

News story: CMA launches consultation on 2018/19 annual plan

Making sure consumers get a good deal from businesses and that firms treat their customers fairly remains central to the CMA's work.

Across all its work next year, the CMA [proposes](#) to take a particular interest in vulnerable consumers and ensuring that markets can be trusted. It also plans to work with partners, including groups which represent vulnerable consumers, to learn more about how people's circumstances can affect their ability to engage in markets and get a fair deal.

The CMA also plans to better connect the CMA and the role of competition with wider society, by clearly explaining how better competition is good for ordinary people who benefit from better products and services, and good for the economy because it means that the best businesses succeed and grow.

To ensure its practices, interventions and capabilities keep pace with the tech-enabled evolution of business models and practices, the CMA plans to continue to expand its digital analysis capabilities, including by establishing a new digital, data and tech team. In the online world it intends to make sure that organisations which hold significant market power do not abuse it and that algorithms and forms of artificial intelligence do not become enablers of collusions.

There are [proven links](#) between strong competition, higher productivity and economic growth. By prioritising cases in markets which underpin and enable economic growth, and helping to create the conditions which allow innovative businesses that treat their customers well to emerge and succeed, in 2018/19 the CMA can continue to make a valuable contribution to addressing the UK's longstanding problem with low productivity.

In 2018/19, the CMA will continue its preparations for the UK's exit from the EU, building its capacity and capabilities to prepare for a greater role in the review of global mergers and international competition enforcement investigations post-Exit.

The CMA will also increase its presence and capabilities outside London by opening a new, expanded Edinburgh office, ensuring that it is keeping in touch with markets and consumer issues in Scotland.

David Currie, CMA Chairman, said:

With increasing and accelerating changes to the world in which we operate – in the run-up to and beyond the UK's exit from the EU – the coming few years will be ones of opportunity and transformation, for the CMA and the competition and consumer regimes.

The investments we have made since we were formed in 2014 are delivering real results for consumers, and we will continue to invest further so that our capacity and capabilities match our ambition.

We've carried out a wide range of work that makes a real world difference for people every day, as well as helping fair-dealing businesses to thrive and the economy to grow. We have been increasing pace, scale and impact across all our work and our draft priorities show that this is a journey we are committed to continuing in the coming year. We look forward to receiving views on our proposed plans for next year.

The CMA will enter 2018/19 with a substantial volume of ongoing work and is currently running 15 competition enforcement cases, 7 consumer enforcement cases, 11 merger investigations and one market investigation. Most recently, it [provisionally found](#) that a pharmaceutical company abused its dominant position by overcharging the NHS by millions for an essential thyroid drug. Having concluded its [digital comparison tools \(DCTs\) market study](#) in September, it also recently [published the final report](#) in its study into care homes for the elderly, issuing a series of recommendations to make the market work better for residents and their families.

Press release: Government unlocks £25 million to deliver more homes

Housing and Planning Minister Alok Sharma today (4 December 2017) announced that the [Planning Delivery Fund](#) is now open for bids and will support ambitious local authorities and third sector organisations in areas of high housing need to plan for new homes and infrastructure.

Initially opening up £11 million of the fund, councils will be able to apply to help gain the skills or capacity they need to deliver high quality housing growth at scale, pace and implement wider planning reforms. The fund is aimed at encouraging more innovation in the design quality of new housing developments, as well as provide design advice and support to local authorities.

As part of the government's plans to raise housing supply to 300,000 per year on average by the mid-2020s, a package of measure has been announced to boost local authority planning capacity, support councils to take a proactive role in planning and encourage ambition and leadership in the delivery of new communities.

Others measures announced include:

- a further £3 million funding to support the delivery of the 14 garden villages that are part of the government's existing programme
- publishing a consultation on plans to allow the creation of locally led New Town Development Corporations, and help speed up the delivery of new garden towns.

Housing and Planning Minister Alok Sharma said:

Locally-led developments have enormous potential to deliver the scale and quality of housing growth that we need. By supporting our local authorities, we will be able to unlock more homes where people want to live.

These measures including the £28 million of government support which will help develop new communities that will not only help deliver high-quality well-designed homes, but will also bring new jobs and facilities and a boost to local economies.

Across England, the government is currently supporting 24 locally-led garden cities, towns and villages, which have the potential to deliver around 220,000 homes.

Backed by £16 million funding, a further £3 million has been allocated to 14 garden villages in the programme to fund dedicated staff and studies and assessments that are vital to the delivery of garden villages that are key to successful delivery.

The government's [housing white paper](#) in February 2017 committed to the creation of New Town Development Corporations, which would be overseen by the local authority or authorities covering the area proposed for a new garden community, rather than by Whitehall. Government is now seeking views on this proposal.

The first part of [Planning Delivery Fund](#) allocation of £11 million will be open to bids for the financial years 2017-18 to 2018-19.

A garden town is a development of more than 10,000 homes. Garden villages are smaller settlements of between 1,500 and 10,000 homes.

The 14 Garden Towns are: Long Marston, Oxfordshire Cotswold, Tresham, Culm, Welborne, West Carclaze, Dunton Hills, Spitalgate Heath, Halsnead, Longcross, Bailrigg, Infinity Garden Village, St Cuthberts and Handforth.

Measures apply to England only.

Press release: Doncaster scrap firm fined for illegal activity in Tyne & Wear

A Doncaster-based scrap car dismantling and salvage firm has been ordered to pay nearly £25,000 for breaking environmental laws at a site in Tyne & Wear.

Motorhog Ltd, which used the now-closed site on Wallsend Road in North Shields, to depollute and bale end of life vehicles, repeatedly broke the terms of its environmental permit. Yesterday (29 November 2017) the company, which continues to operate sites in Leeds, Doncaster and Hull, was fined £20,000 by North Tyneside Magistrates' Court after pleading guilty to two of three charges. It was also ordered to pay £4,936.88 costs.

The prosecution was brought by the Environment Agency after officers spent a significant amount of time attempting, unsuccessfully, to bring the site into compliance.

Environment Agency Officers visited the site on 1 December 2015 to assess permit compliance after several breaches were identified during a previous inspection. During the visit they identified further permit breaches, against which they issued two enforcement notices.

The first gave Motorhog Ltd until 8 February 2016 to carry out maintenance to the vehicle baler so it could operate without spilling or leaking potentially polluting materials. It also required the company to clean all observed spillages on site and keep appropriate records.

The second notice required Motorhog Ltd to either ensure the concrete surface where the vehicle baler operated was compliant with permit requirements or to move the baler to a more suitable area. The firm was given until 11 April 2016 to comply.

Environment Agency Officers visited the site again on 2 March and 12 April and noted failure to comply with each of the orders. They also noted unattended spills throughout the site, including fluids visibly leaking from the baler onto the surface below where there was no sealed drainage.

Environment Agency spokesperson, Rachael Caldwell, said:

I hope that Motorhog Ltd takes a long hard look at its operations across the north to ensure that all its sites are compliant and its staff are properly trained.

The regulations exist to protect the environment and local communities from the risk of harm. Vehicles contain liquids that are harmful to the environment and they must be dealt with correctly.

We will not hesitate to take action against any operator that repeatedly breaks the law and disregards its environmental obligations.

News story: Government proposals on children and young people's mental health

The government has [published proposals to improve mental health support for children and young people in England](#). Over £300 million has been made available to fund them.

[The government is asking people for their views on the planned measures, which are set out in a green paper](#). The measures include:

- encouraging every school and college to have a 'designated senior mental health lead'
- setting up mental health support teams working with schools, to give children and young people earlier access to services
- piloting a 4-week waiting time for NHS children and young people's mental health services

This short video describes the main proposals in the green paper.

[Children and young people's mental health green paper video](#)

Other proposals in the green paper include:

- a new working group to look at mental health support for 16 to 25-year-olds
- a report by the Chief Medical Officer on the impact that technology has on children and young people's mental health, to be produced in 2018

The consultation on the green paper will run for 13 weeks until 2 March 2018.

Press release: Improving efficiency at

mine water treatment schemes

The Coal Authority, which manages Britain's coal mining legacy, employs contractors to clean water cascades and pipework across its 75 mine water treatment sites on a regular basis.

The manual 'wash and brush-ups' are needed to prevent a build-up of iron solids (ochre) that are produced as part of the treatment process. The ochre clogs up the system and reduces the effectiveness of the treatment scheme that pump the water out from disused coal mines.

In a move to reduce costs, the Coal Authority is working with Dr Maria Romero-Gonzalez and her research group in the Department of Geography at the University of Sheffield, in a 6 month trial of new super hydrophobic materials that will aim to repel the ochre and prevent it from clogging up the treatment systems.

"Hydrophobic materials are nothing new," explained Dr Chris Satterley, Technical Research and Development Manager for the Coal Authority. "But the most recent generation of super hydrophobic materials are now available commercially and we want to see whether they will help us to improve the efficiency of our operations.

"Currently we need to regularly remove the build-up of ochre, which obstructs the process of the schemes. But if this simple process works, it could be a significant development for our on-going maintenance programme."

Various hydrophobic materials were tested in laboratory conditions by Maria and her team and 2 were selected to be used on site at the A Winning mine water treatment scheme in Derbyshire.

"It worked very well in the laboratory but now we need to see if it is just as effective out in the open and on site," added Chris. "Initial observations show that the coating is working and is repelling large solids and ochre flocs. But it is still early days and we will be working closely with our University of Sheffield colleagues to see how it works over a longer period of time."

The mine water treatment schemes run by the Coal Authority are all individual and depend on the amount of water being pumped out of disused coal mines and the local geology. Typically, they comprise of water cascades, a series of settlement lagoons and reed beds. They treat around 122 billion litres of water each year and prevent 4,000 tonnes of iron solids from entering local watercourses and also protect important sources of drinking water for local communities.

At the treatment scheme located at the site of the former Blackwell A Winning pit at South Normanton, there are 4 water cascades. For the trial, one was fully cleaned and coated for testing, a second has also been cleaned to act as a control and the remaining 2 are continuing under the current maintenance

regime for comparison.

The 4 water cascades at the mine water treatment scheme

Further testing and studies will also be carried out on a series of concrete slabs installed in the cascades. One sample will be retrieved every week for the first month followed by monthly sampling for the remainder of the 6 month trial.

Dr Maria Romero-Gonzalez, Director of the Environmental Science Programme at the University of Sheffield, said: "This is a unique opportunity to study the durability and performance of the coatings under a variety of weather conditions.

"We will use electron microscopy and other surface analysis techniques to investigate the efficiency of the coatings at surface level. This will help us to assess how good the coating is and evaluate its application for treating ochre accumulation. The results will allow us to estimate the technical and economic benefits of using coatings for treating mine water, providing the Coal Authority with innovative solutions for the future."