

Press release: Wrexham murderer to spend longer behind bars

A man who went on a violent spree which resulted in the death of an elderly man will spend more time in prison. Solicitor General Robert Buckland QC MP thought Jordan Davidson's original sentence was too low and referred it to the Court of Appeal.

After committing 2 burglaries, Davidson, 26, who was already on police bail for a knife offence, attempted to rob staff at a hair salon, threatening them with a machete. He then went to the home of 67 year old Nicholas Churton and attacked and killed him with the machete and a hammer.

The following day he committed a robbery against another elderly man, again while armed with a machete, and an aggravated burglary at a dwelling, also while carrying the same weapon.

A few days later Davidson committed a further offence of robbery against a 53 year old man whom he struck on the head with a hammer, fracturing his skull. Davidson was arrested on 29 March last year, and while detained he attacked the arresting officer with a hammer. He also assaulted another police officer with his fists during his interview, and while on remand he slashed a prison officer's neck with a makeshift knife.

Davidson was convicted of 14 offences, including murder, aggravated burglary and robbery and sentenced to 23 years and 4 months in prison in December at Mold Crown Court. The Court of Appeal has quashed his original sentence and increased it to 30 years minimum term.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General said:

Davidson is an extremely violent individual and his crimes deserved tougher punishment. His actions resulted in the tragic death of a vulnerable man and have had an impact on numerous people's lives. I am pleased the Court has now seen fit to increase the prison term.

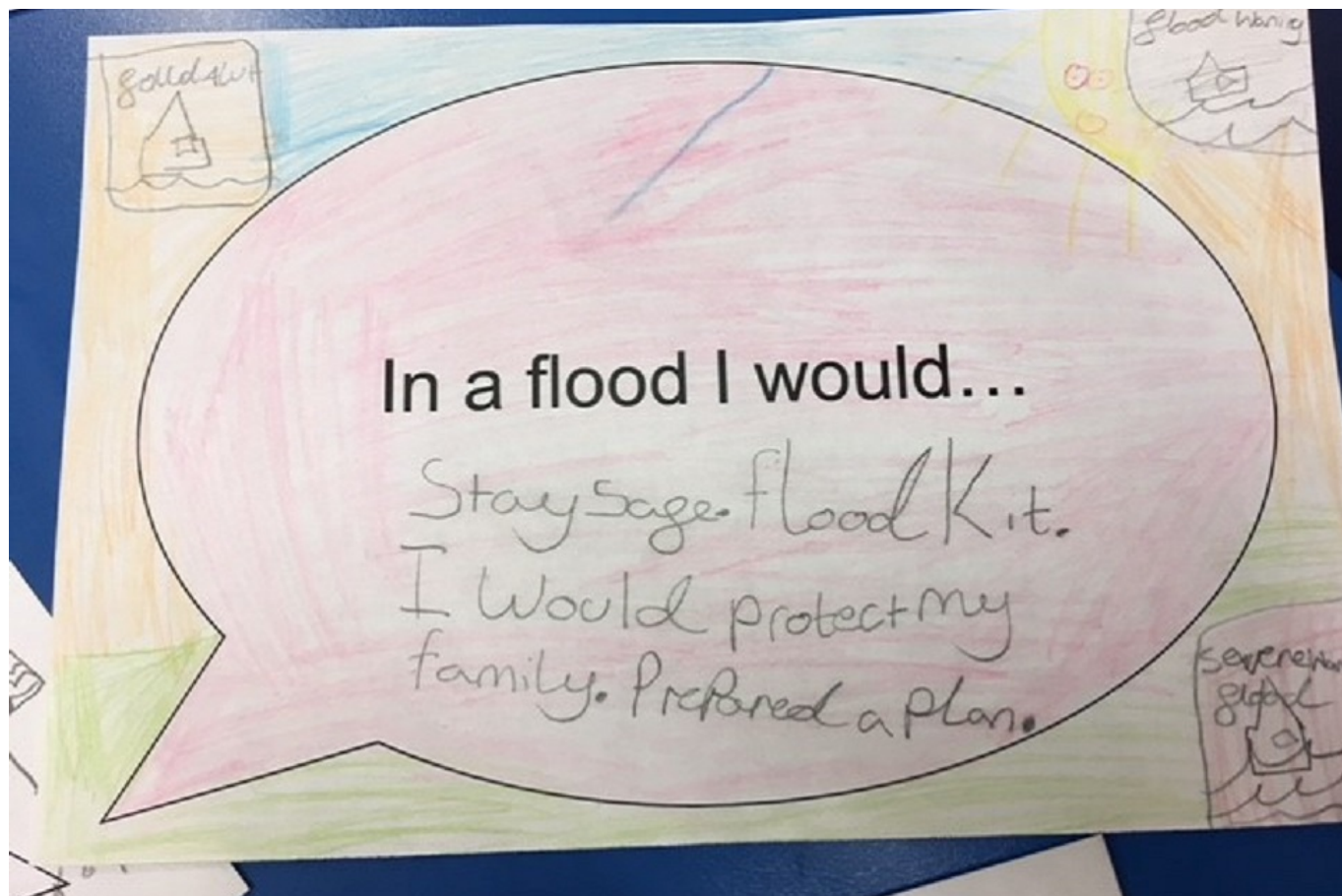
Press release: Pupils help their schools prepare for flooding

Community Engagement Officer Taryn Al-Mashgari has helped youngsters develop flood plans and 'grab bags' so they are prepared in the event of a flood.

The series of themed weeks – which have so far involved 1,200 primary school children – kicked off at North Fawdon Primary School in Newcastle in January, before moving to South Tyneside ahead of the start of Monkton flood alleviation scheme.

Taryn works with the children in all year groups to help them understand different types of flooding and how it happens. They learn what to do before and during a flood, and learn what the flood warning symbols used by the Environment Agency mean.

They then record mock radio broadcasts about flooding in their community.



Important to understand flooding

Each week ends with a community event attended by parents, Northumbrian Water and Northern Powergrid where children launch the flood plan they've created for their own school.

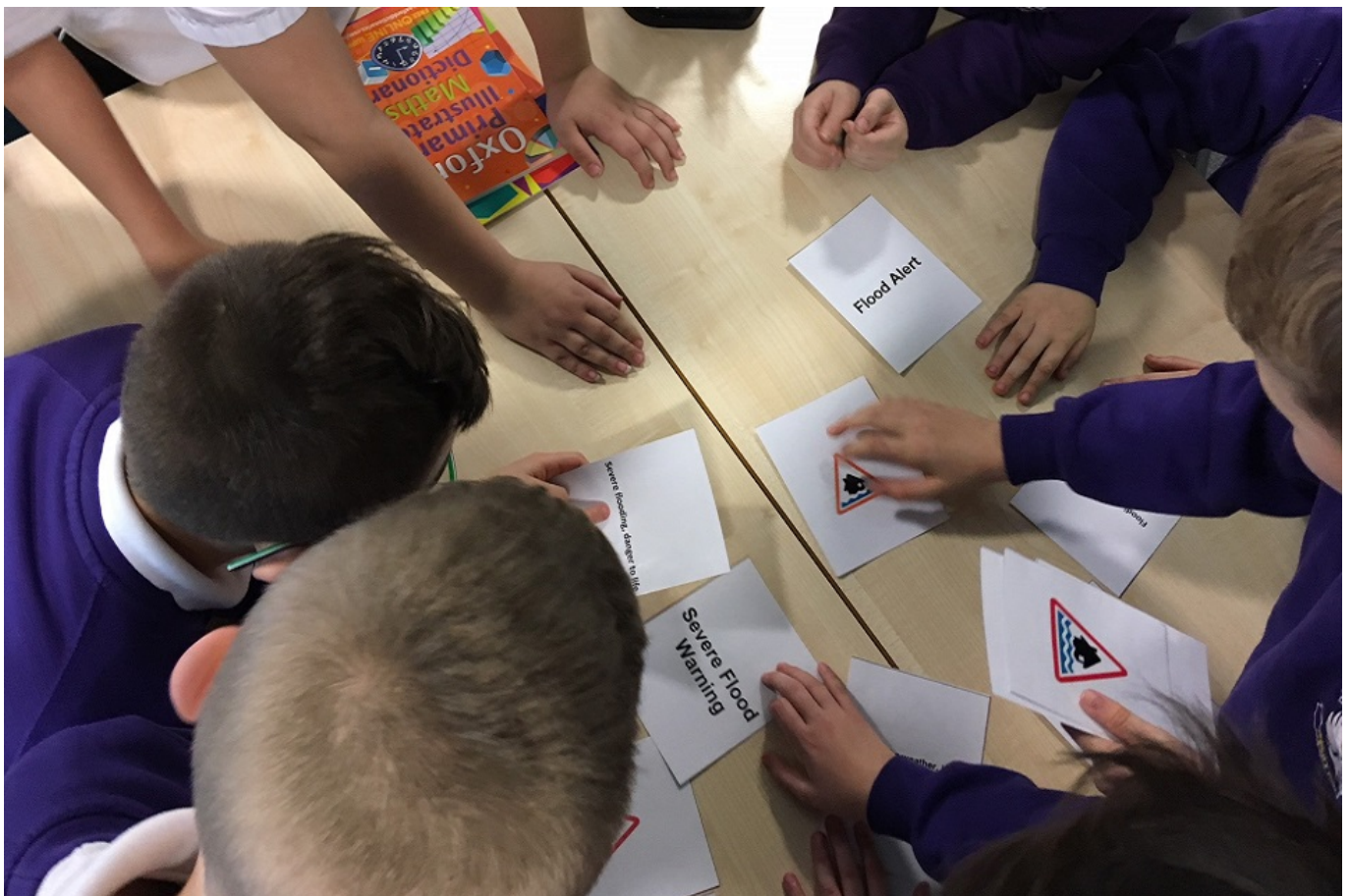
At schools in South Tyneside – St James' RC Primary School and Hebburn Lakes Primary School – Monkton flood scheme project manager Tom Pitman, working for South Tyneside Council and the Environment Agency – and partners at the Tyne Rivers Trust attended to give parents an overview of the project. Taryn said:

It's important that younger people understand what flooding is, how it happens and what the different organisations that deal with flooding do.

We also teach them how to prepare for and what to do during a flood in a series of interactive sessions. It leads to them being able to create a flood plan for their own school, and in turn their parents having a greater understanding.

We know it is absolutely devastating to be flooded and that's why we work closely with our partners to develop schemes to reduce the risk of flooding – such as the project due to start at Monkton.

But we can never completely eliminate the risk and that's why we work hard to educate people and our future generations about what they can do to keep themselves and their valuables safe.



Prepare, Act, Survive

Taryn will visit Toner Avenue Primary School in Hebburn before moving on to Washington with flood weeks at Springwell Village and Albany Village Primary Schools.

She has also developed a teaching pack which will be delivered by secondary schools across the region as part of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum.

The Environment Agency is urging people to 'Prepare, Act, Survive' by visiting the [Floods Destroy website](#) and do three things to prepare for flooding.

- check your postcode and find out if you are at risk of flooding
 - sign-up for free flood warnings if you are at risk
 - view and save the 3-point flood plan so you know how to 'Prepare, Act, Survive' in a flood
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Press release: Video hearing pilot launched

The first hearings will take place this spring, and will enable people to have their tax appeal heard through a video hearing. This will save them the time and money spent travelling to court and waiting for their hearing – which can mean taking an entire day off work. It will also make it easier for people with health problems that can make it harder to attend a physical court building.

By testing and evaluating the pilot, HMCTS will explore how video hearings might be used to improve access to justice and help cases progress faster.

Video technology is already used in criminal courts to allow some victims and witnesses to give evidence without having to come face to face with the accused – examples include a 97 year old victim of an aggravated burglary, and a witness to a gang murder who was not comfortable giving evidence in court. This pilot is taking this concept a step further – with all attendees, including the judge, participating in the hearing via video technology. Making use of technology to hold video hearings for technical parts of cases that mainly involve legal professionals and judges could save court time and help cases to progress faster. Technology is used in a variety of ways in

courts and the various ways in which video links are used in proceedings are kept under regular internal review by HMCTS.

Justice Minister Lucy Frazer, said:

We are spending £1 billion on transforming and modernising the justice system. Video hearings have the potential to improve access to justice and speed up cases.

This pilot will provide important information – together with an increasing body of evidence from other countries – to drive innovation to make the wider system quicker, smarter, and much more user-friendly.

HMCTS are writing to potential participants this week to invite them to take part in the pilot. The video hearings will take place over the internet, with each participant logging in from a location of their choice, using a webcam and, for the purposes of the pilot, the judge located in the court room.

HMCTS are working closely with the judiciary to ensure the majesty of a physical courtroom will be upheld. The choice to use this new type of hearing would always be made by the Judge in the case. It will be possible for private online conversations to be had before the hearing, and the format and process of the hearing will be the same as in a usual court room.

The move is part of the Government's £1 billion investment to modernise the court service, making it swifter, simpler, and easier to access for everyone. HMCTS is exploring how justice can best be served in the digital age.

Other examples of the Government's court reforms which are making access to justice easier for everyone include:

- Launching the first divorce application services online at four sites – making the process easier to understand for divorce applicants and helping to progress applications.
- A new paperless system, in operation at Lavender Hill Magistrates' Court, which means thousands of offenders caught dodging fares or using fraudulent tickets can now be punished more swiftly and effectively.
- A new service which allows people to submit their tax appeals online – drastically cutting the number of applications being returned as incomplete or inaccurate.

[News story: Future railways: £3.6](#)

million invested in rail improvements

Busy London train station at rush hour.

£3.6 million funding has been offered to 10 projects that will transform rail passenger travel.

The projects will develop and demonstrate technologies that will improve the passenger experience on UK railways. These include:

- a design for train carriages that will increase peak hours seat numbers
- a carriage design that can quickly switch from carrying passengers to carrying goods
- beacons that guide visually-impaired passengers through the station and to their seat
- technology enabling disabled passengers to seek real-time assistance with their journey
- an augmented reality application that highlights a journey's landmarks

The technologies will be showcased through real-life demonstrators, enabling passengers to experience and feedback on the innovations.

Supporting innovation in rail

Rail Minister Jo Johnson said:

We are investing in the biggest rail modernisation programme since Victorian times, introducing the changes that passengers want to see – more frequent services and quicker, more comfortable journeys.

While we have introduced real-time platform information, taken big strides on safety and improved how we manage our railways to accommodate more services on existing tracks, the pace of change can sometimes be slower than we would like to see.

[The] funding is part of a wider programme of activities to speed up the delivery of new ideas and high-value innovations, which can have a big impact on passengers' journeys.

Improving travel

The funding was offered through a First of a Kind competition run by Innovate UK, part of the Department for Transport's (DfT) scheme to improve the passenger experience on rail.

Ian Meikle, Director of Infrastructure Systems at Innovate UK, said:

The UK railway is carrying more and more passengers, and they rightly demand improvements to their journeys. What we are announcing today are tangible innovations, which each in their own way will make train travel better.