

[Press release: UK Minister for Africa condemns attack on aid convoy in Nigeria](#)

Minister for Africa, Rory Stewart said:

“I condemn the attack on Saturday against a humanitarian convoy in Borno State, in which four people lost their lives. The UK continues to support the United Nations and humanitarian partners as they deliver essential food supplies to people affected by the current conflict – food that was lost in this attack.

“We call on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and refrain from launching attacks against civilians or humanitarian operations. Life-saving assistance has been provided to 5 million people in the north east of Nigeria, this vital work to help people most in need must not be hampered.”

Further information

[Press release: Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission priorities confirmed](#)

Professor Sadie Morgan, Deputy Chair and Sir John Armitt, Chair of the Thames Valley Growth Commission

The priorities of the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission, which include equipping people with the right skills and providing high quality housing, have been announced during a visit by the new Chair and Deputy Chair.

Sir John Armitt, who was announced as the new Chair at the Budget, visited Bexley to outline the Commission’s areas of focus for the coming months. The Commission’s final report, which will lay out recommendations to government, will be published in spring 2018.

Sir John, who is former Chair of the Olympic Delivery Authority, replaces the former Government Advisor on Local Growth, Lord Heseltine, who stepped down from the Commission in March 2017. He is joined by Deputy Chair, Professor Sadie Morgan, co-founding director at the award-winning practice, dRMM Architects.

Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, said:

It's long been known that the Thames Estuary has vast economic potential and, as a government, we're determined to capitalise on this for the benefit of local communities and national growth.

The Commission, benefitting from refreshed leadership, will now build on its vision to unleash growth and boost productivity.

Sir John Armitt, Chair of the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission, said:

I welcome the opportunity to lead this vital piece of work. I look forward to engaging with all stakeholders to produce a compelling vision and delivery plan for this exciting area, which I believe can help drive the UK's economic growth.

Professor Sadie Morgan, Deputy Chair of the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission, said:

With a combined population of over three million and no shortage of great ideas, the Thames Estuary is brimming with opportunities. I am delighted to be supporting Sir John in helping all stakeholders to realise the exceptional potential of this region.

The Commission will draw together and develop existing plans into a vision to stimulate future growth for decades to come. I have a strong affinity with the Thames Estuary, having lived in the area all my life, and so look forward to being a part of this exciting journey.

The Commission will now focus on the following priorities:

- Sectors – creating internationally-competitive centres of excellence that build on the corridor's sector strengths, for example in ports and logistics, and making the most of growth sectors such as the creative industries
- Connectivity – making the most of planned investments such as the Lower Thames Crossing, and assessing the case for other investments that have been proposed, such as further river crossings and extending the Elizabeth Line to Ebbsfleet
- Communities – ensuring that people right across the corridor benefit from expected growth, including equipping them with the right skills, making sure high-quality housing is available, promoting use of the

river, and enhancing the Thames Estuary's natural environment

- Delivery – working closely with organisations and communities to develop a plan for delivering the vision, aligning with the Government's intention to explore ambitious housing deals in the area.

Since it was established in March 2016, The Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission has been working to develop an ambitious vision and delivery plan for North Kent, South Essex and East London up to 2050. Home to 3.8 million people, the Thames Estuary is on the doorstep of both London and continental Europe, and has the potential to support growth right across the country. It also faces some real challenges, including significant pockets of deprivation.

The Commission ran a [call for ideas](#) from July to September 2016. There were over 100 respondents, including public, private and third sector organisations, and members of the public. The Commission has also held visits to the Thames Estuary, including along the river itself. Both the Commission and the government are grateful to all those who have provided input, and are committed to delivering a compelling vision and delivery plan in close collaboration with a wide range of partners.

Sir John Armit is Chair of the National Express Group and the City & Guilds Group, Deputy Chair of the Berkeley Group and the National Infrastructure Commission, and a member of the Board of Transport for London. He is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Institution of Civil Engineers and City & Guilds of London Institute. He was awarded the CBE in 1996 for his contribution to the rail industry and a knighthood in 2012 for services to engineering and construction.

Professor Sadie Morgan is a co-founding director at the award-winning practice, dRMM Architects. She became the youngest and only third ever-female President of the Architectural Association in 2013. In March 2015, Sadie was appointed as Design Chair for High Speed Two (HS2) reporting directly to the Secretary of State. She is also a member of the National Infrastructure Commission.

[News story: Education Secretary launches RSE call for evidence](#)

- Views of teachers, parents and young people to help shape first updating of relationships and sex education guidance since 2000

- New approach to combat online issues
- Follows confirmation that the subject will be compulsory in all schools, to help equip every young person for life in modern Britain

The government is asking parents, teachers and young people to help shape a new relationships and sex education curriculum that will help them stay safe and face the challenges of the modern world.

The current statutory guidance for teaching Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) was introduced in 2000. It currently fails to address risks to children which have grown in prevalence in recent years, including online pornography, sexting and staying safe online.

The guidance is being updated after legislation was passed by Parliament earlier this year to make relationships education compulsory in all primary schools and relationships and sex education compulsory in all secondary schools.

As part of that process, an eight week call for evidence will invite views on age-appropriate content on mental wellbeing, staying safe online and LGBT issues in the updated subjects.

The move to make RSE compulsory was welcomed by the teaching profession and organisations such as Barnardo's, Stonewall, the Catholic Education Service, NSPCC, Terrence Higgins Trust and the End Violence Against Women coalition.

Education Secretary Justine Greening said:

It is unacceptable that Relationships and Sex Education guidance has not been updated for almost 20 years especially given the online risks, such as sexting and cyber bullying, our children and young people face. Young people must have an education that teaches them the importance of healthy and stable relationships.

This call for evidence is about giving teachers, parents and especially young people a chance to help shape that new approach and I'd urge them to take part.

Currently only pupils attending local-authority run secondary schools – which represent around a third of secondary schools – are guaranteed to be offered Sex and Relationship Education as currently delivered.

The 'call for evidence' aims to gather views from people across England from all backgrounds on the content of this subject. It will look to establish:

- what teachers think they should be teaching their pupils to help them navigate the modern world they are growing up in;
- how parents expect their children to be taught this topic in a safe and

- age-appropriate way; and
- what children themselves think they would benefit from understanding the most, and the online risks they are concerned with.

Ian Bauckham, who was awarded the CBE in 2017 for services to education, will lead this process. He is CEO of a multi-academy trust, executive head of a large 11-18 Church of England comprehensive in Kent and, as a National Leader of Education (NLE), works with many other schools in the region and more widely.

Ian Bauckham CBE said:

I warmly welcome the government's decision to seek views on these important topics. Since I started work as a teacher over thirty years ago, enormous changes have taken place both in the lives of young people and in the wider world in which we are preparing them to live. I hope that the call for evidence being launched now gives us the chance to find out about the best teaching and to improve provision for all our young people in all types of school.

The teaching of this important subject in schools is supported by the wider public. Recent surveys show that:

- 91% of parents believe all pupils should receive lessons to teach them about the risks of sexting, as well as other issues such as contact from strangers online; and
- 74% of 11 – 15 years old believe that children would be safer if they had age appropriate classes on relationships and sex education.

Statement to Parliament: Provisional local government finance settlement 2018 to 2019: statement

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on funding for local authorities in England next year.

From 2015 to 2020, councils in England have access to over £200 billion to deliver high-quality services their local communities need.

They deserve no less.

Local government is at the front line of this country's democracy, with councillors and officers working at the heart of the communities that they serve.

But to make the most of that local knowledge, councils need greater control of the money that they raise.

They need greater freedom to tackle challenges in their areas.

And they need the certainty and stability that will allow them to plan ahead.

This government is committed to delivering that...

... and today I am publishing a draft local government finance settlement that marks an important milestone in the journey to doing so.

It comes in the third year of a 4-year deal that was accepted by 97% of councils in return for publishing efficiency plans.

We will continue to work with the sector to help them increase transparency and share best practice...

...supporting greater progress in delivering increased efficiency over the coming year.

I expect this to have a tangible impact on the steps councils take to promote efficiency from 2019 to 2020.

Local government operates in a society that is constantly changing.

And the system of financing local government needs to reflect that.

The current formula of budget allocations has served councils and communities well over the years.

But to meet the challenges of the future we need an updated and more responsive distribution methodology.

One that gives councils the confidence to face the challenges and opportunities of the future.

So I am today publishing a formal consultation on a review of relative needs and resources.

I aim to implement a new system based on its findings in 2020 to 2021.

Alongside the new methodology, in 2020 to 2021 we will also be implementing the latest phase of our business rates retention programme...

...a scheme that gives local authorities the levers and incentives they need to grow their local economies.

The aim is for local authorities to retain 75% of business rates from 2020 to 2021.

This will be through incorporating existing grants into business rate retention including the Revenue Support Grant, and the Public Health Grant.

Local authorities will be able to keep that same share of growth on their baseline levels from 2020 to 2021, when the system is reset.

So from 2020 to 2021 business rates will be redistributed according to the outcome of the new needs assessment...

... subject to suitable transitional measures.

A number of 100% retention pilots have already been announced and those will continue.

A further pilot will begin in in London in 2018 to 2019 and we had intended that a further 5 pilots would begin that same year.

However, interest in the scheme was such that we will now be taking forward twice as many as planned.

I'm pleased to announce today that the new pilots will take place in:

- Berkshire
- Derbyshire
- Devon
- Gloucestershire
- Kent & Medway
- Leeds
- Lincolnshire
- Solent
- Suffolk
- and Surrey.

The first batch of pilots are taking place largely in urban authorities; the second wave will mainly cover counties.

This ensures that councils right across the country will benefit...

...that the scheme can be tested in a wide range of environments,

...and that the benefits of growth are broadly comparable between London, existing pilots and new pilots

We received so many applications to take part that we will continue to pilot the business rates retention programme in 2019 to 2020.

Full details will be published in due course.

Mr Speaker, over the past year my ministers and officials have been listening to councils of all shapes and sizes...

...understanding their concerns and working together to develop ways of tackling them.

The result of those conversations is reflected in this draft settlement.

So for example, rural councils have expressed concern about the fairness of

the current system...

...with the Rural Services Delivery Grant due to be reduced next year.

So today I can confirm that I will increase the Rural Services Delivery Grant by £15 million in 2018 to 2019...

... meaning the total figure will remain at £65 million for the remainder of the current 4-year settlement.

We've also heard concerns about proposed changes to the New Homes Bonus.

To date we have made almost £7 billion in New Homes Bonus payments to reward the building of 1.4 million homes.

Over £946 million in New Homes Bonus payments will be allocated in 2018 to 2019, rewarding local authorities for their work in fixing our broken housing market.

I consulted on proposals to link New Homes Bonus payments to the number of successful planning appeals and considered raising the NHB baseline.

Following conversations that I've had with the sector, I have been persuaded of the importance of continuity and certainty in this area.

So today I can confirm that in the year ahead no new changes will be made to the way New Homes Bonus works...

...and that the New Homes Bonus baseline will be maintained at 0.4%.

As I set out in the [housing white paper](#), local authorities will be able to increase planning fees by 20% where they commit to investing the additional income in their planning services.

This is a significant step towards addressing the widespread concerns of under-resourcing in local planning authorities.

Following discussions with the sector I am also announcing a continuation of capital receipts flexibility programme for a further 3 years.

This scheme gives local authorities the continued freedom to use capital receipts from the sale of their own assets.

This will help fund the costs of transformation and release savings.

One particular issue that's caused concern for some councils is the so-called "Negative RSG".

This is where changes in revenue support grant have led to a downward adjustment of some local authorities' business rates top-up or tariff for 2019 to 2020.

I do recognise the strength of feeling in local government around this issue.

So I can confirm that my department will be looking at fair and affordable options for dealing with Negative RSG...

...and we will formally consult on proposals in the spring so that the findings are in ahead of next year's settlement.

And of course, anyone who has spoken to anyone in local government will be aware of concerns about funding for adult and children's social care.

That's why, over the past 12 months, we've put billions of pounds of extra funding into the sector...

... and why the Department for Education are spending more than £200 million on innovation and improvement in children's social care.

At [Spring Budget](#), an additional £2 billion was announced for adult social care over the next 3 years.

With the freedom to raise more money more quickly through the use of the social care precept that I announced this time last year...

...we have given councils have access to £9.25 billion more dedicated funding for adult social care over 3 years.

But we also need to find a long-term solution to challenges that are not going to go away.

That's why we have already announced that a green paper on future challenges within adult social care will be published in the summer of 2018.

Finally, I am conscious of calls for further flexibility in the setting of Council Tax.

While we all want to ease growing pressure on local government services, I'm sure none of us want to see hardworking taxpayers saddled with ever-higher bills.

This settlement strikes a balance between those two aims...

...giving councils the ability to increase their core Council Tax requirement by an additional 1% without a local referendum – bringing the core principle in line with inflation.

We have abolished Whitehall capping.

Under the Localism Act, local government can increase Council Tax as they wish – but excessive rises need to be approved by local residents in a referendum.

This provides an important check and balance against the excessive increases [political content removed].

This change...

...combined with the additional flexibility on the adult social care precept that I confirmed last year...

...gives local authorities the independence they need to help relieve pressure on local services such as adults and children's services, while also recognising that many households face their own pressures.

In addition, directly elected mayors will decide the required level of precept by agreement with their combined authorities.

I'm sure voters will be watching closely to ensure this freedom is not abused – as I will.

I can also confirm that the government intends to defer the setting of referendum principles for town and parish councils for 3 years.

This is subject to the sector taking all available steps to mitigate the need for Council Tax increases...

...and the government seeing clear evidence of restraint in the increases set by the sector as a whole.

I have also agreed measures with the Home Secretary to make it easier for Police and Crime Commissioners to meet local demand pressures...

...by allowing a £12 Council Tax flexibility for police services – raising an additional £139 million next year.

Mr Speaker, this settlement recognises the need to keep spending under control while also tackling many of the issues that have been raised by local government over the past year.

With 2 years of real terms increases in resources available to local government...

...it will give local authorities the funding and freedom they need to make decisions in the best interests of the communities they serve.

It's a settlement that offers councils the resources they need...

...the stability they've requested...

...and the fairness they deserve...

...and I commend it to the House.

News story: Fish merchant fined for fisheries offences

Geoffrey Blake, trading as Ventnor Haven Fisheries in the Isle of Wight, was sentenced at Portsmouth Magistrates' Court on 11 December 2017 in a prosecution brought by the MMO.

The court heard how the company, a registered buyer of first sale fish, failed to submit 369 sales notes in either electronic or paper form to the MMO within 48 hrs of the landing taking place between 25 February 2016 and 1 September 2017.

Mr Blake pleaded not guilty but was convicted by the court and ordered to pay a fine of £500, costs of £500 and a victim surcharge of £50.

A spokesperson for the MMO said:

The requirement to submit sales notes within 48 hours enables the MMO to gain an accurate picture of fish stocks on which to base its fisheries management decisions.

When, as in this case, sales notes are not submitted that picture becomes partial, distorted or inaccurate. This prosecution shows that the MMO will take the appropriate enforcement action to prevent such a situation occurring.