

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for the Economy

£165M BROADBAND IMPROVEMENT CONTRACT AWARDED TO FIBRUS NETWORKS LTD

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Mrs Dodds (The Minister for the Economy): Today I announced the contract for the delivery of Project Stratum has been awarded to Fibrus Networks Ltd.

Project Stratum represents a £150million investment as a result of the confidence and supply arrangement, from the Department for the Economy, alongside £15million by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, as well as a substantial investment by Fibrus in network build costs. The project aims to bring next generation broadband services to premises across Northern Ireland currently unable to access speeds of 30 megabits per second or greater.

After a competitive and very robust procurement process, I am pleased to announce that the contract has been awarded to Fibrus. This announcement means that we are one step closer to bringing next generation broadband services to those businesses and people who need it most. Fibrus proposes a full fibre solution, capable of offering speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second to almost 97% of premises in the target intervention area. Deployment of the new infrastructure is expected to commence immediately and implementation will run until March 2024.

While always recognised as important, the pandemic and restrictions we have all had to live under have underscored the importance of broadband connectivity. Project Stratum will transform the broadband connectivity landscape for many of our citizens and businesses across primarily rural areas of Northern Ireland.”

The investment of £150million by my Department, combined with £15million from DAERA and the investment by Fibrus in the project, will deliver gigabit-capable

broadband infrastructure to more than 76,000 premises in the intervention area. My Department will work closely with the supplier and, through continued engagement with DCMS, will deliver infrastructure to serve all premises in the target intervention area, including those not currently in scope, as soon as possible.”

This is a welcome announcement which will enable the Department to work with Fibrus to deliver this much needed improvement to broadband access for rural communities,

The implementation of Project Stratum will further Northern Ireland’s position as digital global leader. Full fibre broadband is key to unlocking the full economic and social potential of our rural communities. This investment will enable towns, villages and rural communities to keep connected and facilitate the increasing demand for working and studying at home. The benefits of Full Fibre Broadband are more relevant now than ever before.

Project Stratum complements the UK Government’s ambitious broadband targets in seeking to provide gigabit-capable broadband to the whole of the UK as soon as possible. UK Digital Secretary

With Fibrus on board, we can bring the benefits of next generation broadband speeds to tens of thousands of homes and businesses, helping people work remotely, take advantage of new tech and boost economic productivity.