

Minutes of the Cross Party Group on Digital Communications

Tuesday 24 November 2015 6.00pm

Chair: Russell George AM

Discussion on Superfast Cymru with Programme Director, Ed Hunt, Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology, Julie James and BT Director Wales, Alwen Williams

Members Present:

Alun Ffred Jones AM (Arfon)

Janet Haworth AM (North Wales)

Elin Jones AM (Ceredigion)

Julie James AM (Swansea West)

Representatives:

Rhodri Williams – Director, Wales – Ofcom

Elinor Williams – Regulatory Affairs Manager – Ofcom

Nia Thomas – Regulatory Affairs Advisor – Ofcom

Russell George AM, Chairman of the Group, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced BT's Director for Wales, Alwen Williams and the programme director of Superfast Cymru, Ed Hunt. Alwen Williams gave a short introduction and welcomed Nick Vaughan, Head of Public Affairs at Openreach. She made reference to the economic impact of BT in Wales, with spend at around £213 million a year with local suppliers.

Ed Hunt proceeded to give a progress report on the Superfast Cymru roll-out to date. He noted that the roll-out has reached over 521,000 premises in Wales and that more homes are now being connected to the internet through installation of fibre to the premises (FTTP). However, he emphasised that FTTP can be costly and often requires complex engineering which may not be the solution for many parts of Wales. The areas where roll-out is yet to be completed were highlighted on a map of Wales.

Elin Jones AM asked for specific information on the Superfast Cymru roll-out in her constituency of Ceredigion. She noted that the roll-out has only reached 50% in Ceredigion and questioned how the programme aims to reach its 96% target by 2016. Ed Hunt confirmed that the target has been extended to the summer of 2017 and that the programme is on track to reach that. In reply to Elin Jones' question, Julie James AM noted that some parts of Ceredigion may fall within the final 4% in Wales. In addition, she agreed to share with Elin Jones the percentage increases of the roll-out in Ceredigion and across Wales over the coming months. **ACTION: JJ**

Ed Hunt referred the Group to the new postcode checker to be launched shortly on the Superfast Cymru website. He noted how the new facility will provide customers with the opportunity of finding

out whether their premises is within the scope of the programme or not, and that information on alternative options of getting broadband such as applying to the Access Broadband Cymru scheme would also be provided. In addition, he mentioned that Facebook is now the best method of communication for the Superfast Cymru project.

The Chairman of Ofcom's Advisory Committee for Wales asked whether Ed Hunt had any indication of when the final phase of planning work for the programme would be completed. He noted that this information would be helpful for the people of Wales to learn whether they will get broadband under the scheme. Ed Hunt agreed to get back to the Group with an estimated date of the end of the planning period. **ACTION: EH**

Concerns were shared about the fact that new housing developments are built without developers being obliged to install the ducting required to deliver superfast broadband. Julie James AM said that she would support any changes in the regulations to enforce this. She added that the Welsh Government is in conversation with the UK Government on the introduction of the broadband USO.

Finally, the Group was informed of the G.fast broadband technology trials which are currently taking place in Swansea to offer speeds of more than 300Mbps.

At the end of the meeting, Elinor Williams and Nia Thomas from Ofcom distributed copies of the November edition of the AM.com newsletter. The newsletter informs Assembly Members and other stakeholders about Ofcom's recent developments.

Meeting closed at 7.00pm