

Press release: Written Ministerial Statement: Northern Ireland Finances

During the course of the past 13 months, in the absence of an Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland, the UK Government has worked tirelessly to facilitate the restoration of devolved government. It had been my firm hope that a new Executive would be in place to set a budget. That will now not be possible in time for plans to be put in place for the forthcoming financial year.

Yet there are acute pressures across public services to be addressed in 2018/19. And clarity is required now to enable planning to proceed for the year ahead. It is now imperative, therefore, that the UK Government provides clarity and certainty around Northern Ireland finances for 2018/19.

2018/19 Budget allocations

I set out below the resource and capital allocations which I consider to be the most balanced and appropriate settlement for Northern Ireland departments. It would be open to a restored Executive, of course, to consider and revise the position I have set out.

In deciding on these allocations I have engaged intensively with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to understand the needs of departments as they continue to work to deliver the draft Programme for Government. I have reflected too on the response to the budget briefing published by the NICS before Christmas, and discussed the budget situation with the main parties in Northern Ireland.

In the absence of local Ministers, and given the proximity of the next financial year, it would not be appropriate for the UK Government to seek to take fundamental decisions about service delivery and transformation at this time. Yet we must act to secure public services and enable NI departments to meet urgent pressures in health and education. That is what this budget settlement will do, by protecting and preserving public services within challenging fiscal constraints.

On the resource side, it delivers real-terms increases for health and education from their 2017/18 opening baseline. It also delivers cash terms increases for the Departments of Justice; Infrastructure; and Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Elsewhere departments would either be cash-flat or see small decreases, with notable reductions only for the two central departments (Finance and the Executive Office). For capital, it provides a strong basis for investment and enables key flagship projects to progress.

Confidence and Supply funding

This settlement also delivers £410m in financial support arising from the financial annex to the Confidence and Supply Agreement between the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party.

This includes £80m in support for immediate health and education pressures; £30m to support programmes to address issues of mental health and severe deprivation; £100m for ongoing work to transform the health service in line with the broad-based consensus fostered by the Bengoa report; and a £200m boost in capital spending for key infrastructure projects. Furthermore, in recognition of the lack of opportunity for more fundamental service reconfiguration over the last 12 months, this Budget position allows for £100m in flexibility to enable existing capital funding to be used to address public services resource pressures in 2018/19. This additional funding will be transferred in due course only with Parliament's full authorisation, in line with the long-established Estimates process.

Transformation

But, as the NICS budget briefing made clear, transformation is needed in a number of areas to make services sustainable in the long term. The urgent work to prepare for this must proceed. To that end, the Budget includes a £4m fund to prepare the ground for transformation, alongside the £100m set out for health transformation above. I also recognise that this budget only allocates resources for 2018/19 and the NI departments will need urgently to plan for future years. In that context, it is right that the NICS should continue to take forward preparatory work which could assist with balancing the budget in 2019/20. This will ensure that options are kept open for a restored Executive to consider as part of future budget processes.

Regional rate

As part of setting a budget, it is essential that the UK Government provides clarity on the regional rate. This budget position has been constructed on the basis of an increase in the domestic regional rate of 4.5%. I consider that this is a necessary and important step to continue to support public services, particularly in health and education. The non-domestic rates would rise only at 1.5%, in line with inflation. Conscious of the interest of many stakeholders in the scheme, I can also confirm that this budget settlement would provide the basis for the Small Business Rate Relief to continue.

Implementing decisions within the overall allocations

This statement outlines overall allocations, based on my assessment of the options currently available to the NI departments. To the extent possible, the consequent prioritisation of resources within NI departments will need to be undertaken by Permanent Secretaries, as has been the case during the past year. The position will be monitored throughout the year and, where possible, resources reallocated to the highest priority areas in the normal way.

Permanent Secretaries cannot, of course, take the full range of decisions that would be available to Ministers. In that context, the UK Government shall continue to support the Northern Ireland administration, and to do whatever is necessary to meet our responsibilities to the people of Northern Ireland.

[Press release: Pubs Code Adjudicator Releases Results of First Tied Pub Tenant Survey](#)

Most tied pub tenants are aware of the Pubs Code that gives them new rights but have less knowledge about the detail of those rights – the first [tied pub tenant survey](#) has revealed.

The Pubs Code Adjudicator Paul Newby today published the findings of an independent survey commissioned to provide more information about the views

and experiences of tied pub tenants.

Carried out by experienced research company, GfK, the 2017 survey shows that 72% knew about the Pubs Code but they had lower understanding of its key elements, ranging from 63% of tied pub tenants knowing about the right to a five-yearly rent review to 36% knowing about the right to request a Market Rent Only (or MRO) agreement.

Just over half (53%) of those surveyed were aware of the PCA – with a higher proportion aware of the PCA if they had submitted or considered a MRO option. Those who experienced an event that opened up the right to request a MRO but did not do so cited costs, a belief that few tenants had been successful, that the process was shut down by their pub-owning business, or a concern about making trouble or missing deadlines.

Asked about the pros and cons of being a tied pub tenant, participants said the best aspects were the ability to make choices about how their pub was run, and the backup and support from a big company. More challenging aspects included the costs of tied products and services, unexpected costs associated with starting up, the cost of dilapidations as well as the lack of room for negotiation and lack of clarity over rent calculations.

Another key finding was that more than half the tenants who had experienced a MRO event believed they did not have a genuine choice between a tied and free of tie option. Reasons for this included a lack of transparency around the rent calculation, unaffordability of the MRO proposal or a lack of encouragement from their company's Business Development Manager.

Many tenants were critical of the general support they received from Business Development Managers although they recognised that the role of these company representatives is vital to successful tenant/landlord relationships and their ability to access their Pubs Code rights.

Paul Newby said: "This survey has provided a very detailed insight into the views and experiences of tied pub tenants. There has been a great deal of talk across the industry about what tenants think and want – but this is the first time that the tenants themselves have been asked for their views.

"The evidence collected will help me target my activity, take up issues of concern with the pub-owning businesses and allow me to track progress over time.

"It reveals a number of priority areas – specifically that more needs to be done across the industry to provide more user-friendly information and greater clarity on MRO issues, and to make progress in changing the culture around the behaviour and operation of Business Development Managers. I was concerned to see the evidence on how often Business Development Managers are changed and the low frequency of contact.

"The Deputy PCA, Fiona Dickie, and I have provided clarity on the terms of Market Rent Only tenancies following recent arbitration awards; advice on this issue was [published](#) last week. We are now working on a more detailed

response to this survey which we plan to publish shortly. However, the survey provides much food for thought for the pub-owning businesses and I am calling on them to consider their responses to the challenges highlighted.”

Notes to Editors:

1.GfK is an independent research agency that works with government departments and agencies, regulatory bodies, the NHS, local authorities and charities to deliver qualitative and quantitative research to support and inform policy development and evaluation.

2.The tied pub tenant survey was conducted between November 2017 and January 2018. A representative sample of 388 tenants was originally interviewed by telephone and 27 took part in a follow-up depth interview.

3.The full survey results can be found [here](#) and the key results [here](#)

[News story: Apprenticeships work for women](#)

The event, taking place on the penultimate day of National Apprenticeship Week 2018, saw high profile names in business, politics and society address an audience of teachers, apprentices and female business leaders at the National Gallery, London, whilst leading art historian introduced some of the artwork created by women and on show in the Gallery’s collection.

The event included speeches and presentations from inspirational leaders – including Anne Milton, Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, Sue Husband, Director of the National Apprenticeship Service, Ann Francke, Chief Executive of the Chartered Management Institute and Charlotte Hughes from GlaxoSmithKline and National Apprenticeship Awards 2017 Higher and Degree Apprentice of the Year award winner.

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton said:

International Women’s Day is a brilliant time to talk about why more women are choosing an apprenticeship and in subjects that used to be seen as “for men”.

I want lots more women seeing apprenticeships in science, technology, engineering and maths as a real and achievable choice. Our Year of Engineering campaign is highlighting the amazing opportunities these fascinating subjects can give, so my message is sign up today!

'Apprenticeships Work' has been the theme of the 11th National Apprenticeship Week. During the week employers and apprentices from across England have come together to celebrate the success of apprenticeships whilst encouraging even more people to choose apprenticeships as a pathway to a great career.

Sue Husband, director, National Apprenticeship Service added:

National Apprenticeship Week 2018 is a week-long celebration of apprenticeships and the impact they have on individuals, employers, local communities and the wider economy. It is great that today's event coincides with International Women's Day and allows us the opportunity to celebrate how apprenticeships can lead to brilliant career opportunities for women.

The audience here today is made up of strong, successful women who were or are apprentices, who recruit apprentices, or who support the apprenticeship movement and want to see more women succeed through an apprenticeship.

I am delighted to address and welcome this audience and special thanks go to teachers from the Apprenticeship Champions Network who are at this event in recognition of the work they do to encourage young women into well great apprenticeships.

Charlotte Hughes, an associate scientist for drug manufacturer GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), has worked and studied as an apprentice since September 2015. She won the National Apprenticeship Awards Higher and Degree Apprentice of the Year award for 2017 and addressed today's audience. Charlotte said:

Entering a full-time job with a degree and work experience combined has been great for my career. I have had opportunity to learn from scientists, progress through my apprenticeship and speak at a big STEM-based careers events to more than 100 people, promoting the benefits of science careers and apprenticeships.

Being invited to speak at this amazing event today has shown me how successful my journey has been so far. There are so many great opportunities for women in all sectors, and particularly for me, in science. I am proud of my apprenticeship and how it has worked for me. I hope others will be inspired by my story.

The event today closed with calls for the audience to continue to press the case for more to be done on gender inequality in the workplace.

You can find images from the event on the [National Apprenticeships Service Flickr page](#).

[News story: Open call for innovation](#)



image caption and accreditation

jHub Defence is inviting organisations with innovative ideas which will benefit Joint Forces Command and wider defence.

We are looking for technology and processes that will help improve the capability of our joint force, in terms of effectiveness and efficiencies.

Your idea could be a product or service that is already developed or close to being developed. We are specifically interested in building military technology, where innovative digital technology can be adapted for military use.

Our 5 focus areas are:

- artificial intelligence
- autonomy
- data analytics
- simulation
- behavioural sciences

Please note we do not do scientific and technical research.

Our online submission service will be available soon.

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News story: Augmented Intelligence Infinity Awards: call for entries

Call for entries for BT Infinity Awards: Augmented Intelligence. Photo: all rights reserved

The partners are on the hunt for SMEs with expertise in machine learning, robotics and Artificial Intelligence. Focusing on the theme of 'Augmented Intelligence,' this year's judges want to see ideas that harness both the data processing powers of technology and the expertise of human manpower.

The initiative is the latest in a series of BT Infinity Lab competitions, with a £30,000 prize pot up for grabs for three winners.

There are 3 categories in this year's competition, with a focus on the areas of defence, public services and retail.

The judges are keen to see innovations that could help provide more insight to the military when planning an operation, humanitarian mission or disaster relief. They would also like to see how robotics could be used to make a retail experience more personalised, or improve a customers' experience when they contact a public service.

In addition to £10,000, the winning start-ups will have the chance to develop their idea with the support of industry experts and tech gurus from BT for 6 months. They will also receive membership to TechHub's global entrepreneur community, workspace and support programme.

To enter, the SMEs will need to submit a 3 minute video explaining why their solution could be the next big tech innovation to help transform public services, retail or defence.

Amongst a range of executive public sector, retail and innovation experts from BT, this year's judges also includes:

- Co-Op CIO Simon Bourne
- General Sir Chris Deverell, Commander, Joint Forces Command, Ministry of Defence,
- Alison Pritchard, COO, Government Digital Service,
- Elizabeth Varley, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of TechHub
- a range of executive public sector, retail and innovation experts from BT

Oliver Dowden, Minister for Implementation, said:

The government is committed to transforming public services, making them as efficient and effective as possible so that they deliver the best services for taxpayers.

Small businesses play a vital role in helping us do this by harnessing the latest digital technologies. I am delighted that we are partnering with BT to highlight and support innovative small businesses in the tech sector.

Margot James, Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries, said:

We want the UK to be the best place to grow a digital business and this partnership will give our dynamic, up-and-coming innovators the opportunity to develop the technology of tomorrow.

I look forward to seeing these ideas become reality and help improve our public services so everyone can benefit from the technological revolution as we build a Britain fit for the future.

General Sir Chris Deverell, Commander, Joint Forces Command, Ministry of Defence, said:

I am delighted to have this opportunity to champion a Defence Challenge as part of the BT Infinity Awards. We are looking for innovative ways in which we can fully embrace digital capabilities, and thereby improve our effectiveness.

There are a wealth of opportunities in the fields of artificial intelligence and machine learning, including robotics, simulation and modelling. We are keen to learn from FinTech and apply similar technologies in the military sector to modernise Defence and create a MilTech ecosystem.

We're therefore reaching out to SMEs who can bring their innovations to this Defence challenge. Colm O'Neill, managing director of BT Business and Public Sector, said: "Last year, our research found that AI had divided the opinions of IT decision makers over whether it would replace or create jobs.

With that in mind, we launched this year's Infinity Labs competition with the theme 'Augmented Intelligence,' as we believe that there's still work to do to demonstrate that automated technologies and business processes can play to the strengths of both people and machines.

I'm looking forward to seeing all the entrants to this year's Infinity Labs competition and to working together on the innovations that we could see transform defence, public sector services and retail businesses in years to come.

Entries close on 12 March 2018. To find out more, visit: [BT Infinity Lab Augmented Intelligence](#) or join in the conversation on Twitter:

#BTInfinityAwards

The winners will be announced after a judging event at the iconic BT Tower on the 24 April 2018.