

Press release: James Brokenshire appoints new Homes England board member

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP has appointed Duncan Sutherland to the board of Homes England, as the agency continues its key role in making the housing market work for everyone.

Since its launch in January, Homes England has adopted a stronger, more commercial approach to developing land in areas of high demand as the government's housing accelerator.

Homes England's 5-year strategic plan was also [announced last month](#), outlining how expertise and significant government investment will drive forward key programmes such as Help to Buy.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

This is an important time for Homes England as it plays a key role in delivering the homes our communities need.

Having Duncan Sutherland on board will be a great addition to Homes England, bringing his experience in development and I wish him the very best of luck in his new role.

Homes England Chairman Sir Edward Lister said:

I'm delighted to welcome Duncan to our Board. He is arriving at an exciting time with a remit to help and advise the agency on the long-term housing challenges facing this country today.

His wealth of experience and housing expertise will enhance and influence the work of Homes England and help us meet the government's ambition to accelerate housebuilding and deliver the 300,000 homes needed each year by the mid-2020s.

Duncan Sutherland said:

Housing is one of the biggest challenges we face in this country and I am looking forward to serving and contributing to the work of the Board in this innovative government agency.

Duncan Sutherland is a housing practitioner with over 35 years' experience in property, housing, investment, regeneration and development with emphasis on public and private partnerships, involving government, local government, local communities and private investors.

Duncan is the Group Regeneration Director for Sigma Capital PLC and Chairman of Sigma Inpartnership Ltd and was also an HS2 board member between 2012 and 2018 with a focus on the benefits of regeneration and development.

News story: UK Forces return home after successful NATO exercise

UK personnel from the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force will return as victors from Trident Juncture, the largest NATO exercise since the cold war, having successfully defeated an acting enemy force of Norwegian, German and Swedish forces.

The UK-led multinational brigade made up of mechanised infantry from the Royal Irish Regiment and Royal Lancashire Regiment, Danish tank units and Polish armoured vehicles completed the week-long final exercise in freezing conditions in Norway. The multinational brigade successfully completed a river crossing on the final day of the live exercise, demonstrating the ability of NATO allies to live, work, and operate effectively together.

Foxhounds from the 1st Battalion Royal Irish prepare to leave in the snowy conditions. Crown copyright.

The brigade conducted defensive operations in a harsh and austere environment in order to disrupt a peer opposition force's advance, before going on the offensive to regain control of lost land. The live exercise phase enabled troops to learn lessons about how to operate when faced with a highly capable and well-equipped enemy.

With Royal Navy ships and RAF aircraft also contributing to the large-scale exercise from the skies and the seas, the exercise demonstrated both the UK's leading role in the alliance and the ability of its armed forces to deploy at scale and integrate with other nations at speed.

HMS Enterprise in the Norwegian Fjords taking part in NATO's Exercise Trident Juncture 2018, the largest exercise of its size for decades. Crown copyright.

With around 50,000 participants from 31 nations, 250 aircraft, 65 ships and around 10,000 used during NATO Trident Juncture 2018, the alliance successfully demonstrated its ability to mount a collective defence response in an Article 5 scenario – when an attack on one is an attack on all.

News story: Chief Inspector publishes his report on Border Force operations at south coast seaports

This inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of Border Force immigration and customs operations at the seaports of Dover, Newhaven, Portsmouth, Southampton, Poole and Plymouth, and looked at its coverage of smaller ports, harbours and marinas along the south coast between Dover and Falmouth. Evidence gathering took place between January and April, and my report was sent to the Home Secretary on 20 June 2018. Despite the delay, I have no reason to think that my findings and recommendations are not still valid.

The focus was on Border Force's strategy, capabilities, and understanding of and overall response to threats to the border, including its collection and use of intelligence and its collaborations with others, and on what changes or improvements had been made since my inspections of General Maritime (GM) in 2016 and east coast seaports in 2017.

I looked again for evidence of displacement of clandestine arrivals from Dover to other ports following the closure of migrant camps and improved security in northern France. The numbers discovered at Portsmouth and Poole had indeed increased, suggesting that irregular migrants looking to enter the UK were now targeting the ferry ports in Normandy and Spain. Meanwhile, efforts by European authorities, encouraged and supported by Border Force, appeared to have reduced the overall numbers successfully boarding UK-bound ferries.

The east coast inspection contrasted the broadly efficient and effective management of fixed immigration control points and freight arrivals at the major seaports with the poor coverage of smaller ports, harbours and marinas. The south coast inspection again showed the scale of Border Force's task. It was clear that it had put considerable effort into improving its coverage, through coastal patrols and more field intelligence work, and with some success.

But, this was a "work in progress", with much more to be done, particularly in freeing up officers to attend GM arrivals, and in effectively harnessing the "eyes and ears" of harbour masters, marina managers, the maritime and pleasure boating communities, and the general public to report unusual and suspicious activities along the south coast.

I made 7 recommendations for improvement, covering resourcing, equipment, the response to threats, clandestine arrivals, customers and stakeholders, GM, and the tracking of recommendations. Most have been "Partially accepted", although the accompanying responses, including to the "Accepted"

recommendations, are heavily caveated.

I recognise that Border Force is dealing with many challenges, not just along the south coast, but nationally, and that its job is not made any easier by having to prepare for the UK's exit from the EU without clarity as yet about what exactly this will involve. However, it is difficult to escape the impression that Border Force believes it knows best and will make changes only on its own terms and at its own pace.

During 2019-20, I had planned to complete my series of seaport and coastline inspections with an inspection of the west coast. The responses to the south coast seaports inspection, and the timescales quoted, suggest that I may need to rethink this.

News story: Army start biggest military robot exercise in British history, Defence Secretary announces

The game-changing Autonomous Warrior experiment will last four weeks and test a range of prototype unmanned aerial and autonomous ground vehicles which aim to reduce the danger to troops during combat. The exercise will finish with a battlegroup experiment, where the best ideas and products will be tested in the toughest of simulated operational environments.

One of the key areas it is set to test is the autonomous last mile resupply. The 'last mile', which represents the extremely dangerous final approach to the combat zone, is crucial to ensuring soldiers have the food, fuel and ammunition to keep them alive.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Our troops now have the chance to test out a huge range of robotic kit in what will be the biggest exercise of its kind in our history. We're always working with the brightest minds in Britain and across the world to see how they can support our military of the future, but now the frontrunners have the chance to prove what they can really do on a battlefield. This equipment could revolutionise our Armed Forces, keeping them safe and giving them the edge in an increasingly unstable world.

Army start biggest military robot exercise in British history, Defence Secretary announces. Crown copyright.

The exercise aims to test technologies in surveillance, long-range and precision targeting, enhanced mobility and the re-supply of forces, urban warfare and enhanced situational awareness.

The Royal Tank Regiment Battle Group from 1 Armoured Infantry Brigade are providing the bulk of exercising troops and taking responsibility of command and control. Overall there will be over 200 multi-national, cross-service personnel. The US Army, Royal Marines, RAF and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) will join industry partners and academia in working alongside them, experimenting with over 70 products and systems.

Autonomous Warrior will play an integral role within the £800 million Defence Innovation Fund which supports ground-breaking ideas aimed at transforming both defence and British industry.

The land-based exercise follows on from the hugely successful 'Unmanned Warrior' which the Royal Navy demonstrated autonomous systems diving, swimming and flying together to engage in surveillance, intelligence-gathering and mine countermeasures.

Press release: Explosive start for triple decker roundabout

Highways experts go back to the classroom.