Introduction

Glasgow City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry into broadband infrastructure in Scotland consultation document.

Comment

Glasgow’s digital connectivity (2MB) is on a par with other UK cities but well below superfast broadband (40MB+) services of international competitors. In 2010, fixed line access to 2Mb broadband was almost universal (Ofcom) with take up in metropolitan Glasgow at only 53% (well short of Scotland 61% and the UK 71%). A recent survey carried out on behalf of the Council showed that access to the internet varied by age and deprivation. Those aged 65 and over were more likely than younger groups to not have any internet access at home, and those in the most deprived areas were more likely to not have access to the internet than those in the least deprived areas. Glasgow is the local authority with the largest share of The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

Of great concern is the weak business (and consumer) demand and exploitation of digital connectivity in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. Though Glasgow already benefits from superfast broadband investment, as of August 2010, BT had upgraded only a minority of Glasgow’s twenty telephone exchanges.

The availability of high capacity broadband is a potential driver of growth for both national and local economies and is increasingly influencing inward investment location decisions. Both traditional and new economy sectors (digital media, music and film, design services etc) now rely on the download and upload speeds made possible through superfast broadband to compete. Glasgow is currently operating at a level well below levels available to its national and international competitors.

Working with BT, the city aspires to full (fibre) superfast broadband (40MB+) across Glasgow as soon as possible. Current availability of BT Infinity is limited to Glasgow Bridgeton, Halfway and Western with coverage being extended in spring 2012 to Glasgow Langside.

Virgin cable superfast broadband can deliver speeds of up to 100 MB and roll out began in 2010 with London, S East and Yorkshire being the first areas to benefit. Virgin cable, which relies on cable connections and is limited to around 50% of the UK, currently offers speeds of up to 50MB.

Uptake of superfast broadband will be affected by the cost to customers.

GCC, SE and the Chamber of Commerce are working to help increase broadband use among businesses and in particular SMEs and export-orientated businesses.

Glasgow City Council has its own channel shift strategy and are working to increase the amount of information and services available to Glasgow businesses and citizens online. The low take-up of broadband service across the city will have impact upon this.

The Glasgow Housing Association who will make their own response are embarking on a three year broadband programme which consists of rolling out and subsidising broadband in their homes.