

News story: Scottish yard awarded HMS Queen Elizabeth contract

A Scottish dockyard has been awarded a contract to carry out the first planned dry-dock maintenance of Britain's largest warship, HMS Queen Elizabeth, Defence Minister Stuart Andrew has announced.

The £5 million contract, won by defence company Babcock, will allow the 65,000-tonne carrier to undergo a routine, planned hull survey and maintenance of her underwater systems over a six-week period at the company's Rosyth site.

The work will sustain 100 jobs at its peak and be carried out in the summer.

Defence Minister Stuart Andrew said:

After a phenomenal year of trials off the East Coast of the US, this dry-docking contract is an important step for HMS Queen Elizabeth as she gears up for operations.

The largest ship in our Royal Navy's history, which was assembled in Rosyth, will now return for this multi-million-pound routine maintenance work as she gets set to represent Britain across the world for decades to come.

The dry-docking period will mark the cutting-edge carrier's return to the shipyard where she was built.

Her sister ship, HMS Prince of Wales, is currently undergoing the final stages of construction at the Rosyth yard and was powered up for the first time in November.

She is due to be handed over to the Royal Navy later this year.

Russell Brown, Director Ships Support at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S), said:

The teams at Defence Equipment and Support are committed to bringing the national flagships into operational service and this dry docking is a crucial step on that journey.

This significant national enterprise is built upon the excellent relationships across defence and the unparalleled skills within UK

industry.

HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales are the largest ships ever built for the Royal Navy.

HMS Queen Elizabeth will resume aviation trials later this year with British-owned F-35s. She is expected to enter operational service in 2020, prior to her first deployment in 2021.

News story: MP praises Power Women for 'putting Cumbria on the national stage'

It follows the announcement of the awards shortlist, which includes the Women in Nuclear (WiN) Cumbria branch.

They will join other Cumbria finalists – Prima Uno Ltd, Balfour Beatty's Amanda Mackay and Sally Fielding of 'Sally's Cottages' at a ceremony in March where the winners will be announced.

The Northern Power Women Awards celebrate the women and men working towards creating gender balance in organisations across the entire Northern Powerhouse, which includes big players like Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Newcastle.

MP for Copeland, Trudy Harrison said;

I am absolutely delighted that Cumbria is being recognised on the national stage at the Northern Power Women Awards.

I want to send my heartfelt congratulations to the finalists, who are shining examples of what our county has to offer.

Having smaller businesses like Prima Uno Ltd and powerful networks like the WiN Cumbria community is helping to ensure our region is a vital contributor to the UK economy, and I look forward to continuing my work with them to improve gender balance in industry.

The WiN Cumbria team was established in March 2018, as part of the global organisation, WiN UK, which recognised the unique contribution that the county makes to the nuclear sector.

Since its launch, the network has become a powerful community of local

organisations and individuals working together to achieve gender diversity within the Cumbrian workforce.

Chair of the WiN Cumbria and Sellafield Ltd employee, Claire Gallery-Strong, said;

The WiN Cumbria team is absolutely honoured to be among those positioning Cumbria as a key player within the Northern Power Women community.

Less than a year since we launched, I am overwhelmed and extremely proud of what our small but formidable team of volunteers has managed to achieve.

From building a powerful network of businesses, individuals and advocates, providing training and mentoring, leading campaigns across the county to enhance visibility of role models, helping host the iconic suffrage flag and supporting the community when in need – we feel we have become an integral part of Cumbrian industry.

It is our mission to ensure we create an inclusive and fair environment that helps attract, retain and build a diverse workforce of the future, for Cumbria and the UK.

Prima Uno Ltd in Cleator Moor will compete for 'Small Organisation' award. Managing Director, Sarah Purdham, said;

To have the company and employees of Prima Uno nominated and shortlisted for such a prestigious award is amazing.

Things like this really do raise the profile of Cumbrian businesses and people making a real difference for their company, county and their gender.

I am so proud to be Cumbrian and I hope this inspires others to follow and realise their dreams.

The winners of the Northern Power Women Awards will be announced in Manchester on 18 March 2019.

[Press release: Newark residents among](#)

40,000 benefitting from quieter roads

People living near the busy A1 in Nottinghamshire are among 40,000 roadside residents enjoying a quieter life thanks to a major noise reduction initiative.

Press release: Newark residents among 40,000 benefitting from quieter roads

Highways England has pledged to reduce noise levels for people living in over 1,000 areas close to motorways and major A roads by spring 2020 by installing noise barriers, providing free double glazing and laying new quieter road surfaces.

A 600-metre-long noise barrier close to the village of North Muskham, near Newark, is the latest structure to be installed as part of the scheme. The three-metre-high barrier has been adopted by the local community after villagers decided to plant 150 shrubs in front of it.

North Muskham Parish Council Chair, Ian Harrison said:

The residents in North Muskham have been pressing for this for some years. The completion provides a real difference to the volume of A1 traffic noise experienced especially by nearby residents.

Some residents also requested that foliage be replanted to provide better aesthetic views and an environment for birds and other wildlife so the parish council made the request and we are grateful for the positive response.

Highways England has a £39 million special fund to reduce noise levels for people living close to motorways and major A roads, which includes installing noise barriers in areas where they are likely to have a significant benefit for local communities.

The organisation has also installed free double glazing at more than 600 homes, and laid quieter surfacing on over 6,000 miles of lanes on motorways and major A roads since 2015 – equivalent to resurfacing the entire M6 three times over.

Quieter surfacing is now installed as standard wherever possible on the roads managed by Highways England. The smoother and thinner top layer can help make

roads significantly quieter than traditional road surfaces.

Ian Holmes, Principal Noise Advisor at Highways England, said:

Around four million drivers travel on our roads every day but they impact many millions more – whether that's businesses relying on long-distance deliveries or families in opposite ends of the country being able to get together for special occasions.

Our roads also have an impact on the people who live near them and I'm pleased we've been able to reduce traffic noise levels for over 40,000 roadside residents since 2015 as part of our noise reduction schemes.

It's great to see that the new noise barrier we've installed in North Muskham in Nottinghamshire is proving popular with residents, and I'm sure the new shrubs they've planted will help make it pretty as well as practical.

Last year Highways England won the 'Silent Approach' category at the Noise Abatement Society's annual awards ceremony in London for its work to reduce noise levels for over 40,000 roadside residents since 2015.

The awards recognise organisations which are judged to have been outstanding in their efforts to both reduce the impact of noise and seek to pioneer practical and innovative solutions.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Speech: LGA Finance Conference 2019: keynote speech](#)

Thank you so much for the kind introduction John [Councillor John Fuller, Vice-Chair, Resources Board, Local Government Association].

It's a genuine pleasure to be with you on my birthday – there's nowhere I'd rather be. And you will recall that a year ago I had to step down from my

role to fight lung cancer, so it's great to be here with you, and in good health.

As you highlighted, in many ways I feel as if I grew up with local government and certainly one of the favourite parts of my job is the chance to find out more about the work of your great councillors – our great councillors.

You live and breathe the issues affecting your areas. You make the places you live in better and improve lives as a consequence of that. That's why I certainly couldn't be prouder to be working alongside you.

But I'm under no illusion about the changes in local government. Challenging finances, shifting demographics and changing lifestyles can sometimes make it all feel like, just when you think you've got the answers, the questions then change again.

And through all this, I've been impressed with how you continue to deliver quality public services and satisfaction remains high. I know that that is no small task.

Local Government Finance Settlement

But I have been determined you get the support you deserve, and the resources you need to grow your economies and ensure opportunity for all – where no one is left behind.

It's why, at last month's [provisional local government finance settlement](#), we provided a cash-increase of 2.8%: from £45.1 billion this year, to £46.4 billion next year.

It's a real-terms increase in resources and I'm pleased the settlement has been broadly welcomed. And in that context I'm very grateful to my colleague, Rishi Sunak, the Minister for Local Government, for his tireless efforts on this work which will continue into the coming weeks, and we look forward setting out the final settlement in early February.

And today is another important part of that conversation.

A conversation that addresses the immediate pressures we face, yes. But equally, it's a conversation about a longer-term vision for a resilient, self-sufficient and innovative local government.

A discussion that transcends numbers and duties, and reaches directly into the heart of communities.

Or in other words: we need to explain 'why place matters'.

Meeting today's pressures

But there's no hiding from the pressures that you face. Our additional funding will support some of our most vulnerable groups, with £650 million for social care in 2019-20.

We've allocated £240 million of that to ease winter pressures – and that's in addition to the £240 million we announced in October to alleviate winter pressures this year.

The remaining £410 million can be used flexibly – either on adult or children's social care and, where necessary, to relieve the demands on our NHS.

As you know too well, adult social care is a complex issue. It's something we need to get right.

But I don't think it should simply be seen as some sort of problem; it's also very firmly an opportunity. An opportunity to reaffirm our commitment as a society to those who need our support.

It's why the [NHS long-term plan](#) which was announced yesterday I think will be a real game changer – giving us more flexibility to treat more patients at home or in their communities.

Because better integration of the health and care systems remains the key, and the upcoming green paper on the future of adult social care will chart how we can do this.

The [Better Care Fund](#) is already showing us how this might be done, for instance by improving patient inflow and freeing up nearly 2000 hospital beds. It's a testament to the excellent work councils have been doing with their NHS partners.

In addition, at the latest Budget the Chancellor pledged an extra £84 million over the next 5 years to expand our Children's Social Care programmes. This will support more councils with high or rising numbers of children in care.

It builds on the excellent work my department has already been doing to improve all services for families with complex problems, through our Troubled Families programme.

Brexit

But as we meet today and as we look to those pressures, we must also rise to tomorrow's challenges.

Brexit will generate a number of opportunities for local government. I'm grateful for how you've worked to prepare, to ensure we can be confident about our departure from the European Union.

But I know that many of you, like me, have heard the same message on the doorstep – get on with the job and deliver Brexit.

And looking ahead to next week's vote – I'm clear that the deal we have on offer is a fair one.

It meets the objectives the Prime Minister set out at the start of negotiations, and involves significant concessions from the EU.

It delivers on the referendum result. It takes back control of our borders, our money and our laws. It protects jobs, security and the union.

And the alternatives simply take us back to square one. More division and more uncertainty.

We all have a duty to ensure every community can benefit from a modern, outward-looking Britain after Brexit.

And no one is better placed to deliver that than you, and local authorities will be, I think, at the heart of our success.

I am committed to ensuring local government and local leaders are adequately prepared to respond to any Brexit scenario.

I have set up a delivery board to support the implementation of changes linked to Brexit within local government – and the work of this group will expand in the coming weeks and months.

And I will shortly be announcing the allocation of £35 million to fund local authorities to support with their work on Brexit preparations.

Self-sufficient local government

But I'm mindful that our long-term thinking does require long-term funding – and I know you have called for greater certainty as we reach the end of the current multi-year deal.

Next year we will finalise the new formula. A formula that makes the link between funding and local circumstances much clearer.

And I'm encouraged by the strong consensus on the principles of our [review of relative needs and resources](#). Because it doesn't matter if you're north or south, rural or urban, large or small – it simply has to work for everyone.

Our [business rates retention reform consultation](#) will build on my department's existing work with the sector to improve the way local government finance works.

Because business rates retention will be at the heart of this change – the engine of a self-sufficient growth-led local government of the future.

Under today's system, local authorities estimate they will retain around £2.4 billion in business rates growth in 2018-19 – a significant revenue stream on top of the core settlement funding.

And I recognise business rates appeals are an issue – and our consultation will address this too.

Ultimately, we want to give local authorities – give you – more control over the money you raise. Our plans to increase business rates retention from 75% from 2020 does that and more.

As well as continuing our existing pilots, at the draft settlement, I announced plans for a further 15 new pilots for 2019-20 and will also be piloting the 75% retentions rates in London.

21st century local government

Every authority stands to reap the rewards of increased growth in business rates income. And as we look ahead to the really important Spending Review, we have a unique chance to rethink and recast what local government in the 21st century can do.

The days of people passively accepting what's offered, I think, are long gone. In our digital age, the ability to feed-back, interact with and shape services is the new norm and government – central and local – needs to reflect that.

It's something my colleague Rishi Sunak has been looking at with his [digital declaration](#): exploring how to apply new technology and new thinking to old problems, and transforming the ways we think about essential services.

But the future of local government isn't just in the cloud – it's also on our high streets and in our communities.

It's why we provided a £1.5 billion support package for our high streets, with a further £420 million to repair and improve our roads and highways.

And the lifting of the HRA (Housing Revenue Account) cap will put local government back on the front line of house building – local authorities can now borrow more to build more.

And at the provisional settlement, I committed a further £20 million to maintain the New Homes Bonus baseline in 2019-20, to ensure we continue to reward councils for delivering the homes our country needs.

Since it began in 2011, we've allocated £7.9 billion to reward 1.6 million additional homes.

Because the success of our communities very much depends on all parts of our community having a decent, affordable, secure home – the challenge of a generation.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, I'm pleased to be celebrating my 51st birthday with you.

It's a turning point for me personally after a challenging year – and equally I know the different challenges that you have faced too.

But I am full of admiration for how you have responded – showing what world-class local government looks like.

And while the year ahead could inevitably provide some new challenges,

perhaps new surprises, there's no question that we're all better placed to face it – and thrive.

And I look forward to working with you: to meet the challenges and to use the opportunities that lie ahead.

To build the homes our country needs.

To strengthen our communities.

To encourage growth, helping ensure every part of our country can prosper.

It's the reason why we're all here and why I'm genuinely so proud and privileged to work alongside you.

Thank you.