

PE1524/L



Glasgow City Council

**Report by Executive Director of Development and
Regeneration Services**

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**GCC response to Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee
– Public access to wifi**

Purpose of Report:

To respond to the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee on public access to wifi.

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee on 5 August 2014 considered Petition PE1524, which states:

“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.”

- 1.2 The Committee agreed to write to a number of councils, including Glasgow, to seek their views on the petition and the related topic.
- 1.3 Glasgow City Councils response is detailed in section 2 below.

2. Glasgow City Council's Response

- 2.1 The roll out of world class infrastructure across the city, both wifi, and wired is a key component of the Digital Glasgow roadmap, which aims to position Glasgow as a leading digital city by 2017.
- 2.2 This infrastructure is an enabler, enabling the city to seize the opportunity that digital presents for both businesses and citizens, ultimately ensuring the cities economic and social success.
- 2.3 The provision of free city centre wifi was a key commitment of the current city administration. Phase 1 of this programme has now been delivered via a city concession agreement in partnership with British Telecom.
- 2.4 The Urban wifi Project launched on 10th July 2014, and saw 49 sites across the city enabled, including key city centre locations such as George Square, as well as selected areas in the East End. Free wifi is available at these sites on a 24/7 basis.
- 2.5 The provision of free wifi outdoors has been hugely successful for the city. Over the 2 week period of the Commonwealth Games, the Glasgow wifi network was busier than that of a similar period during the Olympics. During the month of July the network seen users access 6m free minutes, and recorded 250, 000 individual sessions by 36,000 users. At a random snapshot in time measured 31st July 1600 people were actively using the network.
- 2.6 Phase 2 of the wifi deployment programme will see additional sites rolled out across the city in early 2015.
- 2.7 As part of Glasgow City Council's requirements there is in a place a robust approach to content filtering to ensure users can not gain access to inappropriate material. An approach which is supported and implemented by the successful wireless concessionaire BT. This is not overly restrictive but forms part of the Council's strategic aspirations and requirements as well as ensuring compliance with the Digital Economy Act 2010..

- 2.8 Glasgow City Council as part of the concession procurement process could not prescribe a specific connection speed for the wifi service, rather it was stated that the network must provide a good user experience and be capable of supporting the provision of multi media including live streaming. These are services which require a good connection speed.
- 2.9 Ease of access to the internet was a key consideration of the city wifi programme, as such there is no requirement to register/provide personal details in order to subscribe to the service. In a city where approximately 60,000 households do not have internet access in the home, it is essential that as many barriers to digital access are removed as possible, including any undue registration process.
- 2.10 In addition to the rollout of free access public wifi in public spaces, the City Council as part of a further outcome to the wireless concession are in partnership with BT also providing free wifi access in 32 Community Centre's across the city. In this instance a specific requirement of the service delivery was ensuring that content filtering was provided as a part of the managed service. The City Council through its partner Glasgow Life have recently also procured separately an initial phase of wifi provision in 6 public libraries and two museums. This procurement sought responses which not only delivered a good user experience in respect to connectivity but also an easy to use registration process with a robust level of content filtering. Subject to further engagement with the market Glasgow Life are now exploring further means of extending this wifi provision to other public buildings including the remaining libraries, museums and sports facilities.
- 2.11 Wifi provision is also being piloted in a small number of Glasgow schools.
- 2.12 Partnership is key to the delivery of Digital Glasgow. Across each of our workstreams we work closely with key city stakeholders including Glasgow Life, Wheatley Group, Jobs and Business Glasgow and Department of Works and Pensions (DWP). Working together, the Digital Glasgow partnership have created a digital map of free access provision across the city which can be used as a signposting tool, to which all of the partners have contributed to this. This map can be found at www.gain4u.org.uk. This map is subject to continual review by all partners. Knowledge and information is also shared across the partners. This approach demonstrates that Glasgow as a city are making progress in relation to a common approach, and standards, of course there is scope for this to be developed further.
- 2.13 Nationally, knowledge, information and best practice with regard to digital infrastructure including wifi rollout is shared between all Scottish cities via the Cities Alliance.
- 2.14 The development of a national standard for public wifi connections would almost formalise the knowledge exchange between local authorities. It is certainly something for which there is potential and may contribute to ensuring that future wifi procurements consistently reflect these requirements and mitigate against different levels of service being influenced by different suppliers to the detriment of different parts of the public sector.

Conversely however, the danger in specifying any minimum national standard is that it becomes the accepted status quo, leaving potential suppliers with little incentive to be innovative and offer more added value which could potentially be detrimental to different towns and cities seeking to develop a digital wireless strategy. Cities also have different political pressures, drivers and competing priorities which can make collaboration difficult, albeit they each recognise the benefits and are supportive of taking action. Glasgow for example had the time pressure for the Commonwealth Games, the delivery date for the project therefore was not negotiable. GCC's initial priority was also for outdoor provision, whilst others initially looked at indoor. These contrasting priorities and drivers can often be very difficult and time consuming to reconcile however good practice and experience can still play an important role in helping other Councils to realize their aspirations, a role Glasgow is already proactively taking forward.

6. Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

<i>Financial:</i>	No financial issues
<i>Legal:</i>	No new legal issues
<i>Personnel:</i>	No direct personnel issues
<i>Procurement:</i>	No procurement issues

- Council Strategic Plan:**
- Economic Growth:
 - a resilient and growing city economy.
 - a broad based and more integrated economy with diverse business opportunities including social enterprises.
 - a connected city infrastructure, including better transport roads and better access to the internet and information technology for businesses and residents.
 - A world class city
 - compete internationally with the best cities in the world for investment, business and events.
 - Tackle poverty and deprivation and provide relevant and affordable services for all our citizens.
 - A Sustainable city
 - Jobs and investment in the city
 - A reduced carbon footprint
 - A city that looks after its vulnerable people
 - Support more people to live independently at home, where they choose to do so.

-A Learning city
A high quality learning infrastructure

Equality Impacts:

EQIA carried out: No EQIA carried out as the report does not relate to a new service, policy, strategy plan or significant change to a/review of a service, policy strategy or plan

Outcome: Not applicable

Sustainability Impacts:

Environmental: No impact

Social: Rollout of free wifi creates an opportunity for communities to engage and become involved in civic society as well as job search and save money by shopping online.

Economic: This report provides detail on the rollout of free city wifi, infrastructure that today impacts on key investment and location decisions. The provision of free wifi is also a standard expected by visitors to the city. As such a strong digital infrastructure is important to the local economy.

10. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee note the findings in this report.