[Liverpool City Council: Best Value Inspection](#)

It is a matter of public record that Merseyside Police have for many months been conducting an investigation which has resulted in a number of arrests made on suspicion of fraud, bribery, corruption and misconduct in public office, both in December 2019 and in September 2020. Further arrests were made on 4 December 2020 in connection with offences of bribery and witness intimidation. This investigation involves a significant connection to Liverpool City Council.

On Monday 7 December the Secretary of State met with officers from Liverpool City Council at his request and was given a range of assurances about the steps taken to improve governance in the Council. This was followed up with a [letter sent to Liverpool City Council on 8 December](#) seeking written assurances, including on the steps the council has taken to improve governance and to ensure that the council is operating properly and in line with its Best Value Duty. Liverpool City Council submitted their response on Friday 11 December.

On 17 December the Secretary of State [announced the appointment of Max Caller CBE](#) to carry out an inspection of Liverpool City Council's compliance with its Best Value Duty in relation to the authority's planning, highways, regeneration and property management functions and the strength of associated audit and governance arrangements.

A letter informing the council of the Inspection was also sent on the day of the announcement.

On 7 January Mervyn Greer and Vivienne Geary were appointed as assistant inspectors.

[CMA to investigate Google's 'Privacy Sandbox' browser changes](#)

The investigation will assess whether the proposals could cause advertising spend to become even more concentrated on Google's ecosystem at the expense of its competitors. It follows complaints of anticompetitive behaviour and requests for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to ensure that Google develops its proposals in a way that does not distort competition.

Third party cookies currently play a fundamental role online and in digital advertising. They help businesses target advertising effectively and fund

free online content for consumers, such as newspapers. But there have also been concerns about their legality and use from a privacy perspective, as they allow consumers' behaviour to be tracked across the web in ways that many consumers may feel uncomfortable with and may find difficult to understand.

Google's announced changes – known collectively as the 'Privacy Sandbox' project – would disable third party cookies on the Chrome browser and Chromium browser engine and replace them with a new set of tools for targeting advertising and other functionality that they say will protect consumers' privacy to a greater extent. The project is already under way, but Google's final proposals have not yet been decided or implemented. In its recent market study into online platforms digital advertising, the CMA highlighted a number of concerns about their potential impact, including that they could undermine the ability of publishers to generate revenue and undermine competition in digital advertising, entrenching Google's market power. More information can be found in the [CMA's Online platforms and digital advertising final report](#).

The CMA has been considering how best to address legitimate privacy concerns without distorting competition in discussions of the proposals with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), through the [Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum](#). As part of this work, the CMA has been engaging with Google to better understand its proposals. The current investigation will provide a framework for the continuation of this work, and, potentially, a legal basis for any solution that emerges.

The CMA has received complaints including from Marketers for an Open Web Limited, a group of newspaper publishers and technology companies, which allege that, through the proposals, Google is abusing its dominant position.

Given the importance and potential impact of Google's proposed changes, the CMA was already considering the Privacy Sandbox, in conjunction with the ICO and Google. Given the concerns raised by the complainants, it has decided that this work should be conducted in the context of a formal investigation.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA said:

> As the CMA found in its recent market study, Google's Privacy Sandbox proposals will potentially have a very significant impact on publishers like newspapers, and the digital advertising market. But there are also privacy concerns to consider, which is why we will continue to work with the ICO as we progress this investigation, while also engaging directly with Google and other market participants about our concerns.

The CMA has an open mind and has not reached any conclusions at this stage as to whether or not competition law has been infringed. The CMA will continue to engage with Google and other market participants to ensure that both privacy and competition concerns can be addressed as the proposals are

developed.

Today's announcement follows the CMA's advice to Government, via the Digital Markets Taskforce, on the need for a new regulatory regime for digital markets. As it continues to work with Government on these proposals, the CMA will use its existing powers to their fullest extent in order to protect competition in these markets.

More information can be found on the [investigation into Google's Privacy Sandbox browser changes case page](#).

Statement from International Coordination and Response Group for the victims of Ukrainian International Airlines Flight PS752

One year ago, in the early morning of January 8, 2020, Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 was downed by two Iranian military surface-to-air missiles near Tehran.

Today we honour the memory of those who perished and offer our sincere condolences to all who mourn the victims of the PS752 tragedy. We share the grief of the families, relatives and friends who lost loved ones. We urgently call on Iran to provide a complete and thorough explanation of the events and decisions that led to this appalling plane crash.

Our countries will hold Iran to account to deliver justice and make sure Iran makes full reparations to the families of the victims and affected countries.

Overspeeding trains between Laurencekirk and Portlethen

News story

Investigation into trains exceeding an emergency speed restriction between Laurencekirk and Portlethen, Aberdeenshire, 4 December 2020.

Part of the railway between Laurencekirk and Portlethen

Between about 06:35 hrs and 07:40 hrs on 4 December 2020, two passenger trains passed through an emergency speed restriction located between Laurencekirk and Portlethen stations, at speeds of up to 100 mph (160 km/h), significantly exceeding the temporary maximum permitted speed of 40 mph (64 km/h). The first train was travelling north from Dundee to Inverness, the second was travelling south from Inverness to Edinburgh. The emergency restriction had been introduced as a precaution in case forecast heavy rainfall caused ground movements affecting the safety of the railway.

Neither of the train drivers was aware of the emergency speed restriction at the time they drove their trains over the affected section of track. The events were identified after a Network Rail signaller noticed the relatively short time taken for the second train to pass through the area. The first overspeed was then identified using electronic records of train movements. There were no injuries or damage as a result of these incidents.

RAIB's preliminary examination found no evidence that any other trains which used the line on 4 December did not observe the speed restriction. However, until the second overspeed was identified by the signaller, the only notification to drivers was a printed notice at their booking on points. Lineside signage was not provided by Network Rail processes applicable to this type of speed restriction. After the second overspeed, the method of working was changed so trains were stopped shortly before reaching the restricted area while signallers reminded drivers about the reduced maximum permitted speed.

Our investigation will determine the sequence of events that led to the incidents and include consideration of:

- the processes for advising train drivers of emergency speed restrictions
- any overlap with issues identified during the on-going RAIB investigation of the fatal accident on 12 August 2020 at Carmont, a location within the area covered by this emergency speed restriction (although there was no emergency speed restriction at Carmont on the 12 August)
- any relevant underlying factors.

Our investigation is independent of any investigation by the railway industry

or by the industry's regulator, the [Office of Rail and Road](#).

We will publish our findings, including any recommendations to improve safety, at the conclusion of our investigation. This report will be available on our website.

You can [subscribe](#) to automated emails notifying you when we publish our reports.

Published 8 January 2021

[Celebrating success at the Analysis in Government Awards 2020](#)

The virtual awards ceremony for the first Analysis in Government Awards took place on Tuesday 8 December.

Hosted by David Wood (Head of the Government Geography Profession), the Awards celebrated the excellent work being done across the Government Analysis Function. Despite the ceremony being virtual this year, the 150 people that attended made the most of it by congratulating one another on all that analysts have achieved throughout the year. National Statistician Sir Ian Diamond provided an introduction which highlighted the rapid pace at which analysts across government have delivered new analysis to support the pandemic response whilst still delivering analysis in other priority areas.

A recording of the event is available to view at [YouTube/GovernmentAnalysisFunction](#).

Collaboration Award

The first award to be presented was the Collaboration Award which recognises collaboration between teams, departments, other professions and/or external partners to deliver a piece of analysis or analytical project. The joint winners were the COVID-19 Infection Survey Team at the Office for National Statistics for delivering the COVID-19 Infection Survey and the Population Health Analysis and Public Health Data Science teams at Public Health England for their work on excess mortality in England.

The [COVID-19 Infection Survey](#) provides estimates of the number of current COVID-19 infections within the community population in the UK and has been a key source of evidence for informing the UK response to the COVID-19 pandemic with user feedback describing it as the "jewel in the crown of the UK response to COVID-19". The judges were impressed with the range of partners that ONS collaborated with to deliver at rapid pace with the first analytical

results provided within a week. The results of the survey have informed key government lockdown decisions impacting every citizen in the UK.

[Excess mortality in England](#) provides a weekly measure of excess mortality by date of death registration in different subgroups of the population (for example age, sex or region). This allows decision makers to make accurate and informed decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Judges were impressed with the collaboration efforts shown as well as the innovative use of [Reproducible Analytical Pipelines](#) to deliver vital analysis to help understand the effect of ethnicity and deprivation on excess deaths.

Details of the other shortlisted nominations in this category can be found on the [Analysis in Government Award shortlist page](#).

Innovation in Methods Award

The next award to be presented was the Innovation in Methods Award which recognises innovation in methods of analysis. The winner was the Internal Data Linking Team in the Data and Analytical Services Directorate at the Ministry of Justice for developing a piece of record linkage software (Splink) for probabilistic data linkage at scale.

[Splink](#) can be used it to link up to around 100 million records with greatly improved accuracy. The software is open source and has been downloaded over 100,000 times. Splink is being used across government and beyond. It featured in [ONS's cross-government review of data linkage](#), and is now part of their core methods library. The judges felt that this is an impressive tool that will be greatly beneficial across government for large data linking. It has been peer reviewed by academics and methodology experts at ONS and adopted by other departments. It has improved efficiency in MoJ by replacing existing data linking projects.

Details of the other shortlisted nominations in this category can be found on the [Analysis in Government Award shortlist page](#).

Communication Award

The next award to be presented was the Communication Award which recognises clear and successful presentation and dissemination of analysis using commentary, visualisations, interactives or social media. The winner was the Analytical Products Team in Product Management, Design and Delivery at NHS England and NHS Improvement for their COVID-19 Situational Operational Dashboard.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Analytical Products Team have worked tirelessly to produce an unprecedented 100+ analytical COVID-focused dashboards easily accessible via a single [HUB](#). The work involved an unparalleled level of communication across the entire NHS sector, helping leaders across the NHS make better decisions in response to the pandemic. Judges were impressed by the scale of work which is very innovative due to several inputs and outputs. The dashboard was designed for a wide range of

users with user-friendly and interactive visualisation. Feedback from experts was sought and the data is turned around very quickly (updated daily in some cases).

Details of the other shortlisted nominations in this category can be found on the [Analysis in Government Award shortlist page](#).

Impact Award

The penultimate award to be presented was the Impact Award which recognises analysis which has been impactful through use, influenced decision-making and/or has contributed to the public debate. The winner was COVID-19 Statistical Reporting Team at the Department of Health Northern Ireland for their COVID-19 Dashboard.

The [Department of Health's COVID-19 Dashboard](#) is the primary source of a wide range of COVID-19 information and analysis which has been fully utilised by the media, Government and public alike, inspiring policy changes at all levels and providing the information necessary for sound public debate. Judges felt this work demonstrated significant impact with the dashboard used by large audiences. It was achieved from scratch as the data was not previously collected by the Department of Health. The dashboard is updated at pace (almost daily) by a small team which shows commitment and hard work. Producers sought feedback to improve the dashboard and key policy decisions rely on it, including decisions on local lockdowns.

Details of the other shortlisted nominations in this category can be found on the [Analysis in Government Award shortlist page](#).

Investment in People Award

The last award to be presented was the Investment in People Award which recognises achievements in the development of our people and the building of an inclusive culture across the Government Analysis Function. The winner was the Data Services Team at the Ministry of Defence for their Happiness Index.

The Happiness Index is a tool that assesses, monitors and improves people's wellbeing. Different views were sought to develop the tool and make it inclusive for a range of people. It's helping to promote an inclusive work environment. The impact is also considerable with the tool starting as a small one team initiative but now being rolled out to 12,000 staff.

Details of the other shortlisted nominations in this category can be found on the [Analysis in Government Award shortlist page](#).

Next steps

We'll be hearing more about the shortlisted work (as well as all the other nominated work) at the first ever [Analysis in Government Month](#) being held in Spring 2021 as well as through a programme of sharing webinars that will soon be rolled out across the Government Analysis Function. Further details will

be shared in due course.