

Notes of the 3rd Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Digital Communications

Tuesday 5th November 2013

Chair: Russell George AM

Members Present:

Alun Ffred Jones AM (Arfon)
Andrew R.T. Davies AM (South Wales Central)
Antoinette Sandbach AM (North Wales)
Elin Jones AM (Ceredigion)
Mark Isherwood AM (North Wales)
Mohammad Asghar (South Wales East)
Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM (Carmarthen East & Dinefwr)

Representatives from:

Arqiva
BT
Cardiff City Council
Gary Thompson (Consultant)
Ofcom
Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales
Office of Huw Lewis AM
Office of Russell George AM
Office of Suzy Davies AM
Spectrum Internet

Apologies:

David Rees AM (Aberavon)
Aled Roberts AM (North Wales)
Bethan Jenkins AM (South Wales West)
Suzy Davies AM (South Wales West)
Simon Thomas AM (Mid and West Wales)
David Melding AM (South Wales Central)
Janet Finch-Saunders AM (Aberconwy)

Russell George AM (Chairman) opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. The Chair confirmed that following recommendations contained in the report to the Assembly on Lobbying and Cross Party Groups, the Cross Party Group on Digital Communications would be formally constituted and will hold an AGM in January 2014. In the intervening period, Russell George AM was elected as Chairman and it was agreed that Ofcom would provide secretariat to the Group.

The Chairman welcomed representatives from Arqiva who proceeded to provide an overview of the Mobile Infrastructure Project, the £150 million UK Government project which is designed to boost mobile coverage in those areas which are complete not-spots.

The project's specific objectives are to:

- support economic growth in the UK, including in rural areas
- improve coverage and quality of mobile network services, for consumers and businesses that live and work in areas of the UK where existing mobile network coverage is poor or non-existent.

The aim is to address mobile voice coverage in as many of the 60,000 premises which have been identified as possible, and improve “on the move” coverage on 10 key A-roads including the A470 in Wales.

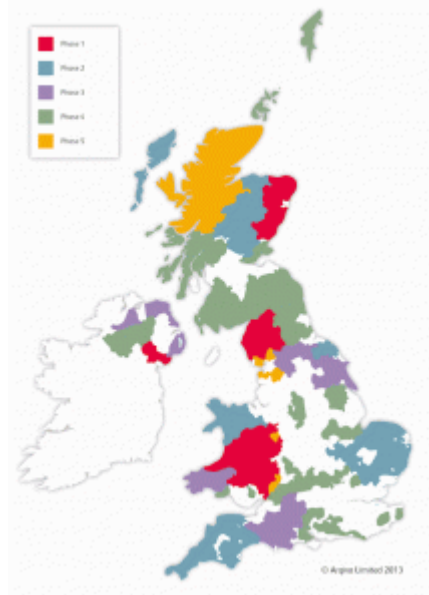
In May 2013, DCMS selected Arqiva as the company which will deliver the project after a competitive bidding process.

As part of its ongoing National Implementation Plan, Arqiva has recently announced that large parts of Mid Wales will be among the first UK areas to benefit in Phase 1 (coloured red on the map below) with North Wales in Phase 2, parts of Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire in Phase 3 and Gower and Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney in Phase 4. The first of the new sites should “go live” in the near future.

Nominal sites have been identified in the following constituencies: Aberconwy, Arfon, Brecon & Radnorshire, Carmarthen East & Dinefwr, Carmarthen West & South Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Clwyd South, Clwyd West, Dwyfor Meirionnydd, Gower, Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney, Monmouth, Montgomeryshire, Preseli Pembrokeshire and Ynys Môn.

These sites have the best prospect of being delivered within the relevant timescales and budget but before the sites are built, each site must be agreed by all four mobile network operators and DCMS and meet a number of siting criteria - power, backhaul, access and rental.

All Mobile Network Operators will use the new infrastructure when it is built. Arqiva will own and manage the sites and the passive infrastructure but the operators will be responsible for their active equipment (i.e. their base stations and antennas) and the actual service to the end user.



Agreed Actions

Gary Thompson (Broadcasting Consultant) and Ian Clarke (Chairman, Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales) referred to the issue of mandatory mobile roaming and recommended that the Cross Party Group makes representations to Ofcom to urge it to mandate roaming for all operators as a way to address any total and partial mobile not-spots which remain following the implementation of the Mobile Infrastructure Project . **ACTION - Group to write to Ofcom**

Andrew R.T. Davies AM (South Wales Central) and Elin Jones AM (Ceredigion) asked why the implementation plan was not in the public domain to allow AMs and the Welsh Government to make contingency plans.

Arqiva reiterated that nominal sites had to be agreed by all four mobile network operators and DCMS.

Furthermore, Elin Jones AM (Ceredigion) suggested that Arqiva work with Assembly Members so that they can be advocates within their local planning authorities to facilitate the rollout of the required infrastructure. **ACTION - Arqiva to work with local AMs and share the nominal implementation plan.**

ACTION - Cross Party Group to write to the Welsh Government BETS Minister to urge the Welsh Government to consider a “Mobile Support Scheme” to assist those areas not covered by MIP.