

PE1524/M

**Aberdeen City Council response to Scottish Parliament Public Petitions
Committee on public access to Wi-Fi**

29th Oct, 2014

Aberdeen City is committed to providing high quality digital connectivity at home and at work through its Strategic Infrastructure Plan and the Accelerate Aberdeen Programme to attract and retain the businesses and employees that ensure sustainable economic growth for the city and region and to meet its responsibilities for digital inclusion under the Welfare Reform Legislation.

Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire have the highest levels of broadband uptake in the UK, at 74% and 72% respectively, but some of the slowest speeds. Public and private sector investment and a share of the Urban Broadband Fund will be used to increase speeds to 80mbps across the entire city. The overwhelming majority of business and residential users in the area are supported with a maximum bit rate of 7.15mbps, but often receive much less because the infrastructure is frequently overloaded, resulting in much lower connection speeds than advertised.

Businesses seeking to locate in the region's major business parks and development corridors require access to worldclass ultrafast digital infrastructure to enable them to compete on an international basis. The provision of ultrafast broadband across the city and 4G wifi coverage will help to:

- accelerate economic growth and create employment;
- provide access to faster and more flexible digital infrastructure;
- support the delivery of education services; and
- enable more cost-effective delivery of public services including tele-medicine and social care.

It is also important to retain key personnel in the energy sector and to prevent the premature fragmentation of the energy industry's presence in the area. Ultra-fast digital connectivity helps provide the means to ensure that the city and region will maintain a high regional GVA through activity in the North Sea and the export of goods and services to other centres of exploration and production. Improvements in broadband connectivity are a key component to maximising growth, for both residential and business needs.

The Council is considering its responsibilities to meet Digital inclusion and response to Welfare Reform, and is reviewing the provision of Wi-Fi throughout key public buildings in general, i.e. not just access to Council services. Initial funding of £300K is available from DCMS to extend and further implement Public Wi-Fi at Libraries, Community Centres, Customer reception/access points and Art Galleries and Museums. A business case is being generated to support ongoing operational revenue costs to support this venture.

Public Wi-Fi access at Council sites requires to be segregated from Council use to satisfy Cabinet Office PSN compliance. While capital investment for this project is available through DCMS funding to implement a new solution, a business case is being prepared to identify ongoing operational revenue implications.

The Accelerate Aberdeen programme, which has recently won the Urban Network Award at the NextGen Conference in London, is a multi-stream project that seeks to provide the region with the world class digital infrastructure it requires, with economic growth and development at its core. The project is funded from the UK Government (Department of Culture, Media and Sports) Broadband UK Programme. The programme consists of 5 parallel projects:

- Enable exchanges and cabinets in Aberdeen City to deliver superfast broadband services as part of the Scottish Government Step Change 2015 project.
- Encourage additional private investment in West Aberdeen/the Energetica corridor covering the major business parks and development areas to deliver world class broadband connectivity.
- Vouchers to be used as a mechanism to enable SMEs to subsidise the connection fee for superfast services and ultrafast broadband services.
 - Concessionary next generation wireless network to improve connectivity in key centres of the city and facilitate rapid deployment of 4G services as they are deployed, supplemented by Wi-Fi in public buildings, learning centres and community centres.
- The development of innovation and demonstration centres, funded by the public sector, which the private (SME) sector can then access and so assist, sustainable economic development. The provision of ultrafast broadband will help accelerate economic growth, create employment, support the delivery of education services, and enable more cost-effective delivery of public services including tele-medicine, social care and council housing repairs.

Aberdeen City welcomes the Scottish Government's interest and commitment in providing increased high speed connectivity across Scotland. To assure best value obligations are met, local authorities must be able to consider the level of investment required in order to deliver to a prescribed standard and balance this against its other obligations. Aberdeen City would support the development of an agreed set of principles to which to aspire in terms of providing appropriate levels of Wi-Fi access consistent with local constraints and conditions and would be concerned that a one size fits all approach enshrined in regulation or legislation could lead to substantial additional costs that would not deliver best value to citizens.

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