

## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE1703](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Hugh MacLellan on behalf of Laid Grazings and Community Committee

**Subject:** Access to broadband in rural Scotland

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to deliver superfast broadband internet access to every household and business in Scotland, particularly in rural areas, before 2021.

### Background

The delivery of telecoms services in Scotland is a matter reserved to the UK Government. Nevertheless, the Scottish Government (SG) is responsible for delivering the UK Government's BDUK ([Broadband Delivery UK](#)) programme in Scotland.

According to the Scottish Government, its [Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband](#) (DSSB) programme had brought access to fibre broadband to 95% of homes and businesses in Scotland by the end of 2017. However, the Scottish Government's commitment to superfast broadband aims to exceed the UK Government's broadband proposals, with a promise that, by 2021, the [Reaching 100%](#) (R100) programme will deliver access to superfast broadband to all residential and business premises in Scotland.

The Scottish Government's superfast broadband target is 30 mbps, while the UK Government's aim will be for access to 10 mbps.

According to the website [thinkbroadband](#), when a search is carried out on the postcode IV27 4UN, which includes Laid Grazings, one is told:

- You do not appear to have any Openreach Fibre products available to you.
- The BT Wholesale IPStream Max ADSL based service is available but your distance from the exchange means it may be slow.
- The postcode is thought to have access only to 2 Mbps or slower options from the telephone network. Check what alternate broadband options are available, this may include satellite broadband.

- The postcode probably has speeds below 10 Mbps, but the continuing superfast roll-outs may change that.

A search using the same postcode for [broadband packages](#) locates only broadband providers who offer access to average broadband speeds of 17 to 24 mbps.

In May 2018, [analysis by Which?](#) found that UK broadband is 51% slower than advertised:

“...even customers on standard broadband packages, advertised as being ‘up to 17Mbps’, were receiving an average speed of just 6Mbps – a third of the claimed speed.”

### **Scottish Government Action**

For the R100 programme, which isn't expected to begin roll out until 2019/20, the initial [procurement](#) exercise was concentrated on rural areas which at present have no access to broadband.

The procurement exercise started in December 2017 and was expected to take 12 months to complete. The SG expect to have suppliers in place – and ready to start building – by early 2019.

The Scottish Government's procurement exercise, to achieve the R100 target, was based on a definition of white premises, i.e. premises which can benefit from government intervention (state aid) because there are no planned commercial solutions in the next three years. The Scottish Government held a [public consultation](#) on its definition of white premises in 2017 and identified about 245,000 white premises in Scotland.

While all of these premises are eligible for state aid intervention, the SG has decided to focus the intervention under the R100 Project on the groups of white premises which are the least served.

The following white premises will be excluded from the scope of the Project:

- All white Premises situated in large urban areas (such as Edinburgh and Glasgow) ('Urban 1'); and
- All white Premises currently receiving speeds of between 24 Mbps and 30 Mbps.

The Initial Descriptive Document for the R100 project (which is the first additional document listed on this [webpage](#)) explained the background to the project.

The project has been split into three geographic lots:

- North - broadly Highlands and Islands, Dundee, Aberdeen and Angus;

- Central - broadly Central Scotland and Fife
- South - broadly the South of Scotland.

Once the priority premises have been provided with access the project should then look at the rest of the premises to ensure that they all have access to 30 mbps before the project ends in 2021.

### **Scottish Parliament Action**

The Scottish Government led a debate on [Digital Connectivity](#) on 3 May 2018. The Parliament agreed this motion as amended:

“That the Parliament recognises that the Scottish Government’s 95% fibre broadband target does not guarantee superfast broadband speeds and that there remains a digital divide in Scotland, where many rural and deprived communities have slow or no broadband access; acknowledges that progress has been made in improving overall broadband coverage from a low base; recognises that, as well as the role played by the programme, including local authority partners, communities have also played their part in increasing access by creating their own broadband systems, which should be supported by the R100 roll-out, and calls on the Scottish and UK governments to work together to provide universal coverage that is future-proofed, where all communities have access to affordable, high-speed broadband and ensures that Scotland is a world leader in digital connectivity.”

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**7 August 2018**

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