

[News story: New guidance on taxi licensing to protect passengers](#)

Passengers in taxis and minicabs could be kept safer under strict new licensing guidelines planned by the Department for Transport.

The government has today (12 February 2019) [launched a consultation](#) on robust new rules for licensing authorities outlining how they should use their powers to protect vulnerable passengers from harm.

These guidelines would improve safety with enhanced safety standards for taxi and private hire vehicles, which will be consistent across the country. New safety measures proposed include recommending councils ensure every driver undergoes enhanced criminal record and background checks.

[New guidance on taxi licensing to protect passengers video](#)

Taxis Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

While the vast majority of drivers are safe and act responsibly, we have seen too many cases where taxi and minicab drivers have used their job to prey on vulnerable people, women and children.

These rules would make sure that drivers are fit to carry passengers, keeping people safe while stopping those with bad intentions from getting behind the wheel of a taxi or minicab.

The consultation will run up until 22 April and comes as part of the [government's response to the Task and Finish Group's report on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing](#), which made a series of recommendations to reform the sector in September.

The government has also pledged to legislate on national minimum standards for drivers, establish a national licensing database and look at restricting drivers operating hundreds of miles away from where they are licensed.

As part of these minimum standards, the department will consider whether vehicles should be fitted with CCTV. These encrypted systems mean footage can only be accessed if there is a crime reported.

[Press release: Cairncross report](#)

recommends levelling of the playing field for UK journalism

- Online platforms should have a 'news quality obligation' to improve trust in news they host, overseen by a regulator
- Government should explore direct funding for local news and new tax reliefs to support public interest journalism
- A new Institute for Public Interest News should focus on the future of local and regional press and oversee a new innovation fund

Read the the [final report](#).

The [independent review](#), undertaken by Dame Frances Cairncross, was tasked by the Prime Minister in 2018 with investigating the sustainability of the production and distribution of high-quality journalism.

It comes as significant changes to technology and consumer behaviour are posing problems for high-quality journalism, both in the UK and globally.

Dame Frances Cairncross said:

The proposals I have put forward have the potential to improve the outlook for high quality journalism. They are designed to encourage new models to emerge, with the help of innovation not just in technology but in business systems and journalistic techniques.

DCMS Secretary of State Jeremy Wright said:

A healthy democracy needs high quality journalism to thrive and this report sets out the challenges to putting our news media on a stronger and more sustainable footing, in the face of changing technology and rising disinformation. There are some things we can take action on immediately while others will need further careful consideration with stakeholders on the best way forward.

Dame Frances was advised by a panel of experts from the local and national press, digital and physical publishers and advertising. Her recommendations include measures to tackle the uneven balance of power between news publishers and the online platforms that distribute their content, and to address the growing risks to the future provision of public-interest news.

It also concludes that intervention may be needed to improve people's ability to assess the quality of online news, and to measure their engagement with public interest news. The key recommendations are:

- New codes of conduct to rebalance the relationship between publishers and online platforms;
- The CMA to investigate the online advertising market to ensure fair competition;
- Online platforms' efforts to improve their users' news experience should be placed under regulatory supervision;
- Ofcom should explore the market impact of BBC News, and whether its inappropriately steps into areas better served by commercial news providers;
- The BBC should do more to help local publishers and think further about how its news provision can act as a complement to commercial news;
- A new independent Institute should be created to ensure the future provision of public interest news;
- A new Innovation Fund should be launched, aiming to improve the supply of public interest news;
- New forms of tax reliefs to encourage payments for online news content and support local and investigative journalism;
- Expanding financial support for local news by extending the BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service;
- Developing a media literacy strategy alongside Ofcom, industry and stakeholders.

The Government will now consider all of the recommendations in more detail. To inform this, the Culture Secretary will write immediately to the Competition and Markets Authority, Ofcom and the Chair of the Charity Commission to open discussions about how best to take forward the recommendations which fall within their remits. The Government will respond fully to the report later this year.

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The [review](#) has looked at the overall state of the news media market, the threats to the financial sustainability of publishers, the impact of search engines and social media platforms, and the role of digital advertising. Some of the report's key findings include:

- Half of UK adults worry about "fake news" or disinformation. A quarter do not know how to verify sources of information they find online. So users need to get the right skills to spot fake news, and platforms must identify and quickly remove the deliberate spread of misinformation on their services.
- Although news can be found on television and radio, written journalism (whether in print or online) originates the largest quantity of original journalism and is most at risk – particularly investigative journalism and democracy reporting.

A Mediatique report [Overview of recent market dynamics in the UK press, April 2018](#) commissioned by DCMS as the part of the Cairncross Review found:

- Print advertising revenues have dropped by more than two-thirds in the ten years to 2017;
- Print circulation of national papers fell from 11.5 million daily copies in 2008 to 5.8 million in 2018 and for local papers from 63.4 million weekly in 2007 to 31.4 million weekly in 2017;
- Sales of both national and local printed papers fell by roughly half between 2007 and 2017, and are still declining;
- The number of full-time frontline journalists in the UK has dropped from an estimated 23,000 in 2007, to just 17,000 today, and the numbers are still declining.

A report [Online Advertising in the UK](#) by Plum Consulting, commissioned by DCMS as the part of the Cairncross Review (and available as an annex to the Review) found:

- UK internet advertising expenditure increased from £3.5 billion in 2008 to £11.5 billion in 2017, a compound annual growth rate of 14%.
- Publishers rely on display advertising for their revenue online – which in the last decade has transformed into a complex, automated system known as programmatic advertising.
- An estimated average of £0.62 of every £1 spent on programmatic advertising goes to the publisher – though this can range from £0.43 to £0.72. *Collectively, Facebook and Google were estimated to have accounted for over half (54%) of all UK online advertising revenues in 2017.
- The major online platforms collect multiple first-party datasets from large numbers of logged-in users. They generally, they do not share data with third-parties, including publishers.

Dame Frances Cairncross is a former economic journalist, author and academic administrator. She is currently Chair of the Court of Heriot-Watt University and a Trustee at the Natural History Museum. Dame Frances was Rector of Exeter College, Oxford University; a senior editor on The Economist; and principal economic columnist for the Guardian. In 2014 she was made a Dame of the British Empire for services to education. She is the author of a number of books, including “The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution is Changing our Lives” and “Costing the Earth: The Challenge for Governments, the Opportunities for Business”. Dame Frances is married to financial journalist Hamish McRae.

[Press release: Appeal decisions could](#)

be cut by 5 months

- Government publish independent review into planning appeal inquiries
- Proposals could drive down the time taken to decide appeals from 47 to 26 weeks
- Ministers welcome the report and commit to working with the Planning Inspectorate to drive down the time it takes to process appeal inquiries

The most contentious planning cases could be decided up to 5 months faster, and some in half the time, giving certainty to communities about future developments, a major review has found.

Bridget Rosewell CBE said the average time to decide a planning appeal inquiry could be slashed from an average of 47 weeks to around 26 weeks.

As [Rosewell's report](#) was published today (12 February 2019), Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said speeding up decisions can help the government deliver on its target to build 300,000 homes each year by the mid-2020s.

Faster inquiries into contested development will give house builders and local communities more certainty on when decisions will be made, while also maintaining the integrity of the appeals system which works to prevent inappropriate development.

The wide-ranging review concluded outdated administrative processes and poor IT infrastructure were unnecessarily holding up cases.

Her report also suggested that a lack of suitably qualified inspectors was also hampering efforts to set up inquiry hearings on time.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP commenting on the review, said:

Planning appeal inquiries have held up development and kept communities waiting in limbo – 47 weeks on average is far too long to wait for a decision on something so important as a proposal for new development.

That's why I welcome Bridget's diligent work over the last 6 months, which has produced a fantastic report and provided us with a clear direction of travel on how we can ensure the appeals inquiry process is fit for purpose.

Reducing the time it takes to secure crucial decisions ensures the delivery of more homes, in the right places, and help us reach our ambition of 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s.

Mrs Bridget Rosewell CBE added:

It's critical that all parts of the planning system contribute towards the efficient delivery of the homes we need as well as the refusal of those which don't meet our high standards.

My review found, with commitment for all involved, that speeding up inquiries can be achieved through straightforward reforms, shaving months off the current time it takes for inspectors to make a decision.

I'm pleased my report has been welcomed by the government and the Planning Inspectorate and look forward to seeing these changes being implemented.

The report made 22 recommendations. These range from committing the Planning Inspectorate to introducing a new online portal for the submission of inquiry appeals to setting out a strategy for recruiting additional inspectors so inquiries can be scheduled sooner, reducing the length of time they take to conclude.

The Planning Inspectorate will prepare an implementation plan which will set out precisely how it will deliver these recommendations.

The [Rosewell Review](#) is part of the government's programme of reforms and targeted investment to ensure the planning system delivers 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s.

The government will now consider the findings before publishing a response in the coming months.

The review was undertaken by Mrs Rosewell over a period of 6 months and was submitted to the government on time in December 2018.

Approximately 30,000 new homes were granted permission by the Planning Inspectorate through the appeals process last year.

Mrs Rosewell, a qualified economist, has extensive knowledge and experience in the planning sector, including previously acting as an expert witness at planning inquiries. Among her current roles, Mrs Rosewell is a Commissioner for the National Infrastructure Commission and Chair of Atom Bank.

The [Planning Inspectorate](#) is an agency of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and handles over 20,000 appeals each year. Planning Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State are independent and impartial.

Speech: British High Commissioner raises royal toast to celebrate Burns Night in Fiji

Good evening.

Burns night is an event held every year to commemorate one of Scotland's finest poet of all times. Born in January 25, 1759 to parents William Burns and Agnes Brown, Robert Burns developed an early passion to read traditional stories and songs . From a young age, he nurtured a passion for poetry. Not having the time at all to sit and ponder on his poems was he was constantly helping his parents work at the farm, it became his habit to compose his poems and songs as he worked.

Robert Burns lived to the age of 37 and during that time, travelled wide and far composing poems and songs. As well as making original compositions, Burns also collected folk songs from across Scotland, often revising or adapting them.

So how did Burns Night start? Burns Night started shortly after the poet's death when his friends celebrated his life and career in Ayrshire, Scotland, in the late 1700s on the date of his death, July 21.

The date was later changed to the day of his birth, and now those in Scotland, and some areas within the UK and parts of the world and here in Fiji, also mark Burns Night.

On the 25th of January each year, there is not an hour in the day or night when a Burns Supper is not taking place somewhere on this earth. On this day people don their tartan, rustle up a tasty plate of haggis and recite some rhymes in honour of Scotland's favourite son but Burn's night is more than just a good reason to raise a 'wee dram' of whisky while enthusiastically belting 'Auld Lang Syne'.

A lot has been written about this man over the years, a man who has been often described as a sort of 18th century rock star whose amazing riffs in poetry, public performance ended prematurely when he died at the age of 37.

Tonight, we celebrate the birth and life of a common man whose work left a huge impact on the world. At 21 years old, Robert was elected as the President of the Tarbolton Bachelors Club in 1780, thus setting an example followed by many Burns clubs around the world.

Robert tried a few ventures which did not work and he died on the 21st of July, 1796 after being sick. He was buried with full Military Honours on the 25th of July.

Robert is quite known to have been a humourist, storyteller, satirist, a lover, socialist, nationalist and a philosopher. To those who knew him, he

was romantic, charming, funny and sarcastic with a devastating wit.

I will therefore highlight a few things about Robert Burns that are generally not known about him:

- Widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland, after Queen Victoria and Christopher Columbus, Robbie Burns has more statues dedicated to him around the world than any other non-religious figure;
- 260 years after his birth, Robert Burns is still beloved and has inspired modern recreations of his work such as J.D. Salinger's 1951 novel 'Catcher in the Rye' believed to be based on the poem 'Comin Thro the Rye' and John Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men' is believed to stem from his poem 'To a mouse';
- British born astronaut, Nicholas Patrick carried a miniature book of Burns poems into orbit on a two-week space mission in 2010. Burns' poetry completed 217 orbits of Earth.
- Robert Burns was the first face to feature on a commemorative bottle of Coca Cola in 2009.
- The largest collection of Burns' work can be found in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow which includes translations of his poems in more than 30 languages.
- 'Auld Lang Syne' traditionally sung at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve is one of Burn's most famous pieces of work and is recognised by Guinness Book of World Records as one of the three most popular songs in the English language.

Chieftain, thank you again for your invitation of having me here in this special night.

I am very proud to give you this toast which we should drink with pride and joy.

I hereby ask you all to fill your glasses and raise them high as I give you the Immortal memory of Robert Burns.

Speech: Speech: Melanie Hopkins welcomes back 2017/2018 Fijian Chevening scholars

Bula vinaka Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a pleasure to have you all here today despite your busy schedules.

This year, we are celebrating Chevening's 35th Anniversary which was launched 11th October, 2017.

Like every year, we take time to catch up with the Chevening alumni and this enables scholars to also build their network.

Applications for Chevening scholarships will open again in August and we encourage you to look out for potential leaders who can excel academically and benefit from studying in the UK.

British Universities as you all know, are profoundly international, reflecting our belief that knowledge knows no boundaries and that diversity has inherent educational value. The program has a global alumni network of more than 50,000 exceptional individuals who are breaking boundaries across a variety of professional fields.

In the 35 years, Chevening has remained constant; to bring the brightest individuals from across the world to the UK to experience all that the UK has to offer. These individuals immerse themselves in our culture and learn at world class universities and institution, making life-long friendships with their peers in the UK.

Today, we celebrate your achievements and we are here to let you know how proud we are.

I will be presenting certificates to Doctor Lusiana Manoa, who has been recognised and awarded a joint award for the Brian Abel-Smith prize for outstanding overall performance in the MSc in International Health Policy and to Dr Mike Kama who studied MSc in Control of Infectious Diseases.

I would like to wish you all the very best in your areas of expertise.

Thank you.