

# Press release: Government calls on technology firms to help tackle the UK's biggest challenges

Today Minister for Implementation, Oliver Dowden, will announce the first round of competitions for tech specialists to tackle social challenges at the government's flagship digital conference, Sprint 18.

The competitions will be delivered using the £20m GovTech fund launched by the Prime Minister in November 2017.

Contributing to each of the government's [Grand Challenges](#) – the data economy; clean growth; healthy ageing and the future of mobility – the competition is designed to incentivise Britain's tech firms to come up with innovative solutions to improve public services.

The Government Digital Service is challenging tech experts to find solutions for specific issues including tackling loneliness and how to reduce plastic waste.

The first of these competitions opens on Monday 14 May and runs for six weeks, with the remaining competitions being launched in subsequent months.

Tech firms bidding to the fund will have free rein to create truly innovative fixes. Winning companies will be awarded up to £50,000 to develop their ideas.

The companies providing the best potential solutions will then be awarded research and development contracts of up to £500,000 to build prototypes. These solutions will then be available to the public sector to purchase.

Minister for Implementation, Oliver Dowden, in the Cabinet Office said:

Our modern Industrial Strategy will cement Britain's position as a world-leader in digital innovation and this Government is committed to providing more opportunities for tech businesses – including small firms – to access public procurement contracts. The GovTech fund encourages firms to find innovative ways to fix the big social problems we all face – loneliness, plastic pollution and national security.

Through emerging technologies, this fund will elevate British companies onto a global market while helping to deliver outstanding public services and improving lives for people.

The first GovTech competition opens on Monday 14 May for six weeks – see more here. It will be overseen by a dedicated GovTech team which will operate at

the heart of Government and oversee the £20 million fund.

The GovTech assessment panel is made up of representatives from Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), The Government Digital Service (GDS), Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), HM Treasury, the Innovate UK (the UK's innovation agency), and the devolved Northern Ireland administration.

Sprint 18 will bring together digital and technology leaders to hear about the work taking place across the public sector to make government work better through the themes of Transformation, Collaboration and Innovation. Discussions will include how the UK is using its status as a world leader in digital government to help other countries, through the recently announced Global Digital Marketplace, and how departments are using Government as a Platform, which uses digital services to make government work better for citizens.

The challenges, which will all be launched in coming months, are:

Identifying terrorist still imagery (Home Office). Home Office research shows that more than two-thirds of terrorist propaganda disseminated online is still imagery. This project will support both Government analysis of, and broader efforts to remove, this harmful material.

Tracking waste through the waste chain, submitted by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). A new technological approach could help record, check and track waste, helping boost productivity, reduce costs, and protect both human health and the environment.

Tackling loneliness and rural isolation, submitted by Monmouthshire Council. The government recognises that rural transport is vital to local communities, and businesses. A technological solution, exploiting vehicles with spare capacity could support rural economies.

Cutting traffic congestion, submitted by Department for Transport (DfT). Greater collection and new analysis of data could help target interventions to cut congestion.

Local authorities have large numbers of council vehicles crossing their areas every day. If they can be equipped with innovative data capture systems, they could understand potholes, litter, recycling, parking, air quality and more in real-time, every day, for no added cost. This could mean reduced service delivery costs and better local services.