

Broadband and Digital Infrastructure Committee Meeting MK Council Scrutiny meeting, 26th January 2011.

The questions asked by MKBAG were:

1. [Openreach] What are the plans **and** timelines to in-fill the "missing" exchanges, such as Woburn Sands (no fibre plans, period) and Bradwell Abbey (FTTP trial, limited coverage, no FTTC)
2. [Virgin Media] What are the plans for a fibre upgrade in MK, when, and will it carry data?
3. [Openreach] When will FTTC actually go live
4. [Openreach] How do we get FTTP live outside of Bradwell Abbey (and why did the trial get extended to July?)
5. Will MK Council commit to ensuring that areas not due for fibre upgrades such as Woburn Sands will 100% be funded by MKC for upgrades, to not create a 2-tier Milton Keynes (parish council funding is **not** enough as exchanges sit across 3 sometimes even 4 parishes, so agreement and funding in those cases, again such as Woburn Sands, will be nearly impossible to get!)

It is worth noting that this committee is charged with scrutinising strategies and actions of the Council and reports to the Council.

Present at the meeting, in addition to the councillors and officers, were a number of MKBAG members plus Bill Murphy BT's MD of next generation access (NGA). His invitation came as a result of a chance meeting with Councillor David Hopkins; he has had no contact with MK Council before this.

Bill made a short introductory presentation during which he said that he was unhappy with the Analysis Mason report as it did not show a true picture in many respects.

He said that MK Council had been talking to a part of BT, but not to the correct part, which was him. He would have expected to talk to the CEO and the political leaders with a view to establishing a strategy for providing fast broadband to the whole of MK, not just the areas covered by the FTTP trial and the rollout of FTTC. He has had this type of discussion in other areas which resulted in his allocation of some of the substantial (£1bn) funds at his disposal to add to the funds which the councils had received from (mainly) government funds. He told us that there was something in the region of £1bn available in this way for the improvement of digital communication technology.

He said he would await an invitation from the CEO and leaders of the council to discuss this with them and to assist them in achieving their policy of a equal fast broadband service over the whole of MK. Any discussions will then be covered by a non-disclosure agreement. He pointed out that the government funds were to be bid for in March and September and so MK had better get its finger out if we were not to miss the boat.

Bill indicated that BT always looked at the number of businesses in an area, as well as the residential demand. Bill was not able to answer questions about specific areas, although he was pressed on Great Linford and Woburn particularly. (He cited commercial confidentiality). The impression given was that Great Linford was not top of the list as it is

mainly seen as residential. He did say that some work regarding Woburn Sands exchange was in process, but he would not say what that was. He said that announcements were made every two months indicating the plans for the next year or so. By implication there will be no further extensions to the parts of MK not already covered by the FTTP trial or exchanges not already providing FTTC for twelve months or so.

Bill expects FTTC to have made far wider inroads in the next 12 months (both in reach and ISPs offering the technology). He also intimated that BT have no plans to "universally" roll out superfast broadband as per their work in Cornwall (part funded by the EU). He mentioned that in areas that are impractical to reach they will work with partners/other providers to get access, specifically mentioning wireless and satellite.

Practically this means that if you live more than 2km from your cabinet in a predominantly residential area you shouldn't hope for fast internet (better than 10Mbps) anytime soon -- unless you can convince someone to provide you FTTP.

Information had been seen about Virgin's apparent intention to continue to carry analogue TV (5 channels) on the cable, but nothing had come direct to the council.

After Bill left the meeting, there was a spirited discussion among the committee members, firstly about the absence of Virgin although they had accepted an invitation to be present. The committee passed a motion asking that the MK CEO (who was present) both establish the councils legal position vis-à-vis Virgin and write to them expressing outrage at their rudeness and unwillingness to explain to the council what its intentions were about the digital future of the cable. Secondly the CEO was asked to forthwith put in hand the work needed to secure appropriate funds from the monies available and to arrange formally to meet with Bill Murphy to establish a strategy to provide fast broadband over the whole of MK.

After this meeting it seems that those who are presently on slow broadband will remain so for some time to come.