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Jenny Marra MSP
Convener
Public Audit and Post-Legislative Scrutiny
Committee
Room T3.60
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

10 December 2018

Dear Ms Marra

AUDITOR GENERAL REPORT: SUPERFAST BROADBAND FOR SCOTLAND

Thank you for your letter dated 19 November 2018 on behalf of the Public Audit and Post-Legislative Scrutiny Committee. The Committee's questions covered three areas: Community Broadband Scotland, broadband speeds and the on-going procurement for the Reaching 100% (R100) programme.

Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) was created to assist communities in delivering their own broadband infrastructure projects. By its nature, the service provided by CBS was demand-led, responding to the individual asks of community groups. This approach differs significantly from that used to deliver the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme, which involved a far more strategic and planned roll-out of fibre broadband. The approach adopted for delivery of R100 will be akin to that of the DSSB programme – an approach recognised by Audit Scotland as having been delivered effectively.

The successful delivery of the DSSB programme demonstrates that the Scottish Government has a track record of delivering large-scale, broadband infrastructure projects, but lessons can still be learned from this and from CBS.

Robust contract management and assurance processes have been put in place, taking on board lessons learned from the DSSB project. Reflecting recommendations made previously by Audit Scotland, we are now utilising longer term procurement frameworks to secure the right skills and people, supported by specialist external advisors where necessary, for the duration of the R100 programme.

The Audit Scotland report recognises improvements in public reporting made by the DSSB programme. We will look to build upon this for R100. The nature of the DSSB contracts meant that there was an element of flexibility regarding where rollout would take place.



R100 contracts will be different and should allow us to provide the public with individual premises level data earlier than was possible during DSSB deployment.

While the review, in conjunction with HIE, concluded that the CBS model was no longer suitable, we will look to replicate and build upon the level of community and supplier engagement undertaken by CBS for our R100 programme. There are particular lessons around how demand is most effectively aggregated and these will help shape the R100 *aligned interventions* workstream, if it is required. We are also working closely with HIE, drawing on the expertise gleaned from their successful delivery of the DSSB contract in the north of Scotland.

You mention that members have queried why Audit Scotland focus on fibre broadband coverage, rather than on the speeds actually received. This is because the aim of the DSSB programme was to provide *fibre* broadband access to 95% of premises: its main focus was not on delivery of a pre-stated download speed. This differs from the R100 programme, which has committed to providing access to speeds of 30Mbps, speeds which will be ensured through R100 contractual obligations.

The 376,000 premises identified in the Audit Scotland report is the actual number of premises unable to access 30 Mbps, regardless of how they are connected, i.e. fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) or fibre to the premises (FTTP). FTTC is the technology predominantly used to deliver broadband through the DSSB programme, however this will not necessarily be the case for R100. Early discussions with the three potential bidders suggest that full fibre is likely to play a key role in the delivery of R100. We expect competition between bidders to push coverage further, driving value for money and delivering greater FTTP coverage across rural Scotland.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Davidson
DG Organisational Development & Operations