

Electronic Communications Consultative Committee (ECCC)
Minutes from the Meeting held on Wednesday, 6th September 2017

Present: Dax Richards, Financial Secretary (SHG), Chair
Thomas Holvey, Policy Advisor (SHG), Secretary
Angelo Berbotto, Attorney General (SHG)
Christine Thomas (Sure)
Chris Durnell (Sure)

1. Review of Terms of Reference

Issues were raised around frequency of meetings. It was agreed to keep the March meeting in the diary and aim to have two meetings in 2018 due to business need.

A formal meeting note should also be shared with the public.

2. Update on the services being provided and service developments

Telecommunications Licence Schedule 2 (Internet Service) has been met in terms of prices and speeds of internet services. The speeds and capacity had been increased by Sure and they have met the 5% reduction in prices for broadband packages, with the final 5% reduction to be made in January 2018.

A question was raised regarding the Licensee's agreement to investigate the prioritisation of VoIP services within broadband capacity. Sure were asked to provide a response on the progress of this.

Telecommunications Licence Schedule 3 (Mobile) has been adhered to, with Sure stating that the commissioning of the new Bottom Woods mobile site has meant that the necessary 95% population coverage of residential and business areas being reached.

Broadcasting Licence Clause 3 has been adhered to.

3. Update on current and future prices

It was noted that current prices were as per the licence. It was also noted that a review of prices needed to be completed by the end of January 2018. However, the Committee felt that a new timeline to carry out the review was needed. The review should also look at how broadband prices should change in the future.

4. Update on marine cable and implications for Sure and SHG

Discussions were held around the license agreement and the current proposals for a marine cable.

It was also agreed that the ECCC wasn't the correct forum to discuss the current progress of the cable as the correct representatives from either side were not part of the committee. It was therefore agreed to continue the cooperation outside of the meeting and that information requests from SHG to Sure would follow.

5. Changes to the Telecoms Ordinance as proposed by Sure

Prior to the meeting Sure raised two issues with the ECCC to be considered regarding the Telecoms Ordinance:

The Telecoms Ordinance currently caps the amount Sure may apply for telephone installations to £30. The current economic climate and inhibiting costs have meant that in many instances over the past few years, Sure has not been able to recover the full cost of customer installations; we apply to have this changed to ensure that Sure is able to recover all costs no matter the line length of an installation. This links into the price review noted above, where we note our Licence states that we are entitled to recover our costs and earn a reasonable return.

The ECCC response was to understand further the impacts and costs that are associated with this. In particular including the payback period for people are connected through their monthly bill. SHG were keen to stress the original intention of the cap, to ensure residents could access the service relatively cheaply and with the new digital inclusion aim this was more important. It was also noted that if inflation was applied to the £30 from the original date the new cost would be c£35. Sure noted that other publicly owned utilities on Saint Helena are not subject to any such cap.

The Telecoms Ordinance stipulates a period of 30 days after customer's receipt of a bill before Sure can demand payment. To ensure efficiency of debt collection and reduce the risk of increased debt to customers and the Company; we would like to apply for the Ordinance to be changed to 30 days after the issue date of the bill and to allow Sure to apply an interest rate of 0.75% to any outstanding balances.

The ECCC raised issues around charging interest, which whilst not opposed, did want to ensure that there were some safeguards in place, such as a grace period and an extension to current disconnection periods. Sure noted that other utilities and SHG-owned entities charge interest on late payments. Sure further noted that charging interest is a better option than disconnection, and that the cost of persistent bad payers adversely affects all customers. The ECCC would also like to understand better the level and nature of the debts and has requested further information.

6. Update on performance indicators as reported by Sure

A discussion was held on the nature and use of the indicators. The ECCC assured Sure that these were for internal use, but have also made up part of the annual report in the past.

7. Summary of customer complaints and any significant issues that arise

There were no significant issues that had arisen and many of the legacy complaints around data had largely disappeared. No significant complaints raised to the Chief Magistrate.

8. Ability of the public to raise issues with the Committee

This issues looks into the fact that there is no formal regulator on the island and that the ECCC is a committee which make recommendations to Governor in Council. As there is an independent recourse to refer disputes to the Chief

Magistrate in the event that the customer has not been able to resolve directly with Sure, it is felt that the regulatory function is adequately covered by the two bodies.

9. Production of the Committee's Annual Report for 2017

This is largely a function to adhere to the licence. It is produced with regard to meeting the licence requirements and any significant changes, which have occurred in the past year. It will be produced following the actions in this note and the production of the publicly available meeting note and the aim will be to produce a draft in early October, following further discussions which are deemed necessary.

10. Any other business

No AOB was raised.