

**Minutes from the Electronic Communications Consultative Committee Meeting held on
Friday, 31 January 2025 @ 11 am
in the Financial Secretary's Office at the Castle**

Present: Mr Dax Richards, SHG Financial Secretary (Chairperson) (DR)
Mrs Susannah Nightingale, Head of Communications Policy,
Regulation and Compliance (SN)
Mr Jeremy Roberts, Chief Digital Officer (JR)
Miss Christine Thomas, Chief Executive (Sure) (CT)
Ms Chris Durnell, Sure Legal & Regulatory Director (CD)
Mr Adam Yon, Sure Networks Manager (AY)

Secretary: Miss Nicole Plato, Executive Assistant to the Chief Secretary (NP)

1. Welcome

DR welcomed all to the meeting with a special welcome to SN who was visiting in person.

2. Confirmation of minutes from the last meeting held on 23 October 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2024 were confirmed.

3. Review of Actions from the last meeting

3.1 Customer Survey

CT had shared the April 2024 customer survey results and apologised for the delay in sharing this.

3.2 Request for information for the Telecoms Programme Board

SN had spoken with CT to discuss the above request.

3.3 ECCC Annual Report

DR advised that he would still like an ECCC Annual Report for 2023 to be completed and made public. SN had re-sent the spreadsheet to Sure for data collection to help inform the Annual Report and DR reminded Sure to complete this spreadsheet so that he can complete the reports for 2023 and 2024 even though they will be late. The 2024 report has to be completed by the end of April 2025.

(Action: CT/DR)

3.4 SHG requirements for upgrades

SHG requirements for additional Sure services were discussed with the ECCC.

4. Global Emergency & Volunteer Service Platform

SN informed the Committee that this request had been received from the Chief of Police and the Joint Emergency Services Control Centre. The request was received to zero-rate data used by the Global Emergency & Volunteer Service Platform to exempt users of the app from incurring mobile data charges when using it. The purpose of this request was to get an initial thought on the feasibility of doing this.

CT said that a data volume of 50mb per month is 15p at the current rate. CT reiterated that it is not that Sure would not want to support zero rating the Global Emergency & Volunteer Service Platform data but the billing system capability at this time, wasn't able to zero rate that data. Another issue is that the 4G network is not available across all areas of the Island. However, CT said as an alternative, Sure could add a free allowance on the mobile packages of those using the app.

AY advised that Sure isn't able to operate protocol billing, they just account data at that point in time so it doesn't differentiate what the data is used on e.g. Facebook, the Global Emergency & Volunteer Service Platform etc. Whilst you could do it using their devices, this goes back to a very manual process, therefore giving the free allowance might be the best way to achieve this.

SN advised that based on the request received, the long term vision is for everyone to have the app, not just the first responders so that you can raise alerts through it etc. When first responders have to do a video on-site of an accident this is where the high data usage comes in and would be dependent on the network as well.

CT suggested that Sure could implement an initial roll-out of the free allowance by giving it to the first responders and if they don't have a monthly fixed data package then this is something that Sure could sponsor.

JR said that if this product is to be rolled out then the network needs to be available at all locations around the island otherwise there could be a significant blame game if you can't contact the emergency services through the Global Emergency & Volunteer Service Platform. Even the Police should trial this so that they can reach HQ from wherever they are located on Island. AY also advised that they have plans to enhance the network coverage.

It was agreed that CT would discuss the issues directly with the Chief of Police and the Joint Emergency Services Control Centre. SN would support this action.

(Action: CT/SN)

5. Mobile Phone Numbers

SN advised that Minister Brooks had raised the issue about people having problems with 2 factor authentication from international systems that they are not always able to access because of their short phone number on St Helena. After investigation into the matter, it has been noted that St Helena is possibly 1 digit short of the E164 standard in terms of telephone numbers, therefore the Minister would like to understand why the standard is not being met and what can be done to rectify this. AY said that they went out in 2014/15 and registered the 5 digit number ranges and no one came back to say that we were not compliant with that standard and because we only have 2000 customers, the 5 digit numbering is more than adequate and compliant for what was required at that point in time. AY took on board that we are 1 digit short of the E164 standard but for St Helena it is the case of understanding how significant the issue is because there are a number of systems out there that do work using our current numbering system, whilst also noting that there has been some instances where there were issues e.g. the Gibraltar Bank but AY worked with them to resolve the issue to route the traffic to the right place etc.

AY said that whilst this is something that they can do, it needs to be considered in the long term; it will take months of planning, customer advanced notification and international partner notification; it can't just be implemented at the switch. In the meantime, AY suggested that if there are particular apps, providers etc. that are struggling then they should let AY know so that he can contact them and work to resolve those issues.

AY said that some websites will say that you are a digit short but one way to address this is by placing a zero or any number at the end because when it hits Sure's system it will just take the last digit off. SN said that customers should be notified about this so that they know how to resolve the issue should they come across it.

AY noted that if customers experienced issues with particular services then this should be reported to Sure who can search the international database to identify the routing issue and work with international carriers to resolve it. Sure advised that this case-by-case scenario would prevent the consumer costs associated with an island wide number change. CT noted that in the current environment if there were issues with particular apps this could be resolved. CT also noted that national number plan changes are a comprehensive process that would take up to a year to plan and then another year to implement. There needs to be sufficient justification to

take this step; therefore customers reporting to Sure when they have issues would be a good starting point to assess the need.

6. Sure Update

6.1 Customer Trends

Sure provided the ECCC with an update on customer trends across TV, mobile and broadband; this provides the ECCC with insight into which services are in demand and which ones are experiencing lower demand.

6.2 Network updates

AY advised that Sure has conducted extensive testing and is now ready to launch the VDSL service in Jamestown initially.

AY said that from a network perspective, Sure have encountered quite a few issues, the majority attributed to the power outages that has blown some of their equipment e.g. more recently this week with the power outage in Levelwood, equipment was blown which has restricted communications in that district. Sure is trying to restore the 4G service to Levelwood; the TV service was also affected but had been restored in 24 hours. CT noted that even the surge protectors were overwhelmed and had blown as a result of the surge.

Where there was demand, Sure has also upgraded the bandwidth for business class customers as well as SHG; there were also some corporate customers in outline districts who needed high speed connections back to their head office in Jamestown. Sure has implemented microwave and fibre solutions for these premises.

6.3 Customer Complaints

CT advised that a number of customers have been complaining about the quality of service but most of this was traced back to modems or people using VPN's. Some customers have their own modems that they configure and some use VPN's which slow the service down but this is rectified by putting in place a Sure Modem which stabilises the service.

DR said that they also receive verbal complaints from the Chamber of Commerce but the Minister for Treasury have asked them to write to the ECCC who can then raise it formally with Sure.

Cyber security challenges were discussed and CT advised that Sure has raised with the Resilience Forum the individual issues that people have reported as this is the forum to raise awareness.

6.4 VDSL

The initial roll-out will be in Jamestown and lower HTH potentially, to business customers only in the initial phase; this could be rolled out wider once we know what the interest is to potentially high end users but the next discussion on the future will help to inform how much investment Sure puts into this area in the short term.

AY said that they continue to request investment for end of life equipment, primarily around critical infrastructure to keep it going etc.

7. SHG Update

Work was ongoing on a draft Communications Bill. The Bill was being drafted to reflect the 2020 policy. The policy had been extensively consulted on at that time, including with Sure, and therefore the Bill should not present any surprises. Sure will be invited to submit their views on the Communications Bill once it is open for consultation; SN will speak to CD about how they would like to approach this.

(Action: SN/Sure)

DR also advised that the Chief Auditor had issued a report on the outcome of the Fibre Optic Cable project which will be published on 14 February and that some of the recommendations from this report had been factored into what we want to do in terms of the future discussions.

8. AOB

CT reported that merging the Ascension Island Customer Service element into St Helena has gone ahead smoothly and has not had an impact on their services at all.

The meeting closed at 12:05.