

UK broadband install

Background

So this is a bit of a story worth telling. Some folks still seem to have this weird belief that the UK is so much better off now after “brexit”, that the economy is strong, businesses are flourishing, and it is so easy to get things done now.

I have a house in Scotland, and given the mobile coverage of all the UK operators is so dire there (it's 3 miles from the town of Arbroath, so it is hardly remote rural Scotland), I thought it'd be a good idea to order broadband.

However, the service providers in the UK consider anything outside built up areas as remote rural Scotland (maybe that's why the mobile coverage is 1 bar if I'm lucky), so the choices of who would actually deliver are very close to zero. It seems to be BT or Fleur Telecom/Home Telecom/whatever they are called this week - I opted for the latter on recommendation by a neighbour (BT is hugely expensive being the former incumbent monopoly).

To make things more complicated, apparently, the phone line into the house has not been connected in the street because a phone line has not been needed so far. But with more and more appliances being “smart” (ie needing an Internet connection to allow owners to find out what they are doing), broadband is needed.

The OpenReach fibre terminates about 1km away, so the actual copper run is quite short, so it should be possible to get decent broadband, delivered on VDSL, with operators promising about 40Mbps down and 1.5Mbps up. (Folks in Arbroath itself enjoy fibre broadband with 1Gbps speeds. 3 miles away. Hmmm.)

The Timeline

1. Broadband service was ordered on 21st December 2022
2. On 4th January 2023 I was emailed to be told that an “engineer” (why does the UK insist in calling technicians “engineers”??) would turn up on the 13th January between 8am and 1pm. And that this person might need access to my house. As I was away at the time, I arranged with a neighbour for access.
3. The technician from Kelly Communication arrived just after 7am on the 13th January when my neighbour was still asleep. He phoned and woke them up. My neighbour was not amused.

4. Kelly Communications installed the OpenReach wall box in my house (the line was there but just not terminated) and verified the connection to the pit at the roadside outside my house (the pit is in my garden!) They could not connect the copper though because there was no room under the cover, as they put it. They showed my neighbour what the issue was. The technician called OpenReach to explain the problem. The technician said he could try and force the cable in but it would likely break the telephone service for all residents in that area. The technician stated that OpenReach would have to attend to replace the cover in the pit to accommodate my connection.
5. On 11th February I emailed Home Telecom to find out about progress of the installation and when OpenReach was likely to attend to replace the cover in the street-side pit. No answer from Home Telecom until I called them on 20th February where I was told that they were in conversation with OpenReach to get the installation completed. I called again on the 22nd February and the same message was repeated, in that there was an active discussion with OpenReach to complete the job.
6. On 27th February I received an email to say an “engineer” (yep that technician being mis-named again!) would arrive on 6th March between 1pm and 6pm to complete the connection. OpenReach automated system called my neighbour to say the appointment was actually on 14th March between 1pm and 5pm, press “1” to confirm, etc. My neighbour accepted the time on that day. My neighbour sat in the house the entire time; no one showed up, no phone call, nothing. I informed Home Telecom about the no show via the current open ticket for my job - no response from the ticketing system or a human.
7. On 22nd March I finally received an email from Home Telecom apologising for the delays I have been experiencing and that the issue has been raised with OpenReach, and that an update would take 24-48 hours. I called on 27th March to follow up about this, and was told it would take 24-48 hours to get an answer even though the issue supposedly had been raised on the 22nd. I followed up by email on the 29th March. No answer from Home Telecom. Same ticket used, still open. *Does anyone actually use their ticketing system, I wonder, or is it just a way of ignoring email and blaming a computer?*
8. On 26th April I finally received an email from Home Telecom to say that my new service would be live soon. An “engineer” would arrive on 27th April any time between 1pm and 6pm. Being given almost no notice, I wasn't at home, so had to organise with my neighbour for them to be present. OpenReach's automated system did call my neighbour to confirm the appointment. I had two neighbours present at my house the entire afternoon, either indoors or in the garden. OpenReach did not show up at all. They did not phone to say they were there, or were unable to come, nothing at all. Another missed appointment. *OpenReach's own policy says that if an appointment is missed, the “fine” is £150. So that's £300 that OpenReach now owes me for two no-shows.*
9. As part of the 26th April email from Home Telecom, I was given a phone number. That phone number didn't work on the 27th April, nor did it work for a long time afterwards (see later).
10. On 3rd May I received an invoice from Home Telecom for the first month of service. So I called Home Telecom Orders on 4th May to ask why, when the service had not been connected and OpenReach had failed to show up for their appointment. I was immediately transferred to their Accounts Department who apologised and credited most (but not all) of the invoice back to me. *Computer error again, eh.*
11. I called on Home Telecom again on 1st June to find out what was going on with my connection. I was abruptly told that I'd missed the appointment by OpenReach so I would be charged. This was completely untrue, a total fabrication by OpenReach. The result of that phone call was me being billed for £150 for an appointment OpenReach failed to keep - and Home Telecom Orders Department told me I had to prove that there was someone at home at the time.
12. By 8th June my neighbours who were present on-site during the time of OpenReach's no-show all wrote signed statements stating that no one turned up in the small cul-de-sac, and I

submitted those to Home Telecom, as that was the proof that was needed that someone was at home at the time. Home Telecom responded immediately to say that they had requested evidence from OpenReach that they had attended as they said.

13. Between 27th and 30th June a lot of back and forth between Home Telecom and me. They received a job sheet from OpenReach proving they were there. *Oh really?* The evidence I had provided from my neighbours (written statements) was not sufficient - did I have video evidence of OpenReach not turning up? *Yes, that's how stupid it got.*
14. Home Telecom next contacted me on 12th July offering 25% discount on the OpenReach charge because I was a “valued customer”. I was also informed that nothing more would be done by OpenReach until the no-show charge was paid. I had no choice by to agree to this extortion.
15. On 17th July Home Telecom noted my acceptance of the discounted charge from OpenReach, and told me I had to contact their Orders Team to rebook OpenReach to complete their job. Clearly no one in Home Telecom talks to anyone else in Home Telecom (in addition to ignoring tickets), so I duly phoned the Orders team to rebook the connection.
16. On 24th July I finally heard back from Home Telecom that the appointment for OpenReach had been rebooked (clearly it takes one week for anything to happen). Appointment made for 1st August, between 8am and 1pm, conveniently when I was on an aeroplane, so yet again a neighbour had to be involved.
17. Amazingly enough, an “engineer” from Kelly Communications turned up at 08:10 on 1st August. Not OpenReach as the appointment and confirmation had said. The technician was surprised he was called out because the work in the pit was for OpenReach to do. He called OpenReach there and then, and the person he spoke to said he'd attend straight away. The OpenReach technician arrived around about noon, and had the work in the pit completed in a few minutes. He wasn't able to activate the phone line, as that was another department, but it was now physically connected from my “house to the exchange” and verified. The technician also confirmed OpenReach's standard operating procedure when coming on-site: if no answer at door bell, call the contact number; if no response to contact number, leave a calling card with info of the visit in the letter box. Which confirmed the OpenReach no-show back in April - there was no call to the contact number (one of the neighbours), no calling card in the letter box.
18. On 9th August, in the morning, the number I was given was now recognised by the system. I could call it, and it rang, rather than doing the “number not recognised” response. Progress! But still no dial tone at my house.
19. On 10th August around 9am, dial-tone miraculous appeared, and a very crackly phone line was now available. Calls could be made in and out. Still no broadband though - must be yet another OpenReach department. I reported the appearance of dial-tone to Home Telecom, no response as usual.
20. On 14th August I called Home Telecom Orders team to find out what was happening with my broadband order. I was informed that OpenReach had only just reported the connection was live, and that Home Telecom would now have to raise the job to connect the broadband. The connection would take at most 5 working days.
21. As of 22nd August, still no broadband, and still no improvement in the very crackly phone line. Also, when calling into the number, it diverts after 10 seconds to a voice answering service which says “Please Hold” and then the line goes dead. That's not v useful. Home Telecom has no on-line fault reporting service, so it will have to be yet another phone call. Maybe once broadband is working, so as not to distract them about news of the bad phone line. *Actually, how will broadband work if the phone line is so bad? I guess we'll find out eventually.*

This log will be updated as more information becomes available. Stay tuned for the next exciting update on how to get broadband installed in rural Scotland (3 miles from a major town, that is).

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