

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport
Department for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport
2 – 4 Cockspur Street
SW1Y 5DH

20 January 2012

Dear Jeremy

It was very good to see you at the Local Government APPG this week. The excellent turnout was testament to the importance which local government attaches to our shared agendas.

I agree wholeheartedly with your comments on the tremendous opportunities for councils presented by the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Cultural Olympiad and superfast broadband. I was also very encouraged by Liz's vision for a single cultural conversation between ACE and local councils. I am looking forward to discussing this further when I meet Liz and Alan next week.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer some more detailed comments on two issues.

Youth Sport Strategy

Councils fund 80% of community sports facilities and programmes, and have the leadership role necessary to forge partnerships, unblock problems and make the local sports system deliver better.

Despite facing tough budget cuts, councils up and down the country are striving to keep supporting youth sport initiatives. The extra funding you announced last week is very welcome and will build upon existing partnerships between councils, schools, health, National Government Bodies, County Sports Partnerships and local sports clubs. Councils are also committed to using the inspiration of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to motivate young people to get more active.

Sport England's latest Active People Survey highlights the enormous challenge we face to increase young people's participation in sport. As you work with Sport England on the detailed plans that will underpin the strategy, I encourage you to reflect the fact that local government is the key delivery agent for sport and uniquely placed to bring together the sometimes disparate elements of the local sporting landscape.

Superfast Broadband

The national roll out of superfast broadband will help drive economic growth and dramatically improve the quality of people's lives. Government funding is very welcome and councils are working hard to secure match funding and get local broadband plans in place, working with BDUK. In parallel, councils up and down the country have been helping communities and businesses to get online.

However, I am concerned about the rigidity of the Government's timetable.

You emphasised in a recent letter to Leaders that councils are required to secure BDUK's approval of local broadband plans by end of April 2012 and to complete procurement by end of December 2012. At the APPG this week you made it clear that if councils do not meet this deadline not only will they lose match funding but Government will consider taking the funding back to the centre and negotiating a national procurement contract.

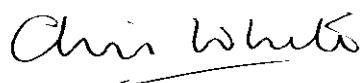
Whilst I understand and support your encouragement of councils to meet the December deadline, the reality is some will struggle to achieve it. As this timescale was not clear at the outset, not all councils have planned or budgeted according to this. Condensing 35-40 projects into a period of seven months will raise questions about overheating due to constrained market capacity, and possible cherry picking or projects failing to attract bids. It will also raise wider questions about programme and project level value for money.

Councils are as keen as you to ensure that their communities and businesses can start to benefit from superfast broadband as soon as possible. Please rest assured that we are committed to working in partnership with yourself and BDUK in order to resolve the issues that remain and to ensure that the vast majority of contracts are signed by the end of this year.

Finally, for areas that are also eligible for Rural Community Broadband Funding, I encourage you to give local areas sufficient flexibility to align procurement timescales so that the best possible deal can be secured.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Councillor Chris White
Chair LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board