

Press release: £75m investment set to revolutionise Royal Navy operations

Robots and autonomous mine-hunters are set to revolutionise Royal Navy operations after the Defence Secretary announced a £75million injection into pioneering new technology.

The funding boost will be spent on two new autonomous mine-hunter vessels with cutting-edge sonars to enable remote mine-hunting at higher range, speed and accuracy in the Gulf, as well as a new joint military and industry hi-tech accelerator, NavyX.

The Royal Navy's new autonomy and lethality accelerator will look to overhaul and turbocharge the way the Royal Navy buys the latest technology, streamlining the process and creating a brand-new facility where industry, military and academia can test, assess and purchase new equipment.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Today's announcement will not only allow the Royal Navy to rapidly harness dynamic, cutting-edge equipment at speed, but also ensure they can outpace adversaries both on the water and the sea floor.

Technology is moving faster than ever, and with the defence landscape rapidly evolving, we must ensure our Armed Forces are continually pushing the boundaries at the forefront of this change.

Secretary of State at QinetiQ's Portsmouth Technology Park. Crown Copyright

By operating autonomous mine-hunters, the Royal Navy will not only improve current capability and put sailors at less risk, but also ensure the Royal Navy can evolve to meet developing underwater threats.

Admiral Sir Philip Jones KCB ADC DL, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, said:

From the invention of the steam catapult and aircraft carrier, to the first use of sonars and torpedoes, the Royal Navy has a strong pedigree in the development, testing and introduction of new technologies that help us keep our country safe.

Across the generations, our willingness to embrace innovation has kept us one step ahead of our adversaries, and to assure our continued success on operations into the future it is vital that

the Royal Navy continues to be equipped with the latest cutting-edge capabilities we need to address the rapidly evolving challenges that pose a threat to our national interests around the globe.

During a visit to QinetiQ's Portsmouth Technology Park, which is building the UK Centre of Excellence for Maritime Mission Systems, the Defence Secretary saw first-hand the world-leading work being done in the field by British industry.

More than fifty of the world's state-of-the-art autonomous vehicles, vessels and drones were on display at the technology park, including hoverbikes, wave gliders and Gravity's 'Ironman' flying suit.

The development of NavyX, which will combine the brightest military minds, civil servants, entrepreneurs and industry specialists, comes after the Royal Navy's involvement in Unmanned Warrior, Commando Warrior and Information Warrior, which was held at Portsmouth Technology Park.

It also comes after Mr Williamson announced the first of the three Royal Navy Defence Transformation Fund programmes, an accelerated Concept and Development Phase for two new Littoral Strike Ships, in February.

After securing an extra £1.8bn for defence and overseeing the Modernising Defence Programme, the Defence Secretary has dedicated millions of pounds to transforming defence, arming the British military with innovative technology through fast-tracking new projects.

The MOD is embracing transformation at an ever-faster rate and the Transformation Fund is focused on investments in truly high-tech innovation that will create the armed forces of the future.

News story: Over 50,000 applications to the EU Settlement Scheme on opening weekend

The EU Settlement Scheme was launched on Saturday 30 March following both private and public testing of the application process which began in August 2018.

During the testing phases of the scheme there were over 230,000 applications, of which 210,000 cases have already been concluded. Since the scheme went fully live on Saturday, over 50,000 further applications have been received. This brings the total number of applications to over 280,000.

EU citizens applying to the scheme only need to complete three key steps – prove their identity, show that they live in the UK, and declare any criminal convictions. Applicants can use any laptop, tablet or mobile device to apply.

For those who want to apply entirely online, a custom identity document check app has been developed to allow applicants to verify their identity remotely and swiftly.

While the app is currently available on Android devices, the Home Secretary has confirmed it will also be available on Apple devices later this year.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Our EU Settlement Scheme is now up and running and after a successful launch, over 280,000 EU citizens have applied so that they can continue to live their lives as they do now.

I'm also pleased to confirm that Apple will make the identity document check app available on their devices by the end of the year.

The app is just one of several ways people will be able to verify their identity, including by post. There will also be over 50 locations where applicants can have their passport scanned and verified. Assisted digital support and a dedicated telephone advice and support service are also available.

To ensure the scheme is a success, the Home Office has boosted EU Settlement Scheme staff numbers to over 1,500, developed an entirely new case working system and created a new resolution centre to resolve telephone, email and online queries.

Deal or no deal, EU citizens will have until at least 31 December 2020 to apply.

Press release: Birmingham prison contract ended

- Mutual agreement with G4S to end contract early
- The costs of the ['step-in'](#) have been covered in the settlement we will receive from G4S
- Improvements to the prison continue at pace

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) took over the running of

the prison for an initial six-month period in August 2018, which was extended in February until the end of the summer.

HMPPS has now decided, with the full agreement of G4S, to end the contract and bring HMP Birmingham back in-house.

Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said:

I am confident that HMP Birmingham has made good progress since the 'step-in' but to build on this, the prison needs stability and continuity.

That is why we have mutually agreed with G4S that the public sector is better placed to drive the long-term improvements required and the contract will end.

Our priority remains the safety of prisoners and staff but this move to restore and consolidate order at one of our most challenging jails will ultimately make sure that we are better protecting the public.

Minister Stewart emphasised that this move was a response to the specific circumstances faced by HMP Birmingham and the Urgent Notification received by the Secretary of State from HM Chief Inspector of Prisons.

He added:

We need to be absolutely clear that we still believe in a mixed economy of providers with some of our private prisons among the best performing in the country.

Indeed, G4S itself is running excellent prisons at Altcourse and Oakwood, and this Government believes passionately that private providers should continue to play a crucial role in our system.

As part of the decision to bring HMP Birmingham back into the public sector:

- HMPPS has agreed a settlement with G4S paying £9.9 million to cover the additional cost of the 'step-in' action – including additional HMPPS staff. This meets the department's commitment to recover 'step-in' costs in accordance with the contract and includes a sum to cover essential maintenance works.
- G4S staff at Birmingham will transfer to HMPPS contracts on 1 July and are being supported through the transition. Trade unions are involved in

this process.

- Experienced Governor Paul Newton, who took command of the prison last August at the time of the 'step-in', will remain in post to lead the prison and steer the transformation process.

Work continues to drive-up standards at the prison and the action taken includes:

- The introduction of a new dedicated search team to detect and deter those responsible for bringing contraband into the establishment. A recent full lockdown search was highly successful in addressing contraband.
- A bolstered senior management team and more than 30 additional, experienced prison officers supporting the team on the ground.
- New safety initiatives including the roll-out of the key worker model – ensuring that each prisoner has dedicated support from a prison officer, and a refreshed violence strategy to tackle the causes of violent behaviours.
- Additional training for staff in managing vulnerable and violent offenders.
- The refurbishment of one wing which is now being repopulated. The visitors centre is also undergoing renovation and a new family strategy has been introduced.

Notes to editors:

- The Government [announced its 'step-in'](#) action in August following an Urgent Notification by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. This was for an initial six-month period.
- In February, the Prisons Minister confirmed that the 'step-in' period had been extended until the summer.

Press release: Birmingham prison contract ended

Birmingham Prison will remain under public-sector control following the Government's 'step-in', the Prisons Minister announced today.

Press release: Northern Ireland

Housing Executive Chair and Vice Chair Appointment

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon Karen Bradley MP, today announced that she has appointed Professor Peter Roberts as Chair and Mr John McMullan as Vice Chair of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) Board. In the absence of Northern Ireland Ministers, these appointments were made possible by the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act 2018.

These appointments will take effect from 1 April and will ensure that the NIHE Board can continue to deliver the vital public services within its remit for the benefit of the Northern Ireland community. The Secretary of State also announced short extensions to the terms of appointment of three NIHE Board members who represent the NI Housing Council. The terms of appointment of Councillor Philip Brett, Councillor Catherine Elattar and Alderman Bill Keery have been extended until 1 May 2019 to cover the period leading up to the local elections.

Mrs Bradley said:

My absolute priority is to see the restoration of the Executive. The people of Northern Ireland deserve nothing less. Until that is achieved I have been doing what is necessary to ensure good governance and allow critical bodies to operate effectively in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive Board plays an important role in the management and operation of the NIHE. I am pleased to make these appointments so that the Board can continue to take decisions essential to the proper functioning of the organisation and the key housing services across Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

The NIHE is a Non-Departmental Public Body of the NI Department for Communities and was established by the Housing Executive Act (Northern Ireland) 1971. Under this Act, the NIHE took over the housing responsibilities of 65 separate authorities and became Northern Ireland's overall housing authority. It is currently landlord to approximately 86,500 dwellings and is one of Northern Ireland's largest public sector organisations with a budget of over £740m and a staff of approximately 2,700. It also makes a substantial contribution to better health, education and wellbeing through housing.

Provision for the NIHE Board is set out in the Housing (Northern Ireland)

Order 1981. The principal role of the Board is to set the strategic direction for the Housing Executive and to provide stewardship of all public resources entrusted to it to implement the policies and priorities of the Minister and the Executive. The Board oversees the performance and outputs of the executive team, which is responsible for the day-to-day conduct of the business within the Housing Executive. The Board also sets the attitude and disposition of the organisation towards compliance with applicable laws and best practice.

Terms of appointment

The position of Chair attracts remuneration of £32,827 per year, plus travel and subsistence allowances for a minimum commitment of two days per week. Professor Roberts has been appointed to this role for a two year term

The position of Vice-Chair attracts remuneration of £16,311, plus travel and subsistence allowances, for a minimum commitment of one day per week. Mr McMullan has been appointed to this role for a five year term.

Biography of Appointees

Professor Peter Roberts

Professor Roberts has served on the NIHE Board since 2013. Most of his work over the past four decades has been in the field of strategic planning having worked with local and central government, councils and international bodies. He was responsible for establishing the Academy for Sustainable Communities, through which he was able to create an England-wide organisation across over 100 professional areas. He has served on a number of Boards including the First Ark Group, Audit and Risk Committee for a hospital trust and Home and Communities Agency. Professor Robert's Board experience along with his extensive knowledge and experience in various social housing roles will bring professional finance, governance and specialist experience to the NIHE Chair position. He holds no other public appointments.

Mr John McMullan

Mr McMullan is the former Chief Executive Officer of Bryson Charitable Group, a business he developed from a traditional charity into a modernised fit for purpose Social Enterprise, employing over 900 staff and delivering a range of social purposed services in NI, GB and RoI. He has served on a number of boards including as Chair of Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre. Mr McMullan's experience in governance, policy and strategy development along with other areas relevant to social housing will bring significant knowledge and specialist experience to the NIHE Vice-Chair position. He holds no other public appointments.

CPANI Code of Practice

The appointment process for the appointment of Chair and Vice Chair has been regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointment NI (CPANI) and the appointments have been made in accordance with the CPANI Code of

Practice.

Political Activity

All independent appointments are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process. However, CPANI requires the political activity of appointees to be published. Professor Roberts and Mr McMullan have had no political activity in the last 5 years.

Statutory Requirements

Provision for the NIHE Board is set out in the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. In October 2018, the Secretary of State for NI introduced legislation in Parliament; the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act 2018 received Royal Assent on 1 November. This legislation provides for the appointment to a number of public offices by the Secretary of State. The NI (Ministerial Appointment Functions) Regulations 2019 came into force on 18 February 2019. This Instrument provides for further critical appointments, including that of the NIHE Board.