

Boosting value for money in the council finance system

- Plans to strengthen council finance and protect public funds published
- New consultation on proposals to strengthen local audit framework in response to Redmond Review
- Plans will support councils across England to level up and ensure that councils can build back better from the pandemic

Plans to strengthen council finances, reduce risk to public funds and ensure councils are delivering value for money for taxpayers have been published by the government today (28 July 2021).

Changes to the capital finance system will see improvements in the way that risks are monitored and will drive effective decision-making and ensure council funds are spent effectively.

Local Government Minister Luke Hall has announced the changes in a drive to boost public trust and ensure that residents are receiving the quality of services they deserve as we build back better from the pandemic.

Also confirmed today is a [new consultation](#) on our proposals for how the new regulator, the Audit Reporting and Governance Authority (ARGA), should act as the system leader for local audit within a new, simplified local audit framework.

It also includes proposals for how the government intends to implement other areas of the [Redmond Review](#), which was an independent review by Sir Tony Redmond into the effectiveness of external audit and transparency of financial reporting in councils. These include:

- strengthening the ways that the findings of audit are used by local bodies, including proposals for the inclusion of independent members on local audit committees
- ensuring the supply of appropriately experienced and qualified local authority auditors, including amending guidance related to Key Audit Partners
- consider the functioning of local audit for smaller bodies, including whether the threshold for smaller bodies is set at the right level

Alongside this consultation, we have published two responses to previous local audit consultations – [allocating £15 million to local bodies to help with the costs of audit](#), and [changes to regulations that will help to provide greater flexibility in payments for audits](#), both of which show significant support for the government's proposals.

The government continues to work closely with stakeholders, including local bodies and audit firms, to refine proposals for implementing our commitments around system leadership, as well the range of other commitments we have made

in response to the Redmond Review.

Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government Luke Hall MP said:

Throughout the pandemic, we have worked closely with councils to ensure they have the resources they need to deliver vital services for their communities.

As we build back better, we are strengthening the local audit system, to deliver value for money for taxpayers, support sound investment decisions and sustain public confidence in local government.

The government will continue to monitor the sector, and keep under review whether further action and reform is needed. We will also be engaging with local authorities, and other bodies, as we develop the actions for oversight and intervention, to ensure capital framework remains fit for purpose.

The capital finance system will be improved through a multi-action approach to successfully address all the issues that create risk to the system:

- The first line of control is the scrutiny of local authority activity, enabled by transparency and reporting. This includes effective monitoring by government and others with a regulatory function, but also ensuring that there is sufficient transparency such that local authorities can be held to account locally.
- The second line of control is the system of controls within local authorities. At this level, government actions can directly address local mismanagement through direct intervention or support strengthening of local authority controls and capability to achieve better outcomes. This aims to strengthen local decision making and risk management by supporting improvements to capability and governance of investment decisions.
- The third line of control is the Prudential Framework itself. It uses the existing statutory powers for intervention, alongside previously unused opportunities to strengthen the Framework

[See the Redmond Review.](#)

In response to Sir Tony's Review, since December we have:

- Announced £15 million for this financial year to support councils with likely additional costs in audit fees. We have consulted on the distribution of this funding.
- Launched a consultation on proposed changes to regulations related to fees that will allow more flexibility to ensure that audit firms receive payment for additional work required.
- We are working with stakeholders to deliver the other recommendations where a sector-led or system-wide response is appropriate.
- Extended the deadline for when councils must publish their audited accounts from 31 July to 30 September, for an initial two years, to give

firms more time to complete audits.

Seal of approval for Sellafield engineering design procurement

The government has approved the continuation of a key contract for engineering design and safety case services at the Sellafield site, in West Cumbria

The Design Services Alliance (DSA), a 15-year contract with a total sanction value of £1.5 billion, will continue into its 3rd 5-year tranche from 2022 to 2027.

The alliance was first set up in 2012 with Sellafield Ltd as an alliance partner working as one team alongside AXIOM (a 4 entity joint venture comprising Assystem, Jacobs, Mott MacDonald and Progressive (Aecom and Cavendish Nuclear)).

Since then, working with the broader supply chain, the alliance has delivered cashable, non-cashable and future benefits totalling more than £220 million.

So, for every pound of the nearly £1 billion spent so far through the alliance, Sellafield Ltd has received 22 pence back.

In addition, the alliance has helped to make Sellafield safer sooner by cutting 744 months from hazard reduction schedules – bringing the creation of a clean and safe environment for future generations closer with each day saved.

Paul Adams, head of the DSA, said:

This announcement is just reward for a lot of hard work by the people involved in the alliance. It recognises how we value each other across the alliance and our shared commitment to perform with passion, pride and pace.

We are committed to continuous improvement and our belief that we can deliver even better results between now and 2027.

The DSA makes a real difference at Sellafield by challenging accepted ways of doing things, removing unnecessary scope, making procurement smarter, and reducing project costs with radical new technologies and lean techniques.

Last year an external review concluded that the alliance was well placed to

continue meeting Sellafield Ltd's ongoing need for engineering design and safety case services.

It also urged greater integration with other delivery frameworks as part of a whole lifecycle approach to delivering optimum outcomes.

New ways of working are currently being developed and tested across the alliance, including early contractor input under the Alliance Designed Delivery pilot projects and joint incentivisation arrangements.

The aim is to develop these innovations into a standard part of the alliance's 'business as usual' toolkit in order to improve end-to-end delivery.

Ian Belger, head of design engineering and safety case at Sellafield Ltd, said:

This is great news for the individuals and teams working in the DSA and a recognition of their contribution and effort.

Our alliance with the DSA partners gives Sellafield Ltd access to a range of key capabilities and reach back into some of the world's largest and most capable nuclear industry contractors.

This has enabled Sellafield Ltd's design engineering capability to deliver significant value over the past 9 years.

Our challenge now is to build on this by doing even better and delivering on our digital, sustainability and carbon targets.

This latest sanction from government will allow the alliance to continue providing benefits as it concludes its 15-year mission.

Government nearly half-way to recruiting 20,000 more officers

The government is nearly half-way to delivering on its pledge to put 20,000 additional officers on the streets by 2023, figures released today (28 July) show.

An extra 9,814 police officers have been recruited across all 43 police forces in England and Wales, where they are already having an impact in tackling crime and keeping communities safe.

The latest figures follow the launch of the government's Beating Crime Plan yesterday (27 July), aimed at reducing crime, protecting victims and making the country safer.

The plan includes ensuring each neighbourhood has named, contactable police officers, who know their area and are best placed to ensure that persistent crime and anti-social behaviour is tackled – a pledge made more possible by the increase in police numbers.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

I am delighted we are already almost half-way there in delivering our commitment of 20,000 more police officers to fight crime by 2023.

These figures aren't just numbers. It means that thousands more police are out in communities protecting people, making our streets safer and supporting victims through some of the most difficult experiences of their lives.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

It is fantastic that we are well on track to meet our target of recruiting 20,000 extra police officers by 2023.

These 9,814 officers are already making a difference in neighbourhoods up and down the country, bearing down on criminals and keeping people safe.

This increase in police numbers and the Beating Crime Plan we have launched show the government's determination to back the police, give them the powers they need to take away knives, shut down drug gangs and protect communities and vulnerable people from harm.

The new recruits are already having a positive impact in forces across England and Wales. For example, the increase in numbers will allow Kent Police to send more officers into schools and educational settings to speak to pupils and intervene early and prevent crime.

The recruitment drive is also helping to make police more representative of the communities they serve. More than 6,000 (6,033) female officers have been recruited since April 2020, making up more than 4 in 10 (42%) new recruits.

There are also more black, Asian and other ethnic minorities employed as officers across forces than at any other time in the country's history, making up 11.3% (1,557) of the new recruits.

Martin Hewitt, Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council said:

These additional officers are most welcome as demand for policing services continues to increase post coronavirus (COVID-19).

The figures released today show a good step forward but there is much more to be done to continue to attract and recruit new officers and to retain those already in policing.

Jo Noakes, Director of Workforce Development at the College of Policing, said:

The police service has responded extremely well to the challenges of the pandemic, including adapting how we recruit. Today's figures demonstrate that policing has been able to continue to bring new officers into the service in large numbers. This will ease the pressure on our existing workforce, help reduce crime, keep our communities safe and improve outcomes for victims.

It is encouraging that at this scale of recruitment we are seeing more women and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds becoming police officers, it is important that forces really do represent the communities they serve.

We are proud that The College of Policing's new training for police constable recruits has already been adopted by the majority of police forces across England and Wales, which means many of these new officers will have benefitted from the up-to-date training that reflects the breadth and complexity of the important role they are undertaking.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister hosted a reception at No 10 Downing Street for police officers involved in the recruitment campaign and who have responded to COVID-19 to thank them for their efforts.

Anyone interested in applying to their local force can search ['Join the Police'](#) to find out more.

Force	Uplift as of June 2021
Avon & Somerset	273
Bedfordshire	85
Cambridgeshire	159
Cheshire	104
Cleveland	164
Cumbria	101
Derbyshire	111
Devon & Cornwall	192
Dorset	55
Durham	91
Dyfed-Powys	51

Force	Uplift as of June 2021
Essex	200
Gloucestershire	92
Greater Manchester	455
Gwent	49
Hampshire	365
Hertfordshire	186
Humberside	176
Kent	242
Lancashire	276
Leicestershire	206
Lincolnshire	116
City of London	50
Merseyside	532
Metropolitan Police	1,708
Norfolk	147
North Wales	147
North Yorkshire	86
Northamptonshire	102
Northumbria	343
Nottinghamshire	211
South Wales	185
South Yorkshire	296
Staffordshire	143
Suffolk	90
Surrey	78
Sussex	146
Thames Valley	269
Warwickshire	116
West Mercia	123
West Midlands	740
West Yorkshire	504
Wiltshire	49

[ESFA Update: 28 July 2021](#)

We use some essential cookies to make this website work.

We'd like to set additional cookies to understand how you use GOV.UK, remember your settings and improve government services.

We also use cookies set by other sites to help us deliver content from their

services.

Coventry sex offender handed immediate prison term

A sex offender has had his sentence increased following an intervention by the Solicitor General, the Rt Hon Lucy Frazer QC MP.

Martyn Croucher, 63, engaged in sexual communication online for a number of months with someone he believed to be a 13 year old girl. He was instead communicating with an adult decoy from an online group targeting suspected paedophiles. He sent the 'child' several sexual images and arranged to meet, with the intention of abusing her.

During the subsequent police investigation, it was discovered that he was also engaging in sexual communications with someone he believed to be another young girl, aged 12, but who was in fact a decoy police officer.

Croucher pleaded guilty to attempting to engage in sexual communications with a child and attempting to cause a child to engage in sexual activity. On 3 June 2021, he was sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months at Warwick Crown Court.

Following the Court's decision, the Solicitor General referred Croucher's case to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme. On 28 July 2021, the Court found his sentence to be unduly lenient and handed down an immediate prison term of 3 years.

After the hearing at the Court of Appeal the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Lucy Frazer QC MP, said:

"Croucher's intentions were deeply disturbing, engaging in sexual communications for a prolonged period with what he thought were two young girls. It is important that his sentence reflects the gravity of his crimes, and I am pleased that he will now face a term of imprisonment."

The Court of Appeal has decided that where a defendant sets out to sexually abuse a child, but in circumstances where the child happens to be an adult posing as a child, then the starting point for sentencing should be set by reference to the harm that the defendant intended to cause the fictional child. The fact that there was no real child for the defendant to abuse will then be reflected in a downward movement from that starting point. The extent of that reduction will be a matter for the court in individual cases to decide.