

## [News story: UK government congratulates Liberian President-Elect](#)

I congratulate President-Elect George Weah of the Republic of Liberia on his election success.

The Liberian people and political parties have shown commitment to the peaceful conduct of the electoral process with disputes settled using due process under the constitution. This is a milestone for Liberia's democracy and sets an example for others to follow.

I also pay tribute to outgoing President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who has steered the country towards peace for the last twelve years following decades of civil war.

The UK values its relationship with Liberia and looks forward to working with the new Administration.

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## [Press release: Poisons from cigarettes reach major body organs in seconds](#)

Public Health England (PHE) releases a new TV advert highlighting the dangers of tar in cigarettes, as England's 7 million smokers are urged to make a quit attempt with help from Smokefree this New Year. The latest campaign shows how poisons from tar in cigarettes enter the bloodstream, spreading around the body within seconds and causing damage to major organs.

To help explain the ongoing internal harm being caused, a group of 7 lifelong smokers – including TV presenter and entrepreneur Hilary Devey – declare their intention to quit in January after seeing the results of a lab demonstration. The test results show how their smoking has led to elevated levels of cadmium (a metal used in batteries), cancer-causing nitrosamines and carbon monoxide in their blood. These toxic substances are amongst over 4,000 chemicals released into the body with each cigarette smoked, including more than 70 known cancer-causing compounds.

Elevated levels of these substances were seen in the participants' blood and can lead to an increased risk of major damage to the body.

Exposure to cadmium for a long period of time is associated with an increased risk of damage to the kidneys and bones and may lead to lung cancer. Research has shown that if you regularly smoke 20 or more cigarettes a day, you are twice as likely to develop kidney cancer compared with a non-smoker.

Tobacco-specific nitrosamines (TSNAs) are potent chemical compounds, many of which are carcinogenic (cancer-causing). They can cause DNA damage, cell death and are associated with cancers of the pancreas, mouth, respiratory and digestive tracts.

Carbon monoxide decreases the ability of the blood to carry oxygen and consequently puts a strain on the heart. Carbon monoxide is also associated with an increased risk of blood clots and coronary heart disease.

In the new film that supports the TV advert, Dr Dawn Harper, GP from Gloucester, explains the results of the tests to the smokers and how the quality of their blood would start to improve when they quit – ridding them of harmful poisons which cause major damage to the body. Dr Harper advises the smokers that there are many ways to quit, including free proven support from [NHS Smokefree](#). People can choose what works best for them: face-to-face help, stop smoking aids, a quitting app, email, social media, and SMS support.

Professor John Newton, Director of Health Improvement at Public Health England says:

Smoking is a deadly habit. Each year it kills 79,000 people in England and for every death, another 20 smokers have a smoking-related disease. That means one person is admitted to hospital every minute of every day due to smoking.

Our new TV ad shows how every cigarette sends a flood of poisonous chemicals through the bloodstream in seconds. People know that tar damages the lungs, but it's less well understood that the poisons also reach the other major organs in the body. We are urging every smoker to take advantage of the free Smokefree support and quit for good this New Year.

Dr Dawn Harper, GP and medical journalist says:

I see the damaging effects of smoking in my surgery almost every day. Tar from cigarettes causes damage to major organs, the bones and increases your risk of a range of cancers and diseases. But, the good news is that no matter how long you've smoked, quitting can reduce your chances of developing cancer, heart and lung disease and other serious smoking related illnesses. Some of the benefits are almost immediate, with improved energy and breathing within a matter of days.

I know how difficult it is to stop but the important thing is to commit to trying again, no matter how many times you might have tried and failed in the past – it's never too late.

Hilary Devey, TV presenter, entrepreneur and lifelong smoker says:

I've smoked at least 20-a-day for over 40 years. Like many, I've been hooked on cigarettes and ignoring the damage – even though I know the harm I'm doing, I've found it extremely difficult to quit for good. Even a stroke 3 years ago only led me to stop temporarily.

Seeing the high levels of poisonous chemicals in my blood from these tests really hit home how dangerous continuing to smoke is – and for that reason, I'm done!

I'm absolutely determined to try again this New Year and I hope other smokers across the country will join me making full use of all the free help available at Smokefree – this time next year we could be celebrating one year smoke-free and feeling the benefits.

Smokefree provides motivation, information and support for smokers who want to stop. Just search 'Smokefree' for free support and advice to help you quit smoking.

1. To find out more about the range of free support and tools available to help people quit smoking, please search 'NHS Smokefree' online.
2. Download all [Smokefree films and images](#).
3. Carbon Monoxide, one of the toxic substances identified at elevated levels in the lab demonstration, is not contained in tar but is one of the most harmful elements in tobacco smoke.
4. [PHE](#) exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-leading science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and providing specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health, and are a distinct organisation with operational autonomy to advise and support government, local authorities and the NHS in a professionally independent manner. Follow us on Twitter: [@PHE\\_uk](#) and Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland](http://www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland).

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## [Press release: Government report highlights English cathedrals' community spirit](#)

A new report commending England's 42 Anglican cathedrals for their continued importance as places of worship, their wider community work and their commitment to promoting local economic growth has been published today (29 December 2017) by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The report, "[Cathedrals and their communities](#)", is the culmination of a year

long tour which saw the Minister for Faith, Lord Bourne visit all of England's 42 Anglican cathedrals to better understand their continued importance both to local communities and wider society.

The report highlights cathedrals as diverse churches that are not only important sacred centres of worship but also places of valued social support and community and interfaith engagement. This includes:

- the interfaith projects delivered by Chelmsford and Norwich Cathedrals which build on the shared interests of different faith communities
- the unifying response of Manchester and Southwark Cathedrals in the wake of the terrorist attacks in both cities
- Carlisle, Durham and Hereford Cathedrals' support for Syrian refugees, including providing vital English language lessons
- the extensive work undertaken by many cathedrals across the country together with local authorities to help rough sleepers
- cathedrals, such as Blackburn and Bradford, driving regeneration in town and city centres through collaborating with local authorities, developers and the local community
- the continuing efforts of cathedrals including Chester, Chichester, Lichfield and Liverpool to attract visitors through well-thought out themed events such as arts festivals and Christmas markets
- the dedication of cathedral staff across the country in preserving the architectural splendour and heritage of their buildings

Minister for Faith Lord Bourne said:

There is no better time to remind ourselves of the strong role cathedrals play in our national life than at Christmas, as worshippers gather in naves across the country to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

This year-long tour has given me a real understanding of how the innovation and vibrancy displayed by cathedral staff and their congregations is ensuring that these important churches continue to play a crucial role at the heart of local communities now and for centuries to come.

The report highlights a number of great examples cathedral staff working hard at preserving our local cultural heritage, engaging with a diverse range of communities while continuing their spiritual duties. I look forward to hearing about further successes in the future.

The Very Reverend Adrian Dorber, Chairman of the Association of English Cathedrals, said:

Lord Bourne's report is a really helpful endorsement of all that our English cathedrals are trying to be and do. We want to continue as places of welcome and be able to offer spiritual hospitality and

friendship to all. We're grateful to the Government for taking the time and trouble to conduct such a thorough programme of visits and investigation and for finding out what we do and what our ambitions for the future are. I hope the report will be widely read.

Our cathedrals and churches are crucial to the present and future of local communities and the government is committed to helping them open up further to community, cultural and heritage use, to safeguard their position at the beating heart of our towns and cities.

The government set up the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund 2016 to 2018 to provide cathedrals across England with funds for essential repairs, from heating systems to stained glass windows.

The [English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review](#), set up in 2016 in collaboration with the Church of England, will consider how best to ensure that England's 16,000 cathedrals and churches remain at the centre of civic life while also ensuring that these unique and historical buildings are sustainably maintained and funded.

There were 9.4 million visitors to cathedrals in 2015; a further 1 million people visited Westminster Abbey. 75% of the UK's churches and cathedrals are listed. Two thirds of church buildings and 75% of grade I listed churches are in rural areas where only 20% of the population lives.

See where Lord Bourne has visited using #CathedralTour. A list of cathedrals in the order the Minister visited them is as follows:

## 2016

- Bradford – 27 October
- Ely – 4 November
- Southwark – 8 November
- Portsmouth, Chichester – 25 November
- Leicester – 8 December
- St Albans – 16 December
- Chelmsford – 20 December
- Salisbury and Winchester – 23 December

## 2017

- Peterborough – 20 January
- Carlisle, Newcastle and Durham – 16 to 17 March
- Gloucester and Hereford – 31 March
- Guildford – 10 April
- Manchester – 29 May
- Norwich and Bury St Edmunds – 29 June
- Lincoln, Southwell and Derby – 7 July
- Lichfield, Coventry and Birmingham – 13 July
- St Paul's – 20 July
- Worcester and Oxford – 21 July
- Liverpool, Chester and Blackburn – 27 to 28 July

- Bristol, Wells, Exeter and Truro – 8 September
  - Ripon, York, Wakefield and Sheffield – 14 to 15 September
  - Rochester and Canterbury – 22 September
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## [News story: New appointments to the Veterinary Products Committee \(VPC\)](#)

Enrique Vega, Mark White, Ye-Mei Ruby Chang, Andrea Tarr, Helen Ballantyne and Rachel Bennett have been appointed members of the VPC. Professor Malcolm Bennett has been appointed as Chair.

Their appointments, by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, will commence in January 2018.

The new members will receive £148 per meeting with an additional £76 for preparation. The Chair will receive £185 per meeting with an additional £94 for preparation.

- Enrique Vega is a veterinary surgeon with experience of public health and food safety
- Mark White is a pig consultant
- Yu-Mei Ruby Chang is a chartered statistician
- Andrea Tarr is a pharmacist
- Helen Ballantyne is a dual qualified registered nurse in veterinary and human health
- Rachel Bennett is a qualified veterinary surgeon with experience of clinical pharmacology
- Professor Malcolm Bennett is a veterinary surgeon and has served on the VPC since January 2012

Their appointments adhere to the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies. All appointments are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process.

In accordance with the original Nolan recommendations, there is a requirement for appointees' political activity (if any declared) to be made public: none of these seven members have declared any political activity during the past five years.

The VPC advises the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) on behalf of the Secretary of State. The VMD is an executive agency of Defra and is responsible for ensuring the safe and effective use of veterinary medicinal products to protect public health, animal health, and the environment.

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## [Press release: Sajid Javid acts to help businesses affected by unfair 'staircase tax'](#)

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has today (29 December 2017) published [draft legislation](#) to reverse the impact of a 'staircase tax' which has unfairly affected up to a thousand businesses.

A recent Supreme Court judgment saw hundreds of businesses that operate in adjoining units or rooms, but are accessed from a common corridor or staircase, receiving separate rate bills for each unit.

The ruling also resulted in some businesses facing higher rate bills, with some paying more due to the loss of small business rate relief.

The action Sajid Javid is taking today will mean these firms can choose to have their rates recalculated under the old single bill system and any savings due will be backdated.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The 'staircase tax' is an unfair rates hike for businesses. For years these businesses in adjoining units or rooms received one rates bill, but this ruling meant they now faced multiple bills for operating in an office linked by a communal lift or stairs.

I am ending this by giving those businesses affected the option of getting their rates bills recalculated and any savings due backdated.

The publication of draft legislation follows a decision in the Supreme Court (*Woolway v Mazars*) which brought about a change the practice of the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) in assessing rateable values for businesses.

Following this ruling, businesses who occupied more than one property in a shared building received a separate rates bill for each unit. This was widely known as the 'staircase tax' and meant businesses in adjoining units who had previously received one rates bill, were now being subject to several bills. Some businesses were paying more overall due to the loss of small business rate relief – a discount applied to the bills of certain businesses with a lower rateable value.

This ruling overturned an established and widely understood practice where businesses occupying two adjoining floors or two rooms separated by a wall only received a single bill.

Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Bill, those businesses who have been directly impacted by the Supreme Court judgement can ask the VOA to recalculate valuations based on previous practice. It can then have its bill recalculated if it chooses, and backdated. This includes those firms who lost small business rate relief.

The department will now consult with stakeholders and experts, with a view to introducing the Bill shortly. See the [consultation document](#).