

PE1424/N

Petitioner Letter of 3 November 2014

It is very encouraging that many of the organisations who responded already provide public Wi-Fi connections at some of their sites and intend to increase provision in the future. I welcome the support from some respondents who consider documented national standards may be beneficial in guiding organisations who wish to provide public Wi-Fi connections. It is therefore important to ensure this rollout is relatively consistent and does not lead to a postcode lottery where areas of the country are left at a disadvantage.

Comments in consultation replies	My response
Users are required to log onto this service using a credentials provided by individual organisations.	Under my proposal, there would either be no requirement to enter credentials to log on, or there would be unified credentials which would allow access to all public Wi-Fi networks in Scottish public buildings.
Users are required to accept terms and conditions for individual public networks.	Under my proposal there would be a single set of terms and conditions for public Wi-Fi connections, saving people from having to read terms for each site.
Public networks are unsecured and data can be intercepted.	The proposed national standard would set out a minimum level of security. This would almost certainly require connections to be encrypted.
A large number of users streaming video simultaneously could saturate available bandwidth.	It may be possible to use a dynamic bandwidth cap which would respond to the number of users connected and prioritise the organisation's staff over members of the public.
Many people can access the internet on their smartphones using a mobile data connection (i.e. direct to mobile phone masts). The advent of 4G phones may make Wi-Fi networks of less value.	This is true, but in reality there are substantial limitations: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mobile data connections are generally only available on phones and not laptops or tablets. It is technically possible to 'tether' a phone's internet connection to a laptop, but mobile network providers charge extra for this.2. Mobile signal in rural areas is substantially poorer than in urban areas, so there is a risk rural areas will be left behind if mobile data is relied upon.3. Due to the longer distance the signal has to travel, mobile data connections use at least ten times the power than Wi-Fi connections,

	<p>so are not as energy efficient¹. For these reasons the availability of mobile data does not make the provision of Wi-Fi of no value.</p>
<p>Given the current constraints on public funding it is difficult to justify expenditure on free internet access (e.g. rather than direct patient care).</p>	<p>I agree that core functions such as patient care should be the first priority for public authorities. The petition seeks to use existing infrastructure as far as possible to reduce costs. However, the Scottish Government recognises that the benefits of digital connectivity outlined in <i>Scotland's Digital Future</i>² are worthy of capital investment. The Scottish Government may wish to make specific funding available for such systems, and be able to coordinate a collaborative procurement so the cost to each organisation would be less than if they were to install systems individually.</p>
<p>Private providers may provide public Wi-Fi connections, either altruistically or funded by advertising.</p>	<p>I agree this is a possibility, but would be cautious in allowing private companies to place advertising on public WiFi systems.</p>
<p>A minimum standard may become the accepted status quo and inhibit improvement.</p>	<p>Organisations would be free to exceed the standard, and it would be reviewed regularly to increase in line with technological developments.</p>

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¹ Carbon Trust (2013) <http://www.carbontrust.com/about-us/press/2013/08/carbon-trust-unlaces-carbon-bootprint-of-watching-football>

² Scottish Government (2011) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/04162416/0>