DCIA DISSEMINATION EVENT - JUNE 2022

Sharing learnings from the DCIA pilots' progress and driving collaboration

On the last day of June, the first in-person dissemination event for the DCIA project was held in Bristol. Attended by over 100 people, including representation from regional and local authorities, all four mobile network operators, telecoms infrastructure providers, platform providers and cross government departments. It was a lively event featuring updates on all the DCIA pilots, interactive panel discussions and plenty of time for networking.

Dagmar Steffans, from the West of England Combined Authority, kicked off proceedings with a clear message that DCIA is key to the region's plans to drive connectivity for businesses and residents. In a world where connectivity has effectively become a utility, ubiquity is essential to ensure nobody is left behind, while connecting SMEs can help to unlock innovation. Delivery of connectivity is paramount, but so too is an understanding and appreciation by communities of why it is needed.

In a theme that was reflected throughout the day, Steffans identified the importance of sharing learnings and successes throughout the cohort of attendees - representing both those actively working on pilots, other workstreams, and the Early Adopter Group - to both develop capabilities and help to win hearts and minds.

Discover key takeouts from the event

Wireless Infrastructure Strategy

Louise Lancaster, from DCMS, outlined how DCIA was borne out of the Barrier Busting Taskforce in response to conversations with Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), shared infrastructure providers and local authorities about the challenges that are inherent with deploying networks. Recognising that similar challenges were coming up everywhere, funding was sought from the Shared Outcomes Fund

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Lancaster summarised the four key workstreams of the DCIA project:

- Digital Asset Management: being explored by the 8 pilots and the primary focus of the Bristol event. The digital asset management workstream seeks to support national adoption of online platforms which digitalise and as much as possible automate the process of finding and securing rights-of-use of suitable locations for deployment of advanced wireless equipment.
- PFI contracts: Analysis of the impact of public finance initiative (PFI) contracts, relating to the use of street furniture assets.Where street furniture assets are jointly or wholly managed by PFI contracts, granting permissions to use assets for small cells can be complex. DCMS has been working with DfT and PFI providers on how to address some of the associated legal and practical challenges.
- Standard contracts: Work has been taking place with local authorities and providers who have already gone through contract processes to take best practice from standard contracts and make them available to a wider network; helping to cut down on time and legal expenses. Links to these contracts can be found on the DCMS Guidance on access agreements page.
- Standards for smart infrastructure: Working with BSI currently on publicly available specifications (PAS's) for smart lamp posts. As a precursor to the PAS work a Physical Security study was conducted, to explore the physical security landscape of street infrastructure.

Speaking to the Wireless Infrastructure Strategy, Lancaster placed DCIA as part of the wider policy work undertaken by her team with the primary goals of: supporting digital inclusion, encouraging investment in digital infrastructure and maximising the benefit from 5G and other advanced technologies. The directorate as a whole has a broad remit, encompassing gigabit broadband, security and resilience of networks and the equipment supply chain, and believes that networks will become more diverse, with new models emerging to improve the economics of delivery.

"We know there is huge potential to be had from 5G and it feels like we're in an interesting place. The tectonic plates are shifting – moving from wireless networks primarily used for humans to connect with each other to a point where primarily machines are needing connectivity – AI, digital twins, advanced manufacturing. Connectivity is becoming the

fundamental infrastructure of the economy. The range of apps the networks need to support has gone from voice to data to mission critical services relying on features that standard consumer networks can't provide - such as Ultra Reliable Low Latency, higher uplink - and to provide these networks, more investment is required."

The approach within the team, she stated, is a dual one: (1) overcoming barriers to make it easier to deploy connectivity but also (2) to understand the role of the public sector as a customer of that connectivity.

To the first point, Lancaster referenced changes that have been made to planning in England, making it easier to deploy equipment e.g. on roofs, and allowing for bigger masts that can then be shared. Additionally, a bill (the Product Security & Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill) is currently making its way through government to bring clarity to negotiations between landowners and network providers.

Considering the role of the public sector as a customer, Lancaster highlighted a range of potential use cases from smart place apps to IoT sensors, for health and social care or environmental monitoring, or supporting investment in connectivity for transport links. "We're seeing places starting to grapple with how they can enable and encourage the investment they can benefit from for their local economies," she said, before clearly stating that DCMS wants to work with places to figure out what those models are. Critically, she identified that while it may not be the role of central government to say what the right model is, they do want to work and have conversations with all parties present at the event - and beyond - about how DCMS can support places to get the connectivity they need, in partnership with providers.

In her final comments, Lancaster reflected on the 5G Testbeds & Trials programme and how it had been hugely useful in demonstrating what 5G and the technologies it enables, can be used for. She called out the 5G Logistics project, based in Bristol, as a fantastic example of how something that starts as a trial can move into commercial provision, stating that government is keen now to move from trials and pilots to finding the commercial models for sustainable deployment. It is through these models that providers and communities will be able to work in partnership to find ways to deliver connectivity for the benefits of everyone.

This first formal presentation of the day expressed both the importance of DCIA in the context of the wider infrastructure strategy, and the commitment within DCMS to support both local authorities and industry by identifying and tackling challenges at a central level.

Insights & Updates from the DCIA Pilots

During this first DCIA dissemination event, attendees were able to hear updates from all eight of the digital asset management pilots. Dejan Bojic, DCMS, introduced the session by setting the scene: all pilots had been awarded c. £500k public funding and are running until March 2023. Across the pilots are 44 local authorities, from eight leading regional authorities. They have been tasked with

trialling online tools to digitise and to automate - as far as possible - the process of identifying and securing sites for deploying digital infrastructure. At their heart, Bojic identified three key questions the pilots were looking to answer: can digital platforms work, do they prove helpful and can we afford them at scale?

Mobile Network Operator Panel

A key focus of the DCIA dissemination event in Bristol was to bring together different parties, stakeholder groups and places to not only share learnings and best practice, but to establish a sense of shared purpose across the cohort. Throughout the various sessions of the day and extended networking lunch, there was a palpable energy and sense of collaboration. As Dejan Bojic, DCMS said, "One fundamental premise of DCIA, right from the start, was to use collaboration as the way to make a difference and make change happen. And here we are - 120+ people all in one room together and looking at the conversations happening, it's already working". So it was in that vein that the afternoon saw two engaging panel sessions; first Gareth Elliot, Mobile UK hosted a panel with representatives from all four of the UK's mobile network operators, testament to their commitment and willingness to forge successful partnerships with local authorities.

Cross-Government Panel

Offering a rare opportunity to pull together representatives from different departments, agencies and teams, Nick Wiggin hosted a cross-government panel at the recent DCIA dissemination event. He was joined on stage by Matthew Eglinton, DFT, Rowena Clift-Shanley, BDUK, Jesam Eyong from the Barrier Busting team in DCMS, and Amit Slaich, NUAR, for a discussion that explored the work of all panellists and how they intersected and can help inform the DCIA programme.