

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

17th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday  
22 November 2023

## PE1931: Improve the R100 rollout by prioritising properties who currently have speeds of less than 5 Mbps

**Lodged on** 4 April 2022

**Petitioner** Ian Barker

**Petition  
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to prevent digital exclusion for rural properties and their households by giving priority in the R100 programme to properties with internet speeds of less than 5 Mbps.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1931>

### Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [4 May 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new response from the Scottish Government which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's [webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the petition's [webpage](#).

7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 68 signatures have been received.

## **Action**

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe A

### PE1931: Improve the R100 rollout by prioritising properties who currently have speeds of less than 5 Mbps

#### Petitioner

Ian Barker

#### Date lodged

4/04/2022

#### Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to prevent digital exclusion for rural properties and their households by giving priority in the R100 programme to properties with internet speeds of less than 5 Mbps.

#### Previous action

Written to my MSP and MP.

I have had an article published in the local newspaper explaining the problems.

#### Background information

I live in a property which lies 800 m from fibre. We applied for a community partnership which quoted over £100000 for 6 houses. We are connected by copper back to box number 3 which in turn is connected to Lhanbryde exchange by copper.

Last year a new cabinet was installed on the B9103. This meant running fibre less than 1 metre away from cabinet number 3. The fibre runs down the B9103 and under the minor road to Scotstonhill. This is 800m to my property.

We are apparently not in the scope for fibre or even a new cabinet at the junction to the Scotstonhill road, yet properties who already have speeds of 70 Mbps are being upgraded to 900 Mbps.

This is digital exclusion. Rural households should have fair access to the internet supplier market rather than being restricted to expensive alternative solutions.

Vouchers provide only expensive solutions and don't allow households fair access to the whole internet provider market, again exclusion.

## Annexe B

### Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1931 on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023

**The Convener:** PE1931, lodged by Ian Barker, calls on the Scottish Government to prevent the digital exclusion of rural properties and households by giving priority in the reaching 100 per cent—R100—programme to properties with internet speeds of less than 5 megabits per second.

At our previous consideration of the petition, the committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government and the relevant contractor—BT Openreach—to seek further information about how work is sequenced and prioritised. The Scottish Government's response explained that it conducted an open market review to identify the premises that would be eligible for public investment through R100. The intervention area identified was tested through a public consultation to confirm that it was accurate. The Scottish Government also weighted the scoring for some rural locations as part of the bidding process to encourage deployment in those areas. The submission provides information about the full fibre charter for Scotland, which aims to extend build further into remote, rural and geographically challenging areas.

BT Openreach's response to the committee explains its inside-out approach to sequencing works, whereby build begins from the primary exchange location, where the main fibre controls unit is located, out into the communities. The rationale for that is to make the most use of public subsidy and extend the network as much as it can with the funding that is available.

Finally, a recent parliamentary question from Willie Rennie MSP highlighted an FOI that, he said, reveals that the full R100 programme will not be delivered until March 2028.

The subject has entertained the chamber with a degree of controversy for as long, frankly, as I can recall. Colleagues, have we any comments in the light of the evidence that we have received?

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** As you say, this is a very topical issue and members and communities have been sceptical about what is taking place. More requires to be done. We should keep the petition open. It might be useful to find out from the Scottish Government what proportion of Scotland currently has superfast broadband and when it is anticipated that all households will have it. In your comments, you touched on rural locations and geographical challenges. It is vital that we find out whether the Government has evaluated the full fibre broadband charter in Scotland and the efficacy of extending and expanding the build into remote, rural and geographically challenging areas. That is the crux of it. It is those locations that have the problem. Those communities and their representatives are sceptical about where things are going and how they are progressing. If we can get some of that information from the Scottish Government, it will help our deliberation.

**The Convener:** Are there any other comments? Are we content to proceed as Mr Stewart suggests?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Annexe C

### Scottish Government submission of 10 June 2022

#### PE1931/D: Improve the R100 rollout by prioritising properties who currently have speeds of less than 5 Mbps

Thank you for your email on 21 March 2023 requesting information regarding superfast broadband coverage in Scotland and Scotland's Full Fibre Charter in relation to Petition PE1931. The answers to these questions are set out below.

#### **Superfast Broadband Coverage - Scotland**

Ofcom's 'Connected Nations 2022: Scotland' report from December 2022, states that:

*"There continues to be wide coverage of superfast broadband. Speeds of 30 Mbit/s are available to 94% of homes in Scotland, an increase of over 62,000 premises since last year."*

All remaining premises not in commercial or R100 contract plans can access a superfast service via the R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme. This is a demand-led programme, supporting various superfast technologies, and not all homes and businesses have chosen to take this up.

The R100 programme has three strands of activity – the £600 million R100 contracts, the R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme and continued commercial build.

While this ensured that all homes and businesses had the ability to access a superfast broadband connection by the end of December 2021, the R100 contracts are continuing to deliver future-proofed full fibre connections in some of our most rural communities.

The networks being delivered will support download speeds of up to 1,000 megabits per second (Mbps) – far in excess of our original 30Mbps commitment. We want to ensure that as many people as possible can benefit from future-proofed digital infrastructure and are working with the UK Government on the design of Project Gigabit, which

represents an opportunity to build on the success of our R100 investment and continue to target public investment at the parts of the country who stand to benefit from it the most.

## **Scotland's Full Fibre Charter**

[Scotland's Full Fibre Charter](#) was introduced as a way of leveraging a number of key commitments and collaborative working from industry.

The Charter operates on the basis of pledges, both for communications network operators and the Scottish Government. These are aligned to our ambitions for digital infrastructure delivery, while also supporting wider Scottish Government policies and ambitions relating to fair working practices and workforce development.

Specifically, signatories commit to accelerate deployment of new full fibre networks, prioritise areas of no coverage for broadband and mobile connectivity, and trial new technologies to improve connectivity. Through pledges to support and develop Scotland's workforce, signatories also commit to support fair working practices and inclusion in the telecoms workforce.

At present, there are eight Charter signatories. Openreach, CityFibre and Axione signed in December 2020, while Borderlink, Cloudnet, Hyperoptic, Lothian Broadband Group and Virgin Media O2 signed in April 2022. We have seen continued interest from industry in becoming Charter signatories and are in discussions with a number of other operators at present.

The Scottish Government supports operators through commitments which include working to identify areas of priority, areas of opportunity and to investigate the barriers operators face to deploying infrastructure. One pledge already fulfilled by the Scottish Government has been to offer [100% non-domestic rates relief](#) on newly laid and lit fibre infrastructure, extended until March 2034. This is the most extended period of rates relief in the UK.

All Charter signatories have agreed to work with the Scottish Government to produce annual case studies designed to evidence their good practice in relation to pledges. Signatories are in agreement that this is the most appropriate and effective means to capture the efficacy of the Charter in achieving its overarching aim of creating an environment that encourages and promotes commercial investment in digital infrastructure. To date, four [signatory case studies](#) have been published, with a pipeline of further case studies in development.



It is expected that this approach to reporting will be reviewed at the 2023 Charter Ministerial Forum. The Scottish Government welcomes this, and remains open to discussing suitable and appropriate approaches to monitoring and reporting with all Charter signatories.

I trust that this information proves useful to the Committee.