

News story: Penny Mordaunt is first minister to use sign language in Parliament

The International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt has become the first minister in British history to use sign language from the despatch box in Parliament.

[Penny Mordaunt using sign language in Parliament](#)

She was highlighting the fact that the UK will Global Disability Summit will co-host its first ever Global Disability Summit with the International Disability Alliance and the Government of Kenya on 24 July 2018.

The summit will take place at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London and will bring together more than 700 delegates from governments, donors, private sector organisations, charities and organisations of persons with disabilities.

[Find out more about the Disability Summit](#)

Press release: Government injects £7.5 million into council digital agenda with launch of new sector pledge

A new “digital pledge” backed by £7.5 million of government funding has been launched today (4 July 2018) to help councils transform their online services.

[Speaking at the Local Government Association Annual Conference](#) in Birmingham, Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak said the new initiative would change the way councils invest in technology, share expertise and ensure members of the public are receiving the best quality digital services.

Over 50 local authorities, government departments and partner organisations have already signed up to the pledge, called the [Local Digital Declaration](#), agreeing a common vision for the future of local services.

They are now calling on the wider sector to also make the public commitment.

Local Government Minister, Rishi Sunak MP, said:

Whether it's an app to report fly-tipping, or slick online services to pay your Council Tax, many local authorities are at the forefront of digital innovation.

But there's much more to do. Digital doesn't belong in the basement, it belongs in the boardroom.

I want councils and partners across the country to sign up to this declaration. By supporting each other and building on each other's work we can revolutionise services for our residents.

While many councils already have excellent online offerings, the digital declaration is about sharing the best innovation across the public sector to benefit people.

For example, the school nursing service in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland worked with young people to help them get health advice by text – Chat Health. It's engaging them in ways that suit their lives and preferences and has worked so well it's now been rolled out to 30 areas and a million people.

As part of the initiative, local authorities across the country will also be able to bid for a share of a new £7.5 million innovation fund to help develop common solutions to their shared challenges.

The pioneering new approach will also see a new course developed to train senior local authority staff in digital leadership skills.

Alongside this, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will establish a new team to work with councils to help them deliver on their declaration commitments.

Speech: The Local Digital Declaration

Let me start, by painting 2 pictures for you; a day in the lives of 2 different council employees.

Before Janet goes to work she remembers that it's bin day, but isn't sure which one. She logs onto the council website, finds the waste page, the check collection page, enters her postcode and then selects her address. Today is black bags.

Janet's daughter attends athletics club, but the school only accepts cheques. So she needs to find a chequebook buried in the drawer.

When she gets into work, rings her father to make sure that he is OK. She hopes her brother remembered to go round to let the carer in.

Today Janet's working on a performance report. Her system has no way to access all the data it needs, so Janet has to email multiple colleagues and agencies asking for the information.

Jane works for another council. Just before she leaves for work she gets a text to remind her that today is black bag bin day.

She pays for her son's school club through on her phone.

Another app lets her know there is someone ringing her mum's doorbell, and she can see that it's the carer. Jane remotely unlocks the door and lets them in.

When it comes to doing her performance report, Jane's computer gets the data she needs from multiple other systems and automatically updates partner agencies when she's done.

So it's clear that technology is already transforming public services, offering real benefits to local government employees, the general public and the council's bottom line.

If you take away one thing from my speech today let it be this: an understanding of digital is no longer something we can leave solely to the IT department.

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

So today, I want to speak about 3 things:

Firstly, about how we should focus on the needs of our citizens.

Next, I'll talk about fixing our digital plumbing, and how that opens up a world of possibilities.

And lastly, I'll outline what I am going to do to help make this happen.

Part 1: services for citizens

Today, we now think nothing of checking the location of trains in real time, or looking round a hotel room halfway across the world before booking it.

And doing all of this from something that fits in our pocket.

This revolution has affected public services too.

If any of you have recently renewed a passport online you'll know the process is a delight to use. No more hanging around in the post office waiting for the photo booth.

Now you do a selfie straight into the system.

There are some great local examples too:

Adur & Worthing is piloting the Going Local service. Here GPs directly refer patients to the council's social prescribing team, helping thousands of them become fitter or stop smoking.

Hackney's Pay My Rent platform, has now been used almost 70,000 times by 15,000 people.

The thing that marks out these top class digital services in both public and private sector is a relentless focus on meeting the needs of their users.

There's no point putting a form online if it's so confusing someone needs to ring up to find out how to fill it in. We've all been there: you just want to pay your taxes, apply for a service, perhaps to get your residents parking sorted.

But after you've worked out what the site is trying to get you to do, sometimes you still have to print the form and email it back – or not so long ago – take 2 forms of ID to the town hall.

A few years ago, Camden council found that every time someone came into a council building, it cost them nearly £14.

When they rang up it was £4 and if they did it online it cost just 30p.

By moving transactions online, they saved £3 million in 3 years.

Similarly, think of your staff.

A recent study showed that up to 60% of a social worker's time is spent typing data into a system. That can't really be a good use of such a precious resource.

So getting this right has a huge impact – both in saving people's time but also saving your council money.

So as we continue to innovate and redesign services, the question you as leaders should be asking is this:

are we thinking about how our citizens and employees live their lives?

And is what we do making life easier for them, or is it forcing them to do things that suit us and actually end up costing money?

Relentlessly focusing on what our users need is the way forward.

Part 2: fixing the plumbing

Next, we need to fix our digital plumbing.

And by this I want you think about the idea of we need to embrace the idea of "Government as Lego".

Lego bricks come in different shapes and sizes, but they all fit together and

allow you to build almost anything.

This is how we should think about our IT.

Today, too much of local government IT is a black box. Too often councils are using huge, proprietary systems for each different thing they do, and they are locked into long-term, inflexible contracts, with opaque cost structures.

But those at the forefront of this digital services revolution, Essex for example, are thinking about the components of our IT that are like a utility and shared across different services.

There are lots of bits of IT that are essentially like electricity. Electricity works to a common standard and there is no point in creating your own version.

Adult Social Care and Revs and Bens are very different services, but each has common elements – workflow, case management, payment systems.

It seems daft to have services in the same organisation paying the suppliers twice to have 2 things doing the same thing.

Multiply this across the hundreds of services a council offers you can see how the costs rack up.

Worse, because all these different systems might come from different providers and each be a proprietary closed system, they can't talk to each other and it becomes hard for a council to share the information it needs across different areas.

Instead we need to separate out those bits of IT that are used a lot across different services, the utility or electricity-like bits.

And for those boring, standard components, we can use modules, or Lego blocks, that we can slot in, swap out and upgrade as we see fit.

Crucially, these Lego blocks are built on common standards which means they are much cheaper and enable information to be shared much more easily.

And as more and more councils use the same common standards for bits of their IT, this catalyses developers to innovate and provide new services and products based on those widely used standards.

A simple example of this fixing the plumbing is moving services to the cloud.

Many local authorities still have services hosted on machines kept in a council warehouse – or even at times – behind the stationary cupboard or under the stairs.

As Glasgow found out a couple of years ago that can mean problems if there's a fire in your data centre.

But increasing numbers of councils are finding out for themselves that

digital services can be hosted for a fraction of the price in the cloud. It's a commodity.

For example, thanks to their new cloud strategy, Aylesbury Vale has incredibly saved several millions pounds.

So, for local government, fixing the digital plumbing has the potential to be truly transformative.

Part 3: what I will do

Lastly, I did say what I would talk a little bit of what I am doing to help make all this happen.

Well, I believe that we are stronger together than alone.

The whole point of local services is that they need to differ in how they respond to local need.

But it makes sense for us to learn from each other, and share the common technical features that means councils don't all have to start from scratch if they want to implement a more user friendly and cost-effective digital services

So today a group of us are launching the [Digital Declaration](#).

It's not my Declaration, or the government's – this is a joint endeavour with over 30 organisations in the sector, including Greater Manchester, West Midlands and Greater London combined authorities, SOLACE, CIPFA, Government Digital Service and a cross section of councils of all sizes and colours from across England.

The Declaration sets out our shared vision for world class public services, and invites everyone else to join the movement.

It commits all of us to work together to make sure that the vision is made a reality.

Words are important. But better when they are backed up with deeds.

That's why I am delighted to announce today that Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will invest up to £7.5 million over the next 2 years through a new Digital Innovation Fund to support and strengthen local authorities' digital capacity.

What will the money be available for?

A report from the MJ and BT last year found that more than 80% of public sector chief executives see digital transformation as one of their key priorities.

But many feel that their organisations lack the skills and capability to take full advantage.

So we will fund key leaders from the sector to go through a new world class digital leadership programme that we are creating.

You might be a Leader, Portfolio Holder, Chief Executive or CFO, but you will be passionate developing your own digital skills and capabilities.

But beyond this, I recognise that everyone is in different places. Some are at the cutting edge, others are nearer the beginning of their journey.

So this won't be a one size fits all Fund. Before we open the Fund, I want to hear from you about what would be most useful for you?

Where will a small amount of extra resource make the most difference?

And lastly, in addition to the funding, we at MHCLG are creating a delivery team to support everyone who signs up to this ambitious Digital Declaration.

We've worked with 50 to get this far. We now want to work with many more to turn this into a national movement.

We want 50 to turn into 80.

And 80 to turn into hundreds.

Together, I know we can achieve more than we can alone. By supporting each other, and building on each other's work we can build better services for our residents.

Services that are efficient, modern, responsive and simple and delightful to use.

Services that are built around citizens' needs, not ours.

And services that save us money, allowing more of our precious resource to be where it should be: not in the basement cupboard of our IT department, but on the front line where it belongs.

I believe this is the exciting first step of a journey.

And I cannot wait to see where we get to and what we can achieve together.

Thank you.

Speech: Launch Event: LGBT Action Plan 2018

I have been in the House of Commons for 8 years and a minister for 4.

I have worked in local government and with communities and amazing grassroots organisations that deliver amazing support and services for those in their neighbourhood.

I have worked with disability activists and advocates with incredible talents and compassion for others.

I have worked with the finest armed forces in the world and with the most amazing people, working to save others, to rescue them, to protect them from harm, to make their lives better.

It has been my privilege to witness those heroic acts – for that is what they are. And I have learnt that the motivation in all these good deeds is the same thing.

And is the same thing that I see in all of you in this room today that drives all of you. Whether it is the work you do in the media to tell stories and get the truth for your listeners and your viewers. Whether it is the support you provide through groups or campaigns. Or the protections you bring for people's rights. Or the services you provide to keep people healthy and resilient and enable them to reach their full potential.

Or whether it is the calling you have answered to serve as elected representatives and do your best for those who put you there.

The common thread in all these heroic acts is love.

I want to thank you for all you do for others. All that I have learnt is that everything is driven by love. What supports love, what promotes love is a good thing. And what hinders love, what fails to appreciate it, fails to recognise it for the heroic act it is, fails to understand how love fosters caring for one another and build strong and lasting relationships, well, that is an evil thing.

Love deserves to be protected. It deserves to be celebrated. And it should never ever have to hide.

Everyone in this country should feel safe and happy to be who they are and to love who they love without judgement or fear.

Thanks to our LGBT charities and campaigners the UK has come a long way. Together we have challenged attitudes and changed society.

Let us not forget that it was only 5 years ago that same-sex couples were allowed to marry, how prehistoric that already seems, let alone the bigotry that was so prevalent against gay men and women in the 1980s.

It is commonplace, but we should appreciate the courage and love of LGBT people who go out into the world each day and refuse to be anything other than themselves despite the backdrop that they experience. And, which now the rest of us can fully appreciate when we look at the results of the LGBT survey.

The progress we have made must be consolidated and it must be advanced. And as your new minister I will do everything in my power to ensure that our country, all four nations of it, is a place where everyone, whatever their gender identity or sexual orientation, can be themselves and live their lives with dignity and respect.

That is why today alongside the survey results we are launching a new action plan. One that will build on the pioneering work that our government has done already.

It is a plan with 75 commitments tackling issues in health, safety, education and employment and more, to improve the lives of LGBT people in our schools and on our streets, in our workplaces and in our homes.

This plan is directly responding to what you have told us are the biggest problems and prejudices you face through our survey. The plan's commitments range from a national lead on healthcare, to banning the abhorrent practice of conversion therapy, to action on hate crime and combating bullying in our schools.

But in the time I have to speak to you today I want to focus on some other issues, which have perhaps for too long, been in the too tough in-tray for our society.

The survey highlighted the dissatisfaction with gender identity services in particular. Waiting times were too long. Access to care was difficult. The result was suffering and damage to mental health and wellbeing. We want to fix this.

Next year NHS England will be deciding how gender identity services for adults can be modernised, to allow higher quality outcomes and greater flexibility.

The Care Quality Commission will also begin inspecting all gender identity clinics in England, ensuring that they are providing the best service possible to trans-people.

Better safeguards and improved access to health services will make a significant impact on the lives of LGBT people, but if we want lasting and fundamental change then we need to start in our schools.

You told us that our education system currently isn't preparing many young LGBT people for adulthood. This government has already started to introduce new subjects on relationships education in primary schools and relationships and sex education in secondary schools.

We will ensure that these new subjects support all pupils whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity.

They also showed that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying is an issue that we need to tackle. By the end of this year we will have invested £5 million in programmes aimed at reducing these kinds of bullying.

And we will continue our investment of such schemes for a further 12 months as we consider how best to tackle prejudice-based bullying in all our schools as part of the forthcoming spending review. Safety, health and education are just some of the areas that are being tackled by the action plan, but we will be making one more announcement today.

Last year we said we would consult on reforms to the gender recognition process and that is what we are going to do. The consultation will be published later today and the Prime Minister will be saying more about this this afternoon.

This consultation is about reforming an important public service. We have heard your feedback that this process isn't working for you and we want to improve it.

We want to also ensure that any changes we do make are made carefully and maintain existing protections in law.

The consultation will run for 16 weeks and we want as many people to participate as possible, as it is important we hear everyone's voice. Only when the consultation is concluded and we have analysed the findings will we publish our decision and our response. It is vital that this consultation is conducted in an environment of respect, empathy and pragmatism.

There has been much misinformation about the GRA consultation.

We already require people to live in their new gender two years prior to changing their gender identity. I would ask those who have not had to consider what that means, to do so for a moment:

The courage that it takes just to go about daily life.

The inadequacies of the existing process, meaning you have some identification documents in one gender and some other documents in another.

Imagine socially navigating and having to plan a strategy about which bathroom you're going to use or how you're going to get changed to go to the gym.

The additional stresses you face meeting new people, forming friendships, forming relationships

Imagine the courage, the determination, the resolve required. Imagine at the end of all of that the hurt you would feel to be excluded after all you've been through.

In the run-up to today much has been said about our pragmatic approach and that we have no intention of reforming the Equality Act or the rules around women's spaces. That is correct, but I think it is also important to say what the starting point for this national conversation and this consultation:

Trans-women are women. Trans-men are men.

And we want the process to change your gender identity, and we want your community and wider society, to support you too. And we want others to be reassured.

That is our goal.

On these challenging issues for society I think sometimes it is always good to remember that occasionally the best way to protect your rights is to protect someone else's.

We will be working across government and with LGBT sector organisations to deliver on the action plan and the cultural change in our society that the survey results demand. We will be supporting this work with new funding from the Government Equalities Office which we will distribute to LGBT partner organisations – more details on that later.

We are also establishing an LGBT advisory panel for government. This group will advise us on LGBT equality issues we need to better understand and help us inform the delivery of this plan.

Once again thank you for your commitment to this agenda.

Together we can bring about much-needed change and make our society all the stronger for it. We all know what needs to be done, so let's get to work. Thank you.

News story: Strengthened guidance to protect children at risk

Children at risk of abuse or neglect will now be protected through improved partnerships between local police, councils and health services.

Strengthened guidance published today (4 July) sets new legal requirements for the three safeguarding partners, who will be required to make joint safeguarding decisions to meet the needs of local children and families.

Senior police, council and health leaders will jointly be responsible for setting out local plans to keep children safe and will be accountable for how well agencies work together to protect children from abuse and neglect.

The new advice is aimed at all professionals who come in to contact with children and families and includes guidance on current threats to child protection, such as sexual and criminal exploitation, gangs and radicalisation.

Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

We all have a responsibility to promote the welfare of children and protect those at risk of harm. It is important that young people can grow up in an environment that is as safe and stable as we would want for our own children. That's why we have changed the law to create a stronger safeguarding system, placing greater accountability on the key professionals involved so vulnerable children can get the support and protection they deserve.

This guidance will bring health agencies, police forces and councils together to work more collaboratively, making effective decisions that put the needs of local families at the heart of their work.

The Government has also announced 17 areas of the country as 'early adopters', which will work with the National Children's Bureau to implement the new local safeguarding arrangements before they are established across the rest of the country.

The 17 areas include 39 local authorities and will develop new and innovative approaches to set up multi-agency safeguarding processes and produce clear learning which can be shared across other areas, which will have up to a year to publish local arrangements.

The statutory guidance, ['Working Together to Safeguard Children'](#), follows a public consultation on the changes, which received over 700 responses.

In response to the consultation, the requirements on all those working in sports and faith-based organisations have been strengthened, requiring them to co-operate with the local police, council and health partners where requested. This is in line with the important role these groups play in promoting children's welfare.

The new safeguarding arrangements will replace existing Local Safeguarding Children Boards, taking into account recommendations made in a 2016 review by Sir Alan Wood.

Sir Alan Wood said:

I am delighted that the government has brought forward legislation and guidance to reform the safeguarding arrangements we make for children. I believe the changes will ensure a sharp focus on the key factors of improving multi-agency practice which protects children, create a national learning framework to improve our ability to learn from serious events and introduce a health-led process to maximise potential for learning from child deaths.

I am particularly pleased that the new arrangements ensure that each of the new statutory partners in an area, the police, health and the local authority, now have duties which require them to take joint responsibility for ensuring multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in an area are effective.

The changes include:

- equal duties placed on the police, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and local authorities to work together on safeguarding decisions and to promote children's welfare;
- placing greater accountability on senior leaders for each agency: the council Chief Executive, the accounting officer of a CCG and the Chief Officer of Police;
- strengthening expectations on schools and other educational settings that they must co-operate with the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements;
- extending safeguarding responsibilities to sports clubs and religious organisations in recognition of their important role in working with and protecting children and young people;
- new duties on CCGs and councils to carry out reviews of child deaths, instead of children's services, in line with evidence that only a small number of these incidents relate to safeguarding concerns; and
- better reviews of complex or nationally-important cases, and improving identification of the lessons learnt from these, led by the new Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel chaired by Edward Timpson and replacing Serious Case Reviews.

Further info:

- The 17 successful bids to adopt the new local safeguarding arrangements early are: Thameside; Northumberland, Gateshead, Newcastle on Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside & Sunderland; Calderdale; North Lincolnshire; York; Hertfordshire; Bexley, Greenwich & Lewisham; Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kensington & Chelsea & Westminster; Reading, West Berkshire & Wokingham; Devon, Plymouth & Torbay; Wiltshire; Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall & Wolverhampton; Birmingham; Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire; Solihull; Trafford; and Salford.