

Item 9 - Question Time

To the Leader of the Council

“Following the Motion from Councillor A Graham and others re broadband which was unanimously approved at our last meeting, could you give me an update on progress in arranging a meeting with the parties concerned?”

Response to Mr Prag

Improving the region’s digital infrastructure is key to the long term future of the local economy. It will drive innovation through the better use of our physical and digital assets to enhance public and private service delivery. The Council has the ambition to be the best digitally connected rural region in Europe.

Digital connectivity was a substantive item on the agenda during a recent meeting of the Convention of the Highlands and Islands chaired by the Deputy First Minister. I raised the importance of ensuring that those communities across the Highlands who do not yet have Superfast coverage are connected and that the Scottish Government accelerates progress on delivering its commitment on 100% coverage.

I have recently met with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity and raised this matter with him.

In addition, Lord Dunlop, Under Secretary of State at the Scotland Office attended the launch of the Switch on the Wi-Fi project and the opportunity was taken to again highlight to him the critical importance of digital connectivity across the Highlands.

I have also written to BT and Openreach requesting a meeting to discuss what steps they are taking to accelerate delivery of Superfast Broadband in Highland.

Finally, as part of the City-Region Deal a joint Digital Programme Board has been established with representatives from the Scottish and UK Governments, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Council to identify and explore ways to ensure the Council Highland Council area is best placed to take advantage of digital coverage and the latest meeting took place on 7 December, 2016.