

[News story: The SME spend target must go on](#)

As shown in the latest figures from 2015/16, over £12bn worth of central government work was delivered by SMEs in that year, and there's effort underway to ensure this figure continues to rise:

Regular webinars

Introducing small business owners to platforms such as [Contracts Finder](#), services like [Mystery Shopper](#), and buyers who set out the type of products and services they're after. In the space of 30 minutes, with a conversation accessible from anywhere, these online events connect SMEs with the people in government who are working to make it easier for small firms to win work.

Meet the Buyer events

Face to face meet the buyer events are on the rise with cross departmental events, the popular and annual [NDA supplier show](#), and sector focused innovation and buying exchanges such as [Defence Contracts Online](#) and [Transport Systems Catapult](#). We are looking to collate these events on a single page so SMEs have one point of access to find out what's happening in their sector/locality.

Advice and guidance for SMEs

A free [selling to the public sector guide](#) offers top tips and testimonials from entrepreneurs who've been there and done it, in addition to [4 videos featuring advice and guidance for SMEs](#), from SMEs, wanting to work with government.

SME Panel

A passionate group of entrepreneurs, in the form of an [SME Panel](#), meets regularly to work on solutions to bring down the greatest barriers to SMEs winning work. And their counterparts in government, the SME Champions, meets to discuss how terms and conditions in contracts can be simplified, payment be prompt, and upcoming contracts communicated to a small business audience

This work reflects a commitment from within government, and from willing entrepreneurs, to work towards government's aspiration of spending £1 in every £3 with SMEs is met by 2022.

There's always more that can be done. That's why in 2018 a key area of focus for the SME team will be in matching government's largest strategic suppliers with small businesses, to jointly fulfil government contracts. We do not want to see the problems that have afflicted SMEs in the Carillion supply chain – far from it. But what we do want to see is greater cooperation between big and small to sort payment terms down the supply chain, and to jointly innovate to deliver the best deal for the taxpayer.

The case of Carillion isn't a warning against outsourcing; it's an opportunity to build stronger relationships in the delivery of public services; between government and auditors, large companies and their suppliers, and SMEs direct with buying departments. The benefits of this will be felt by all.

Emma Jones is [SME Crown Representative](#) for Crown Commercial Service.

Press release: North East now boasts highest broadband coverage in the UK

New figures out today (29 January 2018) show the Northern Powerhouse is one of the most connected regions in the UK thanks to the government's £1.7 billion broadband roll out programme.

97.2% of the North East is enjoying unprecedented access to superfast broadband – the highest coverage in the country. The North West follows only shortly behind with 96% of the region having access to superfast broadband.

More households and businesses across the North are now accessing superfast broadband speeds of 24 Mbps – more than double the 10 Mbps required by a typical family home.

Today's figures published by [Think Broadband](#) show that the government is succeeding in improving connectivity in the Northern Powerhouse with businesses across the region benefitting from improved digital infrastructure and faster broadband; last year's Autumn budget announced up to £1.8 billion of further government funding for the North to improve transport, digital connectivity, and economic regeneration.

Northern Powerhouse Minister, Jake Berry, said:

The Northern Powerhouse is leading the charge in bridging the rural-urban digital divide. Strong digital infrastructure, including access to superfast broadband, is vital for a flourishing local economy by helping to spur growth and create thousands of new jobs.

We're doing all we can to bring broadband access to even the most remote and rural areas in the country and are giving businesses the tools they need to meet the demands of the digital age.

DCMS Secretary of State, Matt Hancock said:

Over the last 5 years, the government's rollout of superfast broadband has made superfast speeds a reality for more than 4.5 million homes and businesses who would otherwise have missed out. But there's still more to do in our work building a Britain that's fit for the future.

We're reaching thousands more premises every single week, and have committed to making affordable, reliable, high speed broadband a legal right to everyone by 2020.

The government's £1.7 billion rollout of superfast broadband to areas deemed "not commercially viable" by industry has so far reached more than 4.5 million UK premises that would otherwise have been left in the connectivity slow lane, the majority of which are in rural areas.

With 19 out of 20 UK homes and businesses now enjoying superfast broadband access, the government has also delivered on its manifesto pledge to bring superfast broadband to 95% of UK premises.

In addition to the huge benefits to day-to-day life that superfast speeds offer, this closing of the "digital divide" has also delivered a significant boost to local economies – creating around 50,000 new local jobs and generating an additional £8.9 billion in turnover in the areas covered by the government rollout between 2013 and 2016.

The latest broadband coverage figures are available at www.thinkbroadband.com.

[Press release: Plans to upgrade the A30 in Cornwall go on public display](#)

Highways England announced the preferred route for the £290 million improvement scheme, part of the Government's £15 billion Road Investment Strategy, in July last year.

The improvement to the eight-mile stretch will help to improve journey times for residents, businesses and visitors, as well as unlocking one of the last bottlenecks in Cornwall.

Since the preferred route was announced, Highways England has been working with landowners along the route to develop the design of the scheme, the details of which will be announced from today (Monday 29 January 2018) when consultation is launched.

Josh Hodder, Project Manager for Highways England, said:

We recognise the strategic importance of improving this section of the A30 in helping to unlock economic growth in Cornwall and the whole of the region.

We look forward to sharing our progressed plans with local stakeholders, businesses and the community, full details are available from today, and we welcome all feedback during consultation.

The scheme offers a number of benefits to the area – as well as boosting the area's economy, upgrading this stretch of the A30 is vital to improving motorists' journeys, cutting congestion, improving safety and connecting local communities.

After the opening of the Cornwall Council-led A30 Temple to Higher Carblake dualling scheme last summer, Highways England is proposing to upgrade the eight-mile Chiverton to Carland Cross section, which will offer drivers more than 100 miles of dual carriageway between the M5 and Camborne in Cornwall.

The cost of developing the scheme is being partly funded by an £8 million contribution from the European Regional Development Fund, with an additional £12 million for the construction phase. The remainder of the cost of developing and delivering the scheme will be funded by central Government.

Cllr Geoff Brown, Portfolio Holder for Transport at Cornwall Council added:

I welcome this next step and the further consultation with communities. The scheme will help to improve journey times for local people, businesses and visitors and we know from previous public engagement that there is strong support locally to improve this stretch of the A30.

This project will build upon the excellent working relationship that we have with Highways England and I encourage people to take this opportunity to view the proposals and discuss them with the Highways England design team.

Public consultation events will offer people the chance to see detailed plans of the scheme, including junction and slip road access, roundabout and bridge designs, and meet with members of the project team. Information will also be available to view at local information points.

Full details of the scheme and information on the consultation events and information points can be found on the dedicated [consultation webpage](#).

Following consultation, the scheme will then progress through the formal planning process and, subject to statutory approval under the 2008 Planning Act and the Secretary of State, construction is planned to start in spring 2020.

European Regional Development Fund

The project is receiving up to £8 million of funding from the England European Regional Development Fund as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme 2014-2020. The Department for Communities and Local Government (and in London the intermediate body Greater London Authority) is the Managing Authority for European Regional Development Fund. Established by the European Union, the European Regional Development Fund helps local areas stimulate their economic development by investing in projects which will support innovation, businesses, create jobs and local community regenerations. For more information visit the [European Structural and Investment Funds Growth programme](#) webpage.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Press release: Local government ethical standards: Committee calls for evidence](#)

The Committee on Standards in Public Life has today [called for evidence](#) about how local councils are supporting good ethical standards in local government in light of changes over the past ten years.

Committee member, [Dr Jane Martin CBE](#) who will be leading on the review, said:

“Robust arrangements to support ethical standards are needed to safeguard local democracy and facilitate the representative process, but also to ensure high standards of conduct by councillors. The Committee considers it is timely to undertake a health check of local government so the public can have confidence that the standards arrangements supporting local democracy are working effectively.

“The Committee has maintained a longstanding interest in local government ethical standards, and regularly receives correspondence from members of the public expressing their concern about this issue.

“We are keen to hear first-hand how effective councils’ standards

arrangements are, in light of the substantial changes in the standards landscape for local government over the last ten years.

“We are interested in how local authorities have designed their complaints handling, scrutiny and sanctions regimes in order to maintain excellent ethical standards and how members, local government officials and the public experience them.

“The Committee would like to hear from councils and individuals who can help us understand how ethical standards issues are dealt with by local authorities.”

Based on the submissions to this review and meetings with key stakeholders, we intend to publish our findings and recommendations late in 2018.

Notes to Editors

1. Interview requests and media enquiries should go to Maggie O’Boyle on 07880 740627.
2. The independent Committee on Standards in Public Life advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in the UK. It monitors and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders.
3. The Committee has an independent Chair. Its membership is comprised of four independent members and a representative from each of the Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democratic parties.
4. You can follow the Committee on Twitter [@PublicStandards](#)

[News story: Have your say on marine planning in England](#)

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is inviting stakeholders to get involved in the next stage of the marine planning process for the North East, North West, South East and South West.

Workshops are running throughout February and March and will provide an ideal opportunity for stakeholders to check progress towards the development of marine plans in their area. The workshops will be supported by an opportunity to respond on-line.

The engagement will focus on:

- Draft marine plan area visions.
- Draft options to address issues in each marine plan area.

For more information on marine plan areas and to subscribe to marine planning follow the links below:

[North West](#)

[South East](#)

[South West](#)

[North East](#)

Consultation workshops are taking place on the following dates and locations:

Area	Location	Venue	Date
North West Whitehaven		Beacon Portal	07/02/18
North West Liverpool		Adelphi Hotel	08/02/18
South East Chatham		Sun Pier House	21/02/18
South East London		The Wesley Euston	22/02/18
South West Newquay		The Headland Hotel	06/03/18
South West Plymouth		Future Inn	07/03/18
South West Weston-super-Mare		The Winter Gardens	08/03/18
North East Seahouses		The Hub	20/03/18
North East Newcastle		Copthorne Hotel	21/03/18
North East Middlesbrough		Middlesbrough Football Club	22/03/18

You can [sign up](#) for the workshops now.

Further information

- There are 11 English marine plan areas, including inshore and offshore areas. Each area will be covered by a marine plan by 2021 with a 20 year view of activities.
- Marine planning addresses the key issues for the marine area, including the coast, estuaries and tidal waters, as well as developments that impact on these areas. The plans will include a vision and objectives together with policies to achieve them.
- Marine plans are used by public authorities as part of the decision-making process for all new activities and developments in or affecting the marine area.

- Marine plans build on the requirements of the Marine and Coastal Access Act and the Marine Policy Statement.

About marine planning

MMO has produced a short animation called 'What is marine planning?' to explain marine planning.

[Video](#)

Find out more about [marine planning](#).