

News story: Ground-breaking satellite projects will transform society

Ordnance Survey MasterMap.

The electric vehicle charging point project, led by Energeo Ltd working with Bournemouth Borough Council, will combine satellite imagery, Open Data, and Machine Learning to deliver an interactive map based user interface. This will help the council identify charge point requirements via visualisation of different features and influences on EV roll out, such as existing charge points, residential driveway availability and size, and footpath width and potential obstructions.

The eight new projects are part of the UK Space Agency's [Space for Smarter Government Programme](#), which demonstrates the potential of using satellite technology to solve challenges faced by the public sector.

Satellite data and applications which use space have the potential to change the way the public sector works, leading to better services and lower costs. This in turn could help boost the growth of the UK space sector, which is already worth £13.7 billion to the economy and provides around 40,000 jobs.

The announcement comes on the day the Space Industry Act received Royal Assent, which will unlock an exciting era of British space innovation, exploration and investment. The Act will enable the first commercial space launch from UK soil in history, creating the potential for hundreds of highly-skilled jobs and bringing in billions of pounds for the economy.

Science Minister Sam Gyimah said:

"These projects demonstrate the potential of satellite technology to benefit life on Earth with innovative solutions to challenges ranging from monitoring plastic waste in the sea to supporting the roll out of charge points for electric cars.

"As set out in our Industrial Strategy, the UK Space Agency is working together with industry to ensure the UK thrives in the commercial space age. The Space for Smarter Government Programme is transforming the way the public sector works. It will stimulate innovation and growth, while helping the public sector save money and improve decision making."

The Environment Agency will collaborate on two projects, one of which deploys satellites and drones in the battle against marine waste and the other will use satellite data to monitor flood defences in the Thames Estuary.

Dr John Kupiec, Environment Agency's Innovation Manager, said:

"The Environment Agency is delighted to support the development of these innovative projects that will help us work towards protecting the environment

and promoting sustainable development.

“The Government’s 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment highlighted the problem of plastics in the environment – particularly in marine and coastal environments. By using Earth Observation and other novel technologies we hope to accomplish our common goals in reducing plastic and other waste pollution.”

The UK Space Agency is providing training to policymakers as well as access to data, wider expertise and market capability as part of the programme. Working alongside public sector partners, academia and industry can help bring new satellite applications to market to meet UK needs.

The full list of projects, which have received a combined total of more than £700,000 in funding, can be found below:

Project title

City Level Energy Analysis for Electric Vehicle Charging Points

Funding

£59,898

End user

Bournemouth Borough Council

Lead organisation

EnergEO Limited

Energeo’s CLEAN EV service will utilise geospatial Big Data (such as satellite imagery), Open Data, and Machine Learning in conjunction with strategic textual information. It will deliver an interactive, web based tool, designed to support roll out of Electric Vehicle charge point (EVCP) infrastructure in urban environments via intuitive visualisation, contextualisation and analysis of data in a map based user interface.

Public sector end users will be able to efficiently identify charge point requirements via visualisation of different features and influences on EV roll out, such as existing charge points, residential driveway availability and size, and footpath width and potential obstructions, in order to provide an accurate overview of current and potential EVCP preparedness. In addition, users will be able to identify specific features manually through the map interface, or run queries in order to model pre-determined scenarios that will support the strategic decision making process.

Project title

Transport modelling based on PNT data

Funding

£59,950

End user

Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset

Lead organisation

City Science

This project takes a range of position, navigation and timing (PNT) data and assesses the feasibility of its use to provide accurate and informative outputs within a transport planning context. Using PNT data, the project will investigate issues such as the scheduling and impact of HGV deliveries, the associated impact on congestion, bus timetable reliability and the distribution of journeys at different times of day. It will do this by integrating PNT data with traffic simulation and modelling models.

The outputs will be a data-based understanding of existing and future pinch points across a range of transport modes that are robust, fit-for-purpose and meet the needs of the local authority.

Project title

Urban healthy living using satellite enabled air pollution monitoring and mitigation

Funding

£123,582.09

End user

Cherwell District Council, Oxfordshire

Lead organisation

Geospatial Insight Ltd

This project addresses how air pollution exposure affects wide swathes of public sector policy and programmes. Management and mitigation of adverse air pollution exposure by integrating space-enabled technologies with other public-sector initiatives offers prospects for smarter, more efficient operations, risk reduction and enhanced policy delivery in many key areas, notably healthcare and urban air quality management.

Geospatial Insight Ltd will lead a team of innovative SMEs to work in partnership with leading public authority stakeholders to demonstrate beneficial disruptive interventions in primary and secondary healthcare provision and urban planning through the management of ambient air pollution.

Project title

Quantifying Congested Maritime Environments

Funding

£60,000

End user

United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO)

Lead organisation

SCISYS UK Ltd

Improved understanding of patterns of life in congested maritime environments will allow greater situational awareness for users of maritime waterways. The well-established Automatic Identification System (AIS) can determine movements of large vessels, but smaller vessels without AIS are less well understood and remain difficult to quantify. Some vessels in this category are visible from space using radar and optical satellite imagery, which may also capture tidal and seasonal changes.

SCISYS's novel approach involves automatically mining through archives of satellite data to build up a picture of spatial and temporal activity, taking variations in data availability into account. The main advantage is that this approach locates all objects of a certain size, irrespective of their type or if they are broadcasting an AIS signal, thereby delivering value-add information to existing maritime products and services. The United Kingdom Hydrographic Office will partner SCISYS for this feasibility study.

Project title

Space Derived Condition Assessment tool for CNI Structural Risk Management

Funding

£172,974

End user

Environment Agency

Lead organisation

Geomatic Ventures Limited

This project aims to provide a basis for the regular remote assessment of structural condition for Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) asset owners such as power stations, railways, roads, gas storage facilities, runways, flood defences and water treatment works. It will provide early warning

indicators of potential engineering failures through absolute motion vector mapping using a combination of satellite based radar with satellite navigation.

The project uses satellite based remote sensing to provide initial wide area, medium resolution screening and identify relevant site criticalities. Using national threshold standards it will target higher resolution deformation studies. An asset risk index will be developed so that the remote sensing techniques can be applied on soft and hard targets and used to inform asset condition across a range of asset types.

Project title

GeoInt Service for Marine Litter

Funding

£60,000

End user

Environment Agency

Lead organisation

ARGANS Ltd

The GeoInt Service for Marine Litter is a platform developed by ARGANS Ltd, aiming to integrate big data sources about marine litter from satellites, drones and citizen science initiatives on a single platform. The goal is to provide synoptic information to the public, voluntary and private sectors with an interest and decision-making capability to support policy-making, cleaning, prevention operations and long-term monitoring.

Local, regional and national authorities, NGOs, foundations, conservation societies, waste management companies and industry especially those focused on the circular economy will benefit from this service. ARGANS Ltd has received end user support from the Environment Agency, Cornwall Council, and European Space Agency.

Project title

AI Satellite Pluvial flood forecasting

Funding

£129,922

End user

Greater London Authority

Lead organisation

Ambiental Environmental Assessment Ltd

This project aims to help the public sector to increase the uptake of satellite and Earth Observation data via sustainable 'live' services relating to surface water flood forecasting, and associated dynamic mapping of changing patterns of green space in urban areas.

The goal is to enable smarter, more efficient operations, reduce risk/cost and enhance the quality of decision-making within the public sector in real-time. A novel aspect of the project involves utilising Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance situational awareness and provide actionable intelligence.

Project title

E0-derived soil moisture estimation

Funding

£55,900

End user

Network Rail

Lead organisation

CGG NPA Satellite Mapping

This project will improve the understanding of soil moisture evaluation from Earth Observation (E0) data. Soil moisture can have significant impacts on asset management within the rail sector. The occurrence of earthwork failures have been shown to correspond with ground (soil) saturation and weather conditions reported at the time of failure. NPA's E0 experts believe that soil moisture estimation algorithms developed for use with Sentinel-1 data could facilitate the remote estimation of soil moisture. If successful, this capability should improve Network Rail's ability to identify the most at-risk parts of its network. It is hoped that this solution will also benefit other public sector organisations concerned with asset management. In addition to working with Network Rail as a public sector end user, NPA will also receive support from the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and British Geological Survey (BGS).

For more information about the work of SSGP and to view other case studies, please visit the [Space for Smarter Government Programme website](#), or contact the team at ssgp@ukspaceagency.bis.gsi.gov.uk

Press release: Salisbury attack: Joint statement from the leaders of France, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom

We, the leaders of France, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom, abhor the attack that took place against Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, UK, on 4 March 2018. A British police officer who was also exposed in the attack remains seriously ill, and the lives of many innocent British citizens have been threatened. We express our sympathies to them all, and our admiration for the UK police and emergency services for their courageous response.

This use of a military-grade nerve agent, of a type developed by Russia, constitutes the first offensive use of a nerve agent in Europe since the Second World War. It is an assault on UK sovereignty and any such use by a State party is a clear violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and a breach of international law. It threatens the security of us all.

The United Kingdom briefed thoroughly its allies that it was highly likely that Russia was responsible for the attack. We share the UK assessment that there is no plausible alternative explanation, and note that Russia's failure to address the legitimate request by the UK government further underlines its responsibility. We call on Russia to address all questions related to the attack in Salisbury. Russia should in particular provide full and complete disclosure of the Novichok programme to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Our concerns are also heightened against the background of a pattern of earlier irresponsible Russian behaviour. We call on Russia to live up to its responsibilities as a member of the UN Security Council to uphold international peace and security.

Speech: Hard as well as soft power: the case for modern defence

1. BRITAIN'S PROUD HISTORY

The United Kingdom has a proud history on the world stage. We helped defeat tyranny in two world wars and communism in the Cold War. We have shielded the

most vulnerable from Kosovo to Sierra Leone. We helped liberate millions from the shackles of oppression and exported democracy, tolerance and justice around the world. In the process, Britain alongside our allies ushered in a period of peace and prosperity across our continent unparalleled in its history

2. OUR ARMED FORCES ARE STILL DELIVERING FOR US TODAY

Today, our Armed Forces continue to uphold this proud British tradition. They are keeping us safe across the world. Our pilots are destroying terrorist targets in Iraq and Syria and policing Eastern European skies against an increasing threat from Russia.

Our soldiers stand sentinel with our NATO Allies in Estonia and Poland to deter this threat. We are strengthening the security of Afghanistan and, in South Sudan, helping establish stability and giving democracy the chance to grow and flourish.

Our sailors are countering international piracy, policing our waters and securing safe passage for the ships that support our global trade.

Beneath the waves our nuclear submarines go undetected, our submariners on patrol every day of every year providing our ultimate defence against the most deadly dangers to our way of life

In the last few weeks alone our forces have provided vital assistance in the wake of Storm Emma and are using their expertise to assist the ongoing criminal investigation following the horrific attack in Salisbury.

I want to thank each and every one of them for the dedication and commitment they have shown our nation.

3. THREATS INCREASING

Continuing to deliver for the Armed Forces is imperative – especially in a world where the threats are growing.

When it comes to non-state actors we're seeing a generational shift with terrorist organisations able to access increasingly sophisticated weapons.

And state-based dangers are increasing. Back in 2010 we did not believe they posed us a credible threat. With the benefit of hindsight, this can, at best, be described as naive.

China is pushing for superpower status, restructuring the People's Liberation Army, pushing towards the Indian Ocean and employing "sharp power" including military, media and economic pressure against any challenger.

Iran's proxy military presence in Iraq, Syria and Yemen is well known.

North Korea has demonstrated an active global cyber capability while its

nuclear actions are destabilising the international order, flouting decades' worth of non-proliferation treaties.

And then there is Russia.

At a time when its economy is under pressure, it is still prioritising military expenditure, investing in highly capable equipment across all domains including long-range surface to air missiles, T-90 tanks, new advanced submarines, long-range precision strike systems and ISKANDER ballistic missiles, a new range of BLACKJACK strategic bombers and the new nuclear systems President Putin recently boasted about in his state of the nation address.

What is also clear is that the Kremlin is ripping up the international rule book. Using its growing hybrid capabilities to subvert, undermine, and influence countries around the world. Its cyber operations are active and brazen. It uses social media to muddy the waters and spread confusion.

Last year Russia's military intelligence organisation directed the NotPetya ransomware activity. Overwhelming systems in Ukraine from its power grid to its postal service and causing hundreds of millions of pounds of damage to companies around the world including here in the UK

But Russia is capable of much more. It is already increasingly using proxies to undermine sovereign states. Its involvement in the Ukraine conflict has cost tens of thousands of lives.

In Syria, we're seeing a humanitarian crisis where Russia is using private military companies such as the Wagner Group to reduce their liability and limit criticism on the world stage.

Meanwhile, Russia is also using its operatives insidiously to interfere in the political processes of other nations.

Security authorities have compelling evidence to show Russia was involved in the attempted 2016 coup in Montenegro, just prior to that country's joining NATO.

And, if we doubted the threat Russia poses to our citizens, we only have to look at the shocking example of their reckless attack in Salisbury.

4. WE MUST HAVE THE CAPABILITY

But against this backdrop of threats, we shouldn't forget that our Armed Forces remain truly world class and we are giving them the capabilities to respond

For example, we know the chemical threat doesn't just come from Russia but from other actors so we're evolving the capability to meet that danger.

I made the decision to offer the anthrax vaccine to our forces at the highest readiness providing them with vital protection against a deadly danger

And today I can announce we are building on our world class expertise at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory in Porton Down.

We are investing £48 million in a new Chemical Weapons Defence Centre to maintain our cutting edge in chemical analysis and defence.

We've brought together Defence's world-renowned explosive ordnance expertise with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear specialists.

And we are continuing to invest and explore new ways and new capabilities to deal with this threat.

More broadly, our Armed Forces are internationally recognised as having an almost matchless combination of capability and experience, able to field a well-equipped Army division, with armoured brigades, strike brigades, and an air assault brigade, able to project power at distance through an expeditionary air group, based on the state-of-the-art Typhoon and the new F35 Lightning II that will soon embark on our new aircraft carriers.

Those carriers, in turn, will form part of a hard-hitting maritime task group including modern destroyers, frigates, submarines and commando forces.

All this plus the world's best Special Forces and some of the most advanced intelligence gathering and analytical capabilities in the Alliance.

These are all the hallmarks of a serious military nation:

able to conduct first night, first strike attacks with the technology to go into contested air, sea or land space to project power at range from the UK and make a major contribution to deterring threats not just in the Euro-Atlantic area but across the globe.

Many of these forces are on operations and missions today, we are making a major contribution to the campaign that has crippled Daesh, where we have helped to train over 60,000 Iraqi Security Forces, seen the first UK use of offensive cyber in combat and our airforce is operating at an intensity not seen in more than 25 years

We're training the Afghan and Nigerian security forces and even the US Marine Corps.

And this month we have deployed HMS Trenchant to the Arctic with the US Navy on ICEX 2018 – confirming our ability to operate under the ice.

Our operational experience and prowess is the reason the UK has played an important leadership role in NATO since its formation.

The reason we lead a range of international divisions and operations right around the globe.

And the reason we're the preferred operational partner for other top tier Western militaries, particularly the US and France who also acknowledge they too must modernise to stay ahead of our adversaries

5. THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

But, after a long period of relative peace, threats are increasing again.

So we have arrived at a profound moment in our history.

A crossroads where the choice before us as a nation is simple.

To sit back and let events overtake us.

Or step forward.

Seizing the moment, as we leave the European Union, to shape our vision for a bolder, more prosperous Britain.

A Britain proud of its past and confident of its future.

A Britain ready to reassert its right to do global good in a dangerous and unpredictable world.

A Britain able to protect our security and prosperity at home and abroad

After all, our Armed Forces are the face of Global Britain, enhancing our international reputation, epitomising everything that is great about our nation.

We talk about soft power and we must acknowledge the amazing work of the Foreign Office and DFID, but also of business and organisations like the British Council, in promoting Britain's values around the world.

Our Armed Forces work with them delivering aid in the wake of Hurricane Irma minesweeping in the Gulf and bringing medical support to fight Ebola in West Africa.

But let's be clear soft power only works because hard power stands behind it.

And that's what our Armed Forces deliver and why they are so important to our future.

That's why this is our moment to retain our competitive advantage and invest in hard power capabilities

6. MODERNISING DEFENCE PROGRAMME

And that is why we have launched our Modernising Defence Programme.

It will make sure our country can respond to the changing character of warfare and can deter and, if necessary, contest the new threats we face to British interests demonstrating to potential adversaries that their efforts to harm the UK are futile and not worth the costs they will incur.

So our Modernising Defence Programme will give us a more productive, more lethal, harder-hitting Joint Force able to counter conventional threats and

deal with the new challenges of asymmetric conflict. Building on our existing plans for the future of our Armed Forces.

It will balance routine every day capabilities vital to fulfilling day-to-day tasks with highly sophisticated new equipment, using technology and different approaches to counter the full range of threats to our security and to be able to operate freely in all five domains, land, sea, air, space and cyber

It will prioritise game-changing technologies giving our service personnel the edge in combat.

In practice this will mean taking our intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability to the next level, hoovering up information from beneath the waves, from space, from across the increasingly important electro-magnetic spectrum finding out what our enemies are doing in high-definition and providing artificial intelligence – enabling analysis that can stay ahead in a fast-moving world

It will mean accelerating the development of our innovative 77 Brigade – those reservists and regulars who give us the ability to win the information war – so we create and counter the narratives so central to modern conflict

It will mean investing in new more advanced and more capable armoured vehicles, more drones as well as stealth fighters and state-of-the-art anti-submarine ships in new autonomous systems – in areas like mine hunting – to enhance the protection we can provide to the Royal Navy and our NATO allies and in offensive cyber developing our capability, working in partnership with GCHQ.

Today I can announce we will be spending almost £4million with Thales and General Dynamics Land Systems-UK to deliver the Ajax Shot Detection System which can sense enemy gunfire and protect troops using our next generation armoured vehicles.

But we'll be going further developing and embedding new approaches to warfighting protecting and enhancing our information networks to give our commanders the edge over our adversaries and pursuing technological 'big bets' in big data, artificial intelligence and novel weapons.

All the while building innovation and risk tolerance into our thinking, planning and operating.

So that's my vision:

A modernised force.

Fit for the future.

Delivering the hard power to complement Britain's soft power.

Strong, balanced and innovative Armed Forces, equipped with cutting edge capabilities.

Operating confidently in the new domains of warfare.

Preparing us for the unpredictable.

Keeping British citizens safe wherever they are.

Fulfilling our global ambitions and defending Britain's national interests.

Our Modernising Defence Programme will make sure we continue leading in NATO.

Continue to be a capable and reliable contributor to missions led by close allies and partners but just as importantly continue to act independently or, lead multinational missions when the need arises.

And this weekend I will be attending a major exercise of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force – bringing together the capabilities of nine nations that allow us to respond more rapidly and pack a more powerful punch in times of crisis.

7. STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY

Our Modernising Defence Programme is also about our prosperity.

You cannot have prosperity without security.

What better illustration of that fact than our iconic hosts in Filton today – Rolls Royce.

The very embodiment of cutting edge, world leading technology, one of our largest suppliers of defence aerospace engines, and a driver of local economic growth, as an employer of more than 22,000 people across the UK.

Together with thousands of other brilliant British businesses they form an industry supporting one in every two hundred jobs in the UK and providing high-quality training and apprenticeships that in just over a decade generated more than £73 billion in exports.

Our Modernising Defence Programme will support the growth and competitiveness of the defence sector, helping to create and sustain jobs by transforming our partnership with industry.

It will allow us to deliver cutting-edge capability more effectively bring more small and medium sized enterprises into the supply chain encourage greater innovation and deliver long-term value whilst we drive a harder bargain for the goods and services we buy.

Since strong defence underpins our nation's prosperity, I have invited Philip Dunne to conduct a review to help demonstrate it is far more than an insurance policy, it's an investment in jobs at home and exports abroad.

He understands this sector extremely well and also brings an important independent perspective.

8. SUMMARY ON MDP

This work on the Modernising Defence Programme, delivering the right capabilities for our Armed Forces, making sure we remain a leading voice on the world stage, supporting economic growth and creating a stronger and more strategic partnership with industry will be substantially completed by the time of the NATO Summit in July, at which point we will be in a position to share some headline conclusions

I will be saying more in the weeks ahead about my vision for the Armed Forces we want to create.

I hope to engage with many of you between now and then, and would encourage you to take part in our public consultation.

9. CONCLUSION

But let's be clear – after 1990, we believed the world was going to become a safer and better place with every year that passed.

Just as we have believed there would be only one superpower.

But, as we have seen increasingly clearly over the last few years, the reality is rapidly changing.

In every continent of the world there are not just extremists but states willing to undermine our values, ideas, and everything we stand for.

To deal with this challenge we need to ensure that soft power has the hard power to back it up.

As we take a new approach to Defence in a post-Brexit world we must work harder to explain why it matters to the nation.

When I visited the Parachute Regiment recently I was told something that's stuck with me:

"Knowledge dispels fear"

So let's not give into the demons of doubt

Instead let us be confident.

Let us be determined.

And let us be resolute in our belief that, by using all our power, hard and soft, Britain will continue bringing light to a darkening world.

News story: Extremism Commissioner confirms plans for 2018

Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism, Sara Khan, has today (15 March) set out her plans to engage and consult, produce a comprehensive study and make recommendations to government.

The government has said countering extremism is one of the most significant and important challenges of our generation.

The move follows the formal launch of the Commission after [the Home Office published a charter](#) confirming how the government will work with the independent Commission, and laid a written ministerial statement.

Sara will spend the coming weeks sharing her plans with activists and frontline workers, community leaders and extremism experts in a series of meetings, visits and roundtables.

Commission plan for 2018:

- The Commission will be seeking input to its work from the full range of voices required to tackle a problem that affects so much of our society. This will include public consultation, discussions with government bodies, and insights from experts, academics and think tanks. The Commission will publish a regular update which will summarise its engagement activity.
- The Commission will produce a comprehensive study that exposes the scale and consequences of extremism in this country alongside the great work already being done to tackle it.
- The Commission will challenge the whole of society on what more can be done, and publish recommendations to the Home Secretary by the end of its first year on what the future structure and priorities of the Commission should be.

Sara has described 2018 as a 'watershed moment for extremism'.

Her comments follow a speech by outgoing Assistant Commissioner for the Metropolitan Police Mark Rowley in which he spelt out the "chronic threat" of extremist propaganda, which reaches "into our communities through sophisticated propaganda and subversive strategies creating and exploiting vulnerabilities that can ultimately lead to acts of violence and terrorism".

Sara's statement also reflects the impact of high profile cases, such as the trial of Finsbury Park attacker Darren Osborne and Ripple Road mosque

'teacher' Umar Haque, which demonstrate the frightening reach of extremist propaganda.

In his sentencing, the judge remarked that Osborne was rapidly radicalised over the internet, encountering and consuming material from those determined to spread hatred of Muslims. Umar Haque attempted to radicalise children at Ripple Road mosque by showing students videos of beheadings.

Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism Sara Khan said:

Extremism is a serious threat to all our communities and it requires a whole society response.

There are individuals and groups who have a bigoted 'us versus them' vision for this country. They pump out poisonous propaganda to turn communities against each other. They exploit grievances to promote isolation, provoke discrimination and sow the seeds of violence. They turn people away from the institutions set up to protect them.

This is a watershed moment for extremism. We have seen in recent high profile cases the frightening reach and influence of extremists and their propaganda. But at the same up and down the country brave individuals and groups are speaking out and fighting back.

I have been promoting human rights and exposing extremists for a decade. As activists will tell you, putting your head above the parapet to challenge extremism is often difficult and can be intimidating. But when we come together as diverse groups united by a commitment to tolerance and community we are stronger. That is my vision for this Commission.

On 24 January the Home Secretary revealed that Sara had been selected to lead the Commission for Countering Extremism.

This followed a commitment in the Queen's Speech last year to establish a commission "to support the government in stamping out extremist ideology in all its forms, both across society and on the internet, so it is denied a safe space to spread."

[News story: Minister announces £17](#)

million to improve children's services

Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi has today announced a package of support worth £17 million to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.

More than £15 million will go to eight new Partners in Practice, to expand a peer support programme between local authorities to improve children's services.

The government is also announcing £2 million to improve leadership in children's social care services, which will be delivered through the Local Government Association (LGA).

The funding is part of the Government's £20 million improvement strategy for children's social care, and will see the Partners in Practice Programme – children's services which are rated 'good' by Ofsted – develop and share strong practice, and deliver hands-on peer support to other councils, to help improve outcomes for more children and their families across the country.

Minister for Children and Families Nadhim Zahawi said:

Social workers do an incredible job providing some of our most vulnerable children in our society with life-changing care and support.

This investment for our Partners in Practice Programme will help the fantastic work councils are doing to deliver high-quality services and make a real difference to children's lives.

I am also pleased to support the Local Government Association to drive good leadership, which is crucial if we want to support and encourage frontline staff to deliver excellent care for children and young people.

This investment comes from £20 million announced at the National Children's and Adults Services (NCAS) conference last year (October 2017), to provide additional support for councils at risk of service failure and to help create a system of continuous improvement. Through the funding, the LGA will create a package of support to ensure lead council members have the skills they need to scrutinise performance and drive improvement in children's services.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the Local Government Association's Children and Young People Board, said:

We are pleased that the Minister has backed the LGA's call for

children's improvement funding. This will help to deliver an enhanced programme of sector-led support to councils, offering everything from regular 'health checks' and training for lead members and senior officers.

The achievements of councils through the sector-led improvement approach demonstrate its success and shows what councils can achieve by working together and supporting one another.

Phil Norrey, the Solace spokesperson for Children and Families and Chief Executive of Devon County Council, said:

This is welcome investment for children's services, good news for the children and families we serve and a vote of confidence in local government as a whole. Sector led improvement has proven itself effective in other areas and we are pleased by the recognition that chief executives and whole council leadership is needed to drive meaningful change.

Solace looks forward to working with our partners on this bid – the Local Government Association, Association of Directors of Children's Services and Department for Education – to challenge and support our colleagues across the country.

The new Partners in Practice are Ealing, Camden, North Tyneside and South Tyneside in partnership, Essex, Stockport, Hackney, East Riding of Yorkshire and Doncaster Trust. The Partners in Practice Programme and the Innovation Programme are part of the government's ambitious reforms to children's social care, backed by to up to £250 million.