Digital Directorate
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Ned Sharratt
Assistant Clerk
Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

By Email

15th October 2014

Dear Mr Sharratt

PE 1524 – Free WIFI in Scottish Public Buildings

I am responding to your letter of 6TH August 2014 to the Scottish Government, seeking its views on Petition 1524:

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to issue a code of practice setting out a minimum standard for wifi connections provided by public authorities to members of the public; and to urge all Scottish public authorities to provide wifi connections that meet this standard in all their public buildings.

The Scottish Government has set out a comprehensive digital strategy which recognises the need for action to develop digital infrastructure, encourage digital participation, stimulate the digital economy and promote the use of digital public services. As part of this strategy, Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that Scotland has a world class digital infrastructure by 2020 and is working in partnership with Scottish Futures Trust to consider appropriate technical and financial models to achieve this. Whilst both the possibilities and expectations of digital technology continue to develop at pace, our vision is one in which users are able to access digital connectivity anywhere, at any time and through any device.

The current next generation fibre broadband programme represents a vital step along the road towards this vision of a world class digital infrastructure. This will provide access to the fibre broadband network to 85% of premises by end 2015/16 and 95% of premises by end 2017. In addition, this programme will deliver high quality backhaul to many areas of Scotland for the first time.

Wi-Fi is an important element of our overall vision of a world class digital infrastructure and Scottish Government welcomes the progress made by a number of local authorities across the country in developing and implementing plans for free public Wi-Fi. Recent events such as the Commonwealth Games and the Ryder Cup have demonstrated the public appetite for this form of connectivity and we would expect such an appetite to grow exponentially in future.

As part of our commitment to promoting access to digital technology, Scottish Government recently made £300,000 available, in addition to via the existing Public Library Improvement Funding, to all libraries across Scotland who expressed a wish to provide or extend local Wi-Fi provision. The overall scheme, which is administered by Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), has seen approximately 177 libraries across 15 local authorities benefit from the Fund. A project officer is due to be appointed later this month to evaluate the various models which were used successfully in delivering these services.

In your letter of 6th August you asked specifically that Scottish Government comment on the suggestion made by Jackson Carlaw MSP, that it should consider taking on a "light touch co-ordinating role" in the provision of public Wi-Fi.   The investment described above by Scottish Government and local authorities in the provision of public Wi-Fi provides an opportunity for joint working to develop standards or good practice guidance for such services.   This would be taken forward in line with the High Level Operating Framework http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0042/00424336.pdf which describes a commitment to ensuring that public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to user needs. Whilst the decision to invest in public Wi-Fi at individual public buildings would remain a matter for the building owner, national standards or good practice guidance could play an important role in ensuring that any such service is both secure and easy to use. Information on the subsequent availability of such connections could then be co-ordinated, publicised on an online map and made available, for example, on the Digital Scotland website http://www.digitalscotland.org/.

I hope that this response is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can provide any further information.

Yours sincerely

Colin Cook
Deputy Director, Digital Strategy and Programmes