

Press release: Countdown to high speed broadband for all begins

High speed broadband connectivity for the entire UK moved one step closer today, following the laying of legislation setting the design of the broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO).

Ofcom now has up to 2 years to implement the scheme, meaning that by 2020, everyone in the UK will have a legal right to an affordable connection of at least 10 Mbps, from a designated provider, no matter where they live or work, up to a reasonable cost threshold.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Ensuring access to reliable, high speed broadband is one of the most important things we can do to support our rural communities and businesses in Wales.

The digital sector has become an integral part of the Welsh economy and the rapid growth of many digital businesses means that reliable and fast access to broadband is vital in all communities in Wales. This new commitment means that no matter where you live in Wales, residents will have the right to at least 10 Mbps.

Improving connectivity for homes and businesses is a central pillar of this Government's efforts to strengthen the Welsh economy, and today's announcement means that everyone can legally expect a minimum level of service from their providers, wherever they are.

Digital minister Margot James said:

In the 21st century, accessing the internet is a necessity not a luxury. We are building a Britain that is fit for the future, and we're now putting high speed broadband on a similar footing as other essential services like water and phone lines.

The Government believes that only a regulatory USO offers sufficient certainty and the legal enforceability that is required to ensure high speed broadband access for the whole of the UK by 2020. 95% of the UK already has access to superfast broadband, and the USO will provide a "digital safety net" for those in the most remote and hardest to reach places.

The specification for the USO design includes:

- A download speed of at least 10Mbps, with quality requirements for upload speeds, responsiveness of connections, and data cap; this could

be delivered by a range of fixed line and wireless technologies;

- A per premises cost threshold of £3,400, enabling coverage to around 99.8% of premises. Consumers outside this threshold will be able to get a satellite connection, or would have the option to cover the excess themselves (in the same way the universal service right to a landline telephone works);
- A requirement for demand aggregation, so that people within an area can combine their per premise cost thresholds, to ensure that as many people who want to get connected do get connected;
- For it to be funded by industry rather than public funding; and
- Uniform pricing so that those connected under the USO do not have to pay more for similar services to consumers served commercially.

Although the USO minimum speed will initially be set at at least 10Mbps, this will be kept under review and we expect it to be increased over time. Ofcom advise that 10Mbps is the speed required for a typical household's use of internet access to services such as web browsing, email and video services.

Government and Ofcom are now working to put in place a number of processes to implement the USO as quickly as possible. This includes the running of a process to designate the universal service provider(s) who will be required to offer the service, giving both small and large providers a chance to put their names forward for consideration. Ofcom will also be responsible for establishing an industry fund that will support delivery of connections made under the USO.

Following the creation of new powers when the Government passed the Digital Economy Act 2017, the Government consulted on the design of the USO. The detailed response to this consultation has also been published today.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

1. Ofcom's Connected Nations 2017 report shows that the number of premises without 10Mbps broadband download and 1Mbps upload speeds is 1.1 million, or 4% of premises, compared with 1.6 million or 6% of premises in 2016
2. The designated provider will be under statutory obligation to connect people up to the cost threshold, and to connect them if they are willing to pay excess costs above the threshold.

[News story: NHS gets funding green light for new buildings, wards and](#)

beds

The funding was announced today by Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Jeremy Hunt. It is the biggest investment of its kind in the NHS in over 10 years. The NHS will spend the money on programmes to meet local demand, such as new urgent care centres and refurbishing mental health facilities.

The Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin sustainability and transformation partnership (STP) will receive £300 million to transform local hospital services. It proposes to use the funding to develop an emergency care site and a separate planned care site, with 24-hour urgent care centres at both sites.

The remainder of the money will be awarded to 39 smaller projects, including:

- £6 million to upgrade services of 8 trusts across Yorkshire
- £8 million for a new health and wellbeing centre to join up local NHS services in Kent
- £13 million for 2 new urgent care centres in Newton Abbot and Torquay, and refurbishment of Torbay Hospital's A&E department
- several million pounds for local NHS services in London, including one project worth up to £11 million

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Jeremy Hunt said:

As the NHS approaches its 70th birthday, we are backing it with one of the largest capital programmes in NHS history. As well as a whole new emergency care development in Shropshire, we are backing local NHS services with new buildings, beds and wards so that staff who have been working incredibly hard over winter can have confidence we are expanding capacity for the future.

Further major projects are also under consideration across the country and we intend to announce one large scale scheme the size of the Shrewsbury and Telford plan every year going forward based on high-quality plans coming forward from local NHS leaders.

The government is also releasing £150 million to support the NHS's work to become more efficient. This additional money will be used to:

- improve the use of a digital programme that helps the NHS use its workforce better
- enable more efficient use of energy in hospitals, which could save the NHS £12 million a year in the first 3 years
- improve pharmacy IT and administration systems to reduce medication errors and improve patient safety

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Speech: Call for Humanitarian Assistance in Syria

Thank you Mr President. Thank you for being here today to underscore the vital importance of this topic, and thank you particularly for your very powerful statement. The United Kingdom supports your call for ICC referral.

Thank you also to the Under-Secretary-General for your continued efforts to keep the Council informed of the need for protection and registration. I support their calls. I will not rehearse the catalogue of suffering that we have heard so eloquently today but that omission should not be taken as any indication that the United Kingdom is not as horrified as others by what is happening on the ground. Specifically Mr President, it's diabolical that access is actually worse in the face of such suffering. Diabolical is a strong word, but there are no others to describe what is happening. The worst destruction and suffering has continued in Eastern Ghouta. Those who support Assad have not taken steps to help stop the violence. Instead of which Assad and his spotters have violated the strong words of this Council in Resolution 2401. This makes a mockery of the Council's authority as Ambassador Delattre

set out. Since the 11 March, an estimated 100,000 people have left Eastern Ghouta and are in make-shift reception sites in rural Damascus. Thousands more have been bused to Idlib. Because there are no independent monitoring or provisions for civilians' safety, those fleeing and those staying remain vulnerable, and at risk of mistreatment and abuse by the regime, including being detained, disappeared or separated from their families. Humanitarians, health workers and first responders on the ground report that the regime is deliberately targeting them. This is illegal and those that help the regime are complicit in that illegality.

The situation continues even for those who are left behind. An estimated 150,000 civilians remain in Eastern Ghouta. They suffer from acute food shortages and lack of medical supplies. They are afraid, and above all, they remember how the regime punished the civilians who fled from Eastern Aleppo in December 2016. This is why Ambassador Al-Otaibi's call for protection and registration is so urgent. We welcome UN plans to scale up support to deal with the dire situations in the IDP camps and collective shelters. We call on Russia to use its influence with the regime to ensure that the UN and its partners can also provide assistance and protection for those who remain in Eastern Ghouta.

Whether civilians choose to stay or leave, it is essential that they be protected against attack and have access to the essentials to survive. This is not just a plea on the grounds of humanity; it is a requirement under international humanitarian law. It is the job of the Council and all members of the Council to uphold international humanitarian law. Those who side with regime in its actions are themselves guilty of violating that law.

Mr President, I would like in closing to highlight two further areas. The suffering of the Syrian people continues in Idlib, where civilians have been under attack by regime forces for many years. More than a million internally displaced Syrians live there, including those who have fled Eastern Ghouta. In Afrin, we recognise Turkey's legitimate interest in the security of its borders, but at the same time we remain concerned about the impact of operations on the humanitarian situation. And my Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have raised the need for both protection of civilians and access with President Erdoğan and his Ministers. It was good to hear from the Under-Secretary-General that there may at last be signs of progress in Afrin.

Mr President, after seven years of conflict, over 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria. The Assad regime has created the situation and is now preventing humanitarian actors from relieving some of the horror it has inflicted. We call on Russia to use its influence to ensure that, at a minimum, the UN can fulfil its mandate to ensure humanitarian assistance and protection for Syrians on the basis of need, regardless of any other considerations.

Mr President, I was at Geneva in 2012. I think we all feel that that was a huge missed opportunity in the light of events. The situation has escalated every year since that time, and as the Undersecretary General said, the level of access is worse. The Council has a small opportunity to put measures in place to reduce the risk of reprisals. As you said Mr President, if this

Council cannot do it, who can?

Thank you.

News story: Third Tide-Class Tanker Arrives in UK

The arrival of RFA Tidesurge comes just weeks after her sister ship, RFA Tidespring, met up at sea with aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth for the first time.

The 39,000-tonne tankers can carry up to 19,000 cubic metres of fuel and 1,400 cubic metres of fresh water in support of Royal Navy operations all over the world.

The detailed customisation work to prepare RFA Tidesurge and her sister ships for operations is being undertaken at the A&P shipyard in Falmouth, sustaining around 300 jobs.

Minister for Defence Procurement Guto Bebb said:

The arrival of RFA Tidesurge in Cornwall marks another key milestone in the Tide Class programme. Tidesurge will soon join her sister ships in providing the integral support which powers our warships and helps our Royal Navy maintain a truly global presence.

While in Falmouth RFA Tidesurge will be fitted with UK specific armour, self-defence weaponry and communications systems, with the total UK work content, including A&P, in the Tide Class programme worth around £150 million and sustaining further jobs at 27 UK-based companies.

The customisation work is expected to take around four months after which RFA Tidesurge will begin final sea trials before entering service in Autumn this year.

Meanwhile, RFA Tidespring, which was preparing to conduct a Replenishment at Sea (RAS) refuelling when it met with HMS Queen Elizabeth in February, is currently acting as the training tanker for the Navy's Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) and will take part in exercise Joint Warrior in the Spring. RFA Tiderace, which is currently docked at A&P Falmouth, is undergoing preparations for her capability trials which are expected to commence in early April.

Sir Simon Bollom, Chief of Materiel (Ships) at Defence Equipment and Support, the MOD's procurement organisation, said:

I'm proud to say that the delivery of the tanker programme will provide vital support for the Royal Navy, providing it with fuel and fresh water, while also being able to undertake a wide range of maritime operations, including humanitarian relief.

The fourth of the Tide Class vessels – RFA Tideforce – is expected to be delivered later this year.

A&P Group has held the contract to support and maintain RFA ships at home and abroad since 2008. Under the Cluster Support Programme, A&P Group provides maintenance support to groups of MOD vessels, which include RFA Argus and the RFA Bay Class vessels Mounts Bay, Cardigan Bay and Lyme Bay.