

COMMUNITY BROADBAND SCOTLAND

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

INTRODUCTION

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the Scottish Government's economic and community development agency, are delighted to be delivering, on behalf of the Scottish Government, Community Broadband Scotland (CBS).

We are pleased to have been invited to give evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Infrastructure and Capital Investment (ICI) Committee in respect of the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2015-16. We understand the committee has chosen to focus its evidence taking on three of the Scottish Government's national performance indicators:

- Reduce Scotland's Carbon Footprint
- Reduce traffic congestion
- Increase the proportion of journeys to work by public or active travel

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Overview:

CBS is a key strand of the Scottish Government's Digital Scotland world class 2020 vision and supporting strategy outlined in the Scotland's Digital Future Infrastructure Action Plan (8 March 2013) and subsequent updates. CBS comprises a strong partnership co-ordinated by HIE. Our steering committee consists of; the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, HIE, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Government Digital Directorate, Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Group, Carnegie UK Trust, Cairngorms National Park Authority and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. CBS operates across the whole of Scotland. Initially funded with £5m of Scottish Government conduit funding, through HIE, to March 2015, CBS has been extended to at least March 2018, with an additional £2.5m of funding. We welcome this additional investment from the Scottish Government. We are working with colleagues to explore additional funding as CBS evolves further.

Approach:

The Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme will connect over 95% of premises in Scotland to a Next Generation Access (NGA) fibre broadband infrastructure. The programme is split across two contracts both of which are being delivered by BT Group plc. One project is being delivered by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and will connect over 84% of premises in the Highlands and Islands by the end of 2016 and the other by the Scottish Government which will deliver connectivity to around 96% of premises in the rest of Scotland by 2017. CBS is focusing on those across Scotland, who will not be connected to a digital infrastructure through BT contract delivery. This equates to around 120,000 premises in predominately remote and rural areas.

CBS has been established by the Scottish Government to help communities with advice, guidance, supply chain support and funding to enable the community to acquire and own infrastructure capable of delivering improved broadband. HIE was chosen as the delivery agency for CBS given our extensive experience in supporting communities and building community capacity in some of Scotland's most rural and remote areas. Specifically, CBS is part of the Strengthening Communities Directorate within HIE which works to Invest in, Enable and Empower communities to grow and achieve resilience.

Since inception in Q4 2012 CBS has dealt with over 320 community enquiries. We are currently supporting 80 community groups with project planning and have funded 7 communities to deliver a transformational increase in broadband speeds to more than 700 premises in remote and rural Scotland to date. These 7 projects have been driven by individuals within the community who have the capacity, capability and will to deliver the project as a pure community owned and operated scheme.

Not all communities have the necessary skills, time or desire to deliver and particularly operate broadband schemes themselves currently. Part of the support provided by CBS is to support communities to assess their capacity and skills as they consider making the long terms investment as a community in developing a community led broadband solution.

Supporting Individual Communities

For those communities such as Lochielnet and Sleat who are designing, acquiring and operating community broadband infrastructure we offer a full "wrap around" service supporting communities to invest, enable and empower themselves to deliver solutions to improve connectivity. This ranges from initial engagement, demand stimulation and project scoping to project design, business planning, state aid approach, procurement, build, delivery and driving the participation that will deliver the desired outcomes. We also support communities in developing appropriate governance structures to aid sustainability. This support is delivered through our CBS Advisers who are based throughout Scotland.

Aggregated Approach

Through significant market engagement, CBS has established that for suppliers to be attracted to deliver a next generation broadband services over community owned broadband infrastructure, at least 600 - 1,000 potential connections are required.

To create the necessary scale, we have therefore developed an "aggregated" approach, linking communities with fewer connections into joint initiatives. This is currently being piloted in the Argyll Isles where we have supported 7 community groups across numerous islands or parts of islands, covering over 1,500 premises and 3,000 people to build a project which will deliver next generation broadband for residents and business in the Argyll Isles area. This project is currently being procured and we are confident of a sustainable, robust, next generation solution being delivered for this "community of communities" during 2015.

We offer the full “wrap around “ service to aggregated communities and have identified a number of other aggregated schemes which will be brought forward once we have proof of concept from the Argyll Isles, GigaPlus Argyll, pilot.

NATIONAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Digital connectivity does have a transformational effect on the way people live, work and learn, particularly in remote and rural Scotland.

CBS focus is on those communities who are least likely to benefit from the investment in a fibre infrastructure.

Those communities often have poor, and in some cases no, connectivity and so residents have very little choice but to travel, sometimes having to travel just to get connected to broadband, and have limited scope for home working for example.

- Reduce Scotland’s Carbon Footprint – digital connectivity enables both home working and enterprises (private and social) to be established in remote and rural communities giving e-access to national and international markets and suppliers. Additional benefits, all of which contribute to a reduced carbon footprint, include home shopping, home study, e-health and others.
- Reduce traffic congestion – the majority of the carbon footprint benefits listed above result from reduced car journeys.
- Increase the proportion of journeys to work by public or active travel – digitally connected remote and rural communities could give access to more information including live information on public transport, services, updates and route information.

We trust that this submission from CBS proves useful to the Committee in its consideration of the Scottish Government’s Draft Budget and we would be pleased to provide further details about the activities of CBS, and the potential impact on the national indicators that are required, following the Committee’s evidence session.

Community Broadband Scotland
4 November 2014