Further to the opportunity to verbally give evidence to the committee on the 23rd November 2011 the Digital Inclusion Strategy Group in Fife wish to make the additional points.

Background

Fife requires a first class digital infrastructure with enhanced mobile phone coverage to ensure it remains internationally competitive as a great place to live, work, invest and visit. Fife is working on its bid currently by researching what is needed in Fife in order to increase the numbers of people accessing and using faster broadband speeds. The funding from BDUK will be matched with funding from the EU, private sector and funding for improvement in the public sector network.

It is likely that there will be little private sector investment within Fife’s rural areas due to the levels of demand from the population density. Approx 18% of Fife’s households could be affected.

Further research is required to determine the practicable technology options to provide the quality of broadband aimed for by the Scottish Government.

There is a need to develop scenarios for different mixes of technologies to provide the 100% coverage that the Scottish and UK Governments aspire to. This will include estimated capital investment and operating costs as well as different intervention models.

Funding

A unified approach to the delivering of broadband is needed to ensure the best for end users. The situation we currently have with various funding streams available which need to be meshed into a whole plan for broadband delivery is causing complexity when driving forward this agenda. There are issues around timing with the need to align the Digital Strategy and the recommendations on broadband contained within the McClelland Review. The McClelland Review advocates a national approach to broadband deployment that would leverage significant benefits through the aggregation of public sector broadband contracts.

Fife had hoped to match in the funding it has to upgrade the Council network with BDUK and potential EU funding but may be in the position of having to push ahead with the Council network upgrades and hope to align these later - although that will be much more difficult. The work of the Scottish Public Sector Network Working Group is also relevant as it is looking at public sector investment being utilised not just for the public sector, but for the public good.

Digital Inclusion

Part of the work being done in Fife is to stimulate demand for services and supporting new broadband users.

Digital Fife is a community driven online community supporting people across Fife to get online. There are around 250 community groups and over 1000 learners registered for the bespoke online learning within the portal.

Smart Community Fife is a volunteer-led information service that covers the rural communities of the Howe of Fife.

Digital Inclusion Strategy Group

Fife has a strategy group piloting activity to ensure that those most likely to face barriers in getting online are targeted. Currently there are projects within sheltered housing complexes being run in partnership with WEA (Workers Educational Association) a net book project with parents and pupils in a primary school in one of Fife’s SIMD areas and Digital Panel being set up to provide a way for Fife residents to test and feedback on new online services the Council is delivering and a campaign with a local newspaper to promote the national Race Online initiative.
Research into working with social landlords to promote digital participation is being considered.

**Final Comments**

There is a need for—

- balancing national contracted provision with the need to tailor to local circumstances;
- providing opportunities for "Community-driven enablement" of broadband investment;
- ensuring that adequate competition exists throughout the public network;
- looking at innovative ways of developing sustainable models which generate revenue to fund ongoing network improvements and mitigate future capital expenditure