

Press release: Flood defences put to the test in Bewdley

Environment Agency along with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, Wyre Forest Council and the community flood group have conducted a successful barrier deployment exercise on the Stourport Road, Bewdley, Worcestershire.

The exercise, which ran from 9am to 3pm, tested the barrier deployment plan and procedures, and working arrangements with partners and the local Community Flood Group. This ensures barriers can be quickly and safely erected when needed during a flood with minimum disruption to residents and businesses.

Environment agency staff were on hand to talk to members of the public about the work they do during flooding and other times of the year and also how people can better protect themselves and their properties during times of flood. Students from the local school were given a tour of the barriers and shown how they are assembled, they also discussed the issues of flooding in the local area.

Mark Bowers, Flood Risk Manager said:

This exercise allowed us to practice and test our barrier deployment plan for Bewdley, gaining valuable training experience with our partners as well as the opportunity to identify ways in which we can further refine our plans. This in turn will enable us to better respond during floods.

Temporary barriers are just one of the ways we aim to better protect people and properties. It's important to remember we can never fully protect against flooding, which is why we encourage people to go online at <https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/long-term-flood-risk>, check their flood risk by entering their postcode, and find out what they can do to protect themselves and their property when flooding hits.

Nick Farress, Bewdley Town Council Clerk added:

The exercise was an opportunity to test the community flood plan and prepare our group of volunteers for the real thing. We are very grateful to the Environment Agency for organising the event and continuing to support the use of the temporary barrier. The community flood group, managed by the Town Council, is a vital resource in a flood event and is always in need of new volunteers, so I would encourage anyone who can help to get in touch with the Town Council.

Wyre Forest Station Commander, Daryl Justice, said:

Our involvement with the Bewdley Flood Barrier response is a new arrangement that will see our firefighters add even more value to the Wyre Forest community.

When flooding is predicted our on-call firefighters will be given a period of notice which will minimise the impact on their primary employment and, although deployed under the direction of the Environment Agency, they will remain available for life threatening emergencies.

This is one of the first initiatives of its type in the UK and is a great example of how fire crews can add value in other areas. It also supports Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's wider vision of 'Saving More Lives'.

[News story: Extensive track damage between Ferryside and Llangennech](#)

Between about 06:50 hrs and 08:14 hrs on Monday 30 October 2017, train reporting number 6B13, the 05:00 hrs DB Cargo service from Robeston (Milford Haven) to Westerleigh, caused extensive damage to the track that it travelled over on the part of its journey between Ferryside and Llangennech. The train stopped on the approach to Llangyfelach tunnel, about 70 miles leaving Robeston, when the driver was told of a possible problem. Subsequent examination by Network Rail found at least nine broken rails, and damage to level crossings and signalling equipment.

The train consisted of a locomotive and 29 loaded tank wagons. Examination of the leading wagon found that the brake rigging on the leading bogie had disintegrated, and that the trailing pair of wheels on that bogie had suffered significant damage (wheel flats). Some of the components of the braking system were hanging down and dragging along the track, and others were missing altogether.

The leading wagon was loaded with 76 tonnes of diesel fuel. The following 28 wagons, also loaded with petroleum products, passed over each rail break without derailling.

The RAIB's preliminary examination has concluded that the brakes of all the wagons in the train were almost certainly properly released when the train left Robeston. It appears at present that one set of wheels ceased to rotate at some point during the journey, leading to the development of the wheel

flats, and began to turn again in the Ferryside area. The impacts from the rotating, damaged, wheels gave rise to the broken rails, and may also have caused the disintegration of the brake rigging.

Our investigation will try to determine the sequence of events and find out why the wheels behaved in this way, and why the braking components failed. It will also examine how the developing incident was handled by the Network Rail operating staff along the route, and consider any underlying management factors.

Our investigation is independent of any investigation by the railway industry, or by the industry's regulator, the [Office of Rail and Road](#).

We will publish our findings, including any recommendations to improve safety, at the conclusion of our investigation. This report will be available on our website.

You can [subscribe](#) to automated emails notifying you when we publish our reports.

[News story: Shaping the qualifications landscape](#)

Event brings together employers, trailblazer groups and others to discuss the current qualifications landscape and the changes under way.

Ofqual is today (Tuesday 21 November) hosting an event for stakeholders to learn more about England's vocational and technical qualifications landscape. Around 90 representatives from employers, trailblazer groups, training providers and educational associations and organisations are attending the symposium at the Royal Society in London. The event aims to raise awareness and understanding of the qualifications landscape, gather feedback from attendees on their use of qualifications and discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with reform. Ofqual is particularly keen to describe and discuss how regulation can potentially best support them.

Sally Collier said:

We want employers to be confident that vocational and technical qualifications meet their needs, and those of their employees. We are already supporting those aims through the experience and expertise we bring to regulation. Today's event provides another opportunity for us to listen to what users of qualifications have to say, and ensure that they are right at the forefront of shaping

the new landscape.

Alongside today's event, we are releasing a range of reports and guidance. These include [findings from a review of nearly 100 apprenticeship assessment plans](#), which we have written to help current and future trailblazers develop these important documents. Another identifies the factors that contribute to the effective functioning of assessments through [a review of 27 vocational and technical qualifications found in performance tables](#). A further document reports on how [Applied General qualifications are viewed and used by stakeholders](#). Together, they provide a set of resources to help inform the effective development of new vocational and technical qualifications.

We are also launching the [prototype of a new interactive tool](#) today to help everyone navigate the current qualifications landscape. This innovative way of visualising data makes our register of regulated qualifications more accessible and easier to explore.

[Press release: Drug company accused of abusing its position to overcharge the NHS](#)

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has been investigating how much the pharmaceutical company was charging for liothyronine tablets. It found that last year, the NHS spent more than £34 million on the drug, an increase from around £600,000 in 2006. The amount it paid per pack rose from around £4.46 before it was de-branded in 2007 to £258.19 by July 2017, an increase of almost 6,000%, while production costs remained broadly stable.

Liothyronine tablets are primarily used to treat hypothyroidism, a condition caused by a deficiency of thyroid hormone affecting at least 2 in every 100 people and which can lead to depression, tiredness and weight gain. Although liothyronine tablets are not the primary treatment for hypothyroidism, for many patients there is no suitable alternative and, until earlier this year, Concordia was the only supplier.

CMA Chief Executive, Andrea Coscelli, said:

Pharmaceutical companies which abuse their position and overcharge for drugs are forcing the NHS – and the UK taxpayer – to pay over the odds for important medical treatments.

We allege that Concordia used its market dominance in the supply of liothyronine tablets to do exactly that.

At this stage in the investigation, our findings are provisional and there has been no definitive decision that there has been a breach of competition law. We will carefully consider any representations from the companies before deciding whether the law has in fact been broken.

The CMA is addressing its Statement of Objections to Concordia, as well as to Cinven and HgCapital – private equity firms and previous owners of entities now forming part of Concordia. All now have an opportunity to respond to the provisional findings set out in the Statement of Objections.

This is one of a number of CMA cases in the pharmaceutical sector, including a recent fine against [Pfizer and Flynn Pharma of nearly £90 million](#) in relation to excessive and unfair prices for anti-epilepsy treatment, phenytoin sodium capsules, in respect of which the CMA's decision is currently under appeal. The CMA also fined [a number of pharmaceutical companies a total of £45 million](#) in relation to anti-depressant medicine paroxetine; that decision is also under appeal. The CMA is pursuing another 7 investigations into several companies in relation to drug pricing and competition issues. These can all be viewed on the [CMA's case pages](#).

Notes to editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer protection laws.
2. The CMA is addressing the Statement of Objections to Mercury Pharmaceuticals Limited, Concordia International Rx (UK) Limited, Mercury Pharma Group Limited and Concordia International Corporation, as well as to HgCapital LLP and to Cinven (Luxco 1) S.A., Cinven Capital Management (V) General Partner Limited and Cinven Partners LLP.
3. A Statement of Objections gives parties notice of a proposed infringement decision under the competition law prohibitions in the Competition Act 1998 and the EU law equivalents. It is a provisional decision only and does not necessarily lead to an infringement decision. Parties have the opportunity to make written and oral representations on the matters set out in the Statement of Objections. Any such representations will be considered by the CMA before any final decision is made. The final decision will be taken by a case decision group, which is separate from the case investigation team and was not involved in the decision to issue the Statement of Objections.
4. The Statement of Objections will not be published. However, any person who wishes to comment on the CMA's provisional findings, and who is in a position materially to assist the CMA in testing its factual, legal or economic arguments, may request a non-confidential version of the Statement of Objections by contacting the CMA.
5. The CMA may impose a financial penalty (ie a fine) on any business found to have infringed each of these provisions of up to 10% of its annual worldwide group turnover. In calculating financial penalties, the CMA takes into account a number of factors including the seriousness of the

infringement, turnover in the relevant market and any mitigating or aggravating factors.

6. Media queries should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk, on 020 3738 6337.

[Speech: Sajid Javid's speech to the County Councils Network conference 2017](#)

Good afternoon everyone, many thanks to Paul [Carter] for that kind introduction.

And thank you also for everything you've done as Chairman of the CCN.

You've shown tireless leadership and endless enthusiasm for the task, and it has been a real pleasure working with you.

The last time I spoke at a major local government conference, it was the [LGA's one back in the summer](#).

And I think it's fair to say the reception was a little mixed.

Views were diverse.

Some said it went down like a bucket of cold sick.

Others disagreed – they liked it even less!

I know you've had a great day today.

I've been looking at the agenda and it looks like a brilliant programme.

I'm sorry I'm not able to join you for this evening's festivities.

Sadly I've got to rush back for votes, which is a shame as I see Gyles Brandreth is tonight's after-dinner speaker.

He's certainly worth sticking around for.

I'm sure you all know that Gyles used to be a Conservative MP, from 1992 to 1997.

A very different time, when a minority government was beset with sleaze allegations and facing divisions over Europe...

Less well-known is the fact that, in 1978, Gyles was European Champion at the board game Monopoly.

True story.

So he certainly knows how to get houses built.

And in central London too, not on the green belt!

It's a pleasure to be here in lovely Marlow, on the edge of the Chiltern Hills.

It's a very historic town.

Mary Shelly lived just down the road when she was writing Frankenstein.

The story of a well-meaning individual who wants to do the right thing but ends up unleashing a monster.

Kind of like me with that LGA speech, actually...

With so much focus on the outcome of June's General Election, a lot of people seem to have forgotten about May's county polls.

Well, a lot of people outside this room, anyway!

Congratulations to everyone here who got elected or re-elected.

Paul, for example, he won 66% of the votes in his ward and leads a group that holds more than 80% of the seats in Kent.

80%!

I think it's fair to say us Conservative MPs are a little envious!

I know it's not easy to ask your fellow residents to judge you, put their faith in you, vote for you.

I've done it 3 times myself now and it's certainly a humbling experience.

But a great many men and women did just that back in May, with thousands winning the backing of their local communities and proudly taking their seats on county councils.

In the weeks before the vote I travelled the whole country, talking with and listening to county councillors, candidates, officials and residents and hearing about what really mattered to them.

I often talk about councillors as being on the frontline of democracy and my tour of the counties really reinforced that.

What you do matters.

The decisions you make matter.

The people you serve rely on you to get things right. Time and again – you deliver for them.

You don't do it for fame or riches.

You certainly don't do it for an easy life.

You do it because you want to make a difference.

Because you want to make life better for the people of your counties.

You represent the very best aspects of public service and of British life.

And it's an honour, an absolute honour, to represent you as Secretary of State.

The topics being debated here today and tomorrow show just how important our county councils are.

Social care, children's services, transport, jobs and more.

These are the building blocks of daily life, relied on by millions of people.

And of course the thread that runs through all of them is the thread that runs through all of politics and government.

The thread alluded to by my Labour Shadow just a few minutes ago.

Funding.

I know that I could stand here all night and make any number of announcements and pronouncements and promises...

...and you'd all nod along politely and then say "that's great, Saj, now show me the money".

With the Budget happening on Wednesday and the local government finance settlement to come, it wouldn't be right for me to get into specifics right now.

But, whatever the Budget brings, whatever the finance settlement brings, I remain totally committed to speaking up for the needs of local government.

Twelve months ago I stood in front of you and promised to fight for county councils in the year ahead.

To speak for you, lobby for you and be an advocate for you at the Cabinet table and beyond.

Twelve months on, that's a promise I've worked hard to keep.

Over the past year, Marcus Jones and I have never stopped fighting to secure finance agreements that work for everyone.

For Whitehall, for the counties, and above all for the people we all serve.

That's why we announced an extension of the business rates retention pilots.

That's why we secured sizable amounts of fresh funding for adult social care and just last week announced plans for a [new green paper](#).

And that's why we're continuing to push ahead with our work on Fair Funding.

I recognise this is still a difficult financial climate. I know the pressures that you face, particularly with respect to adult and children's social care.

I'm also not naïve enough to think there's a single magic bullet that will instantly solve all of the issues you face.

I'd advise you to raise a sceptical eyebrow at anyone who claims to have one.

I'm interested in the long-term, not the quick fix.

Sustainable change, not an easy win.

And that's why I will keep working with you to better understand these challenges so I can continue to fight your corner.

With many of your councils dating back to Victorian times, it's easy to characterise counties as the dusty old relatives of the local government world..

...especially when compared with the shiny new unitaries, combined authorities and so on.

But that stereotype couldn't be more wrong.

Because this is an exciting time for anyone involved with county councils.

A time of new opportunities, new roles, new ways to better serve the people you represent.

I know that in some corners of local government there's still this outdated attitude that says councils should stay in their lane.

"We're responsible for this, the districts are responsible for that and never the twain shall meet".

You don't need me to tell you that such thinking is woefully out of date.

The future – not to mention the present – is all about joined-up thinking, working together strategically to get things done.

Look at housing, the single biggest challenge of our age.

Most counties are not planning authorities, directly responsible for delivering homes.

But you're all responsible for transport.

For schools.

For roads.

For creating an environment in which homes can be built, in which communities can be created.

I know that tomorrow you're going to hear from Ed Lister about the role of counties in getting homes built.

And it's great that you're discussing it, because the only way we will build the homes this country needs is if we all roll up our sleeves and do our bit.

There are also opportunities for closer working across county lines.

There was a time when most peoples' lives extended no further than a day's walk from their home, but such days are far behind us.

In 21st century Britain, people are mobile.

Their work is mobile, their lives are mobile.

They are not constrained by lines on a map, and nor should you be.

No man is an island and – with a handful of literal exceptions – no council is either.

All local authorities are intrinsically linked with their neighbours on issues such as transport, housing and the economy...

...even the Isle of Wight with its links to Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton.

Earlier this month I was in China, where interest in the [Northern Powerhouse](#) and [Midlands Engine](#) was pronounced because potential investors want to look at opportunities on a regional level, not just individual towns, cities and counties.

That's why strategic co-operation between councils has never been so important.

Sometimes that will be an informal process, sometimes more official.

We already see a great many Local Enterprise Partnerships crossing local authority lines, recognising the flows of people and money in the modern economy and the need for strategic decision-making.

And of course combined authorities, with a directly elected mayor, are already delivering results right across the country.

Up to now relatively few county councils have been involved in devolution deals.

Devolution has been seen as something for the big cities, the metropolitan centres.

This government remains absolutely committed to the devolution agenda, but I see no reason why its benefits should be limited to the cities.

That's particularly important given our Industrial Strategy, which is built around the goal of sharing the benefits of growth right across the country – north and south, urban and rural, cities and counties.

Devolution and localism, for me, is all about making decisions at the most appropriate level.

Some things, matters of national importance, will always be best decided at Westminster.

But for everything else, there are all kinds of opportunities to redistribute power in all kinds of ways.

Just look at [Transport for the North](#), set to become a statutory body in the spring, and recognising the benefits of looking at transport on a regional level.

What does this mean for counties?

Well, if you have an idea for making local government work better, one that serves the interests of local people, then please come and tell me about it.

If local people want it, if local businesses want it, I'll do what I can to help you make it happen.

And that could include non-mayoral combined authorities in, for example, rural areas where a single figurehead isn't necessarily suitable.

To help with that process we're looking at how to design a devolution framework.

As promised in our election manifesto it will be a common set of guidelines.

Rules that everyone plays by, so that everyone involved in the process...

...local authorities, businesses, residents...

...knows where they stand and what is expected of them.

Work is still in the early stages – and I'd welcome your support in shaping the final product.

But I want a framework that, above all else, provides clarity and consistency about what a successful devolution agreement looks like.

What standards will need to be met, what outcomes will need delivered, what red lines there are for the whole process.

Expectations about leadership, scope and levels of local support.

With a clear position on how devolution negotiations should proceed,

authorities at all levels will much better placed to develop and put forward proposals that suit the unique needs of their residents and businesses.

It will help ensure that the right decisions are made at the right levels, so that local people get the services they deserve.

Of course, devolution and combined authorities aren't the only changes that counties are talking about right now.

I've now received two proposals setting out competing visions for the future of Buckinghamshire – whether that should be as one unitary or two.

These show councils at their best – ambitious, innovative, and ready to come forward with exciting ideas for the future.

We're now going through both sets of plans very closely and will be making an announcement on next steps as soon as we can.

And, earlier this month, I announced that I'm minded to support the plan for a pair of unitary authorities in Dorset.

I know that's a decision that was welcomed by the CCN, it's great to be on the same page as you.

But, more importantly for me, it's a decision that was also supported by two-thirds of Dorset residents.

By the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership.

By the vast majority of local businesses.

By 6 of the 9 local councils.

By most of the county's MPs.

I've always been clear that any change to council structures should not be dreamed up or imposed by Whitehall, but led by local councils and local people.

And that's exactly what we've seen in Dorset.

Yes, some people disagree with the move.

That's what happens in a democracy.

And that's why, when I announced that I was minded to support the change, I made it very clear that further steps are needed to try to secure local consent before a final decision is made.

Last year I told you that I wasn't going to force all of you to go unitary.

That's still very much the case.

But if councils want to come to me with proposals that will improve local

government, improve public services, and give better value to local taxpayers...

My door is always open.

And if, as in Dorset, those plans are built on a foundation of local support, it will make any decision I have to make a great deal easier!

Speaking of councils coming to me with ideas, let me take this opportunity to thank the CCN and Respublica for the fascinating report you've just published.

At a time when opportunities and challenges are plenty, it's great to see you proactively looking at innovative ways of dealing with them.

In Budget week in particular, it's very easy for politicians who aren't in power to offer blank cheques they know will never be cashed and empty promises they know will never be kept.

Actually coming up with workable, practical ideas is much harder.

So this report is a welcome addition to the debate.

It certainly provides food for thought, and my team and I will be looking at it closely.

And I'll also be asking Paul to sign a copy so I can give it to Marcus Jones in the Secret Santa next month!

All ministers have annual fixtures in their speaking diaries – the CCN conference is one such example.

But, because I've run 3 departments in less than 4 years, this conference today is actually the first time I've managed to speak an annual event 2 years in a row!

I think it's fitting that the CCN is where I break that particular duck.

Because local government is very, very important to me.

I talk about housing a lot, everyone knows it's my number one priority, but that doesn't mean I'm not full of admiration for what you do.

So it's great that I'm able to come back year after year to build relationships, reflect on progress, and work together on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

That's why, rather than talking at you for an hour, I'm going to give over the rest of this slot to Q&A.

I want to hear your views, your concerns, your ideas.

I want a conversation with local government, not a lecture.

County councils have roots that go back through the centuries.

They are a significant part of this country's history.

They play a vital role in its present.

And, when I look around this room, I see no shortage of ambition for the future.

I'm looking forward to working with all of you to turn that ambition into results.

Thank you.