

**Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Digital Participation @ The Scottish Parliament
13 September 2016**

Attendees:

- Willie Coffey MSP
- Liam McArthur MSP
- Rhoda Grant MSP
- Jamie Green MSP
- Vicki Nash (Ofcom)
- Jonathan Ruff (Ofcom)
- Alyson Mitchell (Scottish Government)
- Adrienne Chalmers (Individual)
- Marie Dougan (Individual)
- David Walls (Director, Lothian Broadband Networks)
- Evelyn McDowall (Business Solutions Leader, Wheatley Group)
- Mairi Macleod (Communications Consumer Panel)
- David McNeil (Digital Director, SCVO).
- Douglas White (Carnegie UK Trust)
- Michael Fourman (Professor of Computer Systems – Informatics Forum)
- Claire Scally (Joint Managing Director, TRC Media)
- Chris Meikle (Digital Comms. Manager, Zero Waste Scotland)
- Colin Foskett (Head of Innovation, Blackwood Group)
- Patrick Hogan (3x1 Group)

Agenda:

1. Opening remarks and introductions
2. Ofcom's Communications Market Report 2016
3. SCVO Presentation
4. AOB

1. **Opening remarks and introductions (Willie Coffey MSP)**

- 1.1. WC welcomed those attending and indicated that he would be happy to continue to act as Convener for the CPG. All members present agreed.
- 1.2. WC invited nominations for Deputy Convener. LM indicated he'd be happy to fulfil this role and this was agreed. The proposal that Ofcom continue to clerk the CPG was also agreed. WC said that this would allow the CPG to fulfil the requirements for registration with the Standards Committee by end October.
- 1.3. WC also noted that VN would soon be leaving her position as Director for Ofcom Scotland. WC thanked VN for her work contributing to the CPG on Digital Participation.
- 1.4. WC then invited JR to present the key findings from Ofcom's Communications Market Report 2016.

2. Ofcom's Communications Market Report 2016 (Jonathan Ruff, Regulatory Affairs Manager, Ofcom)

- 2.1. JR covered the key headlines from the report: availability of basic and superfast broadband and mobile coverage; adoption rates and usage patterns of digital communications; satisfaction levels and the ways in which digital comms were enhancing people's lives.
- 2.2. JR explained that, while there had been improvements in the availability of services across the UK, there was still great deal of work to be done to ensure that consumers in rural areas received adequate service. This was particularly the case for large areas of Scotland.
- 2.3. During questions/discussion, the following points were raised:
 - Concerns were raised about the way in which Ofcom presented its data (i.e. headline speeds) – he suggested that user-experience did not always reflect the messages conveyed by Ofcom. This was particularly the case for the availability of basic ADSL broadband services – where those living further from the telephone exchange noticed degradation of download speeds. This was reflected in the drop-in satisfaction levels for broadband from the 2015 report to the 2016. There was some short discussion about the potential for mis-leading advertisements from communications providers, particularly around the marketing of 'fibre' based broadband products. Members discussed the merits of inviting the mobile and broadband providers to discuss this at a future CPG.
 - JR advised that the Connected Nations report for Scotland 2016, due to be published in November would contain more detail on availability. This report could form the basis of a possible future CPG presentation. JR confirmed this would contain a section setting out the importance of Community Broadband Scotland to connecting the final 5%. There was some short discussion around the different technologies that might be required as part of this solution; recognising the significant cost attached to installing fixed broadband connections in rural communities.
 - There was some discussion around the implications of going 'mobile only'. Ofcom has done some research on this, noting that mobiles don't replicate the fixed line access experience (eg difficult to access benefits, job applications etc)
 - CPG members noted the importance of access to free wifi – 38% of young people connected this way. Members noted that Singapore is 'barrier free'. We also discussed how free Wi-Fi in hospitals would be particularly useful for patients, helping them feel connected to family and friends
 - Other members noted that the recent Scottish Household survey data detailed how people accessed the internet and what they used it for, plus information on skill levels.
 - Members also discussed whether it would be possible to get a measure of disadvantage in the digital divide. We noted that the 'most excluded' (by

availability or affordability or skills) are likely to suffer an even more acute divide as technology marches on and more and more public services etc. go online.

- Concerns about Openreach not delivering, noting that this was a focus for Ofcom's Digital Communications Review.
- The important role that housing associations play in getting people on-line, by providing technology and skills support – eg the One Digital Project in Glasgow
- Speeds is not just a rural issue – poor speeds can occur in other areas, and there's an unwillingness on the part of providers to plug all the 'holes'.
- How might the CPG's work assist the unconnected? – draw attention to those who have the solutions to the problems/the benefits of connectivity? Persuade others of the merits of our argument.

3. SCVO Presentation on Digital Skills (David McNeil, Director Digital @ SCVO)

3.1. WC thanked DM for offering to provide CPG members with an update on the work SCVO is doing to improve digital participation.

3.2. DM highlighted the importance of digital skills in all aspects of life. Almost 90% of jobs now require some form of basic digital literacy and will be an essential skill as more and more public services are moved online.

3.3. Some of the key messages included recognition that:

- Not everyone is online
- Not everyone who is online has appropriate skills
- Digital exclusion interacts with other forms of exclusion
- We need to ensure existing inequalities are not exacerbated by a widening digital divide

3.4. DM outlined the key components of SCVO's Digital Strategy:

- **PARTICIPATION:** Tackle inequality by equipping individuals with basic digital skills.
- **INNOVATION:** Support digital innovation in the third sector to extend the reach and impact of organisations using tech for good.
- **EVOLUTION:** Maximise the impact of the third sector by encouraging digital transformation and evolution.

3.5. DM explained that SCVO had created a Digital Participation Charter, helped fund 84 'Challenge Fund' projects and was also running a series of events and workshops geared around teaching people basic digital skills. DM noted that several key stakeholders had signed up to SCVO's Digital Participation Charter, including BT, several local authorities and COSLA, amongst others.

3.6. DM also suggested that CPG members visit the following website links for further information about the programme:

- Why Basic Digital Skills Matter > <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwGwOs1cdUn>
- Aberdeen Case Study > <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0M6FDu0c-I>

3.7. During questions/discussion, the following points were raised:

- Questions were raised about whether potential of computers/digital skills were being fully utilised in the early stages of education – some members noted that teachers were often reluctant to ask pupils to undertake internet-based research as some pupils simply didn't have access to the necessary facilities.
- Members discussed whether members of the public should be provided with a 'broadband allowance' in the same way as they receive other benefits from DWP etc. It was broadly felt this was a sensible idea.
- MF noted the correlation between uptake of digital skills and that of income i.e. that those in higher income brackets were more likely to be proficient with computers etc. EW explained that Wheatley Group was doing a lot of work to ensure that these individuals had access to affordable broadband.
- Equality legislation was not currently being applied properly; many websites of UK Government and Scottish Government were not fully set up for e-readers and those requiring accessible readers.
- AM suggested that it would difficult for the Scottish Government to deliver improvements when many of the relevant powers rested with UK Government, such as telecommunications and welfare still being reserved powers. There may be some scope to intervene following the devolution of certain welfare powers to the Scottish Parliament via the Scotland Act 2016.

4. **AOB**

- 4.1. WC thanked members for their time and advised that JR would be in touch with further details once the CPG had been successfully re-registered with the Scottish Parliament.