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Edward Mountain MSP
Convener of the Rural Economy & Connectivity
Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
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18 June 2019

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter of 11 June 2019 regarding my recent update to Parliament on the Reaching 100% (R100) procurement timeline and inviting me to give evidence at the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee scheduled to take place on 9 October 2019.

As Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands, I am clear in my role to ensure that the R100 programme delivers the best possible value and benefit for Scotland, particularly given the unprecedented sum being invested by the Scottish Government in delivering this commitment. Of course, an important point that I and my predecessors have made is that all regulatory and legislative provisions in respect of telecommunications are wholly the responsibility of UK Ministers.

Despite that, and reflecting the impact that a UK-wide approach leaving large areas of Scotland without coverage would have on the Scottish economy, Scottish Ministers have invested, with partners, significant additional resources in delivery of the £400 million Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband programme and, to ensure all premises have access to superfast services at speeds of 30 Megabits per second or better, Scottish Ministers are providing 96.5% of the £600 million investment in the R100 programme. By contrast, only £21 million - or 3.5% - of the R100 programme is currently being met by the UK Government.

As with any procurement of this scale, the process is a complex one and we have had to build in a degree of flexibility to respond to a range of circumstances. This has included extending timelines and allowing for a pause at key parts of the process, at the request of potential bidders. As a result the procurement timeline has been extended, with the appointment of a preferred bidder or bidders anticipated by the end of September 2019 with contracts awarded later this year.

Given the complexity of the procurement, legally, financially and technically, we have always acknowledged 2021 would be a challenging target to meet – a point I made in the Chamber at

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topical questions, as you may recall. While we continue to aim for delivery by our original timescale, we will not sacrifice our aim of securing the best result for Scotland.

As outlined in my update to Parliament on Friday 31 May 2019, and subsequently at Topical Questions on 11th June, the procurement is ongoing and delivery timescales will be confirmed once we have a supplier or suppliers in place, later this year. I will of course update Parliament once the procurement process is completed.

I am more than happy to come before the Committee on this important issue. However, whilst the procurement team aims to be in a position to notify the preferred bidder or bidders by the end of September, and I would seek to announce the outcome as soon as is practicable after that, I suggest that a date later in October would be more suitable if I am to be able to update the Committee on progress.

I hope that such an arrangement would be of value to the Committee's important work and look forward to speaking with you and other members of the Committee.

Kind regards



Paul Wheelhouse

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