

'Minded to' letter on public library provision in Swindon

[unable to retrieve full-text content] Letter from Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, Helen Whately, stating the Secretary of State's 'minded to' decision on public library provision in Swindon.

New digital forensics unit boosts crackdown on crime in jails

- cutting edge digital forensic lab to tackle crime behind bars
- specialist staff to boost fight against dark web gangsters
- part of £100 million package to bolster prison security

A new digital forensics unit and expanded digital investigations team will crack down on criminal activity involving devices smuggled into jails, Prisons Minister, Lucy Frazer QC MP announced today (28 October 2019).

The state-of-the-art lab will be equipped with cutting-edge technology to analyse the growing number of mobile phones seized in prisons.

With strengthened security leading to a rise in contraband seizures, there is increasing evidence that prisoners are using advanced technology to access the dark web, encrypt their messages and use social media in jail.

Staffed by specialist digital experts, the unit will investigate offenders carrying out illicit communications to further their criminal operations from inside prison walls.

The new unit is part of the government's £100 million investment in prison security, with tough airport-style security and phone-blocking technology to clampdown on violence, self-harm and crime behind bars.

Prisons Minister, Lucy Frazer QC MP said:

We know that the ways in which criminals conduct their business is advancing – with prisoners harnessing new technology and the dark web to further their operations behind bars.

Bolstering our powers to detect and disrupt this kind of crime is a key element of our £100 million investment in prison security. Alongside airport-style scanners, metal detectors and phone

blockers, we will crack down on those who continue to commit crime and wreak havoc in our jails.

The new technology will identify perpetrators more quickly and produce improved digital evidence that is more likely to bring a successful prosecution in court.

It will also offer opportunities to gather intelligence on how phones are being used to commit crime and detect and disrupt criminal activity in the wider community.

The specialist digital forensics team is being funded from the government's previously announced £2.75 billion package to transform the prison estate. This includes:

- £100 million to bolster prison security – with the new digital forensics facility, alongside tough airport-style security and phone-blocking technology to clampdown on violence, self-harm and crime behind bars.
- £2.5 billion to provide 10,000 additional prison places and create modern, efficient jails that rehabilitate offenders, reduce reoffending and keep the public safe.
- £156 million for pressing maintenance to create safe and decent conditions for offender rehabilitation.

Notes to editors

- More than 20,000 mobile devices and SIM cards are seized in prisons each year. The number of smartphones seized is also growing – with 1 in 3 phones examined by the Prison Service now having these capabilities.

September 2019 Price Paid Data



Image credit: Helen Hotson/Shutterstock

In September 2019:

- the most expensive residential property sold in September was in Kensington and Chelsea for £17,000,000
- the cheapest residential property sold in September was in Sunderland for £16,000
- the most expensive commercial sale taking place in September 2019 was in Didcot for £32,750,000
- the cheapest commercial sale in September 2019 was in Salford for £100
- there was a 2.9% increase in newbuilds compared to September 2018

Of the 91,459 sales received for registration 25,140 took place in September 2019 of which:

- 545 were of residential properties in England and Wales for £1 million and over
- 304 were of residential properties in Greater London for £1 million and over
- 1 was of a residential property in West Midlands for more than £1 million
- 4 were of residential properties in Greater Manchester for more than £1 million
- 0 were of residential properties in Wales for more than £1 million

The number of sales received for registration by property type and month

Of the 91,459 sales received for registration in September 2019:

- 70,343 were freehold, a 4.2% decrease on September 2018
- 11,595 were newly built, a 2.9% increase on September 2018

This month's Price Paid Data includes details of more than 91,000 sales of land and property in England and Wales that HM Land Registry received for registration in September 2019.

Property type	September 2019	August 2019	July 2019
Detached	21,576	22,213	21,968
Semi-detached	24,418	25,283	24,848
Terraced	24,385	25,244	25,115
Flat/maisonette	15,975	15,565	15,915
Other	5,105	5,269	5,699
Total	91,459	93,574	93,545

There is a time difference between the sale of a property and its registration at HM Land Registry.

[Access the full dataset](#)

In the dataset you can find the date of sale for each property, its full address and sale price, its category (residential or commercial) and type (detached, semi-detached, terraced, flat or maisonette and other), whether or

not it is new build and whether it is freehold or leasehold.

Background

1. Price Paid Data is published at 11am on the 20th working day of each month. The next dataset will be published on 28 November 2019.
2. [Price Paid Data](#) is property price data for all residential and commercial property sales in England and Wales that are lodged with HM Land Registry for registration in that month, [subject to exclusions](#).
3. The amount of time between the sale of a property and the registration of this information with HM Land Registry varies. It typically ranges between two weeks and two months. Data for the two most recent months is therefore incomplete and does not give an indication of final monthly volumes. Occasionally the interval between sale and registration is longer than two months. The small number of sales affected cannot be updated for publication until the sales are lodged for registration.
4. Price Paid Data categories are either Category A (Standard entries) which includes single residential properties sold for full market value or Category B (Additional entries) for example sales to a company, buy-to-lets where they can be identified by a mortgage and repossessions.
5. HM Land Registry has been collecting information on Category A sales from January 1995 and on Category B sales from October 2013.
6. Price Paid Data can be downloaded in text, CSV format and in a machine readable format as [linked data](#) and is released under [Open Government Licence \(OGL\)](#). Under the OGL, HM Land Registry permits the use of Price Paid Data for commercial or non-commercial purposes. However, the OGL does not cover the use of [third party rights](#), which HM Land Registry is not authorised to license.
7. The [Price Paid Data report builder](#) allows users to build bespoke reports using the data. Reports can be based on location, estate type, price paid or property type over a defined period of time.
8. HM Land Registry's mission is to guarantee and protect property rights in England and Wales.
9. HM Land Registry is a government department created in 1862. It operates as an executive agency and a trading fund and its running costs are covered by the fees paid by the users of its services. Its ambition is

to become the world's leading land registry for speed, simplicity and an open approach to data.

10. HM Land Registry safeguards land and property ownership valued at £7 trillion, enabling more than £1 trillion worth of personal and commercial lending to be secured against property across England and Wales.

11. For further information about HM Land Registry visit www.gov.uk/land-registry.

12. Follow us on [Twitter](#), our [blog](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

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[Homes England unlocks its Help to Buy: Equity Loan calculator so advisers can check an applicant's likely approval](#)

The updated sustainability calculator allows brokers and financial advisers to use the mortgage interest rates they expect specific lenders to charge, after any discounted or fixed period comes to an end. This replaces affordability tests based on an assumed Standard Variable Rate of 4.8%. It will show customers what they can afford to borrow from the outset, resulting in fewer loan applications being declined after the customer has their mortgage offer.

Help to Buy Director Will German said:

“Brokers and advisers play a vital role in helping customers to use and understand Help to Buy. We’ve listened to their feedback and have updated the Help to Buy: Equity Loan calculator to help them do more realistic affordability checks for their clients before they formally apply for their equity loan.

“We have unlocked the calculator so they can see, select and enter the most likely follow-on rate from their recommended lender. They can see immediately if it is higher than the current Standard Variable Rate of 4.8% that we apply and can assess affordability more effectively.”

If the individual lender's rate is higher, advisers can factor this in from

the outset of their client's loan application. They can assess the risk of the payment rate potentially causing a problem in the future at the earliest opportunity. Homes England only allows customers to use Help to Buy if they are able to afford the loan payments. Customers who fail the sustainability check cannot take out a Help to Buy: Equity Loan, so the accuracy of the information that goes into the calculator is crucial.

Will German said: "Our customer feedback highlights how important brokers and financial advisers are to customers. This calculator update will allow them to improve the service they offer their customers.

"It also gives potential Help to Buy: Equity Loan customers more certainty about the financial advice they receive, what they can afford and the likely outcome of their loan application."

Jane Benjamin, Director of Mortgages PMS and Sesame, said: "It's great news that the constraints that brokers may have felt with having the second affordability check in place have now been lifted.

"Advisers can now more confidently consider a wider range of lenders at the very beginning of the time-pressured application journey. It's fantastic to be working with Homes England to implement positive change supporting brokers and customers."

The sustainability calculator and guidance for its use are [here](#)

Notes to editor

Help to Buy: Equity Loan – is a government loan, that is interest free for five-years, towards a deposit on a new-build home with a purchase price of up to £600,000. Borrowers pay 5% deposit, the government lends up to 20% (up to 40% in London) and a mortgage of up to 75% (55% in London) makes up the rest.

Homes England is the government's housing accelerator. We have the appetite, influence, expertise and resources to drive positive market change. By releasing more land to developers who want to make a difference, we're making possible the new homes England needs, helping to improve neighbourhoods and grow communities.

For further information, please contact the Help to Buy communications team via Media_helptobuy@homesengland.gov.uk

[Multi-million investment in school and college buildings](#)

Academies and sixth form colleges across England can now bid for a share of

more than £400 million to transform facilities, improve school buildings and create more good school places.

The multi-million-pound annual fund can be used by academies and sixth form colleges to expand classrooms, upgrade facilities such as sports halls or science labs, and address issues with the general wear and tear of school buildings.

This year applications will be subject to new criteria which will favour bids from schools with good governance and organised finances – including showing restraint on executive salaries.

Today's launch of millions of pounds to improve schools and colleges across the country follows the Prime Minister's announcement confirming the budget for schools and high needs education would be increased by a total of over £14 billion over three years, rising to £52.2 billion by 2022-23. Schools and local authorities found out earlier this month their allocations for the first part of that investment – £2.6 billion – for the coming year.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

This government is determined to give all children the best possible education, but as well as great teachers, we want all pupils to learn in classrooms that enable them to gain the knowledge and skills they need for success.

Following our huge investment in school funding with an increase of a total of £14 billion over three years, this year's multi-million-pound fund will support our pledge to create more good school places and continue raising standards.

The Department for Education will today launch the latest round of the Condition Improvement Fund – the last of which approved bids worth over £400 million to improve school buildings and expand academies and sixth-form colleges rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

The new criteria builds on a number of steps taken by the Government to bolster academy trust finances and clamp down on high pay – challenging 278 trusts over pay since 2017, with 51 academy trusts reducing top salaries as a result.

The strengthened criteria for next year's Condition Improvement Fund will incentivise academies and trusts to improve finances and governance. Bids are assessed on a point based criteria and applicants will get a four-point deduction if they pay two or more salaries in excess of £100,000 or one salary over £150,000, and have failed to take appropriate action in response to our high pay challenge. Alongside this, Academies Minister Lord Agnew has also introduced:

- an extra point for applicants that have signed-up to the most recent government funding agreement;

- deductions of up to four points for applicants that have not submitted a financial improvement plan following a visit from a School Resource Management Adviser; and
- Further scrutiny for successful projects worth more than £1 million.

All applications for the Condition Improvement Fund will be scored against the new criteria, with points added or deducted from the overall score. For unsuccessful bids, applicants will still have the option of applying for Urgent Capital Support to ensure their buildings are safe for pupils and staff.

Today's announcement comes ahead of the deadline this Thursday (31 October) for parents to choose secondary schools for their children. In 2019, 93% of parents received offers for one of their top three choices. We're on track to create a million new school places this decade, the largest increase in school capacity for at least two generations.