

News from ...



Peter Peacock Scottish Labour Regional MSP for the Highlands and Islands

08 May 2008

MSP presses Minister for guarantees on broadband for the islands

Labour MSP Peter Peacock has pressed the Scottish government for firmer guarantees on securing better broadband connections for the islands.

Raising the issue in Parliament, Mr Peacock pointed to the representations he has received from constituents complaining that despite the huge progress over recent year in securing broadband for many communities, there were still areas with no broadband or where broadband speeds were grossly inadequate.

He secured a commitment from the Minister for Enterprise , Energy and Tourism, Jim Mather, that local people still without a broadband service will be able to register until the end of May on the government website.

The government plans to sign contracts in June to deliver the service to those registered.

Commenting on the Minister's response, Peter Peacock said: "I would urge anyone who has not registered to do so now and let's hope June will see details of the affordable service he promises to all those registered.

"I am pleased he seems committed to helping and once we see the progress made over coming months I will not hesitate to go back to him for further action if necessary.

"Broadband has become a very important part of modern day living and is vital for business.

"Our area needs to see more progress to complete the coverage.

"The last government made colossal progress and the SNP government needs to finish the job.

"I know from my mailbag just how important this issue is to many people and I will keep arguing for more until the job is complete."

From the Official report of the Scottish Parliament

Oral Question from Peter Peacock

08 May 2008

Broadband (Highlands and Islands)

Peter Peacock : To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it has made to secure full broadband coverage across the Highlands and Islands.

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): We have made great progress with our project, which aims to bring affordable broadband to all eligible Scottish businesses and households that notified us of an access problem. We have received state aid approval for the £3.4 million of Government-funded procurement, which has now entered its final stage of discussions with a preferred supplier. We expect to sign a contract in June, with solutions being delivered over the course of this year from that point.

Peter Peacock: I welcome the progress that the Government has promised, which builds on the progress that was made under the previous Administration.

I thank the minister for the letter that I received earlier this week, which covered some of the issues.

However, will he accept that I am still receiving representations on the matter from across the Highlands and Islands, including from the Black Isle, which is very close to Inverness, a big urban centre, and from parts of the Western Isles, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty, Skye, Lochaber, Badenoch and Strathspey and Moray.

Those areas, or parts of those areas, remain without broadband coverage or have inadequate broadband capacity.

Will he go further today than he has hitherto been able to go and offer a definite commitment to those people who are still registering for broadband that they will get the same Government support as those who have already registered?

Jim Mather: I think that the member is recognising what is a good-news story. We have listened to many members as they have raised the issue.

We have raised awareness.

We have 3,500 registrations.

The work is happening, and in a crisp, businesslike fashion. We have cleared the state aid hurdle. On late registrations, the initial statement was that we were closing registration on 18 January.

We did not; we have kept it open, and we will keep it open continuously through May before the contract sets in June.

We will then deliver affordable solutions from the good suppliers that we have attracted.

The contract will be awarded next month.

ends

Website link

Peter Peacock's website : www.peterpeacock.org.uk

Highlands and Islands Labour : www.handilabour.org.uk