

(Case Ref: KF4246)

Wednesday, 7 November, 2018 16:33

From: "Kate Forbes MSP" <Kate.Forbes.msp@parliament.scot>

To: amor65@btinternet.com

Dear Mr Morrison,

Thanks again for your letter on behalf of Struan Community Council regarding current broadband provision in Struan.

I contacted Openreach asking them to investigate the situation and they have come back to us with the following:

Current broadband service

I've spoken to the local operations manager for the area about the communities concerns and he's confirmed that there're no known problems with infrastructure in the area and faults level aren't particularly high. The residents in this area are connected to Struan exchange. This is one of our smaller exchanges that gives service to approximately 150 premises and offers ADSL broadband with up to 8Mbps speeds.

ADSL broadband is a distance based service delivered over copper lines. The main factor in the broadband speed will be the distance between the exchange and the premises. As the distance increases the speed will continue to decrease, until eventually the service will fail altogether. So longer lines will have slower speeds. The operations manager did confirm that some residents in the area on longer lines so their speeds won't be great. But this isn't a fault as such just a limitation of the ADSL service.

Advice for Kate's constituents

Obviously we can't guarantee a fault free service. But the best thing for residents to do if they have problems with any aspect of their service is to report this to their Service Provider [SP] directly. They'll carry out their own checks and ask us to send an engineer if they think a visit is needed. This is the agreed industry process. Our engineers will work to make sure the service is working as best it can be. And if we do identify any problems in our network [e.g. a faulty section of cable] we'll take appropriate steps to make sure this is highlighted and replaced if its beyond repair.

Reaching 100 [R100]

You'll be aware of the Scottish Government's R100 procurement which is under way, which may be the best longer-term solution for these residents. The Scottish Government has made a commitment to extend superfast broadband (speeds of 30Mbps+) to 100% of premises across Scotland by 2021. To achieve this they announced £600m of public funding over the next four years. The R100 procurement process is underway, with procurement contracts expected to be placed in 2019 with successful bidders.

I realise this does not provide an immediate solution but I'll be back in touch shortly with more information on R100, and what other options may be available to the community in the short term.

This is firmly on Kate's agenda and she plans on writing to both the Scottish and UK Governments to raise the Struan exchange directly.

Thanks again for raising this with Kate and I'll be back in touch shortly with more information.

Kind regards,

Philip

Philip Coghill
Caseworker - Kate Forbes MSP

(Case Ref: KF4246)

Tuesday, 20 November, 2018 15:06

From: "Kate Forbes MSP" <Kate.Forbes.msp@parliament.scot>**To:** amor65@btinternet.com

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Dear Alasdair,

Thank you once again for your letter on behalf of Struan Community Council regarding broadband.

I recognise locals' frustration with the current situation. Whilst I know that my sympathy does not compensate for the slow broadband I promise to do everything I possibly can to support and improve the current situation.

There has been significant funding invested in providing broadband to properties in the Highlands entirely because of market failure. Broadband is, of course, a commercial provision – like electricity. That funding will continue and £600 million has already been committed to connect the 5% of properties across Scotland that do not have superfast broadband, most of which are in the Highlands and Islands. Public funding for broadband infrastructure is to ensure provision of broadband where commercial companies refuse to go because it is not viable. This is an area which is reserved to the UK Government but in recognition of the importance of broadband to people in Scotland, the Scottish Government has topped up the UK Government funding for broadband.

It was announced in April that more than 95% of Scotland's homes and businesses are now able to connect to fibre broadband.

The rollout was delivered through the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) project, with a total contribution of £280 million from across the public sector in Scotland. Without the DSSB programme, it is estimated that only 66% of Scotland would be able to receive fibre broadband

This announcement was understandably frustrating for the remaining 5% of homes and businesses who still don't have fibre broadband, and being the MSP for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, I am acutely aware of people's frustrations.

This 5% exists primarily due to the cost involved in connecting that remainder. The terrain and geography of laying fibre cable for individual homes in places across my constituency increases the cost of operators carrying out work whether funded privately or publicly.

The R100 scheme aims to have completed the first phase of procurement by 2021. Once there is certainty over which areas will be included in the first phase then I would be happy to provide you with that information. The Scottish Government are considering using different technologies to provide access to those not included in the initial R100 phase. This could involve laying fibre, or it could be through mobile, wireless, or satellite technologies.

The principle of the R100 scheme is to work 'outside in' – to go for the harder to reach places first. As I mentioned above, as soon as I have information as to which locations will be included in the initial procurement I will let you know. To give you some background, the Scottish Government split the procurement into 3 lots to encourage as many bids as possible:

North – Highlands & Islands; Angus; Aberdeen; and Dundee. This has a contract value of £384 million and around 84,000 eligible premises.
Central – Central Scotland and Fife. This has a contract value of £83 million and around 42,000 eligible premises
South – The Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. This has a contract value of £133 million and around 21,000 eligible premises.

To encourage the successful contractors to build fibre in the most remote areas of Scotland, the Scottish Government has specified 11 'Mandated areas', all in the North lot, where 25% of premises must be able to get speeds of 100mbps. They have also specified 36 weighted areas, two in the south and the rest in the North.

The procurement exercise requires bidders to set out how many of the in-scope premises they could connect, how they would do this, and at what cost. The Scottish Government will not have an exact picture of how many and which premises its £600 million subsidy will cover until final bids are received, expected early next year.

Assuming that bidders can connect all 147,000 premises, the average subsidy to connect each property for this level of investment is £4,000. This is more than double the cap on how much BT could spend to connect each premise within the terms of the original two contracts. Within this, the range of costs to connect the remaining premises could be significant. Many of the premises still to be connected are in the most remote and challenging parts of the country and connection costs are likely to be high. At the same time, other premises, closer to centres of population and existing infrastructure, are likely to be cheaper to connect.

In conclusion, I would reiterate that unfortunately, the current service in Struan is as it is until the R100 programme delivers superfast broadband to homes in Struan. This is based on the assumption that folk have contacted their respective Service Providers about any faults that may be causing speeds to be lower.

I have and will continue to challenge the poor state of digital connectivity for residents and businesses relying on Struan exchange, and the list of other exchanges in my constituency still without fibre provision.

I have attached an information document about Community Fibre Partnership (CFP) for your information, and if, after reading it, you would like my office to pass on your contact details to Openreach's CFP team then please let me know.

Having said all of the above as background information, I will commit to lobbying strenuously on behalf of the Struan community to have the exchange included in R100 as early as possible. I will write to the Scottish Government and UK Government to raise the case of the Struan Exchange, and will continue to keep the Struan exchange front and centre of the R100 programme. I recognise that does not solve the problem overnight, but I will use any resources or opportunities I have to seek a speedy resolution for the Struan exchange.

I will let you know when I receive a response from the two Governments.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me on this issue.

Kind regards,

Kate

Kate Forbes MSP

Skye, Lochaber & Badenoch
01349 863 888

Community Fibre Partnerships



Helping you get superfast broadband

Around 5% of the UK isn't covered in existing fibre broadband rollout plans, and that's where we come in.

We're committed to working with all communities to find a fibre solution, and our community fibre partnership scheme is designed to enable this. Delivering fibre to the hardest to reach communities is a huge challenge. In rural areas we often face laying cables over long distances and challenging terrain and in urban areas we have the complexity of working in busy streets with limited space.

We'll work with any community to agree a suitable option to bring fibre to an area via a jointly funded approach. We'll cover costs in line with our commercial model and give communities the price for the 'gap'.

To date we've worked with hundreds of communities and this co-funding model helps bring high speed fibre broadband to hard-to-reach communities, as well as smaller business parks.

This means that wherever we deploy fibre broadband, everyone can upgrade to the service via any provider, bringing plenty of choice to consumers and local businesses.

We can work with you to find out if a community project could be for your area and provide you with the tools to understand and establish local demand.

Why Openreach?

Openreach – the part of BT that provides the vital infrastructure which is the foundation of the UK's vibrant internet economy – looks after the fibres, wires and cables that connect the country offering you the greatest choice of service providers, with over 500 using the network. So whether you're making calls, video conferencing with clients, sharing files, downloading music, streaming movies, or indulging in a bit of online retail therapy – it's most likely on the Openreach network.

A number of factors can impact the price of the infrastructure upgrades needed to provide superfast broadband

Easier/cheaper

- Existing infrastructure (cabinet) in place
- Ownership of land clear/no wayleave issues
- Short lengths of fibre required to be laid
- Large number of premises tightly clustered.

Harder/more costly

- No cabinet in place
- Land ownership unclear/wayleave issues
- Long lengths of fibre required to be laid
- Few premises being served and/or premises spread over a large geographic area.

We've a dedicated team providing management and support to help make the process as simple as possible for communities

1. You'll check the current and planned availability using the line checker



- The first step is to see if we're coming to your area by using the line checker at www.communityfibre.openreach.co.uk
- The checker will let you know if you can get fibre broadband already, or if your cabinet's in scope or being built.
- If that's happening, you don't need to do anything as the infrastructure serving your home or business will be enabled in due course.
- If your premises show as 'exploring solutions' that means there's no current plan to deliver fibre in your area.

2. You'll register interest in having a community fibre partnership



- If the line checker shows 'exploring solutions' then investigate a partnered approach with us to get fibre.
- Use the simple form at www.communityfibre.openreach.co.uk to let us know you're interested in having a community fibre partnership.

3. We'll send you information you need to start to gather interest for having a community fibre partnership with us



- We'll send you an email with confirmation of your enquiry and will give you a reference number.
- In that email we'll attach a template for you to complete with the addresses, postcodes and landline numbers of the other interested parties in your community.

4. You'll engage your community and build support for the partnership



- This is the point you'll need to start drumming up interest in your area.
- Talk to your neighbours about getting fibre broadband and the benefits it will bring.
- We can help you go about engaging your community.

5. We'll provide you with an indicative costing



- We'll get a ballpark cost to bring fibre to your area.
- The cost we quote will be the money you need to pay on top of our contribution to the solution.

6. You discuss the cost within your community



- At this stage you'll need to share the estimate with other members of your community and reach out to other premises (whether business or residential) that would also be set to benefit.
- If you're still keen to proceed, we'd love to know – there's no obligation at this time.
- Also please let us know if you've decided not to take things further.

7. We'll generate a firm quote



- We'll give you a firm cost (subject to survey), and will let you know exactly which premises would be covered by the infrastructure upgrade.
- We'll start the modelling work to deliver you a more accurate cost and create a proposal that you can contract for.
- We'll send you that full proposal, outlining the proposed solution, and exactly which areas would be covered by fibre broadband.

8. You'll work with your community to generate your part of the co-funding



- Now it's time to get the community together to raise the money for your solution.
- You'll need to pay half of your share of the costs when you sign the contract with us, and the balance when the infrastructure is delivered – around a year after you've signed.
- We can give guidance and material to help with engaging your community and fundraising fibre broadband.

9. We'll plan and build the infrastructure



- Once you've signed the contract it's over to us to build the infrastructure.
- Deploying fibre can be a complex job, so it won't happen overnight. Once work has begun, we'll keep you updated at various stages throughout the process.
- As soon as the infrastructure is live, you'll need to contact your preferred internet service provider (ISP) to upgrade to fibre. Because our network is open to hundreds of providers, you can shop around for the best deal to meet your needs.

www.communityfibre.openreach.co.uk

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