

Speech: Parole Board 50th Anniversary

I think that the Butler Trust has marshalled a star-studded turnout. It's right that after 50 years we should show our appreciation of the Board's important work and its strong and inspiring leadership. I want to congratulate both Nick Hardwick and Martin Jones for getting this vital body into good shape as it enters its sixth decade. I think that the Board today is energetic, it's faster-moving, it's toned and conditioned. If you like, it's following the regime that a doctor would wish every fifty year old would undertake.

Now before I go any further, I know you heard this morning from Mark Johnson about his experience of prisons and probation. And I wanted to start by sharing with you the thoughts of a 'lifer' who was talking about the impact on him of a Parole Board oral hearing.

He said this, he said: 'I think it's important that every lifer be given the opportunity to speak to the people that make decisions on their life... A bit of paper is flat and emotionless and expressionless. It's open to interpretation and anyone can read what's said, but when I'm here and I'm talking and I'm responding to what you're saying and if you have any doubt you can question me on that doubt – that is the benefit. '

It also...made me feel a lot better about me, that at least I've gone in there and I've put my point of view across...And these people now have something more to contend with than a dead bit of paper...it was satisfying in that respect.'

Now, as is the case with all 'lifera', this man had no chance of being freed until the Parole Board had assessed the risk that he posed to the public. The Board's work is pivotal to the future of offenders and to the wider criminal justice system. It supports the government's priorities to protect the public and prevent there being more victims, while supporting prison reform by encouraging offenders to turn over a new leaf in the hope of a move to open conditions or release.

And the Board has made great strides of late, listing more cases each month and bringing down the backlog faster than predicted. I also welcome in particular the additional focus on IPP prisoners, five hundred and seventy-six of whom were released last year – that's the highest annual figure since IPP sentences were introduced in 2005. HMPPS has been working closely with the Parole Board to help speed up progress, and it's encouraging to see that release rate at 46 per cent, up from 28 per cent just five years ago.

Measured, meticulous, public-spirited

I suppose that if you wanted to characterise the work of the Parole Board it's a reverse detective investigation, raking through evidence for clues to whether a crime will be committed in the future. And it's little wonder the Board's decisions come under public scrutiny. There is a tension inherent in every decision: balancing the need to be cautious with the need to be fair;

protecting society while honouring the competing rights of offenders. Those rights are enshrined in the word 'parole', which of course comes from the French 'parol', or 'word of honour'. In the 19th century it referred to a prisoner of war's pledge not to take up arms again in the same conflict, once released. These days the Board has more to go on than just a prisoner's statement that he will be good to his word.

Its judges, psychiatrists, psychologists, probation officers and independent members deliberate upon offenders' behaviour, past and present, to look in to the future. They are not doing so as soothsayers peering at the entrails of a chicken, but with measured, meticulous and forensic care – while recognising at the same time that risk assessment can never by its very nature be an exact science ... that there cannot be a crystal ball. When new members sign up, as more than one hundred public-spirited people did last year alone, it's in the knowledge they will be called upon to make complex judgments that few of us are equipped for or would feel able to make. And for all that those Members do, for their humanity and courage, I salute them and thank them.

Remembering the early days

There are now around two hundred and seventy Parole Board members. At the beginning, in 1967, there were just seventeen. In those days they almost never saw an actual prisoner. They made paper-based recommendations for the most part. But change was coming. In a way, the Sixties marked the end of a more innocent era: the crimes that we remember from that time were high-profile and notorious. The Great Train Robbery. The 'Moors Murderers', the East End gangster twins Ronnie and Reggie Kray. The perpetrators of those crimes spent decades making multiple parole bids. Each was carefully and properly scrutinised.

To no one's great surprise, successive applications were turned down.

Which are the factors likely to sway the Parole Board towards release? Well, they are factors that happen to chime with our reform goals – qualities that contribute to prisons becoming safer and more purposeful; more likely to support rehabilitation and cut reoffending. A co-operative attitude in custody, coupled with a realistic release plan that involves good support – including positive family contact. A willingness to take responsibility for the original crime, to accept the punishment and to move on. The completion of behaviour courses and health treatment, an appetite for the kind of training that leads to qualifications and work. Staying away from drugs, and not committing serious breaches of discipline.

Looking ahead, I see the Parole Board playing an ever-more important part in prison reform. It can help create capacity in the estate by ensuring that prisoners suitable for release are not marooned behind bars by delayed hearings (and I should say quickly that I'm conscious too that a smooth-running system depends equally on HMPPS playing its part in making sure that the Board has available to it, at the right time, appropriate evidence of an offender's progress, and I am determined to make sure that we do our bit to enable the board to do its job more effectively and swiftly.

The Parole Board's work can reassure offenders that good behaviour will be recognised, incentivising them for their part to embrace learning and training. It can encourage offenders, particularly IPP prisoners, that they can make progress, and not stay in custody for any longer than Parliament or the courts intended. I would add that as we go forward to the next 50 years, I would like to see the Parole Board's membership more closely reflect today's society – an argument I use also about the judiciary, which must hold up a mirror to the people who pass through our courts. And I know that both Nick and Martin share my own desire to increase in particular the number of black and other ethnic minority representatives on the Parole Board – that will help to ensure that it draws members from the widest possible pool of talent, and help maintain public confidence in the system.

The importance of working together

Now, while always respecting the judicial independence of the Parole Board, I see its relationship with the MOJ as one of close partners. Few would deny that both the prison and parole system face considerable challenges in the year ahead. Prisons absorb some of the most troubled people in society. There is still too much violence and self-harm in our jails. The abuse of new psychoactive substances has made many offenders more aggressive and prone to sudden mood swings. Growing gang violence in cities is spreading to wings and landings as the police and the courts find and sentence to custody those responsible for gang violence. And of course, reoffending remains stubbornly too high.

I don't believe – even after just four months doing this job – that there is a single solution, no magic bullet to bring about an answer to those challenge, so that is why we are working on so many fronts. Beyond improving the performance of both prisons and probation services, we are co-operating more effectively with important bodies that have contact with offenders. And contact also with people who we recognise as likely to commit the kind of crime that typically leads to a spell in custody. The hope being, of course, that we can divert them before it's too late. And to that end, we are collaborating with colleagues from the Departments of Health, and Work and Pensions, with NHS Trusts, employers, training providers and not least the many hundreds of invaluable third sector organisations and charities focused on offender reform.

And I believe we can do much more through that kind of partnership in the months and years ahead. We need a plan that tackles the problems of reoffending at source, recognising that many social problems, such as addictions, unemployment and homelessness, affect their lives long before offenders are ever sentenced. Let me share with you two other striking statistics: firstly, that less than one per cent of all requirements started under a community or suspended sentence order are Mental Health requirements.

This is a remarkably low figure and I think it's important that both those of us charged with responsibilities for the criminal justice system and our colleagues with responsibilities for the NHS services and for mental health provision find ways in which to address this problem. The second statistic concerns reoffending and the salutary effects of drug or alcohol treatment

programmes in the community. Recently published statistics show that offenders who undergo that kind of community-based drug and alcohol treatment programme are 33 per cent less likely to commit further crimes. We all need to learn from that experience.

A partnership for reform

In making prisons safer and calmer, the MOJ and HMPPS are well on the way to recruiting 2,500 more staff by the end of next year. That's more than 10 per cent of the total number of prison officers, a significant increase, and they will make a difference. They will help to bring about the safer, calmer conditions in which reform can prosper, with prisoners more likely to be taken from their cells to be taught and trained. At the same time, our new offender management model – with one officer responsible for about six prisoners – takes us in the right direction and we must use every possible means to ensure that prisoners attend workshops and classes.

I am determined too to make sure that HMPPS gives prompt and public responses to issues identified by prison and probation inspectors so that recognised problems do not fester. I would urge everyone here to look out for our new online portal, the Justice Data Hub, where figures on purposeful activity and how long prisoners are spending in cells will be freely available, establishment by establishment. Making this information public is itself a discipline – it makes us more accountable, our work more transparent, and will, I hope, lead to swifter progress on prison performance.

The quality of probation services, and the level of confidence in the supervision of community sentences, also feed into effective offender management. There are many probation officers doing an incredibly professional job. At the same time, the inspectorate's report on through-the-gate services made it clear that these are not performing in the way that we had hoped. We are now looking at probation with an eye to improving performance and maintaining the confidence of courts and the public alike.

Prison should be a last resort. That, after all, is what the law requires. People should go to prison because their crime is so serious that custody is the only punishment that can satisfy justice, or because they would be a threat to public safety if they were in the community. I want to see the prison population come down. Reducing the numbers in prison depends on many things, and not all of those come under the direct control of the MOJ. Parole Board decisions and the performance of probation; access to release on temporary licence; the availability and quality of community-based courses and health treatment all have a bearing. As, of course, do sentencing policy and practice.

If you look at the pattern of sentencing, the number of people placed in custody for 12 months or less has not changed significantly over the past decade – which rather weakens the argument we often hear that the high levels of the prison population is solely due to more people being sent to jail instead of being given community sentences. Rather, the surge in numbers stems from people serving four years or more, often for violent and drug-related crime, and also those sent to prison for sexual offences – many

brought to book long after the event thanks to victims feeling brave enough to come forward. It is very difficult to argue that individuals who have committed that kind of offence deserve a shorter sentence.

IPP prisoners make up a relatively small part of the prison population but as everyone here knows, many remain in custody long beyond tariff. My feeling on IPP sentencing is that as a policy it was flawed from the start, and it was used far more frequently than was ever intended by the Government of that time and by Parliament.

We have a duty now to ensure that parole applicants receive their rightful hearings in a timely fashion, that the Board has the resources to carry out a full and proper evaluation, weighing up all the evidence at its disposal, and that offenders are released if they are judged no longer to be a risk to society. Those facing undue delays feel acutely the loss of hope and a growing frustration, and this leads them to harm themselves or others and for their conduct in custody in general to worsen. With IPP prisoners, as with all offenders, our goal should be to give them every chance of living a positive life after custody, because this contributes to a safer society overall. But it is right that the Parole Board, in judging individual cases, should always give priority to the protection of the public.

And that means that looking forward, the big challenge, the question we need to ask ourselves, is whether there is a way to carry on cutting the numbers of IPP prisoners in custody once what one might term the 'easier' cases have been dealt with and there remains to us a harder core of very challenging, complex and frankly very risky cases of people still inside prisons.

Conclusion

I want to finish with a brief history lesson. While we're here to mark fifty years of the Parole Board, in penal terms parole has been around a lot longer. It dates to the 19th century, an era when governments were edging away from the corporal punishment approach in favour of a more enlightened vision of offender reform. It may be a stretch to take national credit for this, but one notable parole pioneer was Alexander Maconochie, the warden of a remote English penal colony on Norfolk Island, a dot in the South Pacific between Australia and New Zealand.

Norfolk Island was supposed to hold the 'worst of the worst' – convicts who'd been transported to Australia and then exiled even further away for committing yet more crimes. Its regular floggings and hangings were designed to deter convicts left on the mainland from any thoughts of rebellion. But Maconochie had a different vision and set about changing things. He developed a 'mark' system that rewarded good conduct, hard work and study by offenders – is this starting to sound familiar? Marks earned them privileges, and eventually their release.

You know what they all say about breaking the mould – that it's better to be a fast-follower than a pioneer. Maconochie was fired in 1844. But he'd sown the seeds of change and the ideas with which he had experimented were taken up around the world – not least here, where they remain firmly rooted in our

approach to criminal justice.

Although no human institution or system is perfect, I remain proud of our justice system – it's always led the way and it is admired worldwide. The principles and values that run through it are a mark of the kind of country we are. And while we rightly give priority to public protection and we are not afraid of facing up to the need for punishment, we also place a great value on rehabilitation. The great majority of offenders, all but a handful, will one day return to the community. And it is in the interests of everybody in our society – not least potential victims of the future – that we use the time that we have offenders in custody and under supervision to minimise the chance that they will commit again and to add to the possibility that they can make that transition successfully into law-abiding life where they are actually contributing something positive to the wider society in which they live.

And it is thanks to our parole system that many do make that contribution and they are able to do so only when the Board is satisfied that the individual offender in front of that Board will not cause further risk to the public if released. That work, that exercise of sensitive and important judgements, is key to prison reform, key to safer communities and key to ensuring that our justice system will remain both effective and fair. I congratulate all who have served on the Parole Board, on what has been achieved over the first fifty years, and I am very confident that there are more successes and more productive work still to come. I look forward to working closely with Nick and other colleagues in taking that work forward in years to come.

[Statement to Parliament: Statement on the Grenfell Recovery Taskforce Report](#)

Introduction

With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the independent Recovery Taskforce that is working with the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea in the wake of June's tragic fire at Grenfell Tower.

The people of North Kensington have been failed by those who were supposed to serve them.

They were failed by a system that allowed the fire to happen.

And they were failed once again by a sluggish and chaotic response in the immediate aftermath.

It was clear that if RBKC was to get a grip on the situation and begin to regain the trust of residents it would have to change and change quickly.

That started with a change in leadership of the council, new senior officers, and new support brought in from other councils, and central government.

To ensure that this translated into better service for the victims and people of North Kensington and assure me that the council would be capable of delivery, I announced on 5 July 2017 that I was sending in a specialist independent Taskforce.

The Taskforce is made up of experts in housing, in local government, public services and community engagement.

I deliberately appointed independent-minded individuals who would not hesitate to speak their minds.

I have now received the [first report](#) from the Taskforce, reflecting on its first 9 weeks on the ground.

The report has been shared with the Rt Hon Gentleman opposite.

And I will be placing copies in the library of the House, and it will be published in full on [GOV.UK](#).

Green shoots

It is clear from the report that progress is being made. That much-needed change has happened and continues to happen. That the council today is a very different organisation from the one that failed its people so badly back in June.

And the Taskforce is satisfied that RBKC under its new leadership recognises the challenges it faces and is committed to delivering a comprehensive recovery programme. For that reason, they do not see any practical advantage for a further intervention at this time, which would risk further disruption.

Room for improvement

But while the green shoots are there, the report pulls no punches about the fact that there is still significant room for improvement.

The Taskforce has identified 4 key areas in which the council need to step up.

The first is pace. The speed of delivery needs to be increased, more work needs to be done more quickly.

The second area is innovation. The scale and impact of the fire was unprecedented in recent history but RBKC is relying too much on tried-and-tested solutions that are not up to the task. The council should be much bolder in its response.

The third area is skills. Too many of the officers and councillors working on the response lack specialist training in how to work with a traumatised

community. This needs to change.

And the final area, arguably the most important going forward, is a need for greater empathy and emotional intelligence. The people of Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Walk and the wider community have already suffered so much.

Yet the Taskforce has heard too many accounts of that suffering being compounded by bureaucratic processes that are not appropriate. When so many deeply traumatised men, women and children have complex individual needs.

So a greater degree of humanity must be put at the heart of all of RBKC's recovery work.

I have discussed these recommendations with the council's leadership and they have accepted them all without question. Culture change is never quick or easy to achieve in any organisation. But I am in no doubt that the leadership and staff of RBKC genuinely want to do better. It is their community too, and they desperately want to help it heal.

I am particularly encouraged that the council are now drawing on NHS expertise to secure specific training for those front-line staff responsible for providing direct support to the survivors.

I have assured the council that I will continue to support them in building capacity. However, I have also made it clear that my support will not be uncritical or unqualified. I expect to see swift, effective action to deal with all the issues highlighted in the report. I am not taking any options off the table if progress is not made, and I shall continue to monitor the situation closely.

Meetings

Until now, one aspect of that monitoring has involved weekly meetings, chaired by myself, that bring together ministers from across government and senior colleagues from RBKC.

Although these have proved effective, the Taskforce expressed concern that meeting so often is beginning to become counter-productive the time required to prepare properly is cutting into the time available for frontline work.

As a result, the report recommends that we meet less often. I have accepted this recommendation. However, let me reassure the House that this does not mean our priorities are shifting elsewhere or that the level of scrutiny is being reduced.

It is simply a matter of ensuring time and resources are focused to the maximum on those affected by the fire.

Rehousing

One area to which the House knows I have been paying particularly close attention is the rehousing of those who lost their homes in the fire.

Whilst I have always been clear that rehousing must proceed at a pace which represents the needs, wants and situations of survivors, I have been equally adamant that bureaucratic inertia must not add delay.

Clearly some progress is being made.

The latest figures that I have from RBKC are that 122 households out of a current total of 204 have accepted an offer of either temporary or permanent accommodation. 73 of these have now moved in, of which 47 households have moved into temporary accommodation, and 26 households have moved into permanent accommodation.

However, the report is also clear that that the process is simply not moving as quickly as it should.

RBKC's latest figures show that 131 Grenfell households still living in emergency accommodation. Behind every one of these numbers there are human faces.

There can be no doubt that there are families who desperately want a new home but for whom progress has been painfully slow.

Almost 5 months after the fire, this must improve. Responsibility for re-homing ultimately lies with RBKC. However, in central government we cannot shy away from our share of responsibility.

I expect the council, in line with the Taskforce's report, to do whatever is necessary to ensure households can move into settled homes as swiftly as possible.

I will continue to do all I can to ensure this is done.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, when I announced the creation of the Taskforce, I said it would stay in place for as long as it was needed.

Based on this first report, there is still much to be done, so the Taskforce will remain for the foreseeable future. I have asked the Taskforce to ensure that proper action is taken on all the fronts they identify, and to come back to me in the New Year with a further update, which I will, of course, share with this House.

I must of course thank the 4 expert members of the Taskforce for their tireless efforts:

- Aftab Chughtai,
- Javed Khan,
- Jane Scott,
- and Chris Wood.

Mr Speaker, this weekend I read the Right Reverend James Jones's excellent report on the appalling experiences of those who lost loved ones in the

Hillsborough disaster.

It's a sobering piece of work reminding us that, and I quote, "the way in which families bereaved through public tragedy are treated by those in authority is in itself a burning injustice".

We saw that all too clearly in the hours and days after the Grenfell fire.

The clock cannot be turned back, the woeful inadequacies of the early response cannot be undone.

But I can say, once again, that as long as I am in public life, I will do all I can to ensure the failures of the past are not repeated and the people of Grenfell Tower get the help and the support they deserve.

The Hillsborough families had to fight for a quarter of a century to get their voices heard. To be taken seriously. To be treated properly by those in authority.

We cannot allow that to happen again. I will not allow it to happen again.

The Public Inquiry established by the Prime Minister will play the major role but for its part, I am confident that the continued work of the Taskforce will also help ensure that the survivors receive the support and the respect they deserve.

Press release: Graduate game developers win Government grants

Mochi Mode from Cardiff (University of South Wales) and Shuttershade Studios from Huddersfield (University of Huddersfield) are the winners of Tranzfuser, a graduate talent competition funded by the Government's UK Games Fund, that saw startup video game studios from across the country battling it out for grants.

The two winning teams, both receiving £25,000, have joined the prestigious portfolio of professional games development studios working with the UK Games Fund community.

Matt Hancock, Creative Industries Minister, said:

The UK games industry is a fantastic success story and we want to see it continue to grow from strength to strength. The Tranzfuser programme is aimed at identifying and supporting the talented young games developers and the original and innovative games they are producing right here in the UK.

Last year's Tranzfuser alumni went on to publish their own game and I wish this year's winners the same success in turning their creativity into a reality for us all to enjoy.

Over the summer, Tranzfuser tasked 23 teams with just ten weeks to take their idea for a great game from concept to playable demo to be showcased in front of 80,000 games fans and a panel of expert judges at the UK's most popular video games festival, EGX. The teams developed all manner of fun and innovative games, from single-player puzzles to multiplayer room-scale Virtual Reality experiences.

Awarded a grant of £5,000 from UKGF, the teams developed their games with invaluable support provided by a nationwide network of Tranzfuser Local Hubs based at some of the best universities for video game design and development.

Mochi Mode wowed the judges and public alike with their game of bright visuals and simple one touch gameplay that sees players controlling a herd of cows. The setting changes to different locations across the Wild West but the goal is the same: players must guide the herd to safety through a host of colourful obstacles in this fun arcade game.

Laura Wells, Team Leader at Mochi Mode said:

After graduating, it's tough to know what steps will help you 'breakthrough' into the games industry. That was especially true for us with the aspiration to start up our own studio. Tranzfuser has given us guidance at a crucial point of our development. Most importantly, it has allowed us to make a little magic!

Shuttershade Studios is a team of graduates from the University of Huddersfield. The small group of four individuals created a virtual reality game, VR Party Ware, primarily consisting of a collection of various minigames. Players can compete globally through an online leader board system or locally with their own friends in a casual competitive environment.

Marcus Nichols from Shuttershade Studios said:

Winning Tranzfuser has had a life changing effect on both me and the entire Shuttershade Studios team. We're now able to do our dream jobs which is to have very little sleep but to have a tonne of fun developing our own video games. It's the most varied job that we've all had and we wouldn't change it for the world.

New for 2017 is the Tranzfuser Accelerator, a unique programme where the runner-up teams from the competition receive tailor-made consultancy packages to give them the best chance of successfully applying to the UK Games Fund.

The UK Games Fund and Tranzfuser are both funded as part of the £4m UK

Government programme of games development and talent funding announced in 2016, run by UK Games Talent and Finance Community Interest Company (UKGTF).

Paul Durrant, UKGTF's founder, said:

All of the teams worked hard after securing their place on Tranzfuser 2017. Each of the 23 teams has put in a huge effort and each has benefitted significantly from real-world learning throughout. The winning teams are the ones that best managed the scope of their projects, had a shared creative objective across the team and better understood the target audience for their particular games.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. Many startup studios lack the capital to help develop their ideas and attract private investment. Now in its second year, Tranzfuser was created to help bridge that gap and allow developers to take their ideas from the drawing board to production.
2. The Mochi Mode studio is comprised of four members – team leader and designer Laura Wells, programmer Liam Jones, artist Thomas Woodward, animator Amy Baldwin and level designer Kevin Ho. They aim to develop small, engaging games for app markets.
3. Also at the ceremony was an exclusive screening of the first ever Tranzfuser documentary; a broadcast-quality 30 minute long film charting the summer-long competition and the competitor's journey from applicant to professional games developer.
4. The Tranzfuser competition is unique in being a UK-wide talent programme linked directly to a prototype fund allowing new teams to benefit from grants and peer to peer interaction with a host of other early stage games development companies. 85% of the UK Games Fund and Tranzfuser's spend to date has been outside London.
5. Teams that secured support from UKGF in the first Tranzfuser in 2016 are now successful studios. Cold Sun Studios and Miracle Tea Studios are both working towards release of their funded projects.
6. Outside of Tranzfuser, the UK Games Fund supports young start-ups who can apply for funding. Companies such as White Paper Games (based in Manchester) and Coatsink (based in Sunderland) are both excelling as established indie games developers.

Additional quotes

Since first being selected for funding, Coatsink has grown significantly with nearly 50 employees in the business and further growth plans to take that number up in the next couple of quarters. Their latest VR title, the critically-acclaimed Augmented Empire, was released in July.

Eddie Beardsmore, Chief Operations Officer at Coatsink said:

Coatsink expanded rapidly over the last year. Due to our current project roster of over a dozen titles – all in various stages of development – we’re looking to employ a further 15 to 20 developers by April next year.

We continue to develop for multiple platforms and recently announced a partnership with Nintendo to bring our much-loved platformer Shu to the Nintendo Switch later this year. The UK Games Fund has provided a huge amount of support for the studio and we wouldn’t be in this amazing position without them.

White Paper Games, a team of graduate colleagues who were supported by YEAR (the predecessor to the UK Games Fund) is doing incredibly well with the imminent release of a much-anticipated game The Occupation.

Pete Bottomley, Co-Founder of White Paper Games said: > Working with the UKGF has been a great experience. The fund afforded us the additional time to push the quality and design of the game which ultimately allowed us to announce it in a strong position. This was instrumental to The Occupation’s early success and interest and without this, I don’t believe we would be in the position we are now. I can’t recommend and praise the fund enough.

The 23 participating teams and hubs this year were:

Teesside Launchpad, Teesside University (North East England)

Fox Byte Games

Futureworks Media School (North West England)

Broken Pixel Studios, Foxtrot 203

University of Bradford* (West Yorkshire)

Gebba Games

University of Huddersfield, Enterprise Team (West Yorkshire)

Giant Games, Nocturnals, Shuttershade Studios

Sheffield Hallam University (South Yorkshire)

Final Forge, Inside Out Games, Grim Inc

Brunel University (London)

A Loaded Teaspoon, Drift, Slime Time Studios

Slime Time Studios Eastern Enterprise Hub (South East England)

IndieByte

Wrexham Glyndwr University (North Wales) ☐

Ethereal, Round Square Studios, Static Shell Studios ☐

University of South Wales (South Wales) ☐

Mochi Software, Dark Planet Studios ☐

Filthy Fresh ☐ **Northern Ireland Screen (Northern Ireland)** ☐

No Piknik☐

Abertay University (East Scotland)

Pocket Sized Hands

Glasgow Caledonian University (West Scotland)

Pioneer Games

[News story: Welsh Secretary: Let's turn Wales into an innovation nation](#)

Alun Cairns has today (6 Nov) delivered a clarion call to Welsh businesses, urging them to seize UK Government support and take a leap into the world of innovation.

Innovate UK is holding a series of events around the UK to introduce a new pilot programme for innovation loans.

The Secretary of State attended today's event in Cardiff's Tramshed Tech where he called on the 200+ business representatives in the room to have the drive to innovate and apply for the financial support available from the UK Government.

Innovation Loans will offer affordable, patient, flexible funding for later-stage research and development projects with a clear route to commercial success.

Innovate UK will announce loans through future competitions and offer them to growth-oriented small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) that are able to demonstrate that they:

- have a high quality innovation project
- will be able to afford the interest payments and loan repayments
- need public sector support as they can't access project finance on

standard commercial terms

Alun Cairns said:

Innovation can not only revolutionise the way we live our lives, it can bring real opportunities for our businesses to tap into and grow.

The breadth and depth of the innovative and inspiring projects the UK Government supports never fails to astound me. Including here in Wales.

From hydrogen powered cars made in Powys to funding the build of the UK's first office that creates more power than it uses at Swansea University, Innovate UK funding is helping Wales to be at the centre of the new innovations that change the way we do business, the way we live and be at the forefront of developing the solutions for tomorrow.

But there is so much more potential amongst our business community, just waiting to be realised. I encourage Welsh SMEs to take the leap of faith, have the drive to innovate and discover the financial support available from the UK Government to do so.

[Press release: Multi-agency exercise to test temporary barriers at Beales Corner in Bewdley](#)

The Environment Agency's field team, along with support from Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, Bewdley Town Council and other partners, will be testing out the deployment of temporary flood barriers and the local community flood plan.

The exercise, which will start at 09:00am, will provide an opportunity to test our barrier deployment plan and procedures in this training exercise. We will be testing our working arrangements with partners and the local Community Flood Group, so the barriers can be quickly and safely erected when needed during a flood, with minimum disruption to residents and businesses.

Pedestrians and traffic will be unable to use this section of road and pathway between Millside Court to where it joins with Kidderminster Road, via the Stourport Road. Access to Bewdley Bridge and the town will remain fully accessible by using the Kidderminster Road.

Mark Bowers, Flood Risk Manager said:

This is a test of our operational equipment and local community flood plan. Although we have carried out numerous barrier deployment exercises at our training depots, doing it on location will give our field team invaluable experience.

It's important to remember that we can never protect 100% against flooding, and we can't guarantee that specific communities will always have access to temporary barriers.

Local residents and businesses should be prepared by checking their flood risk, signing up to flood warnings and finding out what they can do to protect themselves and their property by visiting the Prepare for Flooding page on GOV.UK or calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

Nick Farress, Bewdley Town Council Clerk added:

This will be a vital practice run to test our new community led flood plan which has been developed to support the Environment Agency in retaining the temporary barrier at Beale's Corner. The Town Council are very grateful to our band of volunteers who have put themselves forward to help with this vital work".

The temporary barrier deployment is also being supported by Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service who is a key partner in the project. Wyre Forest Station Commander, Daryl Justice, said:

Our involvement with the Bewdley Flood Barrier response is new arrangement that will see our Firefighters add even more value to the Wyre Forest community.

When flooding is predicted our on-call firefighters will be given a period of notice which will minimise the impact on their primary employment and, although deployed under the direction of the Environment Agency, they will remain available for life threatening emergencies.

This is one of the first initiatives of its type in the UK and is a great example of how fire crews can add value in other areas. It also supports Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's wider vision of 'Saving More Lives'.

Environment Agency staff and Community Flood Group members will be available during the exercise to provide the public with information about access restrictions, alternative routes and general flood advice. The exercise is

likely to conclude around 13:00pm.