

[News story: New ways of networking: changes for _connect users](#)

From:

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To improve how we connect people and opportunities we're rationalising our networks and closing _connect groups.

Innovate UK will be closing its _connect networking groups on 1 February 2017 to focus on building bigger, stronger innovation communities on LinkedIn.

The new and revamped LinkedIn groups – run by the [Knowledge Transfer Network](#) – will cover our main sector areas. They will help you to connect with experts, academics and government, access funding opportunities, gain intelligence and get the support you need to exploit your innovative ideas.

Pete Wilson, Digital Communications Manager, Innovate UK, said:

The _connect groups were created to give innovators a place where they could seek out like-minded individuals and businesses, share knowledge and collaborate. As social media has grown and evolved, other platforms have come to better meet this need.

By consolidating our communities on LinkedIn – a platform that we know most of our users are already engaging with – we can reach people on their own terms and add even more value to their online experiences.

If you are a member of any _connect groups you will have until 1 February to move your documents.

[Speech: Supporting local government](#)

Thank you Gary for that kind introduction, and for inviting me along to speak to you all today.

It's great to be here at the Local Government Association's (LGA) temporary home.

I know some people have complained that I'm not as close to Gary as [Greg Clark](#) was.

But it's not for lack of trying!

Look at it from my point of view.

In July I arrived at DCLG's HQ, just around the corner from Smith Square.

Literally a 2-minute walk away.

By October, the LGA had moved to the other side of London!

It's hard not to take that personally...

That's not the only grumble I've heard.

Unlike my predecessors all the way back to Hazel Blears, I've never served in local government.

That drew some criticism when I was appointed.

People were saying: "This guy Javid, he doesn't understand us. He was never a councillor. He's just a banker".

Well, I think they said "banker"...

But look, I don't have to have been a councillor to appreciate what a phenomenal job you all do.

You really are the front line of democracy, our local heroes.

Last month, Ipsos Mori released their annual "Trust in the professions" survey.

And, once again, local government was by far the most trusted tier of politics.

That's no surprise.

For one thing, you're directly responsible for many of the services that people use and rely on every day of the week.

You provide homes, take care of the vulnerable, protect consumers.

You educate our children.

You keep the roads open.

And you do so much more besides – including, of course, managing the service that troubles my mailbag more than any other.

You empty the bins!

Across this huge range of responsibilities, you do a great job.

These are tough times for all parts of the public sector, central and local government alike.

But your record in efficiency and delivery is second to none.

We asked you to do more with less and that's exactly what you did.

Satisfaction with most council services has remained high.

Some services, such as road maintenance, even saw rises in satisfaction last year.

As I told MPs last month, there's a lot that Whitehall can learn from councillors when it comes to delivering value for money.

So whatever tier of government you serve in, whatever party you're from, let me say thank you.

Thank you for being willing to stand up, to put in the time and effort to represent your community.

And thank for you getting on with the job and showing just how effective and efficient local government can be.

I know it's not been easy.

I know it's not all plain sailing.

I know that what some of you want me to do today is stand here and promise additional funding for local government.

Well, there's an old politician's adage that goes:

"Everything you want to hear I can't say, and everything I can say you don't want to hear."

But hopefully things won't be quite that challenging today!

Because I get where you're coming from.

No, I've never been a councillor.

But since I became Secretary of State last summer I have worked tirelessly to get under the skin of local government.

I've travelled the country, talking to councils of all types and political persuasions.

A week doesn't go by that I don't have councillors in my office, talking through the challenges they face and the support they need.

I recognise your innovation, your management and your local leadership.

And I understand your concerns.

One of the biggest, of course, is adult social care.

There's no doubt about it, adult social care is a huge challenge for the public sector right now.

People are living longer, and that inevitably means greater demand for care services.

Every year you spend more than £14 billion on adult social care.

It's one of the biggest cost pressures facing councils.

The last Spending Review put in place up to £3.5 billion of additional funding for adult social care by 2019 to 2020.

But I recognise that more needs to be done.

You, in local government, have a statutory duty to take care of vulnerable people.

But I believe that all of us have a moral duty to do so.

It's what a civilised society does.

That's why I was proud to fight for and secure more than £900 million of [additional funding for social care](#).

Longer-term solutions are needed, but this additional cash will make a huge difference here and now.

I'm afraid we'll have to agree to disagree on whether it's so-called "new money".

I'm very clear that there is more cash available for adult social care than there used to be.

Nearly a billion pounds of it.

I know many of you, for various reasons, view things differently.

But let's all be very clear on one point – whether it's old money or new money, it's all taxpayers' money.

I've heard some people object to the precept on Council Tax on the grounds that central government should pay for social care.

They're missing the point.

Regardless of whether funding is raised or allocated by central government or local government, it is all raised by taxing the people of this country.

It's not your money.

It's not my money.

It's their money.

And the social care precept means that their money gets spent in their areas supporting vulnerable members of their communities.

Of course, some local authorities will be able to raise less than others.

That's why the Improved Better Care Fund, worth £1.5 billion by 2019 to 2020, will take into account councils' ability to raise funding through the precept.

And we have listened to calls from across the board saying funding is needed sooner in order to meet short-term pressures.

That's why we've made available a £240 million Adult Social Care Support Grant for one year, distributed fairly according to need.

I can also give you all some reassurance today.

Like I said, I've been talking to a lot of council leaders over the past 6 months.

And one concern that comes up again and again is the possibility that Attendance Allowance funding could be resourced from retained business rates.

Well, I'm listening.

Today I can confirm that the localisation of [Attendance Allowance](#) is no longer being considered as part of the business rates reforms.

I'll be announcing further details on business rates reforms shortly.

But I can tell you now that Attendance Allowance will not be included.

Let's not pretend that increased funding is the only solution to the care challenge.

You can pour as much petrol as you like into your car; if the engine's not working it still won't go.

And there is variation in performance across the country that simply cannot be explained by different levels of spending.

Look at one of the biggest challenges in social care, Delayed Transfers of Care from hospital.

In some areas it's a chronic problem, while others have virtually no delayed transfers at all.

In fact there's a 20-fold difference between the best-performing 10% and the worst-performing 10%.

That can't be explained away by differences in funding or demographics.

I know that most of the delays are down to the health service.

But a gap that size also has to involve some councils simply doing things better than others.

Look at Southampton.

It has reduced delayed transfers of care and unnecessary hospital admissions by integrating 7 health and social care teams into a single service under a pooled budget.

If you're tempted to shake your head and say "that's great, but things are different in the south", look at Northumberland.

£5 million saved thanks to the council working with the local health trust.

Demand for residential care cut by 12%.

And those statistics aren't just numbers on a balance sheet.

They mean more people managing their own health.

More people able to live independently in their own homes.

More people recovering with their families in familiar surroundings rather than being marooned on a hospital bed.

More efficient working is good for councils, good for taxpayers, and good for the people who matter most – those on the receiving end of services.

Health and social care should be fully integrated so that they feel like one service.

The [Better Care Fund](#) is already supporting this with £5.3 billion of funding pooled between councils and Clinical Commissioning Groups last year.

But we also want to make sure that all local authorities learn from the best performers and the best providers.

So we will soon publish an Integration and Better Care Fund Policy Framework to support this.

And in the long term, we will need to develop reforms that will provide a sustainable way of working that benefits everyone who needs care.

Of course, social care isn't the only big challenge on all our plates right now.

There's also that most basic of human needs: housing.

For decades now, this country has not been building enough houses.

That's not the fault of any one government or any one council.

But it's a problem that we will all have to work together to fix.

The LGA has just made a great contribution to that with the report from its Housing Commission.

So thank you to everyone who worked on that.

My plan for getting homes built, the housing white paper, is going to be published shortly.

As you know, it's not an easy challenge to overcome.

We want to make sure we get it right, that we make the biggest impact on the housing shortage that we can.

It wouldn't be right for me to reveal everything that's in the white paper before it's published.

But I will say this much.

I'm not going to be tinkering around the edges.

The white paper will set out serious, lasting, long-term reforms that will boost housing supply immediately and for many years to come.

I know you've heard that before.

But this white paper isn't just about changing guidelines or passing legislation or cutting red tape.

It's about a whole new mind set.

A whole new attitude to house building at all levels – in central government, in the building industry and, yes, in local government too.

Make no mistake, you will have a huge role to play in the future of house building.

You are the enablers.

You are the planners.

You are the local leaders.

Leadership, as you know, sometimes means taking tough decisions.

Unpopular decisions, even.

It's not easy.

But we have to ask ourselves what kind of country we want to live in.

Do we want a divided nation, with an unbridgeable and ever-widening gap between the property haves and have-nots?

Where only those with wealthy parents can get a foot on the property ladder?

Where elderly people are forced to work well past retirement age in order to keep paying off their mortgage?

Where unfettered, unplanned and unhelpful development overwhelms communities who have no say in the matter?

Or do we want a country where anyone who wants to work hard and get on can ultimately afford a place of their own?

Where social mobility is boosted, the environment is protected, and quality of life is improved?

I know which one I want to see.

And the white paper will help bring it about.

Housing is a complex business.

Different people and different places have different needs.

There is no simple, off-the-shelf, one-size-fits-all solution.

The same is true of devolution.

The Sheffield City Region and Cornwall, for example, are very different places with very different strengths and some very different problems.

And that's why the devolution deal that's right for one area might not be right for another.

The West Midlands will benefit from having a mayor, but not all areas will.

Just because Wiltshire has made a huge success of unitary status, it doesn't mean all district councils should shut up shop.

Areas that opt for a directly elected mayor will always be in line for the greatest degree of devolution.

As I've said before, I don't want to devolve power without accountability.

But the whole of point of our approach to devolution and reorganisation is that it's locally led to meet local needs.

It's about bottom-up consensus, not top-down reorganisation.

The last thing I want to do is repeat the failed experiment of identikit regional assemblies imposed along arbitrary geographical lines and imposed from Westminster.

But let me be very clear – we are not going cold on devolution.

We have not lost interest, it has not slipped down our list of priorities.

Myself, my department and my Prime Minister remain absolutely committed to making existing deals a success.

And my door is always open to local authorities who want to put forward their own plans.

I want to see strong, effective, efficient local government in whatever form best suits your area.

If you can deliver that, I'll give you as much as I can.

After all, last June, the people of Britain voted to take back control.

We're not about to reclaim power from Brussels only to hoard it in Westminster.

On the subject of Brexit...

Earlier this week, as you'll have seen, the Prime Minister set out the core principles of our departure from the European Union.

And on everything from consumer protection to economic growth, local government is central to getting Brexit right.

Yes, we want to see a global Britain.

But that has to be built on firm local foundations.

I know my predecessor promised local government a "seat at the table".

I also know the current joke is that he didn't say which seat, at which table or even which building it's in!

But, earlier this week, my colleague [David Davis](#) announced that he'd be sitting down with elected leaders.

And you can rest assured that I'm going to make sure your voice is heard.

Because whichever party you represent, I represent you.

I am your Secretary of State, your champion in Westminster, your voice in Cabinet.

I am proud to speak for you, I am proud to fight for you.

We won't always agree on everything.

But this is a big, big year for local government.

Elections in counties and combined authorities, devolution deals being delivered, the Brexit process beginning, the housing white paper...

And if we're going to make a success of it we are all going to have to work together.

I've talked about 4 of the big issues today.

I know there's a lot more on your mind.

If I haven't touched on something it doesn't mean I don't care about it, I just don't want to spend the whole of this session talking at you.

For all the time I spend meeting with council leaders, the realities of my life and yours mean I don't get enough opportunities to hear from other councillors.

And I really want to hear from you.

I can't promise to give you the answer you want.

There may some questions where I have to hold up my hands and say "I don't know, let me get back to you on that".

But I can promise that I will listen.

That I will go on listening.

And that I will continue doing everything I can to support the single most important part of the public sector – our local councils.

Thank you.

[News story: New options for lodging evidence online will save customers time](#)

From:

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Customers can be more specific about the type of evidence they are lodging when they lodge it online to support a land registration application.

A recent update to the portal, our online transactional channel, allows customers to specify they are lodging the following types of evidence:

- Marriage Certificate
- Death Certificate

- Birth Certificate
- Probate.

Our customers asked us to make this change. They told us that when they lodged evidence online, they trawled the relevant drop down list for these specific options. Up until now, customers have been correctly selecting the generic 'evidence' option from the list, but only after they were satisfied there was not a more specific option on the list.

Making this assessment takes time so we expect the change to save our customers time, while it enables us to route their applications to the most appropriate caseworker.

Customers can still select the generic 'evidence' option if they choose to do so.

This change is one of a number of enhancements we are making to our online channels. We are improving them based on customer feedback.

[Press release: Integrating the Science and Technology Support for the UK's Defence and Security](#)

From:

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An integration has been agreed between the MOD's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) and the Home Office's Centre for Applied Science and Technology (CAST).

An integration has been agreed between the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) and the Home Office's Centre for Applied Science and Technology (CAST). This has been decided following a review to examine the best way to provide enduring and appropriate science and technology (S&T) support to the Home Office and the MOD. The integration will improve the resilience of the S&T support that makes such a major contribution to the nation's defence, policing, security and resilience.

Commenting on today's announcement, Dstl's Chief Executive, Jonathan Lyle said:

Combining our capabilities will improve the science and technology support for the MOD and Home Office, and enhance the nation's defence and security. Dstl and CAST already work closely together on key projects such as forensics, body armour and detection systems. We intend to continue to build on this existing close relationship to make the integration process a success.

The Head of CAST, Andy Bell, added:

This development will enable a more joined-up, coherent approach to science and technology provision for security, policing and resilience in the UK. The move will mean that our customers have access to a wider range of scientific and engineering expertise across government, industry and academia, giving broader access to innovative ideas and solutions. There is a lot of hard work to be undertaken before we complete the move, and we will be providing full support to our staff throughout the transition.

The integration is expected to start in 2017 and end by 2020. CAST's staff and work will move to become part of Dstl, and be primarily based at Porton Down, near Salisbury. An integration programme team will work jointly across Dstl and CAST to support the transfer of staff and capabilities during the transition period, ensuring continuity in support of national security, defence and policy.

[News story: Rural Payments Agency pays 93% of Basic Payment Scheme claims in January](#)

From:

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The Rural Payments Agency reaches its public target to pay 93% of eligible 2016 Basic Payment Scheme claims more than 2 months ahead of schedule.

More than 80,000 (93%) farmers in England have now received their 2016 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) money.

This means the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has paid 93% of eligible claims

more than two months ahead of its end of March target.

The payments are worth £1.48 billion and include a range of 2016 BPS claim types and sizes, including cross border, young farmer, those inspected and farmers with common land.

Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom said:

I know how important these payments are to farmers and I am pleased that the RPA is ahead of schedule meeting their target of making 93% of payments well before the end of March.

This is good progress. However I am very clear that the Agency will remain fully focussed on paying all remaining eligible claims as quickly as possible.

BPS Operational Delivery Director Paul Caldwell said:

We know how much these payments matter to farmers and the progress made so far underlines our commitment to getting money into bank accounts as quickly as possible.

We've worked hard to make sure farmers receive their payments, but we know there is still more work to do. I remain absolutely focused on ensuring the Agency continues to pay every eligible claim.

BPS payments are made direct to bank accounts, so farmers should make sure RPA has the most up-to-date account details. Once a payment has been made a remittance advice is sent in the post, confirming the amount paid.

More information on 2016 BPS, including scheme rules and details of how payments are calculated, is available at www.gov.uk/rpa/bps2016