

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

DRAFT BUDGET 2017-18; BROADBAND

SUBMISSION FROM NIAL MACKINLAY

My name is Nial Mackinlay and I write as someone who both lives and works in a rural community namely Trinafour, PH18. I also write with the knowledge that most of our neighbours have experienced the same frustrations as I have over the years.

I have been corresponding on this subject for some 13 years, firstly with BT as the only available supplier of Broadband in the area and, for the last 11 years, with MSPs. In all this time I have received nothing but empty promises and I can categorically state, and prove, that the service has actually got significantly worse over the years. I will not include with this submission the correspondences with all the various parties but I am happy to make this available as proof of my submission if required.

I was advised in writing by Nicola Sturgeon in April 2013 that there was a commitment to deliver "next generation broadband to 85 - 90% of premises by 2015" and to "put in place measures to ensure a significant uplift in service can be delivered to the remaining 10 – 15%.....". These interim measures were to be in place prior to delivering "world class digital access to all of Scotland by 2020".

Despite asking, I have been given no adequate response as to why we, as the remaining 10 to 15%, have experienced no uplift at all far less a "significant uplift". In fact, as I have stated above, the service diminishes every time a new connection is added and I can prove that my connection speed has virtually halved over the course of the last year. BT themselves have confirmed that there is no chance of line speeds improving without investment in the infrastructure and they also confirm that the line speeds will continue to diminish as new users are added to this exchange.

In addition, there are no plans at all for any upgrade to the exchange we are served by so where is the 'uplift' going to come from I wonder? It seems as if the Government commitment made in 2013 does not actually apply to this area at all.

If you sense a certain sense of discontent in the tone of this submission you would be correct, 13 years is a long time to be asking for a reasonable digital infrastructure without any improvement over that time and no plans for improved connectivity to be made available any time soon.

Why are we being disadvantaged? Why, despite all the press announcements over the years about supporting rural Scotland, are we being left behind? Why are we forced to pay the only provider in the area, namely BT / OpenReach, such high prices for such poor service?

Imagine please just how isolated some people are starting to feel. The older generation trying to embrace this new technology which would help bring them closer to friends and family are being disadvantaged simply because they choose to live in the country.

I am sorry but it is not as if we are literally in the middle of a moorland without any services at all. We are 5 miles from Calvine / Struan and the busy A9 corridor. We have the new Beaully Denny power line, complete with commercial fibre optic, running down the hillside less than a mile away and we have 3G and 4G mobile connectivity yet most of us have less than 1Mb of download speed available from BT. At peak times this is considerably less so only the basic services such as email (without attachments) are possible over the connection.

Yes, there is mobile connectivity but the data packages are too small and far too expensive to be of much use, it is there as a backup on the occasions when the landline connection fails completely but it is hugely expensive.

Please ask the Scottish Government to actually deliver on previous commitments and stop leaving those living in rural communities in the 20th Century as this is what is happening at the moment.

I am very happy to send copies of the various correspondences over the years if required.

Nial Mackinlay.

25 November 2016