PROJECT GIGABIT
Public Review – Outcome Report
Northern Ireland

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Department for the Economy

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1 Introduction

The UK Government's ambition is to deliver nationwide gigabit-capable broadband as soon as possible. It is recognised that there is a need for government intervention in the parts of the country where the provision of gigabit-capable broadband is not commercially viable. This is why the government has committed £5 billion for the hardest to reach parts of the country, ensuring no area is left behind. This will be achieved through a package of coordinated and mutually supportive interventions, collectively known as Project Gigabit.

As part of this, the Department for the Economy (DfE) in Northern Ireland, along with Building Digital UK (BDUK), an Executive Agency within the Department for Science, Innovation, & Technology, is developing a procurement approach for funding contracts to suppliers delivering gigabit-capable wholesale infrastructure. This procurement approach will be a successor to the highly successful Superfast broadband programme and Project Stratum. As a result of significant commercial investment and vital public intervention in Northern Ireland, a substantial number of homes and businesses now have access to improved broadband services, with gigabit-capable accessibility currently the highest in the UK. As such, it may be the case that a procurement under Project Gigabit will be smaller in scale to ongoing deployment under Project Stratum. However, the scale and scope of a target intervention area will only be known as a result of analysis of data following an Open Market Review and a subsequent Public Review.

Since January 2022, BDUK has been asking suppliers who are delivering gigabit-capable infrastructure to submit national data returns on a four-monthly basis (January, May and September) of their detailed build plans at premises level. The purpose of this "National Rolling Open Market Review" (NR OMR) is to ensure that BDUK has the most up to date information about suppliers' existing and planned build over the next three-year period.

The January 2022 NR OMR was used as a 'soft launch' of the new process, and as such, BDUK invited a small number of suppliers to participate in this collection. For the May 2022 NR OMR, BDUK extended the invitation to more suppliers with the intention of including all suppliers over the coming months.

A public review (PR) commenced on 5 June 2023 and closed on 8 July 2023. The review was available on DfE's website. This PR was based on an OMR carried out by DfE specifically for Northern Ireland from 12 December 2022 to 27 January 2023. The Northern Ireland specific OMR used supplier data collected through the September 2022 NR OMR.

The PR process aimed to validate the outcome of the OMR and DfE's mapping to ensure that it correctly represents the information provided by suppliers in the course of the OMR and to ensure that the right premises are targeted for government investment, with supplier submissions being used to inform eligibility across Project Gigabit (please see Project Gigabit - gov.uk website for more information about Project Gigabit). Data collected from the PR will also be used to inform GigaHubs and UK Gigabit Voucher eligibility as well as support the development of other potential BDUK interventions.

We invited stakeholders (including the public, businesses, internet service providers and broadband infrastructure operators) to provide us with feedback about the proposed eligible area for government investment set out in the consultation document.

Suppliers who missed contributing to the preceding OMR, had no definitive plans and/or evidence base on which to substantiate claims at that stage, or had subsequently updated their plans, now had an opportunity to notify BDUK and DfE before the procurement stage. The premises identified by BDUK and DfE as eligible may be grouped into one or more appropriately sized Intervention Areas (IAs). The IAs will be issued to the market so that suppliers can bid for funding to support delivery to those areas.

2 Key eligibility requirements for subsidy

The outcome of this PR and the preceding OMR is shown in terms of White, Grey, Black and Under Review premises. This is based on guidance on the key eligibility requirements for the Project Gigabit subsidy. We will only subsidise build to premises which have been designated as White.

- **White** - indicates premises with no gigabit network infrastructure and none is likely to be developed within three years.
- **Black** - indicates premises with two or more qualifying gigabit infrastructures from different suppliers being available, or will be deployed in the coming three years.

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- **Grey** - indicates premises where a single qualifying gigabit infrastructure from a single supplier is available, or is to be deployed within the coming three years.
- **Under Review** - indicates premises where suppliers have reported current or planned commercial broadband coverage, but where claimed current gigabit coverage has not been verified, or, in respect of planned build, where evaluators are confident that gigabit infrastructure will be delivered, but some risks to delivery remain, or there are some gaps in evidence.

Premises categorised as Under Review will be subject to continued monitoring and verification of supplier plans within the three-year period by DfE. DfE may request commitment from the supplier that significant progress is made within three years. If these commercial plans fall away, these premises will be mapped as eligible and form part of the proposed intervention area and be eligible for intervention via this investment. We requested that suppliers inform us regarding all plans, including plans beyond the initial three-year period.

DfE classifies premises on the basis of their existing or planned broadband infrastructure in line with BDUK practice. The OMR and PR data analysis of supplier broadband coverage claims are undertaken at Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN premises) level.

Once the PR closed, if additional information or clarification was required, DfE raised Clarification Questions with suppliers before deciding on a classification.

2.1 Subsidy Control Checks including Treatment of Broadband Vouchers Data

Coverage claims received from suppliers utilising voucher funding was evaluated in accordance with the Subsidy Control evaluation process. This means that suppliers' claims were assessed against the technology solution being gigabit-capable for existing infrastructure.

Typically, Voucher premises were categorised as follows:

- Projects, or before Voucher is issued - "White" (BDUK data assessment indicates a very low chance that these UPRNs will be built to).
- Voucher issued - "Under Review" (BDUK advise that there around a 4% chance that the UPRN will not be delivered).
- Voucher claimed - "Grey" (should be gigabit-connected).

Further information on the Subsidy Control evaluation process, including BDUK treatment of other BDUK intervention data (Superfast, LFFN (Local Full Fibre Network), Rural Gigabit Connectivity (RGC), Gigahubs) can be found within the [Open Market Review & Public Review Subsidy Control Classification Guidance](). DfE followed the same approach.

BDUK intervention data includes, but is not limited to:

- Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme (GBVS)
- Superfast (NBS 2012 or NBS 2016)
- Gigabit Infrastructure Subsidy (GIS)
- Local Full Fibre Networks Programme (LFFN), Rural Gigabit Connectivity (RGC) programme
- GigaHubs
- Other local body funded broadband infrastructure projects.

3 Outcome of the Open Market Review (OMR) – Northern Ireland

The public review was based on an Open Market Review carried out specifically for Northern Ireland from 12 December 2022 to 27 January 2023. That OMR was published on DfE's website at Project Gigabit - Open Market Review, and utilised supplier data collected through the September 2022 NR OMR.

The OMR indicated that planned commercial coverage for gigabit-capable broadband would reach approximately 880,000 premises and would therefore leave 86,000 premises in Northern Ireland without access to gigabit-capable broadband.

The outcome of the OMR was published and associated postcode list published alongside the Project Gigabit NI public review - request for information document and showed the Subsidy classifications determined for each postcode across Northern Ireland. Supplier data submitted during the OMR was incorporated into the OMR outputs using a methodology that protects commercially sensitive supplier data.

For presentational purposes only, postcodes have been used when mapping the proposed eligible areas for this Public Review. *(NB we will only subsidise build to premises which have been designated as White. Postcodes are not used to determine intervention areas for subsidy).*

For the purpose of mapping only, postcodes have been classified as follows:

1. A postcode is **White** if any 'White' premises are present; else
2. A postcode is **Under Review** if any 'Under Review' premises are present; else
3. A postcode is **Black** if all premises in the postcode are classified 'Black'; else
4. A postcode is **Grey** if all premises are 'Grey' or there is a mixture of 'Grey' and 'Black' premises

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The outcome of the OMR is summarised in terms of 'White', 'Grey', 'Black' and 'Under Review' postcodes and premises in Northern Ireland in Table 1.

Postcode Classification	Number of Postcodes	Number of Gigabit Black Premises	Number of Gigabit Grey Premises	Number of Gigabit Under Review Premises	Number of Gigabit White Premises
White	12,163	54,636	122,391	18,084	50,745
Under Review	4,241	23,628	40,275	16,675	0
Grey	19,087	173,708	175,065	0	0
Black	13,402	289,902	0	0	0
Total	**48,893**	**541,874**	**337,731**	**34,759**	**50,745**

Table 1 - Outcome of OMR

4 Geographical Scope

The Request for Information (RFI) allowed us to identify potential Intervention areas for Government subsidy. The Open Market Review and Public Review (PR) RFI is concerned with Northern Ireland and the map below (Figure 3) shows the planned geographic boundary.
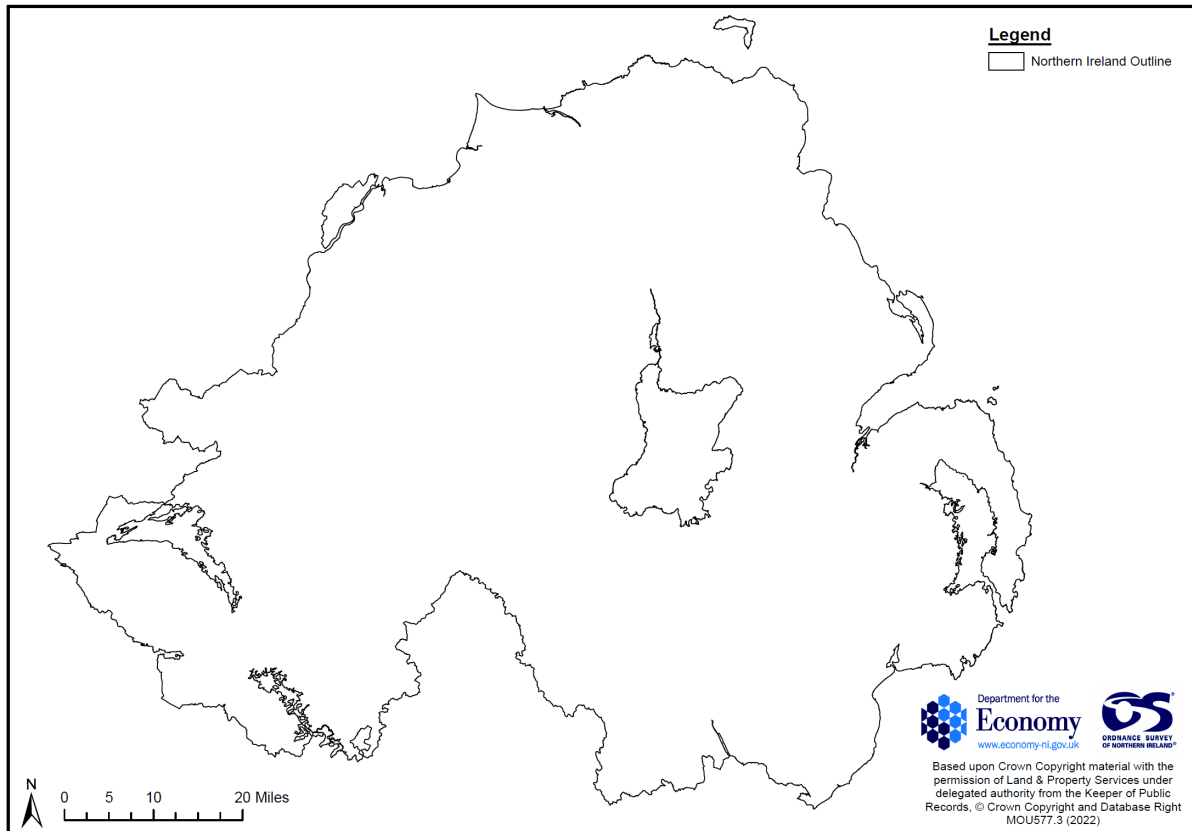

Figure 1 - Geographic Boundary of Open Market Review

Please note, during the Open Market Review, Public Review and Pre-Procurement Market Engagement processes, should any changes occur in relation to the RFI, BDUK/DfE will ensure that it is communicated in a transparent manner to remain consistent with the principles of the Gigabit Infrastructure Scheme.

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5 Premises Dataset

DfE combined the following datasets to form a universe of premises:

Dataset	Date	Number of Records
Domestic Valuations List	3/7/23	840,910
Non-Domestic Valuations List	3/7/23	79,518
Pointer – published dataset	7/7/23	978,736
Pointer – Unverified records	7/7/23	20,299
Pointer – Rejected records	7/7/23	47,096

Table 2 - Premises Dataset Details

Rejected and Historical records were identified as such, along with premises that were valued. The various Pointer[1] datasets were presumed to be mutually exclusive. However, there was a large overlap between the Pointer lists and the valuations lists.

5.1 Exclusions

Premises were removed from the dataset, and included:

- The UPRNs in the valuations list marked as expired (before any linking to Pointer sets). This applied to 11 records.
- The Building Status was 'Demolished' or 'Derelict' AND the premises was not on the valuations lists. This applied to 25,120 records.
- The premises appeared on the Rejected dataset AND the premises was not on the valuations lists; OR the premises was marked on Pointer as having an Address Status of Rejected and was not on the valuations lists. This applied to 76,338 records.

After combining datasets and following exclusions, the dataset consists of 968,394 premises. The premises that did not appear on the valuations list are broken down by building status below:

- 35,458 BUILT
- 28,290 NONE
- 11,192 UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Valued premises were overwhelmingly from the Pointer Product (876,390). The breakdown of other valued premises is below:

- 16,994 Unverified
- 580 Historical

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[1] Pointer is the address database for Northern Ireland and the standard address for every property. Land & Property Services (LPS) maintains the database with help from local councils and Royal Mail.

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- 70 Rejected

5.2 Coverage Dataset

Following collation of this modified data, submissions were matched against the available premises and datasets of premises as shown below.

No.	Input Data/Source	Dataset Name	Rows
1	Land and Property Services	Pointer - product Pointer – unverified Pointer – rejected Domestic Valuations Non Domestic Valuations	968,394

Table 3 – Premises Dataset details

6 Outcome of the Public Review (PR)

6.1 PR Responses

DfE conducted a PR for Northern Ireland from 5 June 2023 to 6 July 2023. Responses to the PR were received from a number of suppliers.

The information provided by these Suppliers was assessed and evaluated in a manner consistent with the principles set out by BDUK. The following sections summarises the position following the PR.

6.2 PR Outcome – Premise Classifications

The following table provides the breakdown by Gigabit classification for all premises in scope following the PR in Northern Ireland.

Premise Classification	Total Number of UPRNs	% Of Total UPRNs
White	58,562	6%
Under Review	60,241	6%
Grey	307,449	32%
Black	542,142	56%
Total	968,394	100%

Table 4 – PR Premise Classifications Summary

This information will be used to identify where we can intervene. However, consideration needs to be given as to where we should. Attention is drawn to the Open Market Review & Public Review Subsidy Control Classification Guidance that describes how Intervention Areas will be determined.

In particular, we may choose either to defer intervention to some White premises or to descope them from the procurement where we believe that will deliver best value. For instance, we may descope White premises if they are adjacent to Grey premises, because although there are no declared plans to build there, it is likely to be straightforward to reach them once the Grey premises have been delivered. **The number of premises that form the intervention area may be less than the number of White and Under Review UPRNs in the above table.**

6.3 PR Outcome – Postcode Classifications

Postcodes have been used to summarise the premise classifications and map the proposed eligible areas. For this purpose, postcodes have been classified as follows:

- A postcode is classified white if any 'White' premises are present; else
- A postcode is under review if any 'Under Review' premises are present; else
- A postcode is classified turned black if two qualifying broadband infrastructure networks serve all premises in the postcode are classified 'Black; else
- A postcode is grey (i.e. all premises are 'Grey' or a mixture of 'Grey' and 'Black'

This is summarised in the table below.

Postcode Classification	Number of Postcodes	Number of Gigabit Black Premises	Number of Gigabit Grey Premises	Number of Gigabit Under Review Premises	Number of Gigabit White Premises
White	13,015	55,272	115,856	32,877	58,562
Under Review	6,066	40,288	45,434	27,364	
Grey	16,848	164,142	146,159		
Black	13,041	282,440			
Total	48,970	542,142	307,449	60,241	58,562

Table 5 – PR Postcode Classifications Summary

A map visualising this information is shown at Annex A. A spreadsheet has been prepared containing a list of postcodes and their Subsidy Control classifications (WGBU), and is available at Annex B.

Annex A: Map to show intervention area following PR Stage

The map below is an image of draft intervention map following the review of information provided at the PR Stage.

Please note, following closure of the PR, a new version of these maps and premises lists will be produced and published on DfE's website based on the latest dataset and market feedback gathered during the PR process. This is known as a PR Closure Notice.
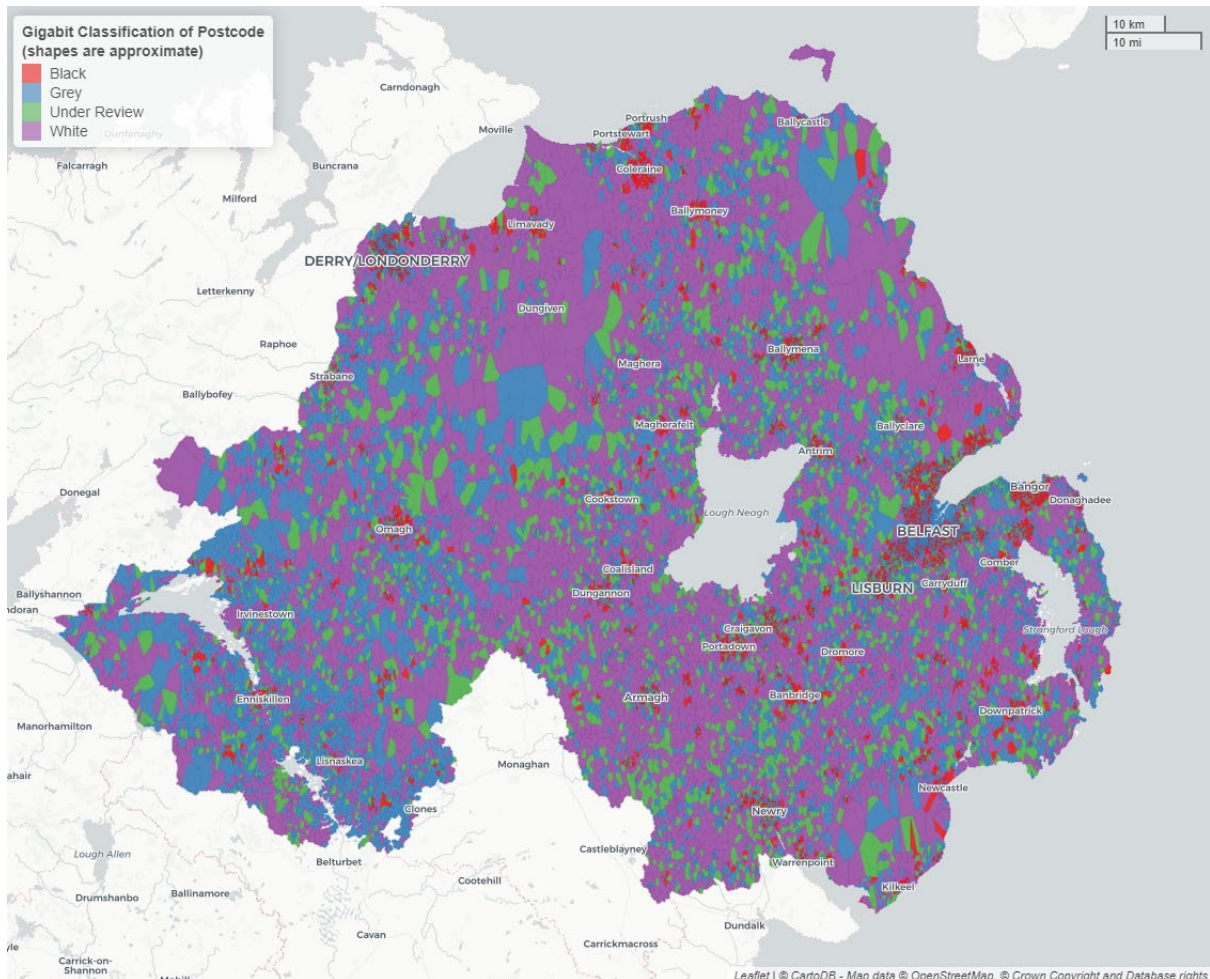

Figure 2 - Map showing intervention area following PR Stage

Annex B: List of postcodes and their Subsidy Control classifications

A copy of this file has been made available separately at: [Project Gigabit public review outcome report - DfE website](#)