[Statement to Parliament: Oral Statement: Northern Ireland update](#)

With permission I would like to make a statement about the current political situation in Northern Ireland.

As the House is aware, Northern Ireland has been without a properly functioning devolved Executive and Assembly for nine months.

During this time, the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, as the two largest parties in the Assembly, have been engaged in a series of discussions to restore inclusive, power-sharing government at Stormont.

The latest phase of the discussions began in August and has run for the past nine weeks.

It is the responsibility of the parties to reach an agreement and the Government has been working tirelessly to support this process.

In addition to this, I have kept in regular contact with the Ulster Unionists, SDLP and Alliance as well as representatives of business and civil society.

My RHF the Prime Minister has also remained closely involved throughout the process and has held a number of discussions with the leaders of the DUP and Sinn Fein, as well as keeping in contact with Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar.

In addition, the Irish Government has been actively involved in the process in accordance with the well-established three stranded approach to Northern Ireland affairs.

I would like, in particular, to acknowledge the contribution of the Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney.

Our efforts have been focused mainly on bridging a small number of differences between the two largest parties, particularly around language and culture, that have prevented a sustainable Executive being formed.

While important progress has been made, the parties have not yet reached an agreement.

Therefore I am not in a position to bring before the House the legislation necessary for an Executive to be formed this week.

The consequence of this is that it is now highly unlikely that an Executive could be in place within a timetable to be assured of passing a budget by the end of November, which is the point at which we and the Northern Ireland Civil Service assess that Northern Ireland will begin to run out of resources.

No Government could simply stand by and allow that to happen and we would be shirking our responsibilities to the people of Northern Ireland were we to do so.

That is why the Government will take forward the necessary steps that would enable a Budget Bill to be introduced in the House in order to protect the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland.

This Budget Bill would deal only with the current financial year. It would incorporate figures provided by the Northern Ireland Civil Service reflecting their assessment of the outgoing priorities of the previous Executive. It would not set out any spending decisions by me or the Government.

As my RHF the Leader has indicated, I would expect the Budget Bill to be considered in this House shortly after the November recess.

Subject to Parliamentary approval, this Bill would give the Northern Ireland Civil Service certainty to plan for the rest of this financial year by giving the necessary legal authority to spend to existing plans.

And I would like to take this opportunity to put on record my deep appreciation for the professionalism of the Northern Ireland Civil Service in maintaining public services during this very difficult time.

The Government's strong desire would be for a restored Executive in Northern Ireland to take forward its own Budget.

So this step is one that I am now taking with the utmost reluctance and only in the absence of any other option.

I also want to be clear to the House that passing a Budget in Westminster does not mark a move to direct rule any more than the passing of legislation by this House to set a Regional Rate did in April.

Furthermore, it is important for me to emphasise that is not an obstacle to continued political negotiations and the Government will continue to work with the Parties with that intent.

Even now, however unlikely this may be, should the parties demonstrate that an Executive could be formed in the immediate future I would clearly wish to proceed with legislation to allow that to happen on the condition that a means could be created to provide an expedited procedure on an exceptional basis to enable the budget to be passed by the end of November.

In addition to preparations for budget legislation, and in recognition of the strength of public concern, I will also reflect carefully on the issue of salaries for Assembly Members.

This is a devolved matter and I cannot intervene without primary legislation in Westminster.

As I recently told the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, in the continued absence of a functioning assembly the status quo is not tenable and therefore

I will be seeking independent advice on MLA pay on what steps may be taken to reflect the current circumstances.

Mr Speaker,

I still hope that the parties can resolve their differences and that an Executive can be formed.

We will continue to work with them and support them in their efforts.

Together with the Irish Government we remain steadfast in our commitment to the 1998 Belfast Agreement and its successors and to the institutions that they establish.

It remains firmly in the interests of Northern Ireland to see devolved government restored. To see locally elected politicians making decisions for the people of Northern Ireland on key local matters such as health, education, transport and economic development.

We are clear that Northern Ireland needs a properly functioning inclusive devolved government, along with effective structures for co-operation North-South and East-West.

But ultimately the Government is responsible for good governance in Northern Ireland and we will to do whatever is necessary to provide that.

And I commend this statement to the House.

News story: Do you want to be a Data Scientist at Dstl?

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) has 12 Data Scientist roles available across its Cyber and Information Systems (CIS) and Defence and Security Analysis (DSA) divisions. The roles involve working as part of multidisciplinary teams, applying innovative solutions to help Dstl answer complex data-led problems for the defence and security of the UK.

Brendan Neeson a Data Scientist at Dstl said

> As a Data Scientist at Dstl you could be using data science skills to collect and analyse intelligence information, support strategic decision makers across government or for work in the area of Artificial Intelligence. Data science is an exciting area to be working in at the moment and no more so than in applying your knowledge to tackle real world defence and security problems.

Dstl has a community of Data Scientists that are already leading the field in the use of Kaggle style competitions to access wider data science expertise from across government, industry and academia. Dstl also led the successful [Data Science Challenge](#), working with the Government Office for Science, SIS and MI5, which challenged the brightest minds in data science to help the UK government meet huge challenges, and keep people safe by revolutionising the way we think about world problems.

In 2014 Dstl Data Scientists placed a [piece of software, called Baleen, into the open source domain](#), via Github, for editing and improvement by the public. By releasing Baleen, which was built on open source technologies and bespoke Dstl developed software code, to the open source community Dstl could reach non-traditional expertise and enhance the output of the tool.

Through the Ministry of Defence, Dstl also has a strategic relationship with the [Alan Turing Institute](#), the national institute for data science which is headquartered at the British Library. The relationship is interested in developing data science methodologies and techniques, and in the direct application of data science for the benefit of defence and security. It enables Dstl Data Scientists to share data science knowledge and skills with other members of the Institute, meaning that our data scientists always have access to best practice and can develop the skills they need.

[News story: Lord Ahmad participates in UN Security Council debates on the Sahel and Children in Armed Conflict](#)

These sessions, convened by France as part of her Security Council presidency and chaired by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, discussed international support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force and Children and Armed Conflict.

The Minister outlined the UK's strong political support for the G5 force and the ongoing commitment to peace and security across the Sahel. He called for a redoubling of efforts for peace, noting that a successful peace process is at the heart of any strategy to defeat terrorism and traffickers in the Sahel.

In response to the Secretary-General's report on Children and Armed Conflict, Lord Ahmad expressed concern at the increasing number of grave violations being committed against children in areas of conflict, including an alarming rise in the number of cases of humanitarian access being denied to those most in need. He expressed strong support for the work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and called on the UN to do more to help protect children's rights.

During the visit, Lord Ahmad also met the Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohamed, Jane Connors, Victims' Rights Advocate for the United Nations and the Foreign Ministers of Mali, France and Sweden.

[Lord Ahmad attends UN Security Council](#)

[Speech: Building a full fibre Britain](#)

Thanks for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Like many of you, I often meet interesting people in my job. But there's one serious frustration. And that is, just as I'm talking to them about the many fascinating things they do, instead they want to badger me about their broadband. Every day.

This problem reached its zenith just last week when I met Tim Peake, Britain's inspirational astronaut, and he collared me about the broadband on his space station.

Tim, for next time you're up there, I'm sure one of our ambitious Altnets can help.

So today is different. Because today, it's you who've got to listen to me talk about broadband. And not just my broadband, but everyone's.

It is a full year since I spoke to the Broadband World Forum, and set out our plans for a full fibre future. Today I want to talk about the exciting momentum that is building in this industry and about our plans for the future.

Let's start by acknowledging Britain's current high levels of connectivity.

The recent Global Connectivity Index published by Huawei, once again ranked the UK top five out of 50 major nations in terms of connectivity.

Our superfast connectivity is the best in Europe.

Our economy has the biggest digital economy, by proportion, of major nations, and we have one of the highest percentages of individual Internet usage. President Trump's use of Twitter probably contributes to America's higher score.

This is in no small part because Government has strongly supported the digitalisation of the economy, and made sure the business environment is friendly to new innovations and the growth of the market.

The statistics to back this up are clear.

We have announced that up to £645 million is to be made available to help take superfast broadband coverage to 98 per cent of the nation over the next few years.

In total we are investing £1.1 billion in our digital infrastructure to support the next generation of fast and reliable mobile and broadband communications for consumers and businesses.

And to support businesses we are introducing 100% business rates relief for operators who install new fibre on their networks.

Superfast broadband is also now available to over 94% of premises, on the way to hitting our target of 95% by the end of the year, and on mobile, the MNOs are legally obliged to reaching ninety per cent geographic coverage by December. 4G coverage continues to rise sharply.

The Connectivity Index also predicts that, as these amazing digital technologies advance, our advantage will drive future economic growth. That's one economic forecast I am prepared to make.

But we can always, always do better.

Over the past year we have published both our Digital Strategy and published our 5G strategy.

We have agreed on the separation of BT and Openreach.

Virgin Media continues at pace with the rollout of Project Lightning bringing ultrafast speeds to more and more of the country.

KCOM are also doing their part and are on track to cover 150,000 premises with their Lightstream Project in Hull.

We have seen record levels of investment into the altnets, including £500 million from Cityfibre and £200 million from Hyperoptic.

Openreach has established its independent board and declared its clear direction in the pursuit of the full fibre future.

We have published proposals for the USO.

We have secured over a billion pounds more of taxpayers' money for next generation technologies and we have introduced rate relief for putting new fibre into the ground.

So we have been busy.

I think this effort demonstrates beyond any doubt the UK Government's commitment to a full fibre and 5G future. We are guided by our mission to deliver full connectivity where people live, work, and travel.

I said a year ago that "I will be on the side of the challenger, helping in every way I can to deliver fair competition and a level playing field."

I meant it then, I mean it now.

And I'm delighted the Altnets are going from strength to strength.

CityFibre, which is already in more than 40 cities, has announced plans to extend its network in more than ten extra cities across the UK.

Gigaclear is bringing ultrafast speeds to consumers and their network now spans over 15 counties.

Community schemes like B4RN and others are expanding.

Indeed INCA has estimated that coverage from its members could potentially reach 18 per cent of UK premises by 2020.

We welcome these developments and encourage more.

But before I set out our next steps on delivering full fibre and 5G, let's turn first to progress on the current technology of fibre to the cabinet or, as it might better be known, copper-to-the-premise.

We have invested £1.7bn of UK taxpayers' money in delivering superfast broadband. For today's needs, it delivers what an average household wants.

Reaching 95% by the end of the year is a very important milestone, and not least with the over £600m of funding from claw-back in the existing BDUK contacts, we hope to go further.

Universal coverage of high speed broadband of at least 10Mbps is an important manifesto commitment that we must deliver, so everyone has today's technology, as we develop the solutions and market for tomorrow's.

On the USO, we have published our consultation on the regulatory option and will be responding to the consultation shortly.

We are also considering the offer put forward by BT to deliver the USO. We welcome their proposal, and we are considering both options on the table, but unless BT can convince us they will deliver universal coverage by 2020 we will have no option but to go down the regulatory route.

We are determined to deliver high speed broadband to all by 2020.

And then, we turn our attention to full fibre. For while the existing copper network is important today, a copper-to-the-premise solution is not fit for the future.

So while completing the rollout of today's technology is important, we are determined to be on the front foot with the technology of tomorrow too. That means full fibre. We cannot stress enough that full fibre is the future.

For we are in the very early days. UK full fibre coverage is just 3%. This will not stand. We will strain every sinew to get it rolled out in Britain.

Over the last year we have unveiled a whole suite of policies to get the UK's

full fibre roll out going.

Like the CTTP roll out, this is a mixed-economy approach: with some taxpayers' funding, but the majority of funding from the market.

First, we are helping to level the playing field by supporting insurgent altnets reach their fibre ambitions through the Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund, which will improve access to commercial finance.

Next, we are investing £200m to fund locally-led projects across the UK. This "Local Full Fibre Networks" programme aims to provide the fastest and most reliable broadband available.

Working with providers and local bodies we have shaped a programme focused on improving the business case for the private sector to invest in fibre networks, and to connect even more homes and businesses.

The Local Full Fibre Network project involves upgrading connections into public buildings with fibre, providing gigabit connection vouchers to increase business take-up; and improving access upgrades to publicly-owned infrastructure. And we're working with Network Rail and others to open up existing fibre, and roll out new fibre down train lines. This rail project is incredibly important and we welcome approaches from industry on how to get connectivity down our railways.

We've got going. Our six wave one projects will trial the approaches outlined for the programme, including public sector as an anchor tenant, reusing public sector infrastructure, and testing gigabit vouchers.

We are particularly interested in how the market responds and how much full fibre build is stimulated.

But we're not just waiting for the results. We're already pushing on with the next wave.

We are developing a competitive process for local areas to bid for resources from a 'Challenge Fund', and that is for projects that will support the stimulation of large scale commercial investment in full fibre networks. Recently we invited local bodies from across the UK to submit expressions of interest in the programme, and their responses will help further shape how we operate this fund.

Details on how the fund can be accessed will be announced shortly, and at that launch we will clearly explain the competitive process through which funding will be allocated. Be clear, there will be no ring fencing of funds to particular regions. Regional roadshow events in support of the Challenge Fund process will take place over the coming months.

The crucial thing about all these projects is that they are actively designed to show this works, to level the playing field, and to help make the business case both inside and outside Government.

Of course taxpayers cash isn't everything. So we're also working on reducing

cost and ensuring the market is structured right.

Many of you have complained about the cost of laying fibre. Ofcom are working to reduce costs, to open up ducts and poles, to reduce burdens and to get the wholesale pricing structures right. They and we are determined to ensure there is a strong return on the investment that is so badly needed. We very much welcome Ofcom's efforts in these areas and hope the outcome of the Wholesale Local Access market review will further encourage fibre investment. And I welcome the laser-focus of Lord Adonis's National Infrastructure Commission which is demonstrating the case for and the terrific returns to connectivity.

To reduce some of the direct costs of roll out, on top of the business rates holiday, we have set up a barrier busting taskforce across Government.

In May 2017 the Broadband Stakeholder Group published its report 'Tackling Barriers to Telecoms Deployment'. This looked at the factors slowing down the rollout of UK Broadband, including local authority planning and the business rates regime for fibre.

As a direct response to this excellent report, our Barrier Busting Taskforce aims to reduce the costs of street-works, liberalising planning, to simplify wayleave agreements and tackle every and any barrier to rollout. We will systematically examine every issues flagged in the report, and then working with local bodies to identify solutions or to implement best practice. We are working with local authorities to standardise their approach and reduce bureaucracy, and we're prepared to change regulations if needed, on planning, transport, and wayleave rules if we need to. We want to hear from you about the practical barriers to deployment.

Like you, we want to get the cost per premise passed down.

As well as government funding, and busting barriers, we are determined to ensure that we get the market structure and incentives right.

I believe that the market for full fibre will look very different to the market for copper connections, and we want to see a fully competitive market for full fibre with a panoply of potential players. And I'm pretty sure one of the reasons so many players large and small are getting going at scale now is to play a part in that competitive market in the future.

The first action we took last year of course was to reach agreement on the future structure of BT and Openreach. I welcome that agreement, and I can already see the new Independent Board under the astute Chairmanship of Mike McTigue making a difference.

The test of the success of the legal separation will be twofold.

First, significantly increased investment by BT Group, through Openreach in the country's full fibre digital infrastructure.

And second, Openreach becoming more responsive to its industry customers, both by entering into new arrangements with customers other than BT group,

and being proactive and enthusiastic on working with others on the ground, for example opening up access to ducts and poles. Like Ofcom, we want Openreach to provide better access to data on its duct and poles so competitors can plan new networks.

While I welcome the work Openreach are doing to reposition themselves, I am concerned at the speed BT Group are moving in formally implementing the agreed split. Unless we make significant progress very soon we will have to talk to Ofcom about what would be needed to make this happen.

So, we have made progress in improving the market, to ensure we have a competitive market for our full fibre future.

But we want to make sure we get it right.

So in the coming months, we will be examining the market for investment in future connectivity in the UK, to ensure we have markets and regulations that encourage investment now and in the future. The purpose of this work, which we shall lead, will be to build on what has been achieved so far, and make sure that the conditions are as good as they can be to maximise investment in full fibre and new technologies.

This commitment to developing a full fibre Britain will make the country the best place in the world for a telecommunications company to invest, because with full fibre comes unlimited potential for business. I'm not sure if I mentioned, but we really are determined to deliver Britain's full fibre future.

Finally, I want to turn to the interaction with mobile. Because of course what really matters to people is not the mode, but the connection. A fast, reliable, secure connection, whenever you need it, wherever you live, work, and travel.

In a market that's increasingly vertically integrated, the links between fibre and mobile are increasingly clear.

At a basic level, I find it astonishing that a large proportion of 4G base stations today are connected via copper and radio links. While this may be adequate for 4G services, it makes it hard to maximise the benefits of 4G, let alone reach the fast approaching multi-gigabit demands of 5G.

And we're going to need fibre spines in much greater density to deliver that 5G connection.

I don't believe 5G and full fibre are alternatives. Even if 5G can bring great speeds to your phone, there's only ever limited spectrum, so full fibre and 5G are complementary technologies.

Our 5G strategy, published at Budget 2017, sets out how we will lead the world in 5G, and we are working on an update to be published before the end of the year.

In October, we launched a competition to select a number of projects to be

funded in 2018/19 as part of the 5G Testbeds & Trials programme.

This first phase of the programme will help encourage the development of a 5G ecosystem in the UK and builds on the foundations laid by our investment in the 5G university research announced at the Budget. As with full fibre, our aim is to demonstrate the benefits 5G can deliver for businesses and how new applications and services can be developed using 5G technology.

The full fibre and 5G programmes are being taken forward under a shared budget, and we hope to fund joint projects that explore the interplay between the two.

As I travel the world I am yet to find a country more prepared than we are for 5G. I'm absolutely determined that Britain will be at the front of the queue.

So there you have it.

I'll end by saying this.

We all want people to stop badgering us about their broadband. And I want to ensure they don't have to badger us ever again, whether they are up in space or down here on earth.

We have set these goals. We've hired some brilliant people to deliver them. We are clear-eyed in our ambition.

But we can't do it without you.

We can get the ball rolling. We can set the framework.

But it is you, the businesses of Britain, who are going to deliver the connectivity people crave.

So take this moment. Rise to the challenge. And together we will give Britain what it needs to be fit for the future.

[Press release: Chief Inspector publishes reports on the Reporting and Offender Management processes, and the Management of non-detained Foreign National Offenders](#)

The completed reports were sent to the Home Secretary in May and June 2017.

In June 2016, I was asked by the Home Secretary to consider bringing forward some work that I had included in my inspection plan for 2018/19 under the theme of 'Compliance Management and Enforcement'. The two inspection reports published today are the result of that work.

The first examines the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office's Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) system, focusing on its understanding and management of the reporting population (those individuals notified of their liability for detention and removal from the UK). It also looks at the implementation of policy and guidance relating to absconders (individuals who have failed to report and whose whereabouts are unknown).

The second examines the Home Office's management of non-detained Foreign National Offenders (FNOs) towards their removal from the UK. This second report looks in particular at the actions taken by the Home Office since 2016, following the creation of an improvement plan to address identified failings.

In both cases, I found people and processes under strain. The numbers required to report routinely mean that it is extremely difficult for staff at Reporting Centres to ensure that reporting events are 'meaningful', in terms of encouraging voluntary departures or resolving barriers to removal. Meanwhile, the removal of FNOs is regularly frustrated, often by last minute legal challenges, and monitoring non-detained FNOs effectively is a challenge and one that raises obvious public protection concerns.

The ROM system is hampered by poor communication and coordination within the Home Office. The inspection found that recording and treatment of non-compliance with reporting restrictions was inconsistent, and there was little evidence of effective action to locate absconders. The ROM report makes 6 recommendations grouped under 3 headings: achieving the stated purpose of the ROM system; concluding cases; and, managing non-compliance.

The FNO inspection makes 8 recommendations, including completion of the improvement work begun in 2016. While these will not change some of the underlying issues and risks, they are important in ensuring that processes are as efficient and effective as they can be.

I have read with interest the Home Office's responses to my recommendations, which I saw shortly before the reports were laid in Parliament. All but two of the recommendations have been accepted in full. I look forward to re-inspecting both areas of work in 2018, when I hope to be able to confirm that the necessary improvements have been made and sustained. In the case of the partially accepted and rejected recommendations, I will be looking to test that the measures to monitor and manage the risks associated with FNOs referred to in the responses are indeed effective.