

Designation of UK Data Infrastructure as Critical National Infrastructure and the Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council Report

Statement made on 12 September 2024

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Statement made by



Chris Bryant

Minister of State for Data Protection and Telecoms

Labour

Rhondda and Ogmore

Commons



Statement

The security and resilience of the UK's data and digital infrastructure are of central importance to the Government's strategic objectives. This statement provides two updates on the Government's approach to safeguarding connectivity and the foundations of the digital economy.

Designating UK Data Infrastructure as Critical National Infrastructure

Data infrastructure - the physical data centres and cloud infrastructure which provide the foundations of the digital economy - faces significant risks and challenges that threaten the day-to-day lives of citizens and other critical infrastructure in the UK. We are today taking a significant step to meet these challenges by designating UK data infrastructure as Critical National Infrastructure (CNI), putting our digital foundations in the same category as Energy and Water.

Data infrastructure underpins essential services that are critical to the UK economy and our way of life and will only become more vital as technologies like AI require greater data centre and cloud capacity. The data it contains is highly valuable, and as such attracts security threats from cyber and physical attacks. Data centres are also vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which is increasing the risk of environmental hazards like flooding, heatwaves, and other extreme weather that can disrupt operations and result in a compromise or loss of crucial services.

Although the sector already has high standards, CNI designation enables better mitigation of risks the sector faces through an improvement to the Government's visibility and engagement with the data centre and cloud service industry. It signals the Government's intention to better partner with the UK's data infrastructure sector to work together to mitigate these. We will also explore further how to ensure the right conditions are in place to drive necessary capacity expansion to support economic growth and innovation.

As the Department responsible for monitoring, protecting and enhancing the security and resilience of data infrastructure, DSIT will be working to better understand industry operators' existing risk mitigations and identify areas for Government support. Data infrastructure will be managed under existing cross-Government CNI structures led by the Cabinet Office, as a sub-sector of Communications. We will work closely in a joined-up approach with internal colleagues, other Government Departments and their respective CNI sectors, such as Energy and Water, contributing to cross-sector work and planning.

I am confident that these measures, taken together and implemented in close consultation with industry, will provide a high level of security and resilience for this increasingly critical infrastructure, giving confidence to the public and investors, and supporting the growth of the UK economy.

Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council Report

In addition, I want to thank the independent Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council, who will today publish a new report setting out recommendations to government on telecoms diversification policy.

A healthy and diverse supply chain for the technology that goes into our telecoms networks is essential for resilience – ensuring that UK network operators can deliver good, reliable connectivity for all. Concentration of that supply chain into a very small number of companies means the UK network is more vulnerable to disruption and means that outages, when they occur, may have greater impact. It is important that we take action to address this, working closely with international partners and allies.

I will review the Council’s recommendations carefully and will provide a government response and update to this House on our efforts to maintain secure telecoms networks, supported by a healthy, diverse supply chain. I value the ongoing collaboration of the technology vendors and UK operators that have been engaging productively with government on this matter.

A copy of the report will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

I look forward to continuing work to strengthen, secure and expand our data and digital infrastructure, working with stakeholders across the economy and international partners.

Statement from

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Linked statements

This statement has also been made in the House of Lords

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Designation of UK Data Infrastructure as Critical National Infrastructure and the Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council Report

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety

Labour, Life peer

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Lords