

News story: First Courts & Tribunals Service Centres launched

- part of the £1 billion modernisation reforms to our courts and justice system, these service centres will provide support to people across the country
- plans also announced to transform the way we collect criminal fines to make it faster and more effective

Two cities have been chosen to house the country's first Courts & Tribunals Service Centres, which will play a key role transforming the courts and tribunals service.

The centres, in Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent, will bring together expertise in managing court and tribunal cases as they transform from traditional paper-based processes to modern digital systems.

We are trying to make justice simpler and swifter by bringing more services online, and making courts and tribunals easier to access for working people. The service centres will combine and share best practice and knowledge, so it can be easily accessed by people across the country.

The 2 centres will employ more than 300 people each, in roles that range from processing cases, and issuing court orders and hearing notices, to answering telephone and web enquiries.

Dominic Raab, Justice Minister, said:

These new administrative centres will make sure we deliver better services for those using the Courts system, whilst delivering better bang for the taxpayers' buck.

The move is part of our £1 billion reform programme to digitise the justice system – making it more sensitive for witnesses, more convenient for other users and better value for public money.

Last year HMCTS dealt with over 4.1 million criminal, civil, family and tribunal cases. As more centres open, many of the enquiries relating to these will be channelled through our new Courts & Tribunals Service Centres.

Bringing knowledge together means a better service. The Loughborough HMCTS contact centre, which deals with telephone calls from many county courts, has improved the speed and reliability of responses, and has very good feedback from those using it.

These service centres go beyond what has been done before, because they go beyond telephone-answering. They underpin wider changes in how and where the justice system can be accessed. People can now access easy-to-use services

online – including applying for a divorce, making a benefit appeal, entering a plea for a speeding offence – making the justice system more open to working people.

The new service centres are being planned based on research into what users want and need, and in consultation with judges, magistrates and legal professionals, as well as agencies that represent the public and support people with cases going through the justice system.

The centres are a fundamental part of the way in which justice services will be provided in future in the £1 billion investment in court reform, which will ensure that more citizens will find it easier to use the justice system. That £1bn is made up of £855 million to modernise and digitise the courts, and £240 million to deliver a fully connected criminal courtroom.

We are also transforming the way we collect criminal fines to make it faster and more effective. Our hard-working staff have been hampered by an ICT system which was created in 1989. The new operating model will improve efficiency, reduce delays and increase the amount of fines collected. At present staff are spread out in over 50 bases across the country. Today, we've announced a proposal to consolidate all of their knowledge and expertise by moving them into 3 centres – in Leeds, Runcorn and Cwmbran.

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 Féin, 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 Féin, 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 do whatever is necessary to provide that.

And I commend this statement to the House.

[Consultation outcome: Crouch and Roach Estuaries protected sites: consultation outcome](#)

Updated: Link to consultation outcome added.

This consultation is in 2 parts and is part of the Mid Essex Coast Phase 3.

1. Formal notification of additional land at Crouch and Roach Estuaries Site of Special Scientific Interest.
2. The proposal to extend the boundaries of Crouch and Roach Estuaries Ramsar site and Crouch and Roach Estuaries Special Protection Area. The proposed extensions include the same area of land.

[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](#)