

OSCE has been an important platform to hold Russia to account: UK statement to OSCE

Thank you, Mr Chair. In contrast to the previous speaker, I would like to start by paying tribute to Poland's professionalism, and that of the OSCE Secretariat, in chairing the OSCE at this extraordinary time.

Since our last Annual Security Review Conference, the European security situation has changed fundamentally. Despite the claims of the Russian delegate, one participating State stands out in particular. Russia has withdrawn from the [Open Skies Treaty](#). Russia has forced 2 of 3 OSCE missions in Ukraine to close – and is on track to make the third close later this week. Russia refused to explain its extraordinary troop build-up, despite its OSCE commitments on military transparency under the Vienna Document. Then on 24 February, without provocation, Russia invaded Ukraine and in doing so launched the biggest war in Europe since 1945. Russia has trampled on the OSCE's core principles such as the non-use of force, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The fact that Russia is trying to distract us with disinformation suggests that they know, as well as we do, that none of their other excuses for invading Ukraine has any solid foundation whatsoever.

Since its invasion, Russia has continued to show contempt for international humanitarian law and OSCE principles. As G7 leaders said yesterday, we solemnly condemn the abominable attack on a shopping mall in Kremenchuk and stand united with Ukraine in mourning the innocent victims of this brutal attack. This is part of a wider pattern of indiscriminate Russian attacks that have killed thousands, including of their own men and women, and driven millions more from their homes. Indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians constitute a war crime. The first Moscow Mechanism report found credible evidence of violations of fundamental rights by the Russian Armed Forces, including the right to life, freedom from torture and other inhuman and degrading treatments and punishment.

There was also evidence of humanitarian convoys and healthcare facilities being attacked, of arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings. We are horrified by reports of sexual violence committed by Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine. Even OSCE staff in Ukraine have been affected; we condemn the detention of the three remaining SMM staff and call for their immediate release.

Mr Chair, despite what Russia claims, Russia continues to deploy its military forces to, and operate from, Belarusian territory. Belarusian forces have not been directly involved in the conflict to date, but their deployment to the Ukrainian border is likely preventing some Ukrainian troops from

supporting operations elsewhere. This is unacceptable. Belarus is enabling this war.

Beyond Ukraine, Russia's invasion has led to steep price rises in commodity markets and is massively exacerbating the disastrous impacts we are now seeing to global food security. The consequences of Russia's aggression are hitting the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world hardest.

Mr Chair, in its response to this awful war, the OSCE has continued to demonstrate its enduring relevance.

Before Russia's invasion, OSCE mechanisms were deployed to try to prevent conflict – and then to send an early-warning signal. The Polish Chair-in-Office tabled the Renewed European Security Dialogue to find a diplomatic solution – Russia refused to engage in good faith. Ukraine triggered Vienna Document Chapter 3 to seek an explanation of Russia's military build-up – Russia boycotted every meeting. The Secretary General's early-warning letter, sent 10 days before Russia's invasion, turned out to be prescient.

Since Russia's invasion, the OSCE has been an important platform to hold Russia to account. 47 participating States, primarily at Foreign Minister level, used the Reinforced Special Permanent Council on 24 February in order to support Ukraine and defend the OSCE's principles. At the weekly Permanent Councils and Forums for Security Cooperation, participating States have continued to call out Russian aggression, abuses, and lies. The OSCE's Moscow Mechanism has already delivered [one report](#) already on human rights concerns during this war, and is on track to deliver another. These will be shared with other international investigations, to hold perpetrators to account.

Going forward, the OSCE, as Europe's regional security organisation, will continue to matter post-conflict. For example, its decades of experience in managing and resolving conflicts will help Ukraine to rebuild and recover.

Mr Chair, the OSCE matters beyond the situation in Ukraine. We strongly support its ongoing work in supporting conflict-affected populations and promoting conflict resolution – notably in Georgia, Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh, the Western Balkans and Central Asia – including managing the situation in Afghanistan. This includes the invaluable work of the OSCE Special Representative on the South Caucasus, the Personal Representative on the Conflict Dealt with by the Minsk Conference, the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the OSCE Special Representative for the Transnistrian Settlement Process. These OSCE activities make a significant impact across the OSCE's three dimensions – including on human rights, democratic governance, environmental and economic activities and fundamental freedoms.

Mr Chair, the UK remains a steadfast supporter of the OSCE and its principles. As the situation in Ukraine and beyond has shown, these principles are now more relevant now than ever. We must keep holding each other to account against them, because that makes us all safer, and is the right thing to do.

Thank you.

Defence Secretary Speech at RUSI Land Warfare Conference 2022

Can I thank Dr Sarah Ashbridge and RUSI for hosting this event. Obviously RUSI is an incredibly old institution, almost as old and esteemed as the British Army.

I'm delighted that Dr Rob Johnson, has recently been appointed Director of my Office for Net Assessment and Challenge, and that's exactly the task that he's going to be put to, which is challenging many of you in this room about choices you make and challenging me I hope, about the political or policy decisions as well. So, I'm delighted to welcome you to the Ministry of Defence, and definitely don't hold off on the challenge.

Ruthless challenge and self-criticism is one of the things that should make our Army world leaders. It certainly does in some of our units and I think it's something that we should really embrace. There's nothing wrong with hearing criticism or critique. Indeed, a young platoon commander is always foolish to ignore the old guardsman in the back of his TAC HQ across the country telling you you're going in the wrong place. Some of my colleagues used to ignore those guardsmen and are probably still there.

So, for many years this Land Warfare Conference has been pondering on the "utility of land power in the 21st Century" and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 as a "harbinger for the future of warfare in Europe". So many previous events with such similar titles have obviously passed through these walls.

Well, we can no longer afford to just ponder. Together, we must act, and fast.

And General Sir Patrick Sanders is the right man to 'mobilise' the army in order to do so.

It was a (much younger) Lt Col Patrick Sanders lecturing at RUSI in 2008, after a particularly demanding tour in Iraq commanding 4 Rifles Battlegroup, who emphasised the importance of combat cohesion, the realities of attrition, implications of the media environment, and the "remarkable morale of the British soldier, which only grows higher the closer they get to danger".

And in 2015, as a 'lowly' Major General at that stage, he was back to stress the Army's core purpose as "protecting the national interest on land, where all conflicts are ultimately resolved." and that "politicians need and expect sovereign political choice and options, with the division one of the cornerstones of UK hard power, without which soft power is simply bluff."

As one of those politicians I agree and here is what I need from you today.

'My mission and your role in it', if you will.

Our job is to protect people and that will always require a presence on land, so long as that's where people live.

And just as you always have to 'go to war with the army you have, not the army you would like' – because even today we can't predict where or when it might be – so must we mobilise to deter and contain with the forces that we have now.

The odds of it being a war in Europe have shortened almost as much as the timeline, so we must act.

We can't protect the British people, or our allies, with just transformation strategies and glossy equipment brochures.

And while it is true that the Army must not become blinkered, fixated on a single priority, countering Russian aggression is neither a uniquely European challenge nor solely for armoured formations.

The Army must contribute to the defence of our values and interest – manifested as the international rules-based system that has kept us safe and prosperous for three quarters of a century – and do so wherever it is threatened.

The threat is global, multi-domain, above and below the threshold of open conflict.

So, I take the mobilisation of 'Op MOBILISE' to be the ruthless prioritisation of readiness and relevance.

And to be relevant you must be modern, forward looking, and prepared to challenge the often deeply held doctrines, too often bordering on the nostalgic.

Too many times in the Army of recent years we have seen 'form before function' and knee jerk reactions to change.

We have also forgotten the premium of being forward and present in the world.

My determination to shift from an emphasis on warfighting contingency to persistent presence for containment – a positional strategy of deterrence-by-denial, for both geographic and influence spaces – must not become another false choice of one approach over another, but a deliberate rebalancing.

We must always be ready to fight, wherever positioned, and in whichever domain, and in doing so contain the Kremlin's aggression, because it is increasingly clear that President Putin cannot be 'deterred' by threat of punishment or the costs imposed upon his people.

As Minister Shoygu told me himself, while I was in Moscow earlier this year, "no one can suffer like the Russians".

There is almost a perverse pride in that suffering, and I believe that is what distinguishes us and our allies from the Putin regime – we serve our people to protect and prevent suffering, while they exploit innocent people's suffering in the service of their imperialist ambitions.

Putin must be contained, sealed-off from their sources of influence, funds, and technological capability.

But he and his government must also be made utterly transparent, a light shone through them and every one of their lies, every corrupt practice, every immoral deed, exposed to the world and to the Russian people. As they too suffer from this tyranny.

We will not be able to deliver this unless we are honest about our own historical failures. In Army leadership, in the MOD, and yes in political leadership.

And I have seen it from all perspectives.

It was a summer morning in July 1991 when me and my fellow young officers on the Platoon Commanders Battle Course were summoned onto the drill square to be told the details of 'Options For Change'; the Government-of-the-day's response to the end of the Cold War.

I was lucky, while my regiment was losing a battalion it was not disappearing altogether. Some of those around me – fresh out of Sandhurst, with new regimental berets – were not so lucky.

In 1991 the world had reason to be optimistic. The Soviet Union had collapsed, Al Qaeda was just a glimmer in the eye of a small religious cohort and China had not yet appeared on the world stage.

So, it was right for the government of the day to review their defence spending and defence postures. And yes that meant also the Treasury seeking a 'peace dividend' in exchange for the decades of investment in large, static formations in Germany.

The problem was and is, that successive governments, both Labour and Conservative, have kept coming back for that dividend. They have gone from being investors to corporate raiders. Which is why I was pleased that this Prime Minister reversed that trend by investing £24 billion in a record settlement.

I have now been both Security Minister and Defence Secretary for over six years. I have been 'read-in', briefed and informed of our adversaries' intentions, their plots and their capabilities on an almost daily basis.

I have read thousands of Secret or Top-Secret documents over the last few years and so I am intimately aware of the threat we face and the direction of that threat.

Security prevents me from sharing the details of such documents and intelligence reports, but I can say, however, that we have consistently

underestimated Russia's appetite for aggression; almost forgotten Al Qaeda (wrongly); missed the rise of China; and comforted ourselves that cyber is at least out of sight and therefore out of mind for the average voter.

Outside the world of Security and Defence that could be true by too many people not in the circle of reading. We have done our best to meet some of our National Cyber Security Centre investments and new defence capabilities, but not in resilience across government as you've seen Covid has exposed.

While we meet our commitments, we have also made some good decisions in order to maximise our outputs, we are – like many in Europe – treading a fine line.

Defence has become a constant competition between capabilities and mass – between one domain or another. And commitments have been made without any real honesty as to the costs twenty years down the line.

Take for example the aircraft carriers. Announced with fanfare by Gordon Brown in 1998 and completed twenty years later.

In the early stages there was no honesty as to the financial costs, opportunity costs, or 'required enablers', and what they would mean for the rest of Defence in the long term.

Like so many projects there was an inherent culture of 'someone else will pay.' That lack of realism has impacted right across our Armed Forces.

In Land, too many Army leaders and politicians focused on platform numbers while meeting rising costs by hollowing out force elements and their readiness.

At sea the cost of overruns was met with sacrificial dry docks and maintenance facilities.

What use is boasting about how many tanks or ships you have if you have no spares or no ammunition?

What is the point of demanding more brigades if the ones you have possess no Electronic Warfare or sufficient air defence?

How long do we think our reformed armoured brigades will last when their enemy's artillery out-range them by tens of kilometres?

There are many lessons from Ukraine and there will be many more to come. Some of the lessons in-fact prove many of the Defence Command Paper's assumptions.

For example, helping countries with their own resilience by not only training but assisting or equipping.

It was the new Ranger Regiment that we sent to train Ukrainians on NLAWs just a week or two before Russia's invasion.

And 'Future Soldier', while reducing infantry units invested in more deep fires and EWSI.

When the PM took the strong decision to invest an extra £24 billion in Defence in 2020, he broke with convention and recognised the need to reverse the decline.

It was a strong start, and we now we investing over £43bn in the Army's Equipment Plan over the next decade.

The next challenge is to ensure that we spend such an investment in the right places and use the resulting equipment in the right ways.

There are too many examples where wargaming has exposed our vulnerabilities only to be ignored because the results presented an inconvenient truth.

I am delighted that Patrick is in post at this critical time. I know he is the right leader at the right time for the British Army.

And as I have always said, as the threat changes so must the funding.

If governments have historically responded every time the NHS has a winter crisis, so must they when the threat to the very security that underpins our way of life increases.

Sometimes it is not about what dividend you can take out, but about what investment in people and equipment you can put in.

For too long Defence has lived on a diet of smoke and mirrors, hollowed-out formations and fantasy efficiency savings, while in the last few years the threat from states have started to increase.

And right now, Russia is THE most direct and pressing threat to Europe. To our Allies and our shores.

I am serious when I say that there is a very real danger that Russia will lash out against wider Europe. And that in these days of long-range missiles and stealth, distance is no protection.

As the Chief of the General Staff so correctly pointed out this morning, the threat has changed. And as the Prime Minister and his fellow NATO leaders are addressing in Madrid today, so must our response.

Russia is not our only problem. An assertive China ready to challenge the rules-based system and democracy. Terrorism on the march right across Africa. And Iranian nuclear ambitions, to date still unresolved.

The threat is growing and is global and multi-domain. It is now time to signal that the peace dividend is over, and investment needs to continue to grow.

Before it becomes too late to address the resurgent threat and the lessons learned in Ukraine it is time to 'mobilise' – to be ready and to be relevant.

Thank you.

Local Government Association annual conference 2022: Secretary of State's speech

It's a pleasure to be here in Harrogate for this LGA Conference, my first in this role.

And I'd like to begin by saying something I suspect you all hear much too rarely. Thank you.

Anyone who puts themselves up for election – and seeks to serve their community – deserves the gratitude of us all.

And as James has reminded us, all too often when people do put themselves forward for public office, they are greeted with incivility. We need everyone to speak out against that and everyone to celebrate that our democracy depends on your efforts. In particular, I want to say thank you to everyone here for the way in which you've risen to the challenges that James illuminated in his speech. I know that for local government these last few years have been tough – tight budgets, rising costs, a deadly pandemic and now the percussive shocks of war on the European continent.

I want to thank everyone in this hall – and beyond – for the hard work, imagination, creativity, resilience, and compassion you have all shown in the face of these challenges.

In particular, I'd also like to echo the thanks James extended to Izzi Secombe, Nick Forbes, Shaun Davies, Joe Harris and Marianne Overton. The Local Government Association – and those of us in government – benefit from the hard work of councillors from all parties and none. Your feedback – always constructive, often robust, is vital to ensuring that I can help you deliver for the communities you serve.

And I also particularly want to thank James for his exemplary leadership. James is always scrupulously fair, he is determinedly energetic on behalf of councils everywhere and formidably forensic in scrutinising what we in central government are doing. He is a model public servant and I hope we can all show our appreciation for James, Izzi, Nick, Shaun, Joe and Marianne.

This 25th anniversary of the LGA comes at a time when the role local government plays is at the heart of our national political debate.

Every single one of the major challenges we now face as a country depends on local government. Whether it's levelling up and tackling inequality, helping the most vulnerable deal with inflationary pressures, reaching net zero, providing our citizens with safe, affordable, warm, decent homes, protecting

and enhancing nature, tackling poor health or supporting those who need social care as our population ages, or improving economic productivity. Without local government playing a leading role, we cannot meet those challenges.

And every one of those challenges is easier to meet and master when local government is stronger.

I believe we have the strongest cohort of local government leaders in generations – and you have proved that in response to the challenges of the past 3 years.

It's been local government that has ensured that we as a nation can play our part in supporting those fleeing conflict and persecution across the world.

Over 70,000 Ukrainians and 20,000 evacuees from Afghanistan have been welcomed in the UK over the last year. On top of that over 110,000 visas have been issued to British nationals from Hong Kong coming to our shores.

Of course, there is more to do to support both our Ukrainian and Afghan friends.

As you'll be aware, we've just announced that we will allow children and minors under 18 who have already applied through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to come to the UK without a parent or guardian.

But we simply couldn't have provided that support and wouldn't be in a position to help so many without the active and engaged work of local government support.

On behalf of the whole Cabinet, can I thank you for everything you're doing on the behalf of those who need our support most.

Through the pandemic too, you have shown local government and public service at its best.

With councils like Swindon turning its iconic historic railway station, "Steam", into a vaccination centre.

Or Oxfordshire, which pooled resource between the county council and district councils to put in place a comprehensive system which ensured there was a coherent and holistic approach to Covid Compliance and Enforcement.

And indeed Oldham, who worked closely with community leaders to address vaccine hesitancy, getting nearly all over-60s to have a first vaccine last April.

In addition, everyone in this hall, through Everyone In and Protect, you've contributed to a 37% decrease in rough sleeping from 2019 to 2020, with a further 9% reduction over the last year.

As a result, rough sleeping is now at an 8-year low. This is a remarkable achievement adding up to lives protected and saved by you in local

government.

These achievements deserve to be celebrated. But it's not enough just to acknowledge local government's achievements, we need to ensure local government has more power to make a difference. Power should always and everywhere be exercised as close to the people as possible. Devolution, decentralisation, decisions made by accountable local leaders, that is the path to democratic renewal – the real taking back control.

That's why the [Levelling Up white paper](#) puts strengthening local leadership and local communities at the heart of our mission to reverse the persistent geographic inequalities which hold back communities across the United Kingdom.

It's clear that overcoming these indefensible divisions is a shared challenge for all parts of government; central and local. For all political parties; Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green, Independent.

No-one has a monopoly on all the necessary solutions or tools to achieve this. We need to work together. That is why I want to see local government – whatever the political colour of its leadership – empowered and strengthened. It's why I will be in Liverpool on Thursday working with Steve Rotherham and why I will be in West Yorkshire later this month to work with Tracy Brabin. My duty is to support local democratic leadership to deliver for communities that have been undervalued and overlooked.

This is what the communities we serve expect – and what I am committed to work with you to achieve.

Tackling persistent inequalities is a social justice mission which is more urgent and important now than ever.

Inflationary pressures bear particularly heavily on the poorest. And we are committed to doing everything we can to support the most vulnerable through this difficult time.

My friend Rishi Sunak has, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, delivered a £37 billion package to help those hardest hit by inflation and local government is an indispensable partner in the delivery of that support through reductions in council tax and the administration of discretionary payments.

But if we are to check and reverse inequality in the long term we must do more. Not just support for the most vulnerable at this time of trial. But reform to ensure all our communities are stronger, more resilient, more productive and in more control of their destinies.

I appreciate that in the immediate months ahead local government faces formidable pressures.

The accumulating demands on adult social care, the challenges facing children's social care, the pressures to support children with special educational needs, the economies which affect non-statutory services, the additional expectations we have in planning and housing.

And we will do everything we can to support you through these challenging times. James and other colleagues have outlined to me what we can do, in terms of funding and by other routes, to support you at this time.

But while I do not, for a second, underestimate the pressures that we all face in the months ahead, they only reinforce my conviction that the way to emerge stronger, and fairer as a nation over time is to further empower local communities to build resilience, shape solutions to our problems, innovate and drive regeneration.

It is those principles which underlie our Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill – which is designed to strengthen local government and strengthen local leadership.

The Bill – and our wider approach towards devolution – marks a significant and I hope irreversible commitment towards strengthening local leadership.

Respecting local democracy means, of course, recognising that there will be different solutions and structures which work in different parts of our United Kingdom. What works in Sunderland may not be right in Surrey. But more power to Sunderland and more control for Surrey's local leaders has to be the way to go.

However, as we do devolve, I have to observe that there are certain models which have clearly been successful – and have the potential to be even more transformative in seeing power move away from Whitehall and Westminster. My friend, and former colleague, George Osborne, took considerable risks in extending the mayoral model outside London. But his judgement has been more than vindicated.

At the time the institutional Treasury view was sceptical – do you really want to give up control, minister? Some of my Conservative colleagues were fearful – Tees Valley having its own mayor, isn't that a recipe for less economic dynamism when we need more? The men and women in Whitehall worried that since they knew best this was folly, all too many voices in Westminster thought that SW1 was where the really important decisions should always be taken. In the postcode lottery they had won the crucial ticket and they should remain the decision-makers.

But George's judgement has been powerfully, and rightly, vindicated by events. You can't have a Northern Powerhouse without more power being exercised in the North. You can't have the economic growth equitably spread across this country which we need without strong, locally accountable, leaders whose mandate and mission is driving prosperity in their areas.

So, in Tees Valley, Ben Houchen has been presiding over his region's rebirth as a high-tech, high-skill global powerhouse.

He has made long-term decisions to set up Teesside for future success by borrowing against their GainShare and Enterprise Zone income to produce a £588m Investment Plan for 2019-2029.

And, as a result, he was able to secure flagship strategic investments such

as taking over Teesside International Airport – delivering on the priorities on which he was elected, ensuring re-election and bring prosperity to his region.

In Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham has also shown leadership. Now I disagree with Andy on lots. But he has a clear mandate, and he has demonstrated what strong local leadership can do – on transport, where he has shown vision, on economic development, where he has been broad-minded and on innovation where he has taken political risks to support the private sector. Andy knows that his period in office will be judged on results – and that is at the heart of the devolution

As Andy Street also knows in the West Midlands. He has shown amazing leadership on brownfield regeneration, on tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, on adult education, on transport investment, on support for manufacturing and innovation and on work to meet our Net Zero commitments. He led work to develop a competitive, flexible and secure modern energy system through Energy Capital. Its aim – to facilitate low cost, clean and efficient power – is local leadership helping to meet a global emergency.

As I argued earlier, I believe we have the best cohort of leaders in local government for many generations, but I also believe the mayoral model has, undeniably, seen many more talented leaders devoting themselves to public service in local government – whether it's Ben Houchen and Andy Street or Andy Burnham and Tracy Brabin the future in politics is increasingly local – and that is an undeniably good thing.

The stronger the powers local leaders have, the more they will be judged on their decisions, instead of other factors intervening. I believe that with a mayor, having a directly accountable figure, with a fixed term and a clear mandate, makes it much easier for local communities to make judgements based on local performance and local delivery rather than the ebb and flow of national politics.

Local leaders deserve to be judged on their performance rather than suffering, or benefitting from, national political trends. Just as US state governors can be elected or re-elected in red states or blue states depending on their plans and record rather than the plans and record of those in Washington, so we should seek to make local mandates matter more and local delivery decisive when it comes to elections.

That's why we are working with you to strengthen and deepen the devolution. Negotiations for a new Mayoral Combined Authority for York and North Yorkshire are now in their final stages alongside plans for an expanded Mayoral Combined Authority deal for the North East.

And we are also strengthening the hand of existing mayors through our 'trailblazer' deals with the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, with greater flexibility over how revenue is raised and spent.

While I'm an unabashed admirer of the mayoral model, I also recognise it won't be right everywhere.

But greater devolution is right everywhere. Which is why we're offering every part of England that wants one a new devolution deal by 2030 under a new, coherent devolution framework.

It is an agenda that will see counties, regions and districts which so far haven't benefited from devolution offered the chance to secure the kind of devolved powers which currently only our largest cities enjoy.

We have announced negotiations with Cornwall; Derby and Derbyshire and Nottingham and Nottinghamshire; Devon, Plymouth and Torbay; Durham; Hull and East Yorkshire; Leicestershire; Norfolk; and Suffolk for early County Deals. And we want to go further with more deals, more devolution, more power to the frontline.

Taken together, this amounts to the greatest devolution of power to local leaders and local communities since the Second World War.

And to make the most of this moment we need not just more power to local communities, but I also believe more transparency and accountability as well.

Local communities want to know more about how all of us are performing, how effective new policies are, how cost-effective service delivery is.

And we all want to be able to learn from the best, to celebrate success in local government and spread good practice.

But at the moment it's difficult to make those judgments, to get a granular way, to get a proper understanding of where excellence lies.

The answer lies in the better marshalling of data and the consequent ability to make meaningful comparisons.

Which local authorities have the most innovative and effective children's services departments, which councils have contributed most to Net Zero, which communities have the best performing planning departments?

The more accurately we can answer those questions, the more effectively we can capture and disseminate the public policy solutions to shared problems.

The information may well be out there, but the chances of finding it in one place, in a credible, easily understandable, easily accessible form, are remote.

And this is also a challenge for local councillors. How can they hope to scrutinise their leaders effectively if they don't have this sort of vital information to hand?

I know this is a priority for the LGA. James and his team are working to ensure we have better data collection and analysis across local government through LG Info and other tools. I will do all I can to support and champion that work. And we won't just cheerlead. We'll get on the pitch as well.

We're creating a new body – the Office for Local Government – to shine a

light on how local authorities are performing and delivering.

It will initially bring together, analyse and publish existing data – because we want this to be useful to authorities rather than an administrative burden.

This will cover the services that matter most to the public such as education, refuse collection and recycling, adult social care and will, in time, look at broader issues such as climate change, the race to Net Zero and also the effectiveness of all partners in the integration of health and social care.

As a result, taxpayers will be able to see which councils are going the furthest on the environment, which are pioneering transformative children's services, and which are providing best value for money in an annual report on local government performance overall.

It must be right to have clear information on measures like finances and value for money – and also it must be right to have the opportunity to highlight excellence in local government, to celebrate it and and share best practice.

We really should celebrate the work of councils like Essex, which through its Care Leavers Charter, is providing a great model of wraparound services that better supports care leavers while also saving time and money.

We should also celebrate councils like Newham, in London, which has reduced fly-tipping by over 70% over 2 years through a hard-hitting enforcement campaign informed by an imaginative research partnership with Keep Britain Tidy.

I want to strengthen the hand of the authorities like these which are doing the right thing, innovating and delivering for those they serve.

At the same time, I want to improve our understanding in central government of the picture across local government so we know where action needs to be taken, where support needs to be given and what it is we need to do.

To that end, I want to work with you in the sector, with the experts, to ensure we get this right for councillors and residents alike.

We will be announcing more details about this work to shape the body in the coming months.

But, as well as celebrating the best of local government, and there is so much to celebrate – we must also – from time to time – take action when authorities do fall short.

Two recent, high-profile instances – although they are not the only ones – have thrown this into sharp relief: I am referring to Liverpool City Council and Slough Borough Council.

In Liverpool's case, the arrest of the former Mayor and ongoing police

investigation into alleged corruption and illegal activity triggered a Best Value Inspection in 2020 and my department had to send in Commissioners last year.

In Slough's, long-running mismanagement by the borough council, with little or no effective scrutiny over decision-making let residents down. Again, we had to send Commissioners going in to address failings in its financial management and governance.

In both there's the common thread of weak leadership.

I'm sure, like me, you find these failings wholly unacceptable. It's not just the case that the people of Liverpool and Slough deserve better, it's also the case that local services matter.

The cause of greater devolution and decentralisation, the reinvigoration of our democracy, is set back when there are conspicuous and glaring failures in some councils.

So, in backing you, I am asking you to back what is right for the sector. For us all to be more assertive and willing to speak up when things are going wrong and the noble ideals of public service and local democracy for which local government stands are not being respected.

In return, I can promise that I will remain a strong and determined champion of local government and decentralisation.

I'm acutely aware, given the economic backdrop, that this means playing my part to ensure you get the resources and tools you need to do your job in the months ahead.

That you get the financial certainty you need not just to deliver services over the coming period, but to think long term about investing in levelling up.

The case for multi-year funding settlements has been well made by James and others in the LGA team.

So, I'm pleased to confirm that, from next year, I will be introducing a 2-year financial settlement to give you that certainty and confidence. My department will launch a consultation on this shortly.

We hope that this will allow you to plan ahead with a greater degree of confidence and really focus on the delivery of great public services that represent value for money.

I'm also conscious if we talk about funding, the number of government funds is well into the hundreds and the amount of bureaucracy around them puts a significant burden on local government. And so, I am looking closely at what we can do and we will reduce the number streams and reduce the burdens on you.

I hope this greater certainty and the prospect of funding simplification is

good news for local government. But we all know that this difficult period isn't going to end overnight, so we will continue to work closely with you all, with the LGA, to keep the financial situation under review and to understand the impact in the coming weeks and months.

And I encourage you, through this time, as you did over the pandemic, to be collaborative and creative. To be open and flexible to new ways of doing things and learning from others. Not to be hampered by boundaries or functional responsibilities.

But I also promise you that I will be there to ensure you have the support and funding necessary to get through this. What matters is how together, we serve our people and places.

Ultimately for central and local government, success comes through partnership.

We won't always agree. And the difficult days ahead will no doubt test us all.

Backing you to give the greatest possible devolution of powers to local leaders. Making sure that communities feel that they're back in control. Increased investment and certainty over funding. Making sure there are incentives to innovate, collaborate and excel.

Balancing those with stronger accountability and transparency. Higher standards of stewardship and a greater willingness to challenge those who fall short.

The potential prize within our grasp could not be greater: better public services, the delivery of greater opportunity, progress towards greater social justice, our democracy renewed and strengthened.

This is what it means to level up and unite our country.

And, with your support, that is what I believe we can together, deliver. Thank you.

Scotland thanks sailors, soldiers and aviators for Armed Forces Day 2022

Events were held across Scotland to celebrate Armed Forces Day 2022 (Saturday 25 June) to highlight the efforts and work our Armed Forces do to keep the people of the United Kingdom safe, at home and abroad.

In Edinburgh, an Armed Forces Day parade took place in the city centre with The Band of The Royal Regiment of Scotland, The Band of the Royal Air Force

Scotland, The RAF Central Pipes and Drums and the Royal British Legion Scotland Standard Bearers.

A parade through the streets of Aberdeen also took place to celebrate the Armed Forces community. Personnel from across all three Armed Services were accompanied by local veterans and local pipe bands marching through the city centre, before The Lord Provost of Aberdeen took the salute outside the Town House.

From the forests of Estonia and the waters of the South Atlantic to patrolling UK air space, the UK Armed Forces have been hard at work throughout the year and local communities turned out in force to thank them for their efforts over the last year.

The Prime Minister, Rt Hon Boris Johnson said:

Our Armed Forces are without doubt the best, most respected and most loved Armed Forces in the world.

You are hugely admired by the people of this country – who cheered you most recently at the Jubilee celebrations – because they are so proud of everything you do to keep us safe. You are there for us and our country when we need you, whether you are watching the skies, patrolling the seas or standing over our interests.

Thank you to everyone in the vast military family. Thank you to our incredible veterans. And thank you to the family and friends – whose support is so crucial to ensuring that we have the best fighting force anywhere in the world.

From Aberdeen to Skelmorlie, national day events were held by communities across Scotland with parades, salutes, fayres, and flypasts.

From Dumfries to Glasgow, flag-raising events also took place across Scotland earlier in the week to officially mark the start of Armed Forces Week.

On Tuesday 21 June, Prime Minister Boris Johnson hosted a reception at 10 Downing Street for military personnel, to thank them for their efforts in protecting the country and supporting allied partners by land, sea and air.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Our service personnel and their families unwavering commitment to the defence of the United Kingdom ensures that we are kept safe, at home and abroad, 365 days a year.

On this Armed Forces Day, I hope the entire nation will join me in saying thank you to this community who make so many sacrifices to defend the freedoms and rights of the British people.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

It's fantastic to see the whole country unite for Armed Forces Day, a culmination of a week of activities to recognise the selfless service of our extraordinary UK military.

It's right that we celebrate and say thanks to our much cherished community of service personnel, reserves, veterans, cadets and families for their unwavering commitment in helping keep us safe.

It was a pleasure to meet representatives of the Armed Forces at the Royal Highland Show in Edinburgh earlier this week and on behalf of the whole of the country, I would like to offer heartfelt thanks to them all.

Scotland endures close links with the Armed Forces; it is home to the UK's nuclear deterrent and submarine fleet, as well as Royal Air Force Typhoon aircraft at RAF Lossiemouth who patrol the skies and intercept unidentified aircraft entering UK air space.

Scotland is also home to a number of British Army units including the Royal Regiment of Scotland, the Scots Guards and the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards. It is also homes to numerous Reserve and Cadets Forces covering the entirety of Scotland, from Shetland to Dumfries

Armed Forces Day is the culmination of a week of events which celebrates the entire Armed Forces community and all that they stand for.

Now in its fourteenth year, it is an opportunity for the nation to show its respect to military personnel and their families, thanking them for defending our way of life, protecting British citizens around the world, and strengthening our relationships with our allies and partners.

[New police powers to crack down on unauthorised encampments come into force](#)

Trespassers who set up camp illegally on other people's land or in local communities could face up to three months in prison from Tuesday 28 June, as a new criminal offence becomes law.

Cracking down on antisocial people causing misery by setting up illegal camps and refusing to remove their vehicles, delivers on a key government manifesto commitment.

Made possible by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, on Tuesday police in England and Wales will be given new powers to limit the harms caused by such unauthorised encampments and new statutory guidance will be published.

Police will now be able to ban trespassers from returning to a patch of land for a year, rather than just three months.

And the definition of harm will be broadened, so that police can take more decisive action to tackle unauthorised encampments when necessary.

They will be able to intervene where unauthorised encampments are causing environmental damage or distress to the community – not just the landowner.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

No one should have unchecked rights to trespass on other people's land, or cause misery in communities without consequence.

The position in law is now very clear – trespassers must move their vehicles when asked to do so, or face jail time and a hefty fine.

Illegal encampments cause misery for thousands of people: they damage and pollute environments and often result in local residents facing unacceptable intimidation on their own doorstep.

Delivering on our manifesto commitments, this government will always stand on the side of the law-abiding majority and on the side of the police.

Under the new guidance, the harms potentially caused by unauthorised encampments could include – but are not limited to – instances where:

- there is excessive littering, noise or smell – including from bonfire smoke
- a local resident is verbally abused or intimidated, or fears leaving their house to avoid walking past an encampment
- local communities are prevented from accessing sports fields, parks or car parks
- property on the land, or the land itself has been damaged – including farmland

For the first time, unauthorised encampments on highways will be covered, as well as on public and private land.

The new criminal offence will be punishable by a prison sentence of up to 3 months, or a fine of up to £2,500, or both, and/or seizure of the vehicle.

The conditions of the offence are clear – if people leave when asked to by the police or landowner, they will not risk having their vehicle seized, a fine or prison time.

Statistics showed that the number of authorised traveller pitches had increased by 41% from January 2010 to January 2020 and the government continues its work to provide even more authorised sites for travellers to reside upon. This includes a new fund recently launched that will provide £10 million of capital grant funding for 2022/2023, to support local authorities in England in improving accommodation provision for travellers.