

# Welsh Secretary's St David's Day message

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart has paid tribute to the people of Wales in his St David's Day message.

Highlighting the sacrifices made during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Welsh Secretary thanks front-line workers. Mr Hart also looks ahead to the year to come, highlighting the progress of the vaccine rollout and the UK Government's plans for growth and recovery in Wales.

These past 12 months have been without precedent. Last St David's Day we could not have predicted the year to come or even that just weeks later we would be heading into the first lockdown across the UK and the disruption to normal life that has ensued.

The year since has been one of tragedy and I offer my heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of more than 5,000 people in Wales who have died or are suffering as a result of this dreadful virus.

It has been the most challenging time since the Second World War – in Wales, across the UK and across the globe. There has been a huge effort from people working on the front line of the pandemic across Wales. Some were deservedly recognised in the New Year Honours, but many thousands more were not and I would like to pay tribute to every one of them and thank them for their selfless work. And I also thank every single person in Wales for the sacrifices they have made in the past 12 months.

The UK Government has also worked to provide support for people and businesses through the disruption the pandemic has caused. We have provided more than £2.7 billion in direct support to businesses in Wales through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) and Bounce Back loans as well as schemes like Furlough and support for the self-employed which have supported half a million people in Wales alone – one in three of the workforce.

The UK Treasury has also provided the Welsh Government with £6.6bn in additional funding this year for its response to the pandemic.

We have also set up more than 50 test centres across Wales, supplied millions of items of PPE and ensured almost 300 personnel from the UK's Armed Forces are in Wales to support the Welsh NHS.

But we can now see the way out of the pandemic as a result of the ongoing vaccination programme. The speed of its development and its rollout across the UK has been astonishing. It is world leading and Wales is playing a major part via Wrexham's Wockhardt facility where the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is being produced.

With the ongoing vaccine roll-out we can begin to look to the year to come. Later this week the Chancellor will deliver his Budget, setting the fiscal course for recovery, prosperity, jobs, growth and a green industrial revolution. We have a huge job to do and we are focused as a government on getting the UK back on course and levelling up the whole of the UK. In Wales this means building on the excellent progress of our City and Growth Deals, investing in renewable industries and infrastructure and delivering funding to the communities which most need it.

Ahead of what I believe will be a year of recovery and growth for all our communities, I wish everyone in Wales and all Welsh people around the world a happy St David's Day.

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## [Foreign Secretary statement on Myanmar violence: 1 March 2021](#)

Press release

Following the increase in violence from the military against peaceful protesters over the weekend, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has made the below statement.



Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

One month on and the military in Myanmar continues to escalate its use of violence to support its coup, including the killing of peaceful protesters over the weekend. The people of Myanmar want their voices heard and are showing huge bravery in response to this brutality.

And today, Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's elected leader, again faced politically motivated charges. The international community must do everything it can to bring pressure to bare to halt the violence,

release those detained arbitrarily and restore the elected government.

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## [New Registrar General for England and Wales announced](#)

News story

Abi Tierney will take up the role.



Abi Tierney, who is Director General for Her Majesty's Passport Office and UK Visas and Immigration, has been appointed as the new Registrar General for England and Wales.

Her appointment to become the head of the General Register Office (GRO) has been formally made by the Queen and takes effect from 1 March 2021. She succeeds the previous Registrar General, Myrtle Lloyd, who will be moving to HMRC as Director General for Customer Services.

Abi Tierney said:

I am delighted to have been appointed 23rd Registrar General for England and Wales, and am looking forward to supporting local authorities and registrars in delivering the local registration service. I am proud to serve as the head of the General Register Office, and to lead its continued development of new ways of working that put the customer at the heart.

The GRO oversees registration services to the public, including the

registration of marriages, civil partnerships, births, deaths, stillbirths and adoptions.

It is the Registrar General's responsibility to make the regulations that govern the duties of registrars and the registration processes. They are also required by law to create and make publicly available a free index of registration records for searching purposes and to issue certificates.

Find out more [information about the Registrar General and the GRO](#).

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## [Interim Office for Environmental Protection to be launched](#)

News story

The new environmental watchdog for England will be launched on an interim basis ahead of its formal establishment as part of the Environment Bill.



The new environmental watchdog for England will be launched on an interim basis ahead of its formal establishment as part of the Environment Bill, under plans set out today.

From July, the new Interim Office for Environmental Protection will be set up in non-statutory form to provide independent oversight of the government's environmental progress and to accelerate the foundation of the full body.

The interim body will be steered the Chair, Dame Glenys Stacey, and Interim Chief Executive, Natalie Prosser, together with other non-executive directors to be appointed in the coming weeks. Following Royal Assent of the Environment Bill, this group will formally become the Board of the Office for Environmental Protection as an independent legal entity.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

The Environment Bill will establish the world-class Office for Environmental Protection. Protecting and improving our environment is an important priority and that is why we are taking immediate action to ensure that the body can start its vital work at the earliest possible opportunity.

Dame Glenys Stacey said:

I am delighted at this decision. It means we can make rapid progress now, in establishing the organisation. The sooner we are up and running, the sooner we can deliver as intended, and so begin to make those tangible and positive differences to the environment that we so wish to see. It is excellent news.

The new Interim Office for Environmental Protection will be able to:

- Produce and publish an independent assessment of progress in relation to the implementation of the government's 25 Year Environment Plan
  - Develop the Office for Environmental Protection's strategy including its enforcement policy
  - Receive complaints from members of the public about failures of public authorities to comply with environmental law
  - Take decisions on operational matters such as staff recruitment, accommodation and facilities
  - Determine approaches for how the Office for Environment Protection will form and operate, establishing its character, ways of working and voice.

This is a move from the current interim environmental governance arrangements in place since the start of January and ahead of the Environment Bill creating the Office for Environmental Protection as a legal body.

The Government remains fully committed to the Environment Bill and The Office for Environmental Protection will be formally established shortly after Royal Assent of the Environment Bill which is now expected in the autumn.

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[Common Platform goes live in the](#)

## south-east

### News story

The new, digital system – designed to enable the criminal justice system to use, manage and share case information much more effectively – is now live in at criminal courts in Guildford and Staines.



The rollout of the Common Platform digital case management system continues and from today (1 March 2021) has gone live in the latest early adopter sites, Guildford Magistrates' and Crown Courts and Staines Magistrates' Court.

HMCTS wrote in advance to the firms and chambers of all defence professionals who work at these courts to encourage registration for accounts, so they are prepared to join hearings which use Common Platform. Initially, this will be a small number of cases with case volumes building over time. System performance will be closely monitored, making sure everything works as anticipated, before gradually increasing capacity.

Common Platform is custom-built to provide a single, streamlined digital resource which will benefit the whole criminal justice system. It improves the way cases are accessed, managed and processed and provides direct, secure access to key case information, cutting down unnecessary administration.

Kevin Sadler, Acting Chief Executive of HMCTS, said:

This is a great step forward in the rollout of this unique and innovative system. Each court which goes live with Common Platform brings us essential knowledge and feedback for us to feed into its further development. This means we can be absolutely confident this service will ultimately meet user needs and deliver significant benefits for us and for all our criminal justice partners.

Thank you to everyone who has worked so hard to help us accomplish this goal. It's a really important achievement. Your dedication and diligence are making a real impact in the progress of our reform ambitions and the future of the administration of justice.

The rollout of the system continues later this month, and the next criminal courts due go live will be:

- North Staffordshire Justice Centre, Cannock Magistrates' Court, Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court and Stafford Crown Court
- Warrington Magistrates' Court and Chester Crown Court

An [online tutorial video](#) is available to support defence professionals in registering for their accounts, and the process should take around 10 minutes to complete.

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