

Enhanced inspection ordered following food poisoning incidents

China's food watchdog has ordered stepped up inspection on food safety in the rural areas after eight people have died from tainted food over the past two months.

In one incident on Dec. 18, 2016, 30 residents came down with food poisoning, two of whom later died, after the cook mistook sodium nitrite for salt during a funeral dinner in Miaoya Village, Bazhong city of Sichuan Province, according to a circular released by the China Food and Drug Administration.

The other two cases included one in a village in Mudanjiang City in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province and one in Huilong Village in Hubei Province in November and December last year. In both instances, methanol was mistakenly served during the banquets, leading to three deaths in each case.

The administration ordered enhanced inspection of the liquor market and strict penalties for illegalities such as selling fake or adulterated liquor.

Regular inspections and supervision of rural catering services should be strengthened and standardized guidance should be released for food safety and banquets in rural areas to prevent such incidents from happening again.

News story: New ways of networking: changes for _connect users

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To improve how we connect people and opportunities we're rationalising our networks and closing _connect groups.

Innovate UK will be closing its _connect networking groups on 1 February 2017 to focus on building bigger, stronger innovation communities on LinkedIn.

The new and revamped LinkedIn groups – run by the [Knowledge Transfer Network](#) – will cover our main sector areas. They will help you to connect with experts, academics and government, access funding opportunities, gain intelligence and get the support you need to exploit your innovative ideas.

Pete Wilson, Digital Communications Manager, Innovate UK, said:

The _connect groups were created to give innovators a place where they could seek out like-minded individuals and businesses, share knowledge and collaborate. As social media has grown and evolved, other platforms have come to better meet this need.

By consolidating our communities on LinkedIn – a platform that we know most of our users are already engaging with – we can reach people on their own terms and add even more value to their online experiences.

If you are a member of any _connect groups you will have until 1 February to move your documents.

[The results of this survey expose the failure of our privatised railways – Andy McDonald](#)

Andy McDonald MP, Labour's Shadow Transport Secretary, commenting on the publication of Transport Focus' National Rail Passenger Survey, revealing significant declines in passenger satisfaction for 2016, said:

“The results of this survey expose the failure of our privatised railways.

With promised upgrades delayed or cancelled and fares rising way ahead of wages, it's disappointing but not surprising to see passenger satisfaction down across the board for 2016.

“With this decline in passenger satisfaction, it's becoming more difficult for the Government to justify allowing private and foreign state-owned companies to take money out of the system that should be used to improve services or hold fares down.

“It's clear that an alternative is needed for Britain's railways. It is time for our railways to be run under public ownership, in the public interest as an

integrated national asset in public hands with affordable fares for all and long-term investment in the railway network.”

Statement by the Welsh Government – Article 50 Supreme Court Judgment

A Welsh Government spokesperson said:

“We welcome the Supreme Court Judgment today which means that the UK Government must seek parliamentary approval in the form of a Bill before it can trigger Article 50 to leave the European Union. It is vital that the UK Government develops an approach to negotiations which reflects the interests of Wales and the UK as a whole – an approach to which the Prime Minister has already publicly committed.

“The judgment preserves and recognises the importance of the Sewel convention whereby Parliament will not normally legislate on areas devolved to Wales and devolved governments without their consent.

“The Welsh Government will continue to work closely with the UK Government, and the other Devolved Administrations, through the Joint Ministerial Committee process to influence the overall UK position. Our aims are to preserve single market access for business and to protect Welsh jobs and investment, along with the rights of workers.”

Speech: Supporting local government

Thank you Gary for that kind introduction, and for inviting me along to speak to you all today.

It’s great to be here at the Local Government Association’s (LGA) temporary home.

I know some people have complained that I’m not as close to Gary as [Greg Clark](#) was.

But it’s not for lack of trying!

Look at it from my point of view.

In July I arrived at DCLG's HQ, just around the corner from Smith Square.
Literally a 2-minute walk away.

By October, the LGA had moved to the other side of London!

It's hard not to take that personally...

That's not the only grumble I've heard.

Unlike my predecessors all the way back to Hazel Blears, I've never served in local government.

That drew some criticism when I was appointed.

People were saying: "This guy Javid, he doesn't understand us. He was never a councillor. He's just a banker".

Well, I think they said "banker"...

But look, I don't have to have been a councillor to appreciate what a phenomenal job you all do.

You really are the front line of democracy, our local heroes.

Last month, Ipsos Mori released their annual "Trust in the professions" survey.

And, once again, local government was by far the most trusted tier of politics.

That's no surprise.

For one thing, you're directly responsible for many of the services that people use and rely on every day of the week.

You provide homes, take care of the vulnerable, protect consumers.

You educate our children.

You keep the roads open.

And you do so much more besides – including, of course, managing the service that troubles my mailbag more than any other.

You empty the bins!

Across this huge range of responsibilities, you do a great job.

These are tough times for all parts of the public sector, central and local government alike.

But your record in efficiency and delivery is second to none.

We asked you to do more with less and that's exactly what you did.

Satisfaction with most council services has remained high.

Some services, such as road maintenance, even saw rises in satisfaction last year.

As I told MPs last month, there's a lot that Whitehall can learn from councillors when it comes to delivering value for money.

So whatever tier of government you serve in, whatever party you're from, let me say thank you.

Thank you for being willing to stand up, to put in the time and effort to represent your community.

And thank for you getting on with the job and showing just how effective and efficient local government can be.

I know it's not been easy.

I know it's not all plain sailing.

I know that what some of you want me to do today is stand here and promise additional funding for local government.

Well, there's an old politician's adage that goes:

"Everything you want to hear I can't say, and everything I can say you don't want to hear."

But hopefully things won't be quite that challenging today!

Because I get where you're coming from.

No, I've never been a councillor.

But since I became Secretary of State last summer I have worked tirelessly to get under the skin of local government.

I've travelled the country, talking to councils of all types and political persuasions.

A week doesn't go by that I don't have councillors in my office, talking through the challenges they face and the support they need.

I recognise your innovation, your management and your local leadership.

And I understand your concerns.

One of the biggest, of course, is adult social care.

There's no doubt about it, adult social care is a huge challenge for the public sector right now.

People are living longer, and that inevitably means greater demand for care services.

Every year you spend more than £14 billion on adult social care.

It's one of the biggest cost pressures facing councils.

The last Spending Review put in place up to £3.5 billion of additional funding for adult social care by 2019 to 2020.

But I recognise that more needs to be done.

You, in local government, have a statutory duty to take care of vulnerable people.

But I believe that all of us have a moral duty to do so.

It's what a civilised society does.

That's why I was proud to fight for and secure more than £900 million of [additional funding for social care](#).

Longer-term solutions are needed, but this additional cash will make a huge difference here and now.

I'm afraid we'll have to agree to disagree on whether it's so-called "new money".

I'm very clear that there is more cash available for adult social care than there used to be.

Nearly a billion pounds of it.

I know many of you, for various reasons, view things differently.

But let's all be very clear on one point – whether it's old money or new money, it's all taxpayers' money.

I've heard some people object to the precept on Council Tax on the grounds that central government should pay for social care.

They're missing the point.

Regardless of whether funding is raised or allocated by central government or local government, it is all raised by taxing the people of this country.

It's not your money.

It's not my money.

It's their money.

And the social care precept means that their money gets spent in their areas supporting vulnerable members of their communities.

Of course, some local authorities will be able to raise less than others.

That's why the Improved Better Care Fund, worth £1.5 billion by 2019 to 2020, will take into account councils' ability to raise funding through the precept.

And we have listened to calls from across the board saying funding is needed sooner in order to meet short-term pressures.

That's why we've made available a £240 million Adult Social Care Support Grant for one year, distributed fairly according to need.

I can also give you all some reassurance today.

Like I said, I've been talking to a lot of council leaders over the past 6 months.

And one concern that comes up again and again is the possibility that Attendance Allowance funding could be resourced from retained business rates.

Well, I'm listening.

Today I can confirm that the localisation of [Attendance Allowance](#) is no longer being considered as part of the business rates reforms.

I'll be announcing further details on business rates reforms shortly.

But I can tell you now that Attendance Allowance will not be included.

Let's not pretend that increased funding is the only solution to the care challenge.

You can pour as much petrol as you like into your car; if the engine's not working it still won't go.

And there is variation in performance across the country that simply cannot be explained by different levels of spending.

Look at one of the biggest challenges in social care, Delayed Transfers of Care from hospital.

In some areas it's a chronic problem, while others have virtually no delayed transfers at all.

In fact there's a 20-fold difference between the best-performing 10% and the worst-performing 10%.

That can't be explained away by differences in funding or demographics.

I know that most of the delays are down to the health service.

But a gap that size also has to involve some councils simply doing things better than others.

Look at Southampton.

It has reduced delayed transfers of care and unnecessary hospital admissions by integrating 7 health and social care teams into a single service under a pooled budget.

If you're tempted to shake your head and say "that's great, but things are different in the south", look at Northumberland.

£5 million saved thanks to the council working with the local health trust.

Demand for residential care cut by 12%.

And those statistics aren't just numbers on a balance sheet.

They mean more people managing their own health.

More people able to live independently in their own homes.

More people recovering with their families in familiar surroundings rather than being marooned on a hospital bed.

More efficient working is good for councils, good for taxpayers, and good for the people who matter most – those on the receiving end of services.

Health and social care should be fully integrated so that they feel like one service.

The [Better Care Fund](#) is already supporting this with £5.3 billion of funding pooled between councils and Clinical Commissioning Groups last year.

But we also want to make sure that all local authorities learn from the best performers and the best providers.

So we will soon publish an Integration and Better Care Fund Policy Framework to support this.

And in the long term, we will need to develop reforms that will provide a sustainable way of working that benefits everyone who needs care.

Of course, social care isn't the only big challenge on all our plates right now.

There's also that most basic of human needs: housing.

For decades now, this country has not been building enough houses.

That's not the fault of any one government or any one council.

But it's a problem that we will all have to work together to fix.

The LGA has just made a great contribution to that with the report from its Housing Commission.

So thank you to everyone who worked on that.

My plan for getting homes built, the housing white paper, is going to be published shortly.

As you know, it's not an easy challenge to overcome.

We want to make sure we get it right, that we make the biggest impact on the housing shortage that we can.

It wouldn't be right for me to reveal everything that's in the white paper before it's published.

But I will say this much.

I'm not going to be tinkering around the edges.

The white paper will set out serious, lasting, long-term reforms that will boost housing supply immediately and for many years to come.

I know you've heard that before.

But this white paper isn't just about changing guidelines or passing legislation or cutting red tape.

It's about a whole new mind set.

A whole new attitude to house building at all levels – in central government, in the building industry and, yes, in local government too.

Make no mistake, you will have a huge role to play in the future of house building.

You are the enablers.

You are the planners.

You are the local leaders.

Leadership, as you know, sometimes means taking tough decisions.

Unpopular decisions, even.

It's not easy.

But we have to ask ourselves what kind of country we want to live in.

Do we want a divided nation, with an unbridgeable and ever-widening gap between the property haves and have-nots?

Where only those with wealthy parents can get a foot on the property ladder?

Where elderly people are forced to work well past retirement age in order to keep paying off their mortgage?

Where unfettered, unplanned and unhelpful development overwhelms communities who have no say in the matter?

Or do we want a country where anyone who wants to work hard and get on can ultimately afford a place of their own?

Where social mobility is boosted, the environment is protected, and quality of life is improved?

I know which one I want to see.

And the white paper will help bring it about.

Housing is a complex business.

Different people and different places have different needs.

There is no simple, off-the-shelf, one-size-fits-all solution.

The same is true of devolution.

The Sheffield City Region and Cornwall, for example, are very different places with very different strengths and some very different problems.

And that's why the devolution deal that's right for one area might not be right for another.

The West Midlands will benefit from having a mayor, but not all areas will.

Just because Wiltshire has made a huge success of unitary status, it doesn't mean all district councils should shut up shop.

Areas that opt for a directly elected mayor will always be in line for the greatest degree of devolution.

As I've said before, I don't want to devolve power without accountability.

But the whole of point of our approach to devolution and reorganisation is that it's locally led to meet local needs.

It's about bottom-up consensus, not top-down reorganisation.

The last thing I want to do is repeat the failed experiment of identikit regional assemblies imposed along arbitrary geographical lines and imposed from Westminster.

But let me be very clear – we are not going cold on devolution.

We have not lost interest, it has not slipped down our list of priorities.

Myself, my department and my Prime Minister remain absolutely committed to making existing deals a success.

And my door is always open to local authorities who want to put forward their

own plans.

I want to see strong, effective, efficient local government in whatever form best suits your area.

If you can deliver that, I'll give you as much as I can.

After all, last June, the people of Britain voted to take back control.

We're not about to reclaim power from Brussels only to hoard it in Westminster.

On the subject of Brexit...

Earlier this week, as you'll have seen, the Prime Minister set out the core principles of our departure from the European Union.

And on everything from consumer protection to economic growth, local government is central to getting Brexit right.

Yes, we want to see a global Britain.

But that has to be built on firm local foundations.

I know my predecessor promised local government a "seat at the table".

I also know the current joke is that he didn't say which seat, at which table or even which building it's in!

But, earlier this week, my colleague [David Davis](#) announced that he'd be sitting down with elected leaders.

And you can rest assured that I'm going to make sure your voice is heard.

Because whichever party you represent, I represent you.

I am your Secretary of State, your champion in Westminster, your voice in Cabinet.

I am proud to speak for you, I am proud to fight for you.

We won't always agree on everything.

But this is a big, big year for local government.

Elections in counties and combined authorities, devolution deals being delivered, the Brexit process beginning, the housing white paper...

And if we're going to make a success of it we are all going to have to work together.

I've talked about 4 of the big issues today.

I know there's a lot more on your mind.

If I haven't touched on something it doesn't mean I don't care about it, I just don't want to spend the whole of this session talking at you.

For all the time I spend meeting with council leaders, the realities of my life and yours mean I don't get enough opportunities to hear from other councillors.

And I really want to hear from you.

I can't promise to give you the answer you want.

There may some questions where I have to hold up my hands and say "I don't know, let me get back to you on that".

But I can promise that I will listen.

That I will go on listening.

And that I will continue doing everything I can to support the single most important part of the public sector – our local councils.

Thank you.