

# Press release: Communities Secretary sets out vision for high streets as vibrant community hubs

The Communities Secretary, James Brokenshire will today (7 November 2018) set out his vision for tackling social problems linked to declining high streets – such as crime, unemployment and loneliness.

Speaking at the Locality Convention in Bristol the Communities Secretary will launch the government's flagship Open Doors project, linking landlords with vacant retail units with community groups offering vital services to young and old.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP will say:

We need to be imaginative in tackling the social and economic challenges our communities face.

This includes seizing the enormous opportunity before us to transform our high streets into vibrant community hubs where people work, live and shop.

That is why I'm delighted to be launching the new Open Doors project that will see empty shops being opened up to community groups offering services to the most vulnerable in our communities.

Reflecting on the scale of the opportunity offered by converting empty retail units into homes and community hubs the Communities Secretary will point to new figures showing that there are currently over 27,000 premises lying vacant in England's town centres.

If just a fraction of these vacant premises were turned into homes, thousands more people could have a roof over their head.

Research also shows that higher numbers of residents on our high streets can generate higher footfall and, in turn, higher demand for shops and services.

The Communities Secretary will also launch a new Community Roadshow, which will see him and his ministerial team travelling across the country to learn from and celebrate the work being done by community groups.

The first of the Roadshow visits will see the Communities Secretary visiting a winter shelter and a community-led housing project in Bristol.

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## [Speech: Spark21 conference 2018: David Gauke speech on diversity in the legal profession](#)

### **Introduction**

Thank you, Jo.

It is such a pleasure to be here today, supporting Spark21's Levelling the Playing Field event. As we lead into the centenary of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 – which took the first steps in breaking down the barriers to the involvement of women in civic life, including in practising the law – I think it is important that we consider what

'celebrating the past to the shape the future for women in law' really means. It is an opportunity for each of us to re-examine and renew our commitment to a strong, equal and diverse legal profession.

Gender inequality is an issue that affects all people and is not just "a struggle for women by women", men need to be agents for change too.

The trailblazers on this have of course been representatives of diverse groups themselves. From Eliza Orme – the first woman in England to gain a law degree, to Baroness Hale – the first woman Law Lord and later first woman President of the Supreme Court, the people who have led the way on this have done so by demonstrating the breadth of their talent.

I think perhaps 'champion' is too grand a word but if I as the Lord Chancellor and a former solicitor myself can play a part in championing diversity in the legal profession then I will do so. And I don't say that for its sake. I don't say it because it's trendy or because it is 'the done thing'. I say it because I think it would be foolish not to do so.

In fact, I would go so far as to say that maintaining the status quo could damage our potential as a nation. In that sense, this isn't just an issue for the 47% of the UK workforce who are women – it's one that 100% of us are invested in.

In terms of the huge pool of female talent that exists in this country, McKinsey estimate that bridging the gender gap in work could add £150 billion to the UK economy by 2025 – £150 billion! That is a figure that we simply cannot afford to ignore.

What's more, companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more likely to have profits above their industry average. Those are astonishing figures and should serve as a call to arms to all of us that committing to gender equality – becoming champions for change – is the smart thing to do.

## **A diverse justice system is a healthy one**

I'm pleased to say that there is much for us to celebrate in terms of diversity in the legal profession. It is important we remember that for the first time in the UK's history the Presidents of the three Law Societies are all women. It is encouraging to see our Law Societies not only lead in this area, but practice what they preach!

More than 50% of all practising solicitors are women; while BAME lawyers now account for 21% of lawyers working in law firms. These figures surpass the UK generally where women make up 47% of the workforce; and BAME people make up 11% of the workforce.

And this isn't just encouraging because of the financial benefits it no doubt brings, it's also crucial to maintaining healthy outcomes in justice – because a well-functioning justice system should accurately reflect the society it serves.

Despite some encouraging progress in the legal profession, we can aim for

more.

The figures show us that the diversity of entrants to the profession is not where the problem is – it's in the senior roles and leadership that gaps appear. When we look at the senior leadership in law firms, while women make up 59% of non-partner solicitors, they account for just a third of partners.

In the biggest firms that figure falls to just 29%. And while figures at the Bar have been moving in the right direction over the last few years – with a greater proportion of female pupils than males – just 37% of barristers currently practising are women. And just under 15% of Queen's Counsel are women.

## **Judicial diversity**

That means fewer women in the pipeline of candidates to join the judiciary. Appointing by merit is, of course, the most important criterion for retaining the quality, independence and impartiality of our judges. But we should remove the barriers to talented women and other under-represented groups applying to join the judiciary. That's why government, alongside the legal professional bodies, judicial representatives and the Judicial Appointments Commission, supports the work of the Judicial Diversity Forum. At its heart, the forum aims to remove the barriers to talented women and other under-represented groups applying to join the judiciary.

I am particularly pleased that we've gone from having just one female justice in the Supreme Court to now having three. However there is more to do.

I know the Lord Chief Justice shares this view. That's why the Judicial Diversity Committee, chaired by Lady Justice Hallett, run a number of schemes to encourage and support under-represented groups. As well as pre-application seminars, the Judicial Work Shadowing Scheme provides insight into the work of judges and the Judicial Mentoring Scheme ensures there are role models for lawyers intending to apply for their first judicial appointment. They also run an annual support programme for women and other under-represented groups interested specifically in applying to the Deputy High Court Judge selection exercise.

In April this year I announced Ministry of Justice funding for the Pre-Application Judicial Education Programme. The programme is the first joint initiative of the Judicial Diversity Forum, designed to support and encourage lawyers from under-represented groups to apply for judicial roles.

We are working with the senior judiciary, Judicial College, Judicial Appointments Commission and the legal professional bodies to develop an online learning platform and judge facilitated discussion groups which will launch in the Spring.

And I do think it is absolutely right that we encourage people from across the legal professions – including solicitors and other non-barristers – to apply for judicial roles. The government will therefore be doing everything it can to promote people from all legal backgrounds bringing their talent and

skills to strengthen the judiciary. To this end we are working with the Law Society, who have kindly agreed to chair and host a joint roundtable for senior partners and law firms to explore what support is needed to encourage more solicitors to apply for judicial office.

## **Broad leadership will bring lasting change**

Ultimately, turning the dial on diversity in the legal profession requires a joined up and wide-ranging response from us in government and the profession itself.

Some of the figures highlighting the disparities in the profession are stark but I think the legal profession has a real opportunity to blaze a trail on this. And I'm pleased to say that it is already doing some amazing work to address the issue head on.

The Law Society's recently published 'Women in Leadership in Law: Toolkit' is one example of that work and I would encourage anyone who hasn't seen it to contact the Law Society for a copy. It not only brings together research and key statistics on female diversity in the law, it also gives practical advice on the challenges – in unconscious bias, the gender pay gap, flexible working, and best practice – that the profession faces in tackling the diversity question.

I want to pay tribute to Christina Blacklaws, President of the Law Society, not just for getting the Toolkit published, but in her wider leadership on this issue, where she is making women in leadership in law a key theme of her tenure. That drive for change should inspire others to follow suit.

As one of the oldest and most recognised professions in the world, it would be fitting for the legal sector to lead the way on this more generally in our country – in making progress on diversity not just for its sake but in the interests of excellence.

We must all promote diversity throughout the law. I really want to see things change so that it's the norm to see women at the very top of their professions, rather than a rarity.

## **Conclusion**

As we head into 2019 and mark the centenary of women being able to practise law in this country, I think it is absolutely right that we renew our commitment to diversity within the legal profession. My message is clear – this isn't a 'nice to have' and we should not be paying lip service to it. A truly diverse legal profession is absolutely crucial to maintaining and improving the performance of our sector.

When we consider that legal services is currently worth £24 billion every year to our economy, it would be remiss of us to ignore how that figure could grow if we encouraged a more diverse workforce. The potential for adding billions to the economy by 2025 is too big a prize to pass up – certainly not for the sake of maintaining a tired and outdated status quo.

By making sure that the profession mirrors the make-up of our society as it exists today, we can build trust in a system that works for all people – no matter their gender, ethnicity, sexuality or any other factor.

Together we can show real leadership on this issue, demonstrating its practical benefits to become one of the leading lights on diversity in our country as a whole. I know that's what our legal profession is capable of and I am committing myself anew to doing everything I can to support it in that endeavour.

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## [Press release: Better journeys ahead with groundbreaking contract awards](#)

We've announced deals with 13 supply chain partners to collaborate regionally to carry out up to £8.7 billion of work on England's motorways and major A roads.

The deals have been set up using a new industry-leading approach, the Routes to Market Regional Delivery Partnership, which incentivises companies to improve safety and journeys on our roads. It contains incentives for results which include:

- shorter duration and more accurate management of roadworks to help drivers better plan their journeys and experience predictable journey times
- buying more efficiently and buying locally – using the capability of a region to benefit the region
- encouraging innovation, for example lighting and signs designed to need less maintenance, reducing disruption and improving road worker safety
- reduced road noise and increased environmental benefits

Our Chief Executive Jim O'Sullivan said:

Routes to Market represents a fundamental change in the way we deliver road projects. It will be performance rather than price based, focusing on building the right projects with the best outcomes for road users and the communities we serve.

It demands a major step up in our supply chain to embrace innovation and team work, and in their ability to deliver value.

The 13 companies – known as Delivery Integration Partners – will be part of the Regional Delivery Partnership working with us. They will develop, design and construct highway projects across England from 2019 through to 2024.

Until now, we've procured work on a scheme by scheme basis. This new approach provides a secure pipeline of work, instilling confidence to invest in skills and employment. Driving value for money, innovation and delivery certainty, the Regional Delivery Partnership model has been designed to start a long overdue transformation within the infrastructure construction sector.

The value of work allocated across the 13 companies is as follows – the values mentioned are shared between suppliers on the lot over a six-year period (includes RIS1 budget and RIS2 estimate):

Lot 1 – South West and Midlands – £200m – two partners: Geoffrey Osborne Ltd; and Griffiths / Farrans Joint Venture (Alun Griffiths (Construction) Ltd and Northstone (NI) Limited trading as Farrans Construction)

Lot 2 – South East and East – £350m – two partners: John Graham Construction Ltd; and Volker Fitzpatrick Ltd

Lot 3 – North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humber – £200m – two partners: Amey Sir Robert McAlpine Joint Venture (Amey OW Ltd and Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd); and North Midland Construction Plc

Lot 4 – South West – £800m – two partners: Galliford Try Infrastructure Ltd; and Taylor Woodrow

Lot 5 – Midlands – £1,250m – two partners: BAM Nuttall Ltd; and Skanska Construction UK Ltd

Lot 6 – South East – £1,100m – two partners: BAM Nuttall Ltd; and Balfour Beatty Civil Engineering Ltd

Lot 7 – East – £2,800m – three partners: Costain Ltd; Galliford Try Infrastructure Ltd; and Skanska Construction UK Ltd

Lot 8 – North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humber – £2,000m – three partners: Balfour Beatty Civil Engineering Ltd; Costain Ltd; and Kier Highways Ltd

The work is arranged into 18 packages of schemes, awarded to Delivery Integration Partners in bands of up to £100m (lots 1 to 3) and over £100m (lots 4 to 8).

## **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

## **Media enquiries**

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