

Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Digital Participation @ The Scottish Parliament
26 April 2017

Attendees:

- Willie Coffey MSP
- Jamie Greene MSP
- Liam McArthur MSP
- Simon Miller (Three)
- Jennifer Amphlett (Three)
- Jonathan Ruff (Ofcom)
- Jose Kurian (Ofcom)
- Alan Pridmore (Ofcom)
- Helen Ferguson (Ofcom)
- John Jackson (Ofcom)
- Aileen O'Hagan (Canongate/Futurescot)
- Bridget Stevens (Tap Into IT)
- Maggie Ellis (PhoneAbility and EKTG)
- Evelyn McDowall (Wheatley Group)
- David Walls (Lothian Broadband Networks)
- Paul Cameron (Renfrewshire Council)
- Laura Muir (Individual)
- Willie Hardie (Royal Society Edinburgh)
- Holly Fleming (Royal Society Edinburgh)
- Liz Leonard (Liz Leonard Media)
- Lauren Pluss (SCVO)
- Adrienne Chalmers (Individual), including Mike McGregor
- Laura Muir (Edinburgh Napier University)
- Phil Crooks (Etive)
- Grant Friel (Etive)
- Elizabeth Tait (Robert Gordon University)
- John Trower (Scottish Futures Trust)
- Michael Fourman (Individual)

Agenda:

1. Three Mobile update
2. Analysis of fixed broadband take-up
3. Ofcom Access and Inclusion Report

Three Mobile update:

- Simon Miller and Jennifer Amphlett provided CPG members with a short update on the work they are doing to promote digital participation:
 - 'Reconnected' Scheme: Three mobile has introduced a handset recycling scheme and is working with community organisations to identify individuals that could benefit from a second-hand smartphone.
 - 'Discovery' Programme: Three mobile has introduced several stores with the aim of building consumer confidence in digital products. It currently has three stores in Islington, Maidenhead and Swansea but is seeking to expand in the coming months.

- Approach to vulnerable consumers: which involves treating consumers in debt sympathetically as well as providing relay services to consumers with disabilities.
- Simon also explained some of the organisations wider activities which had brought about benefits for consumers e.g. introducing handset unlocking ahead of other mobile network operators and preventing 'bill shock' through 'all you can eat' data packages.
- There was a brief discussion about attempts to improve mobile coverage in the hardest to reach areas of Scotland and mobile network operators' progress in meeting UK-wide coverage obligation targets. This included comments from MSP members about the advantages/disadvantages of prioritising infrastructure rollout to rural areas.
- CPG members also asked about the rollout of 5G services across the UK. There was some agreement from members that planning rules would need to be reviewed to accommodate the increased number of cells.

Analysis of fixed broadband take-up

- Professor Michael Fourman provided CPG members with some insights into the "Effect of Distribution of Uptake or Availability on Existing Inequality."¹ This served to highlight concerns about the growing digital divide in Scotland.
- Michael reminded CPG members that broadband access affords social, educational, and financial advantages. Being online can make it easier to access jobs, bargains, information, and education. But the digital divide can magnify inequality if those who are already deprived are also less likely to be online.
- Michael explained that his approach involved applying a simple model to visualise the effects of digital connectivity on inequality, across Scotland.
- CPG members agreed that while much work was still to be done there had been a significant increase in broadband take-up amongst the most deprived areas of Scotland. Michael suggested that organisations such as Wheatley Group had contributed to this.
- Some CPG members suggested that some consumers on low income were opting to use mobile broadband (via mobile phone) rather than fixed connections (which could prove more expensive in some circumstances).

Ofcom Access and Inclusion Report

- Alan Pridmore provided CPG members with some of the key findings from Ofcom's series of Access and Inclusion reports, published in March 2017.²
- Alan explained to CPG members that communications services are increasingly essential for citizens and consumers. People in vulnerable circumstances may particularly depend on certain communications services, for example if they cannot easily leave their homes because of disability or illness. In Ofcom reports, we present a

¹ <http://idea.ed.ac.uk/digiscot/gini/gmap.html>

² <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/multi-sector-research/accessibility-research/access-and-inclusion>

range of data on the availability, take-up, use and affordability of communications services. He explained how this work helps us understand how well the communications sector is meeting the needs of consumers whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

- Alan covered two main themes in his presentation, on access (i.e. the take up and use of broadband, phones and television services by consumers) as well as pricing (i.e. trends in prices available to consumers buying standalone and bundled communications services). The report also looks at levels of consumer engagement, awareness of usage and the extent to which consumers engage with their bills.

AOB

- Willie Coffey MSP thanked everyone for attending Parliament and said he would explore ways of communicating the key talking points to MSPs within Parliament.