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For immediate release

CONCERNS OVER UK GOVERNMENT'S RURAL DIGITAL STRATEGY

Local MP Corri Wilson has said the UK Government must revise its approach on digital investment as rural areas such as Ayrshire are at real risk of being left behind.

The MP for Ayr, Carrick & Cumnock has welcomed additional investment that has been announced but is also calling for the UK Government to revise its proposed Universal Service Obligation (USO) for broadband so that it will encourage providers to “push fibre further.”

Ms Wilson says the direction of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement risks seeing investment in high quality fibre networks centred in urban areas while rural areas will be left with speeds that will be “obsolete within a decade.”

She said:

“There are really excellent businesses in Ayrshire who need high quality internet connections to compete with more urban rivals, but communities, councils and devolved administrations across the UK trying to achieve superfast speeds are being backed into a corner due to this Government's clear lack of ambition on rural connectivity.

“The Chancellor's announcement may represent a welcome investment in high quality fibre networks, but that is not sufficient if those benefits are only likely to be felt in big towns and cities. The Government recognises that fibre infrastructure is the future, but it seems reluctant to accept that rural consumers also want to be part of the future too.

“For areas like Ayrshire that is not an acceptable position. Many are looking at the Government's proposed Universal Service Obligation in the Digital Economy Bill and are, quite rightly, unable to fathom why 10 megabits per second is good enough for some consumers in rural areas, when the networks of the future are likely to offer speeds at least ten times as fast.

“The Scottish Government has made a commitment to reach 30 megabits by 2021, and a flexible Universal Service Obligation (USO)—particularly a voucher scheme, rather than a monetary or contractual agreement with providers —could help them to deliver. But if the USO is simply passed over to providers who are willing to provide 10 megabits to everybody by 2020, I am afraid that we will end up with fibre for the few, while rural areas are expected to make do with speeds that will be obsolete within a decade.”

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