

## Two more Nightingale courts open

- temporary courts open in Cirencester and Stafford
- 39 Nightingale courtrooms now open nationwide
- part of plans to ensure the courts system recovers from the pandemic as quickly as possible

Shire Hall has been provided by Staffordshire County Council, while the Cirencester site is a former magistrates' court owned by the local Police and Crime Commissioner – each venue provides two additional courtrooms.

The temporary facilities will help to free up space at their respective nearby Crown courts – allowing more hearings to be held safely and delivering speedier justice for victims.

It brings the total number of Nightingale courtrooms, set up nationwide to alleviate pressure on courts and tribunals resulting from the pandemic, to 39.

Justice Minister Chris Philp said:

These new Nightingale courts will help to boost the capacity in the system – reducing delays and ensuring speedier justice for all.

This is the latest step in our plan to work with the judiciary and legal sector in pursuing every available option to ensure our courts recover as quickly as possible.

Staffordshire County Council's deputy leader, Philip White said:

We're pleased to have been able to lend our support to HM Courts and Tribunals Service to enable it to continue with proceedings and avoid delays by using the historic courtrooms at our Shire Hall building.

It's important that we all pull together to keep services going through the pandemic period for the benefit of our communities. The Shire Hall does of course provide the perfect space in its court rooms which were last used for this purpose over 30 years ago.

As we move forward beyond Covid-19 we can look forward to bringing the former library area in the Shire Hall back into productive use as our new enterprise hub for small businesses thanks to a £2m investment.

The Ministry of Justice has spared no expense in its continued efforts to keep the justice system running during this pandemic.

£142m has been spent on upgrading court buildings and technology, alongside £110m to increase capacity – making over a quarter of a billion-pound investment in court recovery this year.

1,600 extra staff are being hired, plexiglass screens set up in more than 450 courts, 20,000 remote hearings take place each week, and over 290 Covid-safe jury trial courtrooms are in operation – substantially more than before the pandemic.

The impact of these measures is already being seen. Since August, the magistrates' courts backlog has been relentlessly reducing month on month. In the last full week before Christmas, Crown Court disposals exceeded receipts for the first time since Covid started.

These efforts will be supported by an extra £337m announced in the recent Spending Review to deliver swifter justice and support victims, while £76m will further increase capacity in Family Courts and tribunals.

Every HMCTS building – including Nightingale courts – meet the government's Covid-secure guidelines, and public health experts have confirmed the arrangements remain sufficient to deal with the new strain of the virus.

1. More than £110m is being invested in a range of measures to tackle the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19), including the recruitment of 1,600 additional staff and opening more Nightingale courts
2. We're also spending £153m to improve court and tribunal buildings – the biggest single investment in court estate maintenance for more than 20 years
3. This progress will be bolstered by an extra [£337m the government is spending next year](#) to deliver swifter justice and support victims, while an additional £76 million will further increase capacity in family courts and tribunals
4. [Details on measures to keep courts safe, secure and clean](#)
5. More details on the [Nightingale courtrooms in operation](#)

---

## [More than 22,000 people to work on Lower Thames Crossing project](#)

The new crossing under the River Thames will almost double road capacity between Kent and Essex, ease congestion across the region, and divert over 13 million vehicles away from the Dartford Crossing each year, currently the only river crossing east of London. The ambitious scheme includes the longest road tunnels in the UK, 14.3 miles of new road, new viaducts, seven new green bridges, and 24 miles of new paths connecting habitats and communities.

Delivery of this transformative project will support 10,000 jobs in the peak

year of construction. Over the six-year building phase, it will employ more than 22,000 people, ranging from highly skilled engineers, architects, and designers, to other essential staff such as caterers, sign makers and IT support.

Highways England is currently developing a skills, employment and education strategy that will enable the delivery of the Lower Thames Crossing as well as support the long-term skills and employment needs of the local community.

The project has worked with Local Authorities and a wide range of stakeholders to understand their aspirations and the local skills market, so they can cultivate a workforce that can support these plans. The strategy will be published later this spring.

Matt Palmer, Lower Thames Crossing Executive Director, said:

By connecting people to jobs and businesses to customers, the Lower Thames Crossing will add billions to the local economy and play an important part in the Government's plan to level up the UK. But it also has a more urgent and crucial role to play in our economic recovery by employing more than 22,000 people over the lifetime of its construction.

Our aim to create local jobs, support local businesses, and nurture the next generation of talent, and in partnership with our contractors we have ambitious plans. We will create hundreds of apprentices and places for graduates and are offering free training to local businesses to help them work on this, or any other major infrastructure project. The scale of opportunity is huge, and I look forward sharing more detail on our approach and plans over the next few months.

Kate Willard OBE, Thames Estuary Envoy, said:

As the largest road scheme in more than three decades, it would be hard to overstate the monumental impact the Lower Thames Crossing will have on the region. I am delighted that local people and businesses in the Thames Estuary are being given the opportunity to work on this transformative project.

South East Local Enterprise Partnership Chair Christian Brodie said:

Not only will this transformative project bring major employers in to the SELEP area, but it will also provide a range of opportunities for the South East's SME community in terms of supply chain and service contracts. We are confident that these benefits will be particularly felt through the business communities adjacent to the crossing and will work with Highways England and our partner

organisations in ensuring that this is the case.

This is a hugely important infrastructure project for the South East that will improve our connectivity, and in turn create new opportunities for the local economies either side of the river. That it will also create such a significant number of jobs for the area is an incredibly welcome bonus, and particularly good news at this time when so many have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As well as committing to thousands of hours in schools, the project team are creating resources for students, teachers to help inspire the next generation of UK talent – such as career profiles of apprentices and films showcasing why the industry is so exciting.

Highways England is also building on its track record of supporting local businesses by helping firms across Kent and Essex prepare for the opportunities available. Over 100 businesses have already registered on a new SME directory that will be given to the main works contractors. Hundreds more local firms have taken up offers of free training to help them win work on this or any other major project.

The Lower Thames Crossing will add billions to the UK economy by helping unlock the huge potential of the Thames Estuary – the UK's number one growth opportunity. The new connection will provide a quicker, more reliable connection between our major manufacturing centres, distribution hubs and key ports and open new markets for local businesses, creating a new economy between Kent and Essex.

[Visit the scheme website](#) for more information on this project.

To keep up to date with the latest travel information follow @HighwaysEast on Twitter or visit the [Highways England website](#).

## **General enquiries**

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

## **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

---

# Recovery work begins after heavy flooding in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire

- Teams from the Environment Agency have been on the ground in affected communities, including Didsbury, Warrington and Northwich, since the first bout of heavy and persistent rain over the week of the 18th January.
- Across the North West, Environment Agency staff are still protecting homes by making sure rivers are clear from blockages and ensuring assets are ready to operate.

Flood recovery work is now underway across Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire by the Environment Agency.

Teams have been on the ground in affected communities, including Didsbury, Warrington and Northwich, since the first bout of heavy and persistent rain over the week of the 18th January.

Through a combination of operating defences and assets, the Environment Agency were able to protect more than 24,000 properties and businesses and warn more than 6,000 people in advance of Christoph's arrival. 48 flood warnings and 5 severe flood warnings, meaning a danger to life, were also issued.

However, even with those measures in place, the severe weather caused between 369 properties across Greater Manchester and Cheshire to be affected by flooding, with the Environment Agency still gathering vital post-flood information to determine the total figure.

## **Lesley Worswick, Area Director for Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire said:**

"We would like to thank our communities, partners and staff who have shown a rapid, dedicated response to the intense and unprecedented rainfall brought on by Storm Christoph.

Over the week, our teams operated our flood storage reservoirs in the Salford, Didsbury and Sale areas and, activated all 3 phases of the £7m Northwich scheme, which successfully held back the River Weaver. We are continuing to check our defences after the severe weather and are operating them as needed to help keep people and properties safe.

"The focus now is on recovery. The Environment Agency's flood assets protected thousands of homes and businesses but sadly, some communities across the North West did suffer from flooding and we need to help them recover as quickly as possible.

“We are doing everything we can to support our communities. Alongside, our partners we are coordinating our field teams out on the ground in affected areas. They continue to work around the clock. Our Community Information Officers have also been in touch with residents and business owners to offer information and advice as well as signposting people to help by working with Local Authorities.”

With further heavy showers are expected to continue into the weekend, the Environment Agency is advising communities to remain vigilant and stay safe over the coming days.

People are advised to [sign up for free flood warnings](#) and keep up to date with [the latest safety advice](#), call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or follow @EnvAgencyNW on Twitter for the latest flood updates.

### **Further information:**

- Around 5.4 million, or one in six properties, are at risk from flooding from all sources across England. Of these, 2.4 million properties are at risk of river and coastal flooding..
- The construction of defences, such as flood walls, embankments and gates, is a key tool for reducing flood risk to homes, businesses and critical infrastructure sites – alongside other methods such as natural flood management and property level resilience.
- The government has recently announced a record £5.2 billion investment in flood and coastal defences – double the previous investment – to protect 336,000 properties, and the EA’s FCRM strategy will prepare us for more extreme weather and build a better prepared and more resilient nation.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-strategy-for-england-2>
- For every £1 spent improving protection from flooding and coastal erosion, we avoid around £5 of property damages. This long-term commitment will make homes, businesses and infrastructure more resilient to the increasing impacts of climate change.

---

## **[Innovative scheme to protect newts and promote sustainable development is rolled out across Lancashire](#)**

Great crested newts have seen dramatic declines in their populations over the last 60 years despite being legally protected. The new ‘District Level Licensing’ scheme (DLL) better protects this orange-bellied amphibian by using conservation payments from developers to create new ponds in locations that will benefit the species.

The scheme also benefits local people and authorities by avoiding costly delays for developers, helping to ensure homes are built and local authorities can deliver their plans.

The scheme will create a network of ponds providing vital habitat for our biggest native newt, helping to join up sometimes isolated populations and helping them to thrive.

Natural England, in partnership with Lancashire Wildlife Trust, will invest developer payments not only into creating or restoring new ponds but also taking care of and monitoring the ponds too, for the long term.

Previously, developers had to apply for a mitigation licence before building on or around the places where newts live. Seasonal restrictions on work in places where the newts were present led to delays and uncertainty over the costs and scheduling of planned development. This new 'landscape scale' licensing approach is better for both developers and newts. It provides a faster and more straightforward process than the traditional approach to licensing while helping to provide more homes for newts.

By the end of March this year, Lancashire Wildlife Trust will already have created or restored nearly 60 ponds across the county for the scheme.

John Lamb, Senior Conservation Officer, Lancashire Wildlife Trust said:

I am really encouraged by landowner enthusiasm to create new ponds for the scheme. Everyone recognises that the ponds will benefit a wide range of wildlife and Trust staff are looking forward to continuing this important work so that hotspots of newts can expand and populations can merge and flourish.

Marcus Hudson, Head of Planning, Lancashire County Council, said:

Lancashire is home to beautiful landscapes and habitats, a desirable place to live and work, and a hub for business and industry. We need to find ways to support growth whilst protecting and enhancing our climate and environment. District level licensing offers an opportunity to reduce costly delays to developments, whilst targeting spending on practical conservation measures, such as pond creation, in the locations identified as having the maximum impact to bolster the resilience of Lancashire's great crested newt populations.

Ginny Hinton, Natural England Cheshire to Lancashire Area Team Manager, said:

District level licensing is transforming a difficult planning process into one that is a real conservation success story.

The rollout of this scheme in Lancashire represents a win-win for both local developers and the future of this iconic species. It's a fantastic example of working in partnership at a landscape scale.

## **More about district level licensing in Lancashire**

- Details of how to apply for the scheme are online at this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-crested-newts-district-level-licensing-schemes>
- Lancashire is the latest area to launch a district level licensing scheme. Natural England is working to expand the initiative to 150 local authorities across the country, as part of a programme initially funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- This new licensing approach to authorising development affected by great crested newts is part of a larger programme to reform protected species licensing by focusing conservation effort where it will create maximum benefit. It aims to leave the environment in a better state than before.
- Previously, licences were only granted on a site-by-site basis. This missed opportunities to manage populations of great crested newts on a landscape scale and resulted in habitat for newts being squeezed around development, sometimes in disconnected patches.
- As part of the District Level Licensing project, Natural England has completed the largest ever survey of its type for great crested newts across England, funded by the MHCLG. The data is open and has been published to ArcGIS Online and is available at [Data.gov.uk](https://data.gov.uk).
- Individual site-by-site mitigation licences are still available; since 17 February 2020, there is now a charge for these licences. In areas where there is a DLL scheme, joining a scheme will be the quickest option to enable development that affects great crested newts.

---

## **[Police bolstered with 6,620 extra officers and extra funding](#)**

The government is bolstering the police with extra officers and resources to cut crime and keep communities safe, as new statistics show that an additional 6,620 officers have joined forces across England and Wales.

The figures published today (Thursday 28 January), which show progress from the launch of the campaign up to the end of December, mean that the government's campaign to recruit 20,000 additional officers over the next three years remains ahead of schedule, having exceeded the target to recruit 6,000 officers by March.

Of the new recruits, many will already be out supporting the ongoing police response to the pandemic, helping to stop the spread of coronavirus by



assisting with enforcement action against those flouting the rules.

The recruitment drive is at the centre of the government's promise to back the police with more resources and support to cut crime, and today the Home Secretary has also announced an additional £20 million to help crack down on 'neighbourhood crimes' like burglary, robbery, theft and vehicle crime.

This funding forms the second round of the Safer Streets fund, which launched in January last year. It will be open to both Police and Crime Commissioners and Local Authorities and go towards local-crime cutting interventions in residential areas.

This includes simple changes to the design of high-crime areas, such as improved home security, increased street lighting and the installation of CCTV.

The announcement will bring total investment in Safer Streets to £45m over two years, supporting even more areas that are disproportionately affected by neighbourhood crime with the tools to deliver tangible and sustainable impacts.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

I am delighted we have exceeded our own target to recruit 6,000 additional police officers by March 2021.

Keeping our streets is my absolute priority and many of these new officers are already on our streets helping to fight the coronavirus pandemic, and for that they get my huge thanks.

These new officers, on top of further funding to tackle crimes such as burglary, robbery and vehicle crime will ensure the police have the powers, tools and resources they need to cut crime and make you feel safer in your community.

National Police Chiefs' Council Chair Martin Hewitt:

These additional officers are most welcomed and have already started to make their difference in our communities.

We are more representative than ever before but still have a long way to go before we truly represent those we serve.

I would like to thank those who have worked with us to achieve this number of 6,620 additional officers, in particular policing networks and associations.

Bernie O'Reilly, interim CEO of the College of Policing:

Today's recruitment figures demonstrate, once again, policing's ability to adapt to challenges and continue to bring new officers into the service in difficult circumstances.

We must continue to build on this progress to ensure we have a strong, diverse and well-supported police force that helps keep the public safe for years to come.

I'm pleased that we are able to support forces through our online assessment process, which allows the police service to continue to recruit new officers during this critical time, and also through the updated Safer Streets Fund toolkit, which supports policing to implement crime prevention initiatives.

Today the Home Secretary will visit Hertfordshire Police to meet with new recruits and hear about their work responding to the pandemic.

The Policing Minister will also be hosting a Zoom call with new officers and others from Nottinghamshire Police, to hear about the work the force is doing within the Safer Streets project, as well as supporting the coronavirus response.

Figures today also show that diversity within the police workforce continues to grow.

Of all new recruits, 788 identified as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, representing 10.2% of recruits who stated their ethnicity. This means the police workforce now includes 9,871 officers from these groups, making it more diverse than ever before.

Also released today are figures for the entire police workforce across England and Wales. These figures show that as at 30 September 2020, the workforce had 216,155 (FTE) officers, staff and PCSOs – a total increase of 5.5% on the previous year.

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

| <b>Force name/region</b> | <b>Adjusted baseline</b> | <b>Allocation</b> | <b>Uplift progress</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
|                          |                          |                   | Dec 20                 |
| Cleveland                | 1,246                    | 72                | +159                   |
| Durham                   | 1,138                    | 68                | +58                    |
| Northumbria              | 3,129                    | 185               | +266                   |
| North East               | 5,513                    | 325               | +483                   |
| Cheshire                 | 2,080                    | 90                | +91                    |
| Cumbria                  | 1,199                    | 51                | +66                    |
| Greater Manchester       | 6,787                    | 347               | +266                   |
| Lancashire               | 2,988                    | 153               | +133                   |
| Merseyside               | 3,447                    | 200               | +372                   |
| North West               | 16,501                   | 841               | +928                   |

| <b>Force name/region</b> | <b>Adjusted baseline</b> | <b>Allocation</b> | <b>Uplift progress</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Humberside               | 1,929                    | 97                | +129                   |
| North Yorkshire          | 1,450                    | 58                | +61                    |
| South Yorkshire          | 2,535                    | 151               | +129                   |
| West Yorkshire           | 5,186                    | 256               | +390                   |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 11,100                   | 562               | +709                   |
| Derbyshire               | 1,827                    | 85                | +67                    |
| Leicestershire           | 1,998                    | 89                | +155                   |
| Lincolnshire             | 1,020                    | 50                | +81                    |
| Northamptonshire         | 1,290                    | 57                | +57                    |
| Nottinghamshire          | 2,021                    | 107               | +132                   |
| East Midlands            | 8,156                    | 388               | +492                   |
| Staffordshire            | 1,648                    | 90                | +72                    |
| Warwickshire             | 963                      | 41                | +91                    |
| West Mercia              | 2,164                    | 93                | +93                    |
| West Midlands            | 6,691                    | 366               | +357                   |
| West Midlands            | 11,466                   | 590               | +613                   |
| Bedfordshire             | 1,257                    | 54                | +54                    |
| Cambridgeshire           | 1,526                    | 62                | +114                   |
| Essex                    | 3,316                    | 135               | +101                   |
| Hertfordshire            | 2,077                    | 91                | +111                   |
| Norfolk                  | 1,677                    | 67                | +70                    |
| Suffolk                  | 1,224                    | 54                | +54                    |
| Eastern                  | 11,077                   | 463               | +504                   |
| London, city of          | 809                      | 44                | +42                    |
| Metropolitan Police      | 31,943                   | 1,369             | +1,369                 |
| London                   | 32,752                   | 1,413             | +1,411                 |
| Hampshire                | 2,791                    | 156               | +220                   |
| Kent                     | 3,729                    | 147               | +162                   |
| Surrey                   | 1,994                    | 78                | +78                    |
| Sussex                   | 2,737                    | 129               | +129                   |
| Thames Valley            | 4,250                    | 183               | +258                   |
| South East               | 15,501                   | 693               | +847                   |
| Avon and Somerset        | 2,835                    | 137               | +128                   |
| Devon and Cornwall       | 3,115                    | 141               | +141                   |
| Dorset                   | 1,267                    | 50                | +19                    |
| Gloucestershire          | 1,161                    | 46                | +91                    |
| Wiltshire                | 1,025                    | 49                | +27                    |
| South West               | 9,403                    | 423               | +406                   |
| England                  | 121,469                  | 5,698             | 6,393                  |
| Dyfed-Powys              | 1,163                    | 42                | +27                    |
| Gwent                    | 1,300                    | 62                | +27                    |
| North Wales              | 1,507                    | 62                | +78                    |
| South Wales              | 2,995                    | 136               | +95                    |

| <b>Force name/region</b> | <b>Adjusted baseline</b> | <b>Allocation</b> | <b>Uplift progress</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Wales                    | 6,965                    | 302               | +227                   |
| England and Wales        | 128,434                  | 6,000             | +6,620                 |