

## **Press release: New for newts: better for wildlife, business and people**

An innovative approach by Natural England to protect great crested newts and encourage sustainable development was today (28 February) launched in Kent.

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Developers in Kent can now apply for a licence under [District Level Licensing \(DLL\)](#) for great crested newts (GCN). It follows our announcement of a [nationwide roll-out](#) of great crested newt District Level Licensing in 2017.

GCNs are widely distributed throughout lowland England. However the species has suffered enormous declines, with approximately 50% of ponds in the UK lost in the 20th Century and 80% of current ponds in a poor state. The current licensing system is focused on management to prevent harm on individual development sites rather than addressing the wider health of GCN populations. Our new approach seeks to redress this balance, encouraging targeted efforts towards provision of GCN habitat in areas where surveys show it will most effectively connect and expand GCN populations.

This new approach will increase GCN populations at a county level. It will also reduce delays for developers. Under the current licensing approach, developers who want to build on land which is home to GCNs need to trap and relocate the species before starting work. Seasonal restrictions, where these are not effectively planned for, can lead delays and create uncertainty over the costs and scheduling of planned development.

Through the District Level Licensing scheme in Kent, developers no longer need to do this. Instead developers can make a conservation payment which will cover creating or restoring ponds in areas away from the development. These areas, mapped by Natural England, represent the best places for newts to thrive and habitat created here will be maintained and monitored for 25 years, all funded by developers.

As well as being good for GCN, it is estimated that District Level Licensing will reduce delays and costs for developers and regulators across England, saving hundreds of millions of pounds.

In Kent, several of the [Countryside Management Partnerships](#) have already begun successfully working with landowners to restore and create compensatory ponds for great crested newts in preparation for development commencing.

Thirty-two ponds in Kent have been created and restored, and a further 30 are expected to be restored and created by end of March 2019. This means the scheme has a 'bank' of ponds before it opens and developers start getting involved. This new habitat will help join up existing newt populations, making them more healthy and resilient.

**Marian Spain, Natural England's interim chief executive, said:**

For over two years, Natural England's local and national staff have been working tirelessly with external partners on a new, more strategic approach to great crested newt licensing. This has resulted in the opening of the District Level Licensing scheme in Kent – a victory for wildlife, business and people.

New compensatory habitat will be created in locations to best benefit great crested newts and, at the same time, developers can avoid costly delays to build homes for new communities. The launch of this scheme, a landscape-scale way of working championed in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, shows we are committed to ensuring environmental regulation better serves both the natural environment and the economy.

Natural England worked with a number of partner organisations to pull together existing data and surveys on the presence, absence and habitats of great crested newts in Kent, in addition to setting up an expert panel on great crested newts which will bring together expertise from NGOs, government and universities. This data was then used to develop the evidence-based model on which the scheme is based.

District Level Licensing is expected to replace around 77% of current site-based mitigation and organisational licensing for great crested newts. Funds from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and contributions from developers, including Berkeley Homes, Pentland Homes, Quinn Estates and Redrow, have been used to develop the project and to contribute to the initial creation of new habitat.

**Nick Fenton, from the Kent Developers Group, said:**

Having worked closely with Natural England over the past two years on the development of District Level Licensing for great crested newts we see the scheme as a major step forward as not only does it safeguard important environmental habitats it enables developers to play an active role in the process. Having a streamlined scheme in place will also help speed up the delivery of much needed development, whether it is residential, commercial property or infrastructure, and support economic growth.

**Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development at Maidstone Borough Council, said:**

We have worked closely with Natural England on the development of district level licensing for GCN in Kent for several years and are very supportive of the enterprising approach to bring planning and species licensing more closely together.

The new licensing scheme will enable strategically planned habitat creation to embed within Local Plans and Green Infrastructure Strategies and has the objective to create net gains in habitat in the most ideal locations for resilient populations.

## **ENDS**

For further enquiries please contact the Defra Group news desk on 0330 041 6560 or email [newsdesk@defra.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@defra.gov.uk). For out of hours please call 0345 051 8486.

### **About Natural England**

- Natural England is the government's advisor on the natural environment. Established in 2006, our work is focused on enhancing England's wildlife and landscapes and maximising the benefits they bring to the public.

### **GCN and GCN DLL**

- Great crested newts are a European Protected Species. Under the Habitats Directive, it is an offence to capture, kill, injure or disturb them or their habitat without a licence from Natural England. Although rare across Europe, they can be locally abundant in England.
- Previously, licenses were only granted on a site-by-site basis. This missed opportunities to manage populations of great crested newts on a landscape scale, and resulted in habitat for newts being squeezed around development, sometimes in disconnected patches.
- Under the District Level Licensing approach the first step is the development of a licensing strategy for GCN in the area which identifies areas where development should be avoided, migration strategies such as green corridors, and areas for new and restored compensatory habitat.
- This new licensing approach to authorising developments affected by great crested newts is part of a larger programme to reform protected species by focusing conservation effort where it will create maximum benefit.
- Our scheme in Kent and Cheshire are interim and we will be moving to

assessing NSA and IROPI at scheme level in the future to improve the approach.

For additional information and guidance on District Level Licensing for great crested newts please visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-crested-newts-district-level-licensing-schemes>

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## Speech: Children and Families Minister announces new early years funding

Thank you very much for inviting me. A particular thanks to the member for Manchester Central, Lucy Powell, for inviting me here today, and for continuing to keep the political focus on school readiness in Greater Manchester. I am truly delighted to see such a range of early years professionals here today, and I would like to personally thank you for the hard work that you do. I know that all of you – whatever your role – share my passion and enthusiasm for ensuring our children get the best start in life.

School readiness is hugely important, and that is why the Department for Education has such a focus on the early years, and on improving communication and language skills in particular.

This is something that is very personal to me. Some of you may know that, at the age of nine when I came to this country from Baghdad, I couldn't speak English, and I used to sit at the back of the classroom so the teachers didn't ask me to speak in class. Sometimes when I got a bit more confident I tried to bring a few sentences together. My teachers thought I had learning difficulties. I now stand before you as MP for Shakespeare! But I had great parents and some great role models, and I learned English and then learned that being able to express yourself is the gateway to success, not just in school but in later life.

It's these crucial early years that make the most impact on a child's future path – because for those children who start out behind their peers, it's so much harder to catch up. All the evidence tells us that we need to improve children's communication and language before they arrive at school, to get them on track to be confident, able learners.

The Education Secretary has set a challenging ambition to halve the proportion of children leaving reception without the communication, language and literacy skills they need to thrive, over the next ten years. If we are to meet this ambition, we need to find new and creative ways of supporting children and families – as well as our workforce.

Greater Manchester is leading the way, and I am delighted to be here to talk

about how we can work together to design and deliver systems both locally and nationally that can hopefully ensure every child is able to thrive when they start school.

I strongly believe that a key role for us in central Government is to support local leaders and professionals to innovate; and for Government to ensure the best ideas are able to flourish. The Children's Social Care Innovation Programme has been a successful example of that approach. And our £6.5m Early Outcomes Fund draws on those lessons to help local authorities improve how they deliver services to improve early language outcomes. We will announce the outcome of that fund very shortly.

Today I want to highlight some further examples of where local innovation and central policymaking are coming together to drive progress towards our shared ambition. These broadly cover three areas. The first of these is to address the work of the wider professionals involved in a child's life.

This ranges from GPs, health visitors, speech, language and communication therapists and many more. Health visitors play a particularly important role in identifying and supporting children with speech, language and communication needs.

That is why my Department – in partnership with Public Health England – will train 1,000 health visitors. Wave 1 will begin shortly in areas of high need, including Oldham and Tameside.

This is an area where Greater Manchester is really blazing a trail – both through your language pathway and your investment in tools to identify speech, language and communication needs early. Together these are designed to support the local workforce to identify speech, language and communication needs as early as possible and put in place support that is needed.

Again, this is an important example of how Government can take innovative practice and take it to scale. My Department – again in partnership with Public Health England – is developing a new bespoke early language assessment tool, under government copyright, that will be made available to health visitors and professionals across a wide range of local authorities in need.

Today, I am pleased to announce that the University of Newcastle, led by James Law – Professor of Speech and Language Science – will develop our early language assessment tool. The team working on this tool has extensive expertise in speech and language therapy, health visiting and general practice, and academic expertise in linguistics, psychology and statistics.

We are also working with Public Health England to publish early language pathway guidance which will support local areas to develop and implement their own pathway – similar to that which you have done in Greater Manchester. You have really been the pioneers of this.

Of course, the most important people in a child's life are their parents. Which brings me onto the second area I want to talk about – improving the Home Learning Environment. Because the evidence is clear that what happens at

home in the early years is absolutely key to outcomes later in life.

That is why, in November, the Department held a summit, at which we brought together a coalition of over 120 businesses, voluntary groups, community and public sector organisations. These organisations all share a common goal – to help parents kick start their child's early communication, language and literacy development at home.

We want to get across that there are really simple, everyday things that every parent can do more of to help their children's language and literacy.

Since the summit, I have been working with some of these organisations to bring their commitments to life, and it is no surprise to me to find that there is some excellent, innovative practice here in Manchester. Today after this summit, I am visiting Manchester City Football Club, to observe one of their sessions that uses physical activity to enhance children's communication and language.

Our next steps are to launch a public campaign to encourage parents to chat, play and read more with their children. I recognise that it is important to get this message out there in local communities if we want to see a change in parental behaviour, and for this to work, I will really need your help and expertise.

Our public, private and voluntary sectors are all a vital part of this coalition. From early years settings to libraries, from health visitors to local employers, everyone has an important role to play as part of this society-wide mission to improve the home learning environment.

One of the most important contributions comes, of course, from early years professionals. And this brings me onto the third and final area I want to talk about today – which is supporting the work of our early years settings. I am always struck by the passion and commitment that I see first-hand when I visit early years settings up and down the country. I want to be able to support you to do your job as best as I can.

I know this is a key focus for Greater Manchester. It is for me too. My department's Workforce Strategy, published in March 2017, has resulted in a number of developments to support the early years sector in recruiting, retaining and developing its workforce. These include publishing new level 2 qualification criteria, and a new early years career progression map – both developed through work with sector stakeholders.

I am also delighted to hear that you are encouraging and supporting the use of apprenticeships for your early years workforce. For employers, developing well trained and highly motivated staff who work to the standards they expect is hugely valuable. I am an enthusiastic supporter of apprenticeships and the grow-your-own ethos of the sector.

I also want to address the importance of continued professional development, which I know is another key focus for Greater Manchester. This is why my Department – in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation – is

investing £5 million to fund and evaluate projects focused on high quality professional development and practice in the early years.

And I recently announced a £20m Early Years Professional Development Fund, to help practitioners improve children's early language, literacy and numeracy. This will be delivered via a 'train the trainer' model – much like your planned workforce academy. We recently tendered for a national training partner and are currently assessing the bids. I hope to be in a position to announce the preferred bidder shortly.

Now there is one small but important group of early years settings that I want to mention in particular – Maintained Nursery Schools.

The supplementary funding that my Department provides local authorities to enable them to protect Maintained Nursery School funding and reflect their higher costs is due to end by March 2020. What happens after that will be determined by the Spending Review. But the Spending Review has not yet happened, and this has created an unusual problem for local authorities and Maintained Nursery Schools.

Rightly, you want to allocate places in Maintained Nursery Schools for this September in good faith, but without knowing whether the summer term of 2020 will be fully funded.

Today I can reassure you that you can indeed offer places in good faith. We will provide local authorities with a further £24 million for their Maintained Nursery Schools, to enable them to continue funding them at a higher rate for the whole of the 2020-21 academic year.

This should remove the immediate concerns about Maintained Nursery Schools. I know that this does not answer the question about their long-term future. But I think this is a pragmatic response – I hope you'll agree – that recognises the excellent work that many Maintained Nursery Schools do. And it allows the Spending Review to determine the longer-term future of Maintained Nursery Schools, alongside wider early years considerations. I have set out this morning some examples of the relationship between central government and local leaders and professionals working at its best, taking innovations to scale. In short, if we are to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children, we must think about how we can do things differently – including through parents.

No parent has all the answers – so we need to make it easier for them to kickstart their child's learning at the earliest opportunity, whether by encouraging them to take part in educational activities as a family, support from trained experts at home to identify concerns earlier, or better access to high-quality early years education." I look forward to working together to give all children the best chance to flourish at school and in later life.

Thank you.

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## News story: Selected student police officers to receive Taser training

Student police officers working on the frontline will be able to apply for Taser training, the Home Office has announced today.

It comes after senior officers made a request to the department to allow selected students to put themselves forward for the specialist training. Previously, only officers who had passed their two-year probation period were eligible.

Student officers can be deployed to the frontline and face the same threats as ranked officers. Police chiefs therefore want certain recruits to complete Taser training where there is a clear local need.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The police put themselves in harm's way to keep us all safe and that includes student officers working on the frontline.

Tasers give them an important tactical option when facing potentially dangerous and violent situations.

I remain committed to giving officers the tools they need to protect themselves, their colleagues and the public.

Lucy D'Orsi, National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Less Lethal Weapons and Deputy Assistant Commissioner, said:

Giving chief constables the option of selecting and training their probationary officers to carry Taser is a welcome step

Probationers are posted to the frontline and they respond to the same calls as other colleagues. These calls range from dealing with vulnerable people in need of help to incidents of serious violence.

At present, an officer's suitability to carry Taser is determined by the amount of time someone has been an officer. The diversity of our workforce has changed considerably and many of our probationers have professional and life skills from before they started their police career that help to demonstrate their capability to carry Taser. I believe these skills should be recognised as well as their ability as a Police Officer, particularly when dealing with conflict.



Police use of Taser is regulated by strict standards and is conditional on the completion of a training programme.

All officers who volunteer to carry a Taser are required to have the support of their supervisor, endorsement at Superintendent level and pass the Taser training course.

In addition, student officers who undertake the training are required to:

- have been assessed as safe and lawful for independent patrol
- have demonstrated experience of successfully managing conflict
- hold a review with a supervisor following use of a Taser

The deployment of Taser is an operational matter for chief officers, who determine the number of devices and specially trained officers they need based on their force's strategic assessment of threat and risk.

Taser refers to TASER®, the brand name of the conducted energy device used by police forces in England and Wales

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## **Press release: HS2 set to boost opportunities for businesses in Scotland**

CEO of HS2 Ltd, Mark Thurston, told Scottish businesses today how they can take advantage of thousands of contract opportunities, and become part of Europe's biggest infrastructure project.