

Cross-Party Group on Digital Participation

Meeting at the Scottish Parliament, 20 February 2018

Attendees:

Willie Coffey MSP (WC)	Jonathan Ruff, Ofcom (JR)
Mark Dames, BT (MD)	Matt Hall, Ofcom (MH)
David Walls, Lothian Broadband Networks Ltd (DW)	Adrienne Chalmers (AC)
Mike MacGregor (MM)	Margaret Ellis (ME)
Colin Foskett (CF)	David Jeffrey (DJ)
Anna Grant, Carnegie Trust (AG)	Alyson Mitchell, Scottish Government (AM)
John Trower (JT)	Stuart Young, ETIVE (SY)
Kyle Usher, SCVO (KU)	Liam McArthur MSP (LM)

Minutes:

- No issues were raised with the minutes from the previous meeting. JR agreed to send minutes from the previous meeting in advance in the future.

1. Connected Nations – Jonathan Ruff and Matt Hall

- JR and MH presented findings from Ofcom's Connected Nations 2017 report. The report shows the availability of broadband and mobile services across the UK. JR then explained what Ofcom is doing to improve coverage in Scotland.
- The recent disputes between the UK and Scottish Government over broadband were discussed. MD said that it was important that Ofcom and others continue to "be above the politics" and report on the facts. He said that the UK and Scottish Government programmes were different projects with different targets.
- DW said the Scottish Government's evidence session at the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee clarified the progress of its DSSB programme.
- KU suggested that those in more rural areas, can be more likely to need online services for things such as banking and shopping.
- DW said that multiple definitions and standards of measurements can create confusion. JR said that Ofcom is in conversation with the likes of thinkbroadband about their reporting.
- MD asked about the relationship between R100 and the USO. JR said Ofcom was aware of the need for the two programmes to work together and had been speaking to Scottish Government.
- DW said issues for people around the cost of broadband services are a significant and underreported. He said that the drive for investment in infrastructure could drive up prices. There are urban areas for example with access to fast broadband but people can't afford it. He said that some packages that are not available to those with bad credit. JR said that Ofcom looks to promote competition to drive down price.
- MD explained the service provided by BT Basic and the eligibility criteria.

- DW said that latency is also an issue worth measuring. He said that problems are more prevalent over copper and that fibre is the obvious solution.
- JT questioned the signal threshold Ofcom uses to measure mobile signal. MH said that the threshold had recently been increased, however they would go back to JT to clarify the exact level.
- JT raised the issue of different handsets being able to pick up different signals. Asked if Ofcom mapped where MNOs transmit different spectrum frequencies.
- The group suggested there should be more consumer information on this, particularly with the upcoming spectrum auctions. An example was given of a company in Australia that sells handsets with multiple sims.
- Some of the group questioned the need to have 100% geographic coverage in Scotland. They suggested there are some incredibly rural and uninhabited areas that don't need to be served.

2 Future sessions

- JR asked the group respond to the doodle poll he had circulated.
- JR said that the dates for the next CPG meetings this year are 30 May and 3 October. He said that we were also looking to hold a garden lobby event in Scottish Parliament in September as well.
- AM suggested Scottish Government colleagues working on R100 and Mobile Infill Projects could come talk to the cross-party group.
- AM suggested having a range of organisations, such as social housing associations as well as industry groups, at the garden lobby event putting on "taster sessions". MD added it would be value to have Digital Scotland there as well.
- Many agreed that digital connectivity was increasingly seen as not just a utility, but a right, and suggested the "Internet for everyone" may be a good theme for the event. This would include increasing coverage, but also availability (in terms of pricing) and accessibility (in terms of skills and access services).
- AG suggested digital rights and data as a topic. Said there has been work with Young Scot on the right to be forgotten and managing data. Ties in with the "Year of Young People" and GDPR. Others agreed digital rights was a topic of interest.
- JT suggested the "4th industrial revolution", and how this may impact people jobs may be a good topic for future sessions. Flagged that SCDI has released a report on automation today.
- MD questioned what schools are doing to prepare children for advances in technologies. SY suggested inviting school children to Holyrood to ask about their experiences using with mobile and broadband services.