

## **Help Boost Broadband and Check the List!**

### **What we have delivered so far**

In the last 10 years, public investment of over £77m in broadband infrastructure has ensured that approximately 88% of premises in Northern Ireland have access to at least superfast services<sup>1</sup>. This falls short of the 95% target set by the UK Government, and additional public intervention is needed to improve this.

Funding has been made available as a result of the Confidence and Supply Agreement which could provide substantial enhancements to our Internet connectivity.

We estimate that approximately 100,000 premises remain without access to broadband speeds of at least 30Mbps, mainly in rural areas. In addition, we have the largest economic reliance on rural businesses in the UK<sup>2</sup> and some 25% of SMEs in NI cannot yet access 30Mbps<sup>3</sup>.

### **What we're going to do**

The aim of Project Stratum is to deliver future-proofed broadband access to as many premises in the 'intervention area' as possible. The intervention area is, broadly, a list of all those premises in Northern Ireland who cannot yet get access to download speeds of at least 30Mbps. Up to £200m of funding could be made available to tackle this. Already £150m of new public funds from the Confidence and Supply Agreement could be released.

If your premise is in the intervention area, it is one of the premises that could benefit from Project Stratum with the available funding.

We plan to deliver the Project using guidance from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and in compliance with the relevant rules on State aid that apply to this sector.

This consultation is an important step for part of that compliance.

### **What the OMR document contains**

The Open Market Review (OMR) is a two stage process. It is used to:

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<sup>1</sup> [Ofcom Connected Nations update Spring 2018](#)

<sup>2</sup> FSB NI response to Ofcom annual plan consultation – Feb 2016

<sup>3</sup> Ofcom Connected Nations December 2017

1. establish existing and planned (within the next 3 years) coverage of broadband infrastructure across Northern Ireland. This stage completed earlier this year;
2. test the accuracy of the results of stage 1 by publishing and inviting your response. This is the current stage and will run until 14 January 2019.

The Project Stratum State aid Public Consultation report provides more detail on the first stage of the process and categorises all postcodes into three lists:

- 'White' areas are those in which there is no qualifying broadband infrastructure and none is likely to be developed within 3 years. **These postcodes will be targeted for public investment through the Project;**
- 'Grey' areas are those where only one network is present or is to be deployed within the coming 3 years. **These postcodes will not be specifically targeted for public investment from the Project;**
- 'Black' areas are those where at least two networks of different operators exist or will be deployed in the coming 3 years. **These postcodes do not form part of the Project.**

We have now published a report along with the three draft lists, and we want to know if your postcode has been correctly categorised, according to your broadband experiences.

In addition, we have published a list of postcodes that will be 'under review'. These are areas where a supplier has plans within the 3 year period to roll out services. These areas will be monitored to verify if services are delivered. In the event that these commercial plans fall away, these premises will be added to our white list and form part of the proposed intervention area and eligible for intervention via this aid measure.

If our list is not accurate for your postcode, please get in touch with us.

### **What you can do and how you can do it**

We want to hear from residents, businesses, groups and organisations (such as Local Authorities) and infrastructure providers. In particular, if you experience poor access to broadband speeds we want to check that we have accurately recorded your postcode in our white list.

Please note, there is no need to respond to this public consultation if you have no comment to make.

The information can be found at: [www.economy-ni.gov.uk](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

For residents and business operators, if you think your postcode is in the wrong list, please contact us using one of the methods below and tell us:

1. Your name.
2. The address of the property and postcode concerned (we need the full address please).
3. Contact landline telephone number (if available – this will help us to accurately check the download speed available to your premise).
4. Email address (if available).

There are further details in the Project Stratum State aid Public Consultation report on how to reply if you represent groups and organisations (such as Councils) or infrastructure providers, where we require additional information.

Please send your responses **no later than 12 noon on 14 January 2019** to:

Telecoms Branch  
Department for the Economy  
Netherleigh  
Massey Avenue  
Belfast  
BT4 2JP

**or**

e-mail: [stratum@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:stratum@economy-ni.gov.uk)

You can also leave a telephone message on **028 9052 9352**.

Information about Project Stratum can be found at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/consultations/extending-broadband-across-northern-ireland-project-stratum>

### **How / when results will be published and what we will do**

We will carefully consider all responses and, where necessary, we will adjust the draft lists of postcodes to reflect the responses received.

We will publish final intervention area maps and a summary report in the New Year. These maps will be used to seek approval against the relevant State aid rules.

We then expect to move into tendering for the Project in the first quarter of 2019, and to award the contract(s) in the third quarter of 2019.

Thank you for your participation in this consultation.