

[Press release: UK Government Minister visits Cardiff business making waves on global defence stage](#)

BCB International is an established leader in the field of protective and survival equipment and has become a trusted supplier for troops serving in operations overseas.

The company has evolved from its early days as a cough medicine supplier, to become a major exporter of cutting-edge technologies and slick product design.

Guto Bebb will meet with the company's Managing Director Andrew Howell to discuss how the company is branching out to new markets and developing new products for military services around the world.

UK Government Minister Guto Bebb said:

Businesses like BCB International are reaching out to international markets and putting Wales on the map.

It goes to show that a little Welsh innovation goes a long way – saving and protecting the lives of those hundreds and thousands of miles away, in often challenging and hostile environments.

There has never been a better time for Welsh companies like BCB to seize the moment and start exporting to new markets and the UK Government is standing by ready to support that aspiration.

BCB International has been designing and making specialised protective and survival equipment since 1854.

The company supplies military forces with equipment such as body armour, first aid kits and camping supplies. It exports 40 50 per cent of its products, mainly to the US, the Middle East and Europe and has a turnover of nearly £9million.

This year the company has won new business from new customers including the Canadian Defence Forces (Camouflage Face Paint), and the French (Fire Resistant Gloves) and Dutch Armies (Camp beds).

BCB has benefitted from UK Government help when it won a significant contract to supply the Ecuadorian Navy with 100 units of inflatable body armour. The country's Navy wanted a payment guarantee and UK Export Finance stepped in to share the risk through its bond support scheme so BCB could use it as a working capital for the order and take on more business.

Andrew Howell Managing Director at BCB International said:

It is a pleasure to welcome the Minister to our premises and show him some of the quality products which are helping us capture new export business. We have exciting expansion plans which we look forward to briefing the Minister about.

Wales is already an exporting nation. There are currently more than 3,800 businesses in Wales that export, with a combined value of £13 billion in the first quarter of 2017. Wales is also an attractive place for inward investment, with latest figures showing that 85 foreign direct investment projects were secured in Wales, creating 2,581 new jobs and safeguarding almost 9,000 more.

The Office of the Secretary of State for Wales has produced a dedicated exporting guide, which sets out the full range of support available from the UK Government and contains inspiring stories of companies based in Wales that are successfully exporting, to 26,000 Welsh businesses encouraging them to think about opportunities for exporting.

[Press release: Glasgow becomes a world-leading smart city](#)

Scotland's biggest city is to reap benefits worth nearly £150 million. It follows a £24 million investment from the UK government into digital infrastructure and open data, making Glasgow a world-leading smart city.

The £24 million invested in the city since 2013, through Innovate UK, funds projects that connect the city together and help Glasgow save money and energy and develop the technologies of the future.

Speaking from the City Operations Centre in Glasgow, which has benefited from Innovate UK's funding, Scottish Secretary, David Mundell said:

This fantastic return on investment demonstrates that targeted funding from the UK Government can lead to great results, benefiting businesses, visitors and communities.

Projects funded through this program demonstrate the innovative ways that modern technology and data can be used to make a tangible difference to the lives of people in cities across the world.

Projects funded so far have reduced energy costs in the city through

intelligent street lights that adapt to people's activity; created apps that give visitors and residents the open to plan their routes; and combined multiple separate city systems to allow teams to work on projects that cross multiple different disciplines.

These projects include an:

- intelligent street lighting demonstrator, which showed how the city can use smarter streetlights to improve lighting quality, reduce energy usage and make maintenance more efficient. The pilot scheme also collected useful data that could have a positive impact on the quality of life and public safety in the 2 test locations, Riverside Walkway and Gordon Street, such as noise detection, movement detection, air pollution detection and WiFi service
- active travel demonstrator, which showed how the city could be made friendlier for both cyclists and pedestrians. It has the potential to inform strategies that could help Glasgow reach the Scottish Government target of 10% of all journeys being completed by bike
- energy efficiency demonstrator, which showed how obtaining increasingly accurate information could help inspire ways to cut emissions, reduce overheads and address issues of fuel poverty. By creating a detailed, data-rich portrait of Glasgow's consumption, it became possible to identify and act upon factors that change energy behaviours
- integrated social transport demonstrator, which helped some of Glasgow's most vulnerable citizens access social and educational services. Smart integration and route scheduling software will increase flexibility and responsiveness, while also reducing operational costs and making it easier for the same transport to be used across various organisations

Innovate UK

Innovate UK is the UK's innovation agency, an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. It drives productivity and growth by supporting businesses all over the UK to realise the potential of new technologies, develop ideas and make them a commercial success.

Future cities demonstrator

- in 2012, Innovate UK launched the future cities demonstrator programme. The objective was to discover the value that could be delivered to a city through integrating city services and systems
- the focus was on innovative combinations of tools and techniques available off the shelf to demonstrate what could be achieved with what was already available
- cities developed bids for funding based on their feasibility study to demonstrate in practice how integration of city systems could add value
- Glasgow was awarded £24 million to implement its proposal
- The project produced ROI of £144 million and positively impacted citizens and small to medium-sized enterprises. Read the full [success story](#)

Contact: pressoffice@innovateuk.gov.uk or 07766 901150.

[Press release: Attorney General visits new Law Clinic at King's](#)

Attorney General Jeremy Wright QC MP will visit King's College London University today to see the pro bono work happening there.

King's College has recently opened a new legal advice centre that provides legal services free of charge to those who can't afford a lawyer. The Attorney will meet law students who are carrying out pro bono work – a commitment that is often continued throughout a lawyer's professional career.

Students will get the opportunity to talk to the Attorney about cases they have worked on at the legal advice centre and discuss their wider experiences of providing free advice to those in need.

The Attorney is the Government's Pro Bono Champion and plays a key role in supporting pro bono work, as well as raising awareness of available services among members of the public and practitioners.

The Attorney General said:

Pro bono is an ancient legal tradition that widens access to justice and I look forward to meeting the students involved in pro bono work at King's College.

The advice given at the newly opened clinic will help make a difference to people's lives as well as to the communities in which they live.

These students are the next generation of lawyers, and the skills they gain now will be used throughout their careers.

The Director of Clinical Legal Education, Stephen Levett said:

Our Legal Clinic reflects the ethos of service to the wider community which underpins the work of King's College London.

By spending time with clients and professional lawyers, our students gain first-hand experience of listening and responding to client problems. They learn skills which will put them in good stead in their future professional careers.

Speech: Changing technology, changing government, changing lives

Thank you Dan, and thank you all for joining us today.

It's always good to be here in the West Midlands.

Yesterday one of my kids saw that I was speaking at The Custard Factory and I think she thought it would be some kind of Willy Wonka wonderland.

She wanted to bunk off school, stow away in the car...

I think she'd be the only person here today who was disappointed with what she saw and heard!

This is a great event with some great people, and it's a really timely event too.

Because we're living through a period of enormous change.

The most obvious sphere in which that's happening is technology.

Now, before I go any further, I know that a politician talking about the digital world can all too easily find themselves wading into dangerous waters!

I remember when I ran the DCMS, one person told me that every time an MP says "coding", a programmer dies a little inside...

So I'm not going to stand here today and read a script that lets me pretend I'm some kind of digital guru.

I won't be talking about the finer points of conversion rate optimisation or hybrid cloud brokerage!

But even to the layman it's obvious that the technology we use day to day, hardware and software, has transformed beyond all recognition in the past 10 or 20 years.

And that has had a massive impact on the way we live our lives, in all kinds of different ways.

To take one, very small, example: when I was growing up in Bristol, if I was a naughty boy and my parents wanted to punish me, they'd take my cricket bat away.

Say I couldn't go outside and play.

Today, I've got 4 children of my own.

And if one of them misbehaves, the most effective punishment I have is to change the password on the wifi!

Some say that's excessively cruel.

I say it gets results.

It's just one example of how the way we live our lives is being shaped and changed by the tools that are available to us.

So technology is changing.

The way we live is changing.

And our expectations about all kinds of things, from shopping to public services, they're changing too.

Anyone who's older than about 35 will feel a twinge of nostalgia about the phrase "allow 28 days for delivery".

But today, in 2017, it comes as a bit of a shock when you reach the point where you have to print something off, put it in an envelope, stick it in the post and then sit back and wait for a response.

We expect services to be online, to be accessible, to be instant.

Technology has changed, lifestyles have changed, expectations have changed.

But that alone is not news, certainly not to people like you.

What gives this event its importance, its topicality, is that we're also in the midst of exciting times for local democracy.

Just look at one of our hosts here today, the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The government is absolutely committed to localism, to putting power back in the hands of towns, cities and communities.

And one of the ways we're doing that is through the creation of combined authorities with elected mayors like Andy Street

I know you'll have the chance to hear from Andy in an hour or so.

That's an opportunity not to be missed, because he really is doing incredible work here in the West Midlands, serving as a real champion for the region and showing just what combined authority is capable of.

Combined authorities are all about bringing communities together, breaking down bureaucratic barriers, joining up people and areas that have common interests – much as the internet does, in fact.

They're a great step forward for localism, for devolution and for local government itself.

And their arrival is not the only change.

We're also seeing increasing interest in the use of unitary status.

We're seeing smaller councils at parish and town level taking on greater responsibility for local services.

We've got Local Enterprise Partnerships, police and crime commissioners, the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine...

It's an unprecedented growth in local democracy.

And that nexus of change – in technology, in lifestyle, in government – is where we find ourselves meeting today.

It's home to incredible range of opportunities for the public and private sector, for councils of all shapes and sizes, for SMEs and big-name companies.

The good, the bad and the ugly

As you'll see today there are some examples of councils doing great work in this area.

Later on Andy will be setting out his ambitions for the West Midlands.

I know Camden has also been blazing a trail and that you'll be hearing from Theo Blackwell about that a little later.

It's certainly no surprise that he has been poached by the Mayor of London!

Manchester and Essex are both taking serious action to get data-led change.

Networks like [LocalGovDigital](#) are helping people come together to share ideas, insights and innovations.

And adoption of the local digital service standard is providing common expectations around transformation.

Up and down the country there are examples of small but effective digital innovations that really meet local needs.

In fact, on the surface, things are pretty impressive.

Most councils now take online payments.

I saw a stat the other day that said most contact between residents and councils now takes place online.

That's great.

But peek behind the curtain and the situation starts to look a little less rosy.

Because once all that data has been received thanks to online contact, half of all councils are manually re-keying more than 50% of it.

Think about what that means.

Residents are dutifully providing councils with the data they ask for in the format they request it, and the councils are then employing an army of bureaucrats to type it in all over again.

Much of that data is then stored in siloed server stacks tucked away in the basement, with no sharing or joined-up analysis to improve the way councils work.

Want to study the way services interact, or understand how and why different people access multiple services?

Tough, you can't!

Even simple transactional services like applications for school places or residents' parking permits leave a lot to be desired.

Councils are too often trying to run modern services on outdated legacy systems, with results that are painful enough for public servants, never mind citizens

There are more than 350 full councils in England, and literally thousands more at the parish and town level.

And although they're all delivering the same services within the same rules, when it comes to digital they're all too often working to their own standards and doing their own thing.

All planning authorities have to handle planning applications, yet there's almost no standardization of how these are handled and presented online.

Finding details of a specific development without knowing which local authority is responsible is all but impossible.

It's not uncommon for one household to receive services from 3 different authorities – parish, district and county.

In such cases the public don't care and often don't know which tier of local government, is responsible, as far as they're concerned it's just "the council".

Yet if they want to engage, enquire or even just read up on what's happening, they'll be faced with 3 different websites, often poorly linked and poorly signposted.

A couple of years ago we introduced new transparency rules for the smallest

councils, ensuring that information about how and what they spent money on was available online.

And we quickly found that some bottom-tier authorities had sites that – if they existed at all – looked like they'd been produced in GeoCities.

I know there's more to digital services than the cosmetic.

But if your technology still looks like it did a decade or more ago, the chances are your underlying systems aren't up to speed and the way you use technology is stuck in the past.

There's a similar transparency code for larger councils, asking them to make data available online in an easily accessible format.

To say compliance is patchy would be something of an understatement.

This is not all the result of willful neglect.

Rather, it's symptomatic of a system that, instead of being planned, has grown up organically over time.

If you were starting with a blank sheet of paper you certainly wouldn't design it this way.

But it's what we have, and incentives to do anything about it are sorely lacking.

The lack of consumer power certainly doesn't help here.

If you don't like the service levels provided by one online retailer, you can always take your money elsewhere. But you can't choose to pay council tax to a different local authority.

You have to take what they give you.

And of course your council doesn't face competition from other providers of local democracy, so there's little incentive for them to invest time and money in doing things better.

The opportunities on offer

But do better we must, because the opportunities are enormous.

Nesta says £15 billion could be saved by councils every year if they make better use of technology.

That's a huge amount of money, more than 4 times the revenue support grant.

But the benefits go much further than that.

Just think about the potential if we really designed services around user needs, if we personalised services to reduce avoidable contact.

A consistent approach to gathering data means better analysis of services right across the country, good news for everyone who receives them.

A more open approach to sharing the data government already holds could do so much to speed up the planning, construction and sale of the homes this country so badly needs.

Working with local SMEs rather than vast multinationals can provide a welcome boost to the local economy.

And so on. I talk about these as opportunities.

But embracing digital is no longer optional.

It's not a nice to have, something you can decide not to do.

Part of that is down to customer expectations.

As I've said, in 2017 people rightly demand digital services, they assume that they will be able to access them online.

But we also have to recognise that carrying on as we've always done is simply unsustainable.

Demand for council services is growing, the standards we expect are rising.

You can't just keep patching up existing models and hoping for the best.

We need efficient, responsive, joined-up services, and that's not something you can deliver in an analogue world.

And we need the right leadership, with the right attitude.

An understanding and embrace of digital is no longer something that can be safely left to a local authority's IT department.

It doesn't belong in the basement, it belongs in the boardroom.

What we're doing about it

Now, as you can imagine, in this job I give a lot of speeches about the future of local government.

And what usually happens is that I stand here and set out the problems and talk about how to fix them.

And the audience nods along and agrees and smiles politely and then we get to the questions and they say:

"That's great Saj, but what are you going to do about it?"

Well, for one thing I've appointed a chief digital officer who I've asked to focus on ensuring local government makes the most of the digital opportunities on offer.

My department is working with councils and the Government Digital Service to create a new vision and a call to arms on local government digital.

That should be ready to share in the spring.

In the meantime my department will be working with councils and companies alike to help everyone involved in the sector connect and share common components, skills, design patterns and – yes – code.

But that's not all.

Because the people in this room also have a huge role to play in meeting my number 1 priority as Secretary of State – getting more homes built.

When Harold Macmillan was overseeing house building back in the 1950s, his biggest challenge was getting his hands on sufficient raw materials – wood, brick, steel and so on.

Today, it can be equally hard to get hold of the raw material of the digital age: data.

It's something that comes up again and again when I speak to builders, councils, housing campaigners and others.

And it's an issue I'm determined to get to grips with.

So, following our manifesto commitment on Digital Land, my department will be leading work to develop a new digital platform on which we can publish the kind of raw data and interactive maps that are useful to builders, innovators and entrepreneurs.

This government has long embraced the principle of open data, and I want to bring that to the housing sector.

Releasing data locked away in arms-length bodies like the Homes and Community Agency, and making it easier to access difficult foundational data like geospatial identifiers.

And, although I can't make any promises right now, I'll be working with the Land Registry and Ordnance Survey to see what further datasets they can release.

The role of the digital sector

So I'm very much on local government's side in this.

I'm not just lecturing from on high, I'm getting down in the trenches and doing everything I can to help.

But it's not just local government that can and must do better.

The tech industry also has to challenge the way it traditionally works.

Above all, you have to recognise that the public sector, and local government in particular, are not typical clients.

A business is accountable to its owners, its directors, its shareholders.

But a council has to answer to every single person it serves.

Appetite for risk is, quite rightly, lower.

The “Fail again, fail better” mantra works better with Venture Capital cash than it does with council taxes.

Councils provide universal services that have to be accessed by literally everyone.

Moving fast and breaking things is all well and good, but you can't use social care, education and child protection as some kind of sandbox to try out new ideas.

I absolutely want to see you disrupt public services – but you can't disrupt the provision of services to the public.

To put it bluntly, people notice if their bins don't get collected!

Just ask anyone who lives in Birmingham!

It's also worth noting that the average age of a local councilor in England is just over 60.

Many are absolutely passionate about the opportunities that the technological revolution can bring – after all, Tim Berners-Lee is a spritely 62!

But it's important to remember that most councilors are not exactly digital natives.

And that inevitably shapes their views, attitudes and decision-making.

I want to see more of you supplying services to local authorities.

But if you're going to wean them off the safety-first approach that sees them default to 15-year contracts with the same old vendors, it's so important that you speak the language of local government.

That you think in terms of outcomes for residents rather than exciting digital inputs.

That you show them technology as a means, not an end in itself.

What can you do for the hard-pressed single mum juggling work and childcare while trying to get her kids into a good school?

What can you do for the elderly resident who lives alone and is about to be discharged from hospital?

What can you do to get the right homes built in the right place, supported by the right infrastructure?

What can you do to cut tax bills, to speed up responses, to support lower-tier authorities taking on new responsibilities?

That's what councilors are trying to do and that's what you can help them achieve.

And let me just thank Dan and everyone at Public for all the work they're doing to bring councils and SMEs together to make that happen.

The in-depth report you've published today is excellent.

Conclusion: riding the wave

It's almost 23 years since Clifford Stoll confidently – and infamously – used a Newsweek editorial to mock the idea of people reading newspapers online, or shopping at a website rather than on the high street.

Less noticed in his list of “things that will never happen” was the prediction that “no computer network will change the way government works”.

Well, the internet came for newspapers.

It came for retail.

And now it's coming for local government.

We can't ignore the wave.

We have to ride it.

That's why events like this are so important.

That's why I'm making sure my department offers the support and expertise that digital local government needs.

And that's why I'll continue to do all I can to bring together the best partners in both local government and the tech industry.

There's a lot of work to do.

I know it won't be easy.

But I also know there is no lack of ambition, passion and potential in the world of digital local government.

And I'm looking forward to working with you as we turn that potential into results.

Thank you.

[News story: Lifeboat charities receive £1 million to boost search and rescue efforts](#)

Water rescue charities have been awarded £1 million in funding for vital rescue equipment to help keep the UK's rivers and seas safe.

The money has been made available by the inshore and inland rescue boat grant fund and is the [fourth round of funding under this 5-year, £5 million scheme](#).

Charities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will use this year's fund to purchase 14 new lifeboats and maritime equipment including lifejackets, helmets, boots, ropes, knives and torches.

Today (7 November 2017), Maritime Minister John Hayes is visiting the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA), an organisation in the west of England which has received a grant of more than £110,000.

Based in Gloucestershire, the charity operates lifeboat and water rescue services, helping those around inland and inshore waterways, and carrying out flood rescues. The SARA will use the funds towards a new lifeboat to add to its existing fleet and continue their efforts to keep river users safe.

Maritime Minister John Hayes said:

Every day water rescue volunteers risk their safety to protect the lives of people across the UK. Their dedication and highly specialised skills are absolutely crucial to providing inshore and inland rescue services.

This extra money means that the volunteers and charities can purchase the lifeboats and equipment they need. It means that assistance is never far away for those in need or in distress on or around our waterways.

Since its launch in 2014, the grant has provided water rescue services up and down the UK with funding for new boats, vehicles and equipment.

A total of 62 organisations will receive a share of the £1 million funding for 2017 to 2018 after their bids were considered by an expert panel.

Chaired by the Department for Transport and made up of representatives from DfT, DEFRA, devolved administrations, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, RNLi and the Royal Yachting Association, the panel assessed bids taking into account:

- how the equipment listed supports or enhances the organisation's rescue capability
- evidence that the items funded represent good value for money
- applicants were also required to match fund 10% of the costs of funded items, and to provide a letter of support from the authority that tasks them to rescues

Sir Alan Massey, Chief Executive of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, said:

These smaller, independent charities are the lifeblood of our communities, playing a vital role in supporting the daily lives of thousands of people across the UK.

We often need to remind ourselves that these brave women and men may be called at any time of the day or night to assist persons in difficulty. Those persons may be lost or injured, in trouble at sea, or needing to be rescued from fast-flowing water or floods.

It's essential that funding like this is available to independent lifeboats so that they have the proper emergency equipment to aid in rescues. This funding will help meet their goals and ease their financial burden.