connected economy, our communications infrastructure must keep pace with the expectations and needs of people, and in particular, businesses. This is challenging for planners, as there are around 15,490km² of urban areas in the UK and those areas are constantly evolving.

The Universal Service Obligation expects basic fixed line services to be made available at an affordable price to all citizen and customers across the UK. But at the moment, while 1.2m UK premises do have access to a full, high-speed, fibre-optic service, around 925,000 UK premises do not have access to a decent broadband service.

Part of Ofcom's role is to help ensure that citizens and companies across the UK can access a good internet service, making phone calls and transmitting data where and when they need to. Only by understanding the premises themselves, in detail, and their location, in context, can Ofcom shape a policy that will provide the best possible outcome for consumers.

Ofcom's use of UPRNs is helping service providers to deliver improved communications and connectivity, right across the UK



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Linking UPRNs

Location is a challenge for telecommunications providers. There are obvious factors in a rural landscape - hilly or remote areas - but these are compounded by building materials that inhibit signals, the density of premises (the number of properties inside a building); a combination of reception barriers such as roof profiles and tree canopies, and ever-evolving urban areas.

Currently, in the UK, telecoms providers are delivering 93% of their coverage at speeds of over 30Mbps and, in addition, coverage of 4G networks has increased over the last twelve months or so. The UK now benefits from 68% total indoor coverage and 57% outdoor geographic coverage - but this means there is still room for improvement.

Approximately 2% of coverage is still delivered at speeds below 10Mbps. This is a barrier to development and productivity, for businesses in rural areas in particular.

To shape a policy that can help to improve this situation, Ofcom collects and analyses address-level data. This provides the best possible insights about premises being served by that coverage.

Delivering results

As our world becomes more connected, the importance of reliable high-speed data transmission will continue to increase. By using the UPRN, Ofcom can link specific information to - and derive conclusions from - those premises' characteristics. Decision-makers can then take advantage of robust attributions such as:

- classification codes
- business classifications, and
- BLPU status (Basic Land and Property Use).

This enables Ofcom to understand whether or not an address is likely to be inhabited and by whom and, to a greater extent, what the likely need will be for higher-speed broadband coverage.

The attributes associated with business classifications enable an understanding of SMEs' needs. With enhanced integration of AddressBase, even alternative names for properties are handled with ease. In addition, Ofcom's on-line and app-enabled coverage maps use the UPRN to help consumers in those premises to make decisions about telecoms coverage. This service handled 2.6m views in 2017.

Via the UPRN, the richness and interoperability of data available enhances Ofcom's approach to UK wide policy analysis and enables it to provide better outcomes for consumers.



GeoPlace is a public sector limited liability partnership between the Local Government Association and Ordnance Survey

