

Speech: Democracy Launch Event speech

Welcome

Thank you Minister Atkins for those inspiring words. As you have said so clearly, this year is a tremendous opportunity to reflect on how far our democracy has come and the people who made that happen.

Lessons of the Equal Suffrage campaign

Looking back I am struck by the energy and determination of the women and their allies who fought for equal suffrage. They pressed on with their campaign, often in the face of fierce opposition and ridicule, because theirs was a struggle for justice. Their commitment re-shaped our democracy.

Democratic Progress

Since 1918 we have seen our democracy transformed. By 1928 women had finally achieved equal suffrage and the franchise was broadened, with property owning restrictions stripped away.

Fast forward a century and the General Election in 2017 saw the largest ever electoral register, standing at 46.9 million.

The modernisation of our electoral system, including the introduction of individual electoral registration and the launch of the online digital service, has made it easier than ever to make an application to register to vote. 75% of applications are now made online, but for young people this is closer to 100%.

Future Challenges

As Minister for the Constitution I am aware of how much has been achieved but also of the distance still to travel. I want to open up, protect and improve our democracy.

National Democracy Week

So, in this Suffrage Centenary year, our inaugural National Democracy Week will kick off on Monday 2 July through to 8 July 2018, the 90th anniversary of the 1928 Equal Franchise Act which gave women the same voting rights as men.

National Democracy Week is being delivered in collaboration with NDW Council members, Cabinet Office and our combined extended networks. National Democracy Week is an opportunity to use all of our experience, insight and passion to increase democratic participation. We believe that regardless of who we are or where we are from, we must work together to ensure that every

member of society has an equal chance to participate in our democracy and to have their say.

Together we will deliver a range of democratic engagement activities in the lead up to and during the week.

Our aim will be to get results. To increase understanding of how to take part in decision making, and also to grow those who say they are more likely to participate. I want to do this across the whole UK.

I would like to thank the National Democracy Week Council for their time and commitment so far. They have been working with Cabinet Office to produce our new branding, which you can see around the room today and features real people our Council works with every day.

Parliamentarian Pack Launch

Parliamentarians are at the forefront of our democracy, the embodiment of the principle of representation and a vital connection between people and parliament. In recognition of this unique role, I am delighted to launch this new toolkit to support the crucial work that you do to promote our democracy amongst young people.

Many of you will have been inspired at an early age to explore how you make your voice heard on issues that are important to you. For many, their first awareness of politics and how decisions are made comes from contact with their local representative, in schools, youth clubs and other extracurricular activities.

It is a prime opportunity for engagement which can have a lasting effect on our young citizens' understanding of our electoral system and how it works for them. I ask you to join me in making use of this new resource throughout the year designed to make your interactions with young people effective and powerful.

Awards – Nominations Open

The National Democracy Week Council have also helped determine the categories for the National Democracy Week awards, which I am very excited to announce today.

We know that individuals and organisations across the UK are working tirelessly to engage people in our democracy. Their work, particularly with under represented groups, has the potential to help people understand their democratic rights and make their voices heard. This service is not always recognised, but as part of this summer's festival of democracy, I want to acknowledge the great contributions that so many have made.

The categories, as determined by the National Democracy Week Council, are:

- Young Advocate of the Year Award
- Diversity Champion of the Year Award

- Changemaker of the Year Award and
- Collaboration of the Year Award

So please, if you know of a young person who champions democracy, someone who is committed to ensuring diversity, if you have been blown away by the change that an individual, project or organisation has driven, or there is a partnership you feel breaks new ground, make sure you nominate them through our new National Democracy Week website www.gov.uk/nationaldemocracyweek. Nominations will close 5pm Sunday 27 May and we will hold an Award ceremony during National Democracy Week.

Our democracy should be as inclusive as possible – let's celebrate those who are rising to this challenge. Let us also each commit to do our bit to engage others, during National Democracy Week and beyond. I am delighted to introduce my colleague, Andrea Leadsom MP, Leader of the House of Commons, who will talk further about the Parliamentary Pack and how it can help with that task.

[Press release: National Democracy Week Awards announced to mark suffrage centenary](#)

The Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith, announced the awards in Parliament today, which will recognise national leaders in the area of democratic engagement.

National nominations will be divided into four categories:

- Young Advocate of the Year Award
- Diversity Champion of the Year Award
- Changemaker of the Year Award
- Collaboration of the Year Award

The Awards, held in the 100th year of the first women getting the right to vote, will highlight the work of national leaders in democratic engagement. Anyone may nominate any individual, organisation or group and nominations close on 27 May 2018.

Activities will be held over National Democracy Week and from today, organisations and members of the public will be able to upload their events to the website.

Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith MP, said:

The Democracy Awards will recognise outstanding achievements in democratic engagement and the Suffrage Centenary is a great opportunity to highlight the work so many people are doing in this area, often without reward.

I encourage you all to nominate someone who you believe deserves to be recognised for their work in championing or improving society's relationship with democracy. I am looking forward to celebrating all of the people who are going above and beyond to promote one of our most cherished assets.

Chief Executive of YMCA England & Wales, Denise Hatton said:

Young people have a huge role to play in democracy and it is important that we get them involved as early as possible.

By being involved in events taking place across National Democracy Week, young people can get a taste of the democratic process which will give them the understanding they need to actively participate in society and engage in their local communities.

There are many young people across the country already in leadership roles, engaging and changing the world around them. National Democracy Week will bring together organisations who work all year round to support young people with civic engagement and will act as a focal point for other young people to get involved.

YMCA are proud to be supporting this week and will be running activities across the country, enabling young people to shape their communities and partake in society.

Press release: North East man fined for running illegal scrapyards

A man has been fined for running an illegal scrapyards in Teesside.

Anthony Hanley, 34, of Marton Burn Road in Middlesbrough, appeared at Teesside Magistrates' Court on Tuesday 20 March where he pleaded guilty to two charges of operating a scrapyards without a permit.

He was fined £800, ordered to pay costs of £4,000 and a victim surcharge of £80.

Prosecuting on behalf of the Environment Agency, Simon Crowder told the court

that Hanley is the owner of Cliffs Autos which deals with end of life vehicles.

To take end of life scrap vehicles on to a site, the operators need an environmental permit for disposal of vehicle waste to ensure no risk to the environment by preventing fluids from going into the ground or into drainage systems.

Illegal site

On 25 August 2016 Environment Agency officers attended the illegal site at King George Terrace in Middlesbrough where they saw a sign offering to buy vehicles 'dead or alive', leading them to believe Hanley wanted to buy scrap vehicles.

Officers noticed there was in excess of 30 end of life vehicles stored at the premises. The defendant was co-operative with officers and was told to clear the site within 28 days.

On 12 September the same year, officers returned to the site and saw the number of vehicles had now reduced, and a further visit in December saw the site had been cleared.

But on 7 April 2017, the two Environment Agency officers returned to the site to see it had resumed operation again, with in excess of 30 end of life vehicles present, with some leaking fluids on to the ground.

Illegal sites 'impact on the environment'

Rachael Caldwell, Enforcement Team Leader at the Environment Agency said:

Hanley was given the opportunity to clear the vehicles of waste but when we returned to check the site it was full again.

Environmental permits are needed for a reason – they ensure operators have the correct procedures and equipment in place to protect the environment.

Not only do illegal sites impact on the environment but they undermine legitimate businesses. Every day our officers are out on the ground identifying illegal waste sites and taking the necessary action.

To report an illegal waste site contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Press release: Government investment to unlock more homes across England

- a further 44 areas shortlisted for funding for major infrastructure projects worth £4.1 billion and with the potential to deliver over 400,000 homes
- almost £300 million funding in total for housing projects in Greater Manchester, the West of England and Oxfordshire

Almost £300 million government investment in Greater Manchester, the West of England and Oxfordshire is set to help deliver thousands of much-needed new homes for local communities, Housing Secretary Sajid Javid announced today (21 March 2018).

Greater Manchester is set to receive £68 million funding to support the Mayor's ambitious target of delivering 227,200 homes by 2035 and boost economic growth across the Northern Powerhouse.

Government support for the West of England will help to nearly double the number of new homes being delivered historically, increasing from around 4,000 homes to 7,500 homes a year. This will deliver much-needed homes and support the local economy.

Ministers have also approved a housing deal with Oxfordshire worth £215 million that will help deliver a further 100,000 new homes for local people. This follows a similar deal agreed with the West Midlands last week to support the Mayor's ambitious plan to deliver 215,000 homes across the region.

This latest announcement comes as the government has also announced that [Housing Infrastructure Fund bids](#), from a further 44 areas for projects to help unlock more homes across country, have been shortlisted to the next stage of the competitive process.

A potential £4.1 billion funding will be available for vital infrastructure like roads, bridges, new schools and medical centres, which are needed for new communities.

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid said:

This government is determined to build the homes this country needs. That's why we're working with ambitious areas across England and backing them with investment and support.

This new housing investment in Greater Manchester, the West of England and Oxfordshire will help build much-needed homes, giving more people the opportunity to get on the property ladder.

We're also investing in local infrastructure like schools, roads and hospitals, so that we can help unlock even more new homes in the areas where they're needed most and build a Britain fit for the future.

Greater Manchester housing package

This funding will support a focus on developing brownfield land for housing and getting more homes built on small sites.

The [government package](#) includes:

- £50 million for a Land Fund to help councils in the region to prepare brownfield land for housing development
- taking 4 Housing Infrastructure Fund projects through to the next stage of assessment for funding
- up to £8 million for capacity funding to boost support for housing delivery across the region
- £10.25 million funding to help regenerate the Collyhurst Estate in north Manchester
- new flexibilities on the existing £300 million Housing Investment Fund to allow more homes to be delivered through loans to developers

Mayor of Greater Manchester Combined Authority Andy Burnham said:

I welcome this Housing Deal from government and the £50 million Greater Manchester's Leaders have secured that will allow us to build on more of Greater Manchester's brownfield sites.

It brings us closer to our ambitions and is a clear statement of intent as we move towards publishing the rewritten Greater Manchester Spatial Framework.

As we look to build the homes Greater Manchester needs, we must do everything we can to make sure as much brownfield land as possible is made available for development. This is the best way to ensure we minimise the impact on our green spaces.

But this isn't just about numbers of homes and land for development. I've been clear that I want to see more truly affordable homes built and more homes available for social rent across Greater Manchester.

I also want the rewritten Greater Manchester Spatial Framework to specify a date by which all new homes built across Greater Manchester should be net zero carbon. This is all part of my ambition.

West of England housing package

The West of England – covering Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset – is a high housing demand area. Across the region, the average house prices are more than 8 times average incomes, with Bath more than 10 times the average income.

The government's [interim package](#) supports the Mayor's with ambitious plans to deliver more homes and tackle affordability challenges. It includes:

- £3 million of funding for specialist support to help the region deliver large housing development
- taking 2 Housing Infrastructure Fund projects through to the next stage of assessment for funding
- exploring the potential for a deal with housing associations in the region to deliver more affordable homes

West of England Mayor, Tim Bowles said:

We have worked closely with government to secure this announcement, which will see millions of pounds invested in delivering new homes in the West of England. We know that we need more homes, to buy and rent – homes where they are needed at prices people can afford.

This deal will support us to work with our constituent councils, and North Somerset council, to build homes and communities that are well-connected.

Oxfordshire housing deal

The first completed government [housing deal](#) has been confirmed with Oxfordshire's 6 local authorities – Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire County Council – and the Local Enterprise Partnership, OxLEP.

The deal, which is worth £215 million, will:

- deliver 100,000 homes by 2031 – which is significantly above the Local Housing Need figure in the draft National Planning Policy Framework – playing a key role in the emerging Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford corridor where the government recognises the need to build up to 1 million new homes in the area by 2050 to maximise its economic potential
- provide £150 million of the funding to build much needed bridges, roundabouts and roads
- deliver more than 1300 affordable homes by dedicating over a quarter of the new funding, £60 million, to support these new homes

Oxfordshire is also home to 3 garden towns and villages – at Bicester, Didcot and Oxfordshire Cotswold – where government has invested almost £4 million to deliver an additional 30,000 homes.

Cllr Bob Price, Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board said:

I'm pleased that so many councillors of all parties and from all parts of the county have backed the deal. It represents a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing Oxfordshire's severe housing shortage and infrastructure challenges.

It demonstrates the government's commitment to working with Oxfordshire and recognises the critical role the county will play in driving forward the UK economy post-Brexit, attracting global investment.

The government has said the deal represents a 'downpayment' on a pipeline of infrastructure investment for Oxfordshire – and we in the county will work with them to ensure that happens.

Housing Infrastructure Fund

With the government committed to building 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s, the £5 billion [Housing Infrastructure Fund](#) is part of a comprehensive programme to fix the broken housing market.

Last month, ministers confirmed 133 council-led infrastructure projects that received a total of £866 million funding to support local work that will make housing developments viable and get much-needed homes built quicker.

The latest bids from 44 areas across England are for high-impact infrastructure like key roads, rail links and schools with the potential to deliver over 400,000 homes.

They will now move to the co-development stage, where government officials will work with these areas to further develop their bid and assess the projects. However, not all projects will receive funding after this stage or funding amounts could change to the amount originally bid for.

Without this financial support these projects would struggle to go ahead or take years for work to begin, delaying the homes these communities need.

Together with the government's Industrial Strategy, this funding will provide high-quality infrastructure to support economic growth.

Successful bids will be announced from autumn 2018 onwards and local authorities would then begin building the necessary infrastructure to help speed up new homes being built.

Further details

See [further details on the housing packages](#).

The [Housing Infrastructure Fund](#) is a government capital grant programme to

help unlock new homes in areas with the greatest housing demand. Funding is awarded to local authorities on a highly competitive basis.

The £5 billion fund is divided into 2 streams:

- a Marginal Viability Fund – available to all single and lower tier local authorities in England – to provide a piece of infrastructure funding to get additional sites allocated or existing sites unblocked quickly. Bids have a soft cap of £10 million
- a Forward Fund – available to the uppermost tier of local authorities in England – for a small number of strategic and high-impact infrastructure projects. Bids have a soft cap of £250 million

The government will be progressing Forward Funding projects to go through to co-development in the coming weeks, with final funding announced from autumn 2018 onwards. Find more information on the [areas being taken forward to co-development](#).

[Press release: New charges announced for regulatory services](#)

The Environment Agency has today published its new charging scheme for regulatory permits and services, which will be effective from 1 April 2018.

The [new charges](#) have been introduced so that businesses and organisations cover the full cost of the services they receive rather than the public – this represents a more financially-sustainable model which is simpler, fairer and more effective and that will lead to long-term environmental improvements. Charges for permits and other regulatory services have remained static for the last 7 years.

The charges were drafted with feedback from industry and were subject to a public consultation. The [consultation response document](#) is also being published today, which includes the changes we have made as a result of comments we have received from customers, trades associations and the public.

The charges reflect the amount of regulatory effort needed at a site and will allow the Environment Agency to invest further in our permitting service. Businesses that are well-managed and low-hazard present a low environmental risk and will be charged less. Higher-risk or poor-performing businesses will be charged more.

Neil Davies, Environment Agency Director of Regulatory Charges, said:

Our work to regulate industry protects and enhances the

environment. The changes that have been announced following the recent consultation will mean that businesses and not the public pay for the full services they use. This is more financially-sustainable, will lead to a better service to businesses and long-term improvements to the environment.

We have been engaging with trade associations over the last year while we were developing these proposals. Their input into this process has been really valuable and the feedback has helped shape the new fee structure.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

The Environment Agency carries out a valuable role in regulating the impact of businesses and industry on the environment and it is right that those that benefit from this service should cover the full cost.

The new charging structure will create a simpler, fairer and more sustainable system which will enable better regulation and protection for the environment.

The new charges will come into effect on the 1st April 2018 – the start of the new financial year.