

# Statement to Parliament: Leveson Consultation Response

## **Check against delivery**

Mr Speaker,

With your permission, I wish to make a statement on the Leveson Inquiry and its implementation, and the freedom of the press.

Over many centuries in Britain, our press has held the powerful to account and been free to report and investigate without fear or favour. These principles underpin our democracy and are integral to the freedom of our nation.

Today in a world of the Internet and clickbait, our press face critical challenges that threaten their livelihood and sustainability – with declining circulations and a changing media landscape.

Mr Speaker, it is in this context that we approach the Leveson Inquiry, which was set up seven years ago in 2011, and reported six years ago in 2012, in response to events over a decade ago.

## **Progress made**

The Leveson Inquiry was a diligent and thorough examination of the culture, practices and ethics of our press in response to illegal and improper press intrusion.

There were far too many cases of terrible behaviour and having met some of the victims, I understand the impact this had.

I want, from the start, to thank Sir Brian for his work.

The Inquiry lasted over a year and heard evidence from more than 300 people including journalists, editors and victims.

Three major police investigations examined a wide range of offences, and more than 40 people were convicted.

The Inquiry and investigations were comprehensive.

And since it was set up, the terms of reference for a Part 2 of the Inquiry have largely been met.

There have also been extensive reforms to policing practices and significant changes to press self-regulation.

IPSO has been established and now regulates 95% of national newspapers by circulation. It has taken significant steps to demonstrate its independence

as a regulator.

And in 2016, Sir Joseph Pilling concluded that IPSO largely complied with Leveson's recommendations. There have been further improvements since and I hope more to come.

In November last year, IPSO introduced a new system of low-cost arbitration.

It has processed more than 40,000 complaints in its first three years of operation; and has ordered multiple front page corrections or clarifications.

Newspapers have also made improvements to their governance frameworks to improve internal controls, standards and compliance.

And one regulator, IMPRESS, has been recognised under the Royal Charter.

Extensive reforms to policing practices have been made.

The College of Policing has published a code of ethics and developed national guidance for police officers on how to engage with the press.

And reforms in the Policing and Crime Act have strengthened protections for police whistleblowers.

So it is clear that we have seen significant progress, from publications, from the police and also from the newly formed regulator.

## **New challenges and the future**

And Mr Speaker, the media landscape today is markedly different from that which Sir Brian looked at in 2011.

The way we consume news has changed dramatically.

Newspaper circulation has fallen by around 30 per cent since the conclusion of the Leveson Inquiry.

And although digital circulation is rising, publishers are finding it much harder to generate revenue online.

In 2015, for every 100 pounds newspapers lost in print revenue they gained only 3 pounds in digital revenue.

Our local papers, in particular, are under severe pressure. Local papers help to bring together local voices and shine a light on important local issues – in communities, in courtrooms, in council chambers.

And as we devolve power further to local communities, they will become even more important.

And yet, over 200 local newspapers have closed since 2015, including two in my own constituency.

There are also new challenges, that were only in their infancy back in 2011.

We have seen the dramatic and continued rise of social media, which is largely unregulated.

And issues like clickbait, fake news, malicious disinformation and online abuse, which threaten high quality journalism.

A foundation of any successful democracy is a sound basis for political discourse. This is under threat from these new forces that require urgent attention.

These are today's challenges and this is where we need to focus.

Especially as over 48 million pounds was spent on the police investigations and the Inquiry.

During the consultation, 12% of direct respondents were in favour of reopening the Leveson Inquiry, with 66% against. We agree and that is the position that we set out in our Manifesto.

Sir Brian, who I thank for his service, agrees that the Inquiry should not proceed on the current terms of reference but believes that it should continue in an amended form.

We do not believe that reopening this costly and time-consuming public inquiry is the right way forward.

Considering all of the factors that I have outlined to the House today, I have informed Sir Brian that we will be formally closing the Inquiry.

But we will take action to safeguard the lifeblood of our democratic discourse, and tackle the challenges our media face today, not a decade ago.

During the consultation, we also found serious concerns that Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 would exacerbate the problems the press face rather than solve them.

Respondents were worried that it would impose further financial burdens, especially on the local press.

One high profile figure put it very clearly. He said:

'Newspapers...are already operating in a tough environment. These proposals will make it tougher and add to the risk of self-censorship'.

'The threat of having to pay both sides' costs – no matter what the challenge – would have the effect of leaving journalists questioning every report that named an individual or included the most innocuous data about them.'

He went on to say that Section 40 risks 'damaging the future of a paper that you love' and that the impact will be to 'make it much more difficult for papers...to survive'.

These are not my words Mr Speaker, but the words of Alastair Campbell talking

about the chilling threat of Section 40. And if anyone knows about threats to the press it's Alastair Campbell.

Only 7 per cent of direct respondents favoured full commencement of Section 40. By contrast, 79 per cent favoured full repeal.

Mr Speaker, we have decided not to commence Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 and to seek repeal at the earliest opportunity.

Action is needed. Not based on what might have been needed years ago – but action now to address today's problems.

Our new Digital Charter sets out the overarching programme of work to agree norms and rules for the online world and put them into practice.

Under the Digital Charter, our Internet Safety Strategy is looking at online behaviour and we will firmly tackle the problems of online abuse.

And our review into the sustainability of high quality journalism will address concerns about the impact of the Internet on our news and media.

It will do this in a forward looking way, so we can respond to the challenges of today, not the challenges of yesterday.

## **Conclusion**

Mr Speaker, the future of a vibrant press matters to us all.

There has been a huge public response to our consultation. I would like to thank every one of the 174,000 respondents as well as all those who signed petitions.

We have carefully considered all of the evidence we received. We have consulted widely, with regulators, publications and victims of press intrusion.

The world has changed since the Leveson Inquiry was established in 2011.

Since then we have seen seismic changes to the media landscape.

The work of the Leveson Inquiry, and the reforms since, have had a huge impact on public life. We thank Sir Brian Leveson for lending his dedication and expertise to the undertaking of this Inquiry.

At national and local levels, a press that can hold the powerful to account remains an essential component of our democracy.

Britain needs high-quality journalism to thrive in the new digital world.

We seek a press – a media – that is robust, and independently regulated. That reports without fear or favour.

The steps I have set out today will help give Britain a vibrant, independent and free press that holds the powerful to account and rises to the challenges

of our times.

I commend this statement to the House.

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## **Press release: Transformation of Birmingham Civil Justice Centre – the future of courts and tribunals**

12 new multi-purpose and digitised courtrooms, more modern public space, and 19 new rooms for the judiciary have been built – bringing together all the courts and tribunals for the first time, within a combined Civil, Family and Tribunal Justice Centre. The building now hosts 59 courtrooms and chambers, 60 judges and around 223 members of staff – whose roles range from ensuring trials progress and assisting the judiciary to helping people who are attending court.

The investment into Birmingham Civil Justice Centre is part of the Government's £1bn reform and modernisation of the justice system – ensuring Britain's courts and tribunals are fit for the 21st century.

The County Court is one of the busiest in the country and was responsible for 3.3% of all national civil cases issued in the past 12 months. The Family Court is also one of the largest and received 496 care and 1,945 private law applications. 3.5% of national Social Security and Child Support cases were listed at Birmingham over the last 12 months.

The state-of-the-art Civil Justice Centre is bringing together knowledge and expertise in managing court and tribunal cases from across the region – meaning a better service for citizens in the county and beyond.

Justice Minister Lucy Frazer, said:

We are ensuring the justice system is fit for the 21st century. This investment is just one example of how our reform programme will modernise our courts and ensure swifter justice.

HMCTS CEO Susan Acland-Hood, said:

Birmingham Civil Justice Centre is a prime example of the future of our courts and tribunals.

We are spending £1 billion to make our system more accessible for all citizens, more sensitive for witnesses, and to deliver better

value for taxpayers' money.

Regional Tribunal Judge Rhead said:

Myself and my colleagues are delighted to relocate to the refurbished 4th Floor at Birmingham Civil Justice Centre. The refurbishment is the result of the determination and hard work of HMCTS staff and all associated with the project.

It provides 12 multi-jurisdictional hearing rooms suitable to hear a range of tribunal hearings including social security and child support appeals with appropriate facilities for tribunal users. The hearing rooms and judicial accommodation are an excellent example of a modern 'fit for purpose' justice centre.

HMCTS have developed digital services so that, where appropriate, instead of taking time out to attend a physical court building, working people can now make a number of claims online. These include filing for divorce, challenging rogue traders for money owed, or making a tax appeal. In criminal courts the increasing use of video links means more vulnerable victims can give evidence away from the courtroom and without having to meet their attacker face to face. Across the country, people are also now able to indicate their plea online for low level motoring offences – 80,000 online pleas were made last year. This enables the court to better prepare for the hearing – saving time in the courtroom. £114.7m has already been raised from the sales of underused and poorly-equipped courts to reinvest in the reform and modernisation of the justice system.

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## **[Press release: Environment Agency begins work on £5million Isle of Wight Flood Scheme](#)**

On 1 March Environment Agency contractors are starting construction of a new £5 million flood scheme to better protect more than 300 properties in Ryde. In partnership with the Isle of Wight Council and the Southern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, the completed scheme will significantly reduce flood risk in the area.

Environment Agency Manager John O'Flynn said:

We are delighted to be launching this multi-million pound scheme on the island, which includes over £1 million of partner contributions

that will benefit so many local homes and businesses. A sensible approach to funding and a good relationship with our partners has allowed us to begin the work in early spring. We'll now be able to minimise disruption to the beach in the summer, avoid environmental constraints (including overwintering birds) and deliver a completed scheme that will reduce the flood risk by the autumn.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

We are investing £2.6 billion to better protect the country from flooding, including over 1,500 flood defence schemes which will better protect 300,000 homes by 2021. The Isle of Wight scheme is an important step in building our resilience, protecting more than 300 homes and businesses locally and giving people all important peace of mind.

Cabinet member for environment and heritage Councillor John Hobart, said:

Together with our partners, we are making great progress on flood prevention measures for Ryde and we are working alongside the Environment Agency and the Southern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee to reduce the risk of floods in the long term. We are excited to see this work beginning early spring to further strengthen flood measures for the residents of Ryde and surrounding habitat.

The first stage of the project is to build a new outfall pipe from the sea wall in front of the existing pump station across Ryde sands to the marina. This will mean a clear outfall is maintained allowing more water to be discharged to the sea in heavy rainfall events and a significant reduction in the frequency of river flows overtopping the bank and flooding land and properties in Ryde.

This work will result in the closure of the section of beach from the existing outfall to Ryde Marina. The Environment Agency expects these essential works to be completed in July 2018, allowing it to reopen for the summer holidays. Although the children's play area next to the public toilets will be used as a works compound, it will be replaced at the end of the project.

The second and final stage is the construction of a flood wall around Simeon Street Recreation Ground, Marymead Close and the river boundary of the BT depot. These works are planned to start in June 2018 and be completed by October 2018.

Anyone who would like to find out more about the scheme or ask questions, is welcome to come along to the next Ryde Flood Action Group Meeting which will be held at the Simeon Arms on 13 March at 5:00pm. There will also be an open

day later in the spring where the Environment Agency will present a detailed design of the flood wall that constitutes the second stage of the project.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The Monktonmead Brook drains a catchment of approximately 10km<sup>2</sup> and flows north into the sea via an outfall at Ryde, Isle of Wight. A culvert carries flows the last 170m to the sea wall and a pumping station, after which a 60m long culvert (an underground pipe) carries water to an outfall on the beach. Flows usually drain through gravity. A tidal flap at the sea wall closes against high tides leading to tide locking. High water levels in the Brook trigger operation of the pumps, which lift water over the seawall and into the last 60m of outfall.

As a result of tidal processes, sand has accumulated on the beach surrounding the end of the outfall leading to its regular burial. This sand migrates up the culvert towards the sea wall restricting flow through the outfall. Despite an automatic increase in pumping, the restriction of flows causes water to back up in the Brook, leading to an increase in flood risk to Ryde.

All media enquiries: 0800 141 2743

Please ask for the duty press officer.

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## **[News story: Threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorism to Great Britain](#)**

The Security Service reduced the threat level to Great Britain from Northern Ireland-related terrorism from substantial to moderate. This means that a terrorist attack is possible, but not likely.

In a written statement to Parliament, the Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

Despite the change which has been made today, there remains a real and serious threat against the United Kingdom from terrorism and I would ask the public to remain vigilant and to report any suspicious activity to the police regardless of the threat level.

The decision to change this threat level is taken by the Security Service independently of ministers and is based on the very latest intelligence, considering factors such as capability, intent and timescale. Threat levels are kept under constant review.

The threat level to the UK from international terrorism remains at SEVERE, and the threat level to Northern Ireland from Northern Ireland-related terrorism also remains at SEVERE, meaning that an attack is highly likely.

Threat levels are designed to give a broad indication of the likelihood of a terrorist attack. They are a tool for security practitioners working across different sectors and the police to use in determining what protective security response may be required.

They also keep the public informed and give context to the protective security measures encountered every day.

There is more information about terrorism threat levels in the UK on the [MI5 website](#).

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## **Press release: Bereaved families and community will help determine the future of the Grenfell Tower site**

The government has today (1 March 2018) reaffirmed its commitment to putting bereaved families and the community at the heart of deciding what happens to the future of the Grenfell Tower site.

A set of [written principles](#), agreed with the community and signed by government and Kensington and Chelsea council, will guide the way future decisions are made.

The common assumption is that the decision-making process on the future of the site will lead towards agreement on a fitting memorial to remember those who lost their lives.

Kensington and Chelsea council will ensure that work on the future of the site is taken forward alongside work on the improvements to the Lancaster West estate, so that the area becomes a place where the tragedy can be remembered and the local community thrives.

Shahin Sadafi, Chair of Grenfell United, said:

The future of Grenfell Tower site has been a major source of anxiety for the bereaved, survivors and local community not least because it is the final resting place of the loved ones we lost in the fire.

We are pleased that 8 months on from the fire we finally have agreement that the bereaved, survivors and community will be at the

heart of deciding the legacy of the site. We hope working together to create a fitting memorial will be part of a healing process for everyone affected.

The government and Kensington and Chelsea council have treated this issue with dignity and respect. We can only hope the government applies the same seriousness to our need for truth and justice at the Inquiry, this includes listening to our requests for changes to ensure a thorough Inquiry.

Our door will always be open for genuine cooperation on substantive issues.

Secretary of State for Housing, Sajid Javid said:

I am pleased that after hearing the concerns raised by the community, the government and Kensington and Chelsea council have confirmed there are no existing plans for the site on which the Tower stands.

I have always been clear that only by first listening to the community can we begin to rebuild their trust. This public commitment is a demonstration of us being true to that word and I am pleased we have been able to agree a way forward.

Councillor Elizabeth Campbell, Leader of Kensington and Chelsea council, said:

Since day one of my leadership I have been clear – the council will listen every step of the way to the survivors, the bereaved, and the wider community and assist in any way it can to ensure that a lasting memorial is put in place.

The principles can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

The principles have been agreed and signed by Sajid Javid MP; Elizabeth Campbell, Leader of Kensington and Chelsea council; Grenfell United on behalf of survivors and bereaved families; and Lancaster West Residents' Association on behalf of local residents and community.