

## Internet of Things: Benefits vs Privacy

### BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

22 September 2014, Manchester Central 5, 17:30

Speakers:

- Tony Grew, parliamentary editor, PoliticsHome
- Chi Onwurah, Shadow Minister to the Cabinet Office
- David Evans, BCS

**In a fringe event which focused on data protection and regulation in the face of new technological innovation, Chi Onwurah, Shadow Minister to the Cabinet Office, confirmed that issues on data privacy and sharing would be a key priority for Labour in the following Parliamentary session.**

David Evans, BCS, said the internet of things could be as big a phenomenon as the invention of the internet itself. He said that the technology industry had entered a new phase with mobile devices with cheap sensors connected to the internet, such as domestic and public service appliances. This new technology was generating large amounts of data, which in turn raised issues concerning privacy and security.

Chi Onwurah said the internet of things was a separate technological revolution to the internet. Onwurah said there was an urgent need for an ethical and practical framework for how this data should be stored and shared by public and private institutions.

Tony Grew, parliamentary editor, PoliticsHome, asked the panel whether there were threats to personal liberty from data collection, and whether the government should be more active in regulating this area.

Evans said the internet of things would be hugely empowering for individuals, but argued that there needed to be individuals in government with both policy and technology awareness.

Onwurah conceded that existing regulations on data protection would need to be adapted in response to new technology; there needed to be a greater awareness of this amongst Parliamentarians.

Mark Grayling, Derbyshire Labour Party LCF, questioned how the internet of things could be regulated at a national level. Onwurah said that companies collecting data from home appliances would only be in a position to share that information with the police – for example - through the possession of a warrant.

She said it was clear that if the police had full access to the internet of things they could stamp out crime in an instant; however she did not feel this would be a fair trade off between security and liberty.

Onwurah confirmed that Labour would be looking at data ownership and data sharing during the next Parliamentary session.

Evans noted the UK had a key global role to play in terms of data regulation. There was a real opportunity for policy innovation that would facilitate economic activity whilst protecting individual rights. However, there was a fundamental question over whether citizens trusted government with their data.

### Question and answer

Katie Hanson, Labour councillor for Hackney, said it was important to distinguish between data collection and the means by which data was collected when debating the rights and wrongs of government data regulation.

Evans agreed but said the pace of technological change was faster than policy and legislative development. Helen Milner, staff board director, Tinder Foundation, said it was important to find ways of assisting politicians in keeping up with the speed of technology change.

When pressed on his views concerning e-voting, Evans said he had yet to be convinced of its merits over traditional paper ballots.

John Paschoud, Labour councillor for Lewisham, pointed out that Labour had had an option for on-line internal party voting for some time and suggested that fears over security were unfounded.

Evans replied that he was simply calling for progress on e-voting to be carefully considered. Grew pointed out that physical voting in the lobby in the Commons provided a way for MPs and ministers to meet and discuss issues.

Simon Milner, policy director, Facebook, questioned how best to measure the level of 'digital discomfort' amongst the general population and how to gauge when new regulations were called for in regard to data collection and privacy.

Evans said the technology community had not been particularly open in terms of engaging with politicians and the general population over data regulation.

Tom Tuxworth, head of public affairs, Betfair, questioned the degree to which private companies should be prepared to share data with government.

In closing, Evans said it was easy to focus on large organisations such as Facebook and their treatment of user data but the huge number of organisations without Facebook's privacy expertise were much more concerning