

## CBS Pioneering Communities Seminar – feedback and actions

Representatives from CBS [pioneer projects](#) and existing community broadband projects gathered at CBS’s Pioneering Communities Seminar on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April. The seminar was an opportunity for delegates to share their experiences and learning:

***“...provided an excellent opportunity to share experiences, challenges and solutions”***  
Seminar delegate

It was also a chance for the newly formed CBS team to gather ideas and feedback on the types of support we will offer to communities.

Here we pull together the feedback and actions from the seminar. If you’re interested in what was covered, presented and discussed during the two days, take a look at the [event write up](#) on the updates page of our website. You can also [watch the presentations](#) on the digital pages of the Scottish Government website.

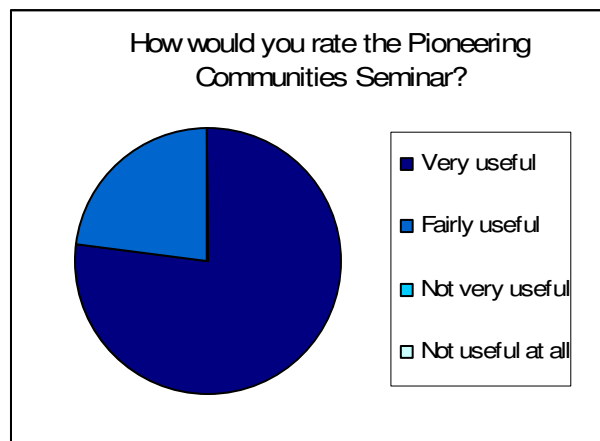
### Seminar Evaluation

The seminar was overwhelmingly viewed as a useful event, with 100% of delegates rating it as very or fairly useful, and more than three quarters reporting the seminar completely met their expectations.

Opportunities to network, hearing more about the pioneer and existing projects, and sharing experiences with other communities were identified as being particularly useful by delegates. Along with gaining knowledge and learning about technical solutions.

***“It’s... reassuring to know that others had to learn the same things so it’s not just an isolated learning curve you face”***

Seminar delegate



There was a recognition the seminar agenda was very full, and a lot was covered. Delegates suggested a number of areas they were keen to have spent more time on, the most common of which were workshops, group work and interactive sessions.

### An Action Plan for CBS

The event was certainly very constructive for CBS, with the feedback from delegates resulting in the following action plan for developing our suite of support for community broadband projects:

#### CBS Action Plan

- ▶ Community broadband roadmap – outlining the key steps of a project
- ▶ Business plan template
- ▶ More case studies
- ▶ Organisational structures and templates
- ▶ Community engagement guidance and checklist (including dealing with the press)

- ▶ Procurement and tendering guidance and template
- ▶ Wayleave guidance and template

### **Lively Workshop Discussions**

Along with some very interesting and useful presentations from the pioneers, existing projects and [quest speakers](#), the Planning and Engagement workshops proved to be extremely useful for delegates and CBS. The workshops prompted in-depth discussion around a number of key topics:

- Community capacity
- Mapping
- Technical options
- Business planning

### **Community Capacity**

One of the key messages to come from these discussions was “***never underestimate the capacity within a community***”. The capacity, expertise and abilities present in any community are often not immediately apparent. There was a clear feeling that projects must be driven by the community to succeed and be sustainable, and that strong community spirit is incredibly beneficial. There was a recognition of the need to have a community organisation driving the project forward.

Messaging was seen as crucial – getting key messages out to all in the community, raising awareness, generating interest, engagement and commitment, and finding out what skills people have to offer the project. Lots of different methods were suggested, including: leafleting, going door-to-door, regular public meetings, posters, pamphlets, emails, a website, social media, and newsletters.

It was felt important that CBS was engaged with a community as early as possible in order to provide relevant guidance and support.

### **Suggestions for support CBS could provide**

- ▶ More case studies and ‘real life’ examples
- ▶ A community broadband road map – showing the steps communities go through
- ▶ Support in formalising the community group (e.g. access to expertise, guidance on organisational structures/models, and templates)
- ▶ Support with contracts and agreements (e.g. wayleave guidance)
- ▶ A community engagement checklist

### **Mapping**

The importance of communities defining their geographical limits was a major theme in these discussions. Mapping of current broadband speeds, along with demand and support for the project was seen as an essential part of this.

Challenges identified in community mapping included some people not knowing that the speed they get is not very good, or not having awareness of the benefits of faster broadband. There can also be some reluctance from community members to sign up to a community run broadband scheme.

Potential to collaborate with neighbouring projects was highlighted as something that can be very useful and should be considered during mapping.

### **Suggestions for support CBS could provide**

- ▶ Help increasing community awareness of the benefits of high speed broadband and the

potential of communities to deliver this (case studies will help with this)

- ▶ A [template questionnaire](#) for gathering speed, demand and support data (access the CBS template questionnaire on our website )
- ▶ Help with access to maps and mapping tools
- ▶ Help to put local projects in touch with each other

### ***Technical Options***

Attendees were keen to point out that getting started with a community broadband project does not require a great deal of technical expertise and that there is a lot of [useful information out there](#).

A lynch pin of these discussions was the importance of communities having someone to advise them who understands the technology and associated language. Getting the right technical advice can be the catalyst to make things happen, however it was felt vital that the community have ownership and establish demand before getting the technical folk in.

Identifying and obtaining access to [affordable backhaul](#) was seen as the hardest element for the vast majority of communities.

### **Suggestions for support CBS could provide**

- ▶ A glossary of technical terms
- ▶ A basic, accessible guide to different technical options
- ▶ A list of known consultants/companies
- ▶ A technical checklist
- ▶ Help with identifying backhaul options

### ***Business Planning***

These discussions centred around the importance of having a business plan; enabling communities to plan sustainable, viable broadband schemes.

Cashflow was identified as a potential stumbling block for some communities, and must be addressed in the business plan. Large capital costs were also seen as a challenge, and this led to discussions about how crucial volunteer support is in reducing costs.

The importance of building in resilience to avoid service failings was also discussed.

### **Suggestions for support CBS could provide**

- ▶ Financial planning tool
- ▶ Business planning tools
- ▶ Business plan template
- ▶ Information about other funding sources
- ▶ Support with procurement and tendering