

# Addendum to Department's Response to Open Market Review and Public Consultation Regarding Project Stratum

## Introduction

This addendum has been created to update the response issued by the Department for the Economy to the State aid Public Consultation (SaPC) regarding Project Stratum. The key outputs from this consultation have been updated due to new information provided to the Department that has a material impact on the intervention area identified following the SaPC.

## Background

On 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019, the Department published its response to a public consultation on Project Stratum that ran from 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018 to 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019. This consultation was itself informed by an Open Market Review (OMR) which ran between 19<sup>th</sup> June and 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018. The purpose of these exercises was to identify premises in Northern Ireland that were unable to access broadband speeds in excess of 30Mbps.

In the Department's response, 97,140 premises were identified as being unable to access broadband with speeds above 30Mbps. These premises were categorised as "white" and premises were further categorised as "grey", where a single provider was able to provide adequate broadband services, and "black" where more than one provider was offering adequate broadband services. Lists of postcodes containing premises in each category were published, along with maps.

## Developments

Ofcom (the regulator for communications services) maintain a Voluntary Code of Practice for providing Broadband Speed Information, see <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-1/broadband-speeds-codes-practice>. A new edition of the code was produced in March 2019, with signatories given 12 months to update speed estimates. In complying with this code, some broadband infrastructure providers undertook a new assessment of speeds available to premises across the UK.

We are also aware that broadband infrastructure providers have continued to be active in making improved broadband services available, so records of deployments and planned deployments have been updated, either as a result of commercial viability or government schemes (such as [Rural Gigabit Connectivity](#) and the [Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme](#)).

Consequently, the Department has been notified that some premises categorised as "white" following the SaPC and OMR are now able to access services with speeds of at least 30Mbps. Other local bodies within the UK have been impacted by refreshes of the data held by infrastructure providers, with one particular UK-wide data refresh

exercise being conducted during the months of December 2019 and January 2020, with impacts on local body interventions and contracts possibly being positive, negative or neutral.

In addition to these notifications, the Department has been provided with updates to the list of beneficiaries of the Rural Gigabit Connectivity scheme managed by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sports across Northern Ireland.

The Department has also been contacted regarding a small number of premises that were not included in the [Address Checker](#). Land & Property Services have been able to update records for some of these premises, allowing them to be considered for inclusion in the Project Stratum intervention.

## Results

As a result of the new information provided, the number of premises eligible for intervention has been reduced by 18,390, from 97,140 to 78,750. The Department aims to maximise broadband coverage across the target intervention area through the full utilisation of public funding, combined with anticipated industry investment. The reduced number of targeted premises is expected to further support this objective.

New editions of Annexes 1-4 have been provided to give updated information on areas where premises will be eligible to benefit from Project Stratum.

We have also published a list of postcodes where changes have occurred, as well as updating the online address checker.