

Press release: Government commits to increase diversity of all public appointments by 2022

The [Diversity Action Plan](#) includes a commitment that by 2022, half of all public appointees should be female and 14% should be from ethnic minorities, bringing representation on public boards in line with the wider population.

The 10-point Diversity Action Plan sets out how the government will deliver these commitments by continuing with existing measures which are working well, and introducing new activities to support further progress. The new activities outlined in the plan include establishing a mentoring programme and developing an Inclusive Boards Charter which will set standards for inclusivity for chairs and their boards.

Considerable progress has already been made in increasing gender diversity among new public appointees. In 2016 to 17, the proportion of new public appointments going to women rose to 49% from 34% in 2013 to 14, and 96% of all shortlists in 2016 to 17 were made up of both male and female candidates.

The launch of the plan marks the first time that the government has published data on the status of diversity across all public appointments. Of the 5,500 public appointees currently in post, 43% are female and 10% are from ethnic minorities.

Minister for the Constitution, Chris Skidmore said:

I am heartened by the increase in women being appointed to public boards but there's more we need to do across all aspects of diversity. Today we published a Diversity Action Plan which sets out how we will make public appointments even more open and accessible to all.

We need diverse ideas and perspectives at the helm of our public bodies, so it is vital that public appointees truly reflect the society they serve.

Peter Riddell CBE, Commissioner for Public Appointments said:

I welcome the ambitious targets set out in the Diversity Action Plan as an important sign of the government's commitment to delivering greater diversity.

The activities outlined in the plan are key to encouraging more diverse fields of applicants to apply for positions on public boards. Success will require a sustained will on the part of

Ministers, departments and public bodies.

Statement to Parliament: Grenfell Tower and building safety

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the on-going response to June's tragic fire at Grenfell Tower and our wider review of building safety.

It is now 6 months since the disaster.

Last week a number of events were held to mark this sad milestone, including the national memorial service at St Paul's.

I had the privilege of attending the extremely moving service, alongside the Prime Minister... ..the Minister for Grenfell Victims... .. and of course the Rt Hon Gentleman opposite, among others. The scale and the impact of this disaster is unprecedented in recent times, and I couldn't hope to cover all aspects of the response in one statement.

So today I want to concentrate on areas where I have new information to share.

However I am very happy to take questions on any aspect of the tragedy and the response to it.

I'll start with an issue that I know is particularly important to Members, Hon Members, and to me.

And that's finding new places to live for those who lost their homes.

Responsibility for rehousing lies with the local authority, the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

However, I have been closely involved with the process to ensure everyone is rehoused as quickly as possible...

... and my department has been providing the council with support to help bring that about.

The council has been tasked with finding places to live for 207 households from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk.

To date, 144 households – almost 70% – have accepted an offer of temporary or permanent accommodation.

According to the latest figures from the council, 102 of these households have now moved in.

For those who remain in other accommodation, the council has offered the opportunity to move into private rented accommodation while a permanent home is found.

Some have taken up this offer, others have made clear that they do not want to move twice – something that I completely understand.

The council was undoubtedly slow off the mark in starting the rehousing process.

But, with its own change of leadership, the help of the Independent Recovery Taskforce, and pressure and support from DCLG, consistent progress is now being made.

But I am far from complacent.

I've always been very clear that we should move at the pace of the families involved...

... and that nobody should be rushed or pushed into making a decision about where to live.

But to have so many families...

...including some children...

...still living in hotels and other emergency accommodation 6 months after the tragedy is simply not good enough.

The situation is undoubtedly complicated.

But I have been very clear with the council that I expect them to do whatever is necessary to help people into suitable homes as swiftly as possible.

I'm confident that the council is capable of doing that.

But, along with the task force, I will continue to monitor the situation and work with the council to ensure that it happens.

The issue of rehousing has an added poignancy with Christmas just around the corner.

Whatever your faith, this a time for family and friends, and that makes it a difficult time for anyone who has suffered loss or trauma.

Nothing anyone can do will make this a normal Christmas for the bereaved and the survivors.

But we are doing all we can to offer extra support over the coming weeks.

A range of activities and events are being staged for local children,

particularly those still living in hotels.

Social spaces have been booked in 4 of the hotels where families are staying, so there is room for people to spend time together.

And NHS outreach workers are visiting residents in the local area to offer specialist mental health support.

This builds on the excellent work the NHS has already done on mental wellbeing.

Specialists have screened almost a thousand adults for signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

426 are currently in treatment for PTSD, while a further 62 have completed their treatment.

110 children have also received or are receiving specialist help.

The dedicated NHS Grenfell helpline remains available, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Local organisations are also providing health and wellbeing support on the ground, including culturally sensitive support that reflects the diverse make-up of the borough.

And [last month's Budget](#) made available a further £28 million to pay for mental health and emotional support...

... a community space for those affected...

... and investment in the Lancaster West estate over the next 3 years.

Of course, it's not only government that has been providing funds.

In the aftermath of the tragedy the British people responded with incredible generosity, donating more than £26 million to various charities.

The majority of that money, more than three-quarters of it has already been paid out to survivors and to the next of kin of those who died.

Of the remaining £6 million, around £2 million is being held back for people who are entitled to payments but have not yet claimed it...

...and for those whose applications are still being processed.

Payments for those who haven't yet claimed will be looked after by the charities until the individuals are ready to engage.

The remaining £4 million will go towards providing long-term support and community projects.

As people are rehoused and take the time to grieve, the distributing charities will work with them...

... identifying their changing needs and ensuring money goes where it can best meet the needs of the community.

The House can rest assured that every penny that was donated will be spent on the people it was intended for.

The generosity of the British public demands no less.

Another issue where the views and wishes of the local community must be paramount is the future of Grenfell Tower itself.

The tower is currently being wrapped in white sheeting, a process that will be completed early next year.

This isn't being done, as some have claimed, to make people forget about what happened.

It is being done because many members of the community – people that have been directly affected by the fire – have said that covering the tower will help them to begin the healing process.

I acknowledge the current anxieties about the long term future of the site from those who have been most affected.

And I can categorically state that no decision has been taken about the long-term future of the site on which the Tower sits.

Those decisions will not be led by myself, the government, this House, or the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

It is the bereaved, the survivors and the wider community that will lead and be at the heart of the decision-making process.

My colleague the Minister for Grenfell Victims is working directly with them to agree a set of written principles that will guide the way forward for the future of this site.

When decisions are taken we want them to have the broadest possible support from those that have been affected...

...particularly those who lost loved ones...

...not just following the views of those with the loudest voices.

The principles we're drawing up will help us to make sure that happens.

And the principles will include a firm commitment from the Council that if the bereaved, the survivors and the wider community do not want the site to be redeveloped for housing...

... then the site will not be redeveloped for housing.

As well as dealing with the aftermath of the tragedy, we're determined to do everything possible to prevent such a disaster happening again.

And a crucial element of that is the Public Inquiry, which recently held its first procedural hearings under the chairmanship of Sir Martin Moore-Bick.

I know that some members of the community are concerned about the inquiry's remit, its structure and its personnel.

Some have called for Sir Martin to be supported by an extended panel that reflects the diverse population of the Tower.

The decision on that rests with the Prime Minister.

She has given a commitment to consider the composition of the panel once Sir Martin has determined what further expertise is needed...

... and she is now giving active consideration to the issue.

Meanwhile, Sir Martin has said he is actively considering plans for a consultative panel of local people who could talk to and receive information from the inquiry.

Such a panel has been established successfully by the Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse as a way of closely involving victims and survivors in the work of that Inquiry.

Sir Martin has said that any decision on the establishment of such a panel for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry will be taken in consultation with tower residents and the bereaved families.

Whatever happens next, I can assure the House that legal representatives of core participants will have access to all relevant documents.

They will be able to offer opening and closing statements at certain hearings.

And they will be able to suggest lines of questioning for witnesses.

The needs of the community have been at the heart of the inquiry since it was first announced, and that will not be changing.

And Mr Speaker, learning lessons for the future will be a crucial part of Sir Martin Moore-Bick's inquiry.

But it's not the only piece of work looking at how building safety can be improved.

Earlier this year, the Home Secretary and I asked Dame Judith Hackitt to carry out an Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety.

The current system is complex and confusing, a situation that has developed over many years and under successive governments.

Today Dame Judith has published her [interim findings](#), which show there is a need for significant reform.

And I can confirm that the government has accepted all of Dame Judith's recommendations.

We agree with her call for a change in culture and a more effective system that will encourage people to do the right thing and hold to account those who try to cut corners.

Everyone who is part of the system – including government – has an important role to play in delivering this change in culture and mind set.

We fully support this direction of travel that has been signalled in Dame Judith's report.

Achieving culture change will, inevitably, take time.

But while Dame Judith explores these issues further, she has also identified a number of areas where we can also make a start today.

These include work on restructuring guidance and tightening restrictions on the use of desktop studies.

On desktop studies, we will revise the Approved Documents on Fire Safety and commission work to produce a new British Standard on when and how such assessments can be used.

On guidance, we will work quickly with industry experts to complete work on clarifying the Approved Documents on Fire Safety.

More widely, we will consider how the entire suite of guidance on compliance with Building Regulations can be restructured and reordered to make it more user-friendly.

We will work with experts across the sector to explore how this can be done.

Dame Judith recommends that consultation with fire and rescue services be carried out early in the design process and then acted on...

...and that fire safety information on a building should be handed over at the right moment.

We will write to building control bodies to highlight these recommendations.

The government will play its part in making the system work better and fixing the problems.

And I urge the construction industry, the building control bodies, the fire and rescue services, landlords and others to play their parts too.

In January Dame Judith will host a summit on building regulation and fire safety.

It will form the springboard for the next phase of her review, and I encourage leaders from across the sector to take part and help design a better system.

While Dame Judith continues her vital work, we are continuing to support wider work to make buildings safer.

In the past 6 months we have overseen a comprehensive set of fire safety tests on cladding components and systems.

Fire and Rescue Services have visited and checked fire safety in every residential tower that has been identified as having cladding likely to constitute a fire hazard...

... or which they consider a priority for other reasons.

Across the country, we've seen swift action taken to improve fire safety systems and to put in place interim measures where risks are identified.

We have provided detailed advice to local authorities, the housing associations and to private landlords on how to ensure their buildings are safe.

DCLG's Expert Panel has issued advice to building owners about carrying out the necessary work to address the fire risks of certain cladding systems.

There is undoubtedly room for improvement in the way the Building Regulations system works and is managed in the future.

However, Dame Judith makes clear that her report should not be interpreted as meaning that buildings constructed under the existing system are unsafe.

The system needs to be made stronger for the future, but the action taken since June is helping building owners make safer homes today.

Mr Speaker, 6 months ago 71 people lost their lives and hundreds more lost their friends, their loved ones, homes and their possessions.

Six months on, progress is being made.

The situation is moving in the right direction.

But there is still a long, long way to go.

And as long as that's the case, I will not stop working with and fighting for people who have suffered more than any of us could bear.

They must not be forgotten. They will not be forgotten.

[Press release: Plan your A303 journeys](#)

ahead of Winter Solstice event at Stonehenge

Up to 3,000 people are expected to visit Stonehenge on the morning of Friday, 22 December, and with limited parking on site, English Heritage is once again urging visitors to use public transport or car share.

The Monument Field will be opened at approximately 7.45am, dependent on light levels, and will close at 10am.

To assist the flow of traffic both before and after the event, a 40mph speed limit will be in place on the A303 between the Countess roundabout and Longbarrow roundabout, with the lay-bys closed in between.

Gareth Price, Highways England emergency planning officer for the south west, said:

We are anticipating traffic volumes to increase around the event, and our aim is to keep the Highways England network running while keeping road users safe and informed.

The traffic management will be in place for safety and to keep disruption to a minimum, and we advise all road users to check our traffic and travel information channels, plan their journeys and allow plenty of time.

Drivers can obtain up-to-the-minute travel information on Twitter, by phoning the Highways England Information Line on 0300 123 5000 or by [accessing the website](#).

Find out more information on the [Winter Solstice event](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Speech: “This Council has unanimously, and appropriately, decided to impose the strictest sanctions in a generation upon North Korea.”

Thank you Mr Foreign Minister for bringing us together for this important meeting under the Japanese presidency of the Security Council.

And thank you too, for the Secretary-General Guterres for your comprehensive briefing on the clear global threats and the challenges that destabilising conduct of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea present to us all.

I should like to start by discussing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It was, it is, a great diplomatic achievement and remains the cornerstone of our international security.

As signatories, we have all benefited from its protections. It is our collective responsibility, and it is in our collective interests, to ensure that all nations stand by their commitments and obligations under the Treaty and its associated agreements.

It is also our duty as members of this Council and as responsible international actors.

We must abide by our collective rules, we must defend our values and we must work together in this Council, to safeguard a system of international security that benefits the whole of humanity.

North Korea repeatedly and wilfully rebuffs these systems and our collective values.

Earlier this week, members of the Council heard appalling and harrowing accounts of the regime’s brutal treatment of its own people. Of women forced to drown their newborn babies as the regime didn’t consider them to be racially pure. They heard multiple examples of violations of foreign citizens’ rights, including of course Mr President, of those of your own country, Japan.

Today, we meet yet again to condemn North Korea’s illegal and dangerous nuclear weapons programme.

Kim Jong-Un claims that he wants to be a responsible actor, and that he wishes to bring security and prosperity to his people. The regime’s actions, exemplified by their systematic violation of human rights and their nuclear weapons programme, demonstrate precisely the opposite intent.

North Korea’s pursuit of an intercontinental nuclear weapon is increasingly destabilising for us all. North Korea has fired some 20 ballistic missiles

this year. We have seen three intercontinental ballistic missile launches and two missiles launched across and over the territory of Northern Japan.

Now, in response to these actions this Council has unanimously, and appropriately, decided to impose the strictest sanctions in a generation upon North Korea.

Our community of nations has shown its deep condemnation of the regime by taking these sanctions seriously. This has of course started to have an impact. We all have the responsibility of ensuring these sanctions are fully and properly implemented so that they have the desired effect.

Now that North Korea's arms dealers are discovering that their usual routes to clients are closed, their diplomats are struggling to process bank transactions for contraband goods. Their exporters of manual labour are finding their contracts are not being renewed.

We must not just keep this pressure up, but we must increase it. We must share information and expertise to prevent North Korea from using front companies or illicit channels to evade sanctions.

We must all co-operate fully with the UN's highly competent and professional Panel of Experts on North Korea sanctions and we strongly commend their work and will continue actively to support them.

But we should be clear that the reason we enforce sanctions is to force Kim Jong-Un to see that he has the choice of two paths.

His current path will lead his country to greater poverty and isolation, and threatens not just North Korea's but the global security.

He can, he must, choose to change course. He can choose to comply with the UN Security Council resolutions and to join the community of law-abiding nations. He can choose to let his people express themselves through debate and commerce.

This is the real path to security and prosperity for the North Korean people. Only Kim can now make this choice and we must all work together here to persuade him to make the right choice.

Our message to Kim Jong-Un and his regime must be clear and united: for the wellbeing of your countrymen and the safety of your neighbours and the wider world, you must change course. I hope the North Korean representative here today conveys these strong messages back to Pyongyang.

Mr President, we must all work together and use all the diplomatic and economic tools at our disposal to deliver this uncompromising message.

Let us stand firm. Let us stand fast to our values.

The world looks to all of us here to defend our system of international security. For the sake of future generations of humankind, we must now rise to this challenge.

Statement to Parliament: PM Commons statement on European Council: 18 December 2017

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on last week's European Council.

Before turning to the progress on our negotiations to leave the EU, let me briefly cover the discussions on Russia, Jerusalem, migration and education.

In each case the UK made a substantive contribution – both as a current member of the EU and in the spirit of the new, deep and special partnership we want to build with our European neighbours.

Russia

Mr Speaker, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea was the first time since the Second World War that one sovereign nation has forcibly taken territory from another in Europe.

Since then human rights have worsened; Russia has fomented conflict in the Donbas and the peace process in Ukraine has stalled.

As I said at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, the UK will do what is necessary to protect ourselves, and to work with our allies to do likewise – both now and after we have left the EU.

So we were at the forefront of the original call for EU sanctions. And at this Council we agreed to extend those sanctions for a further six months.

Jerusalem

On Jerusalem, I made it clear that we disagree with the United States' decision to move its embassy and recognise Jerusalem as the Israeli capital before a final status agreement. And like our EU partners, we will not be following suit.

But it is vital that we continue to work with the United States to encourage them to bring forward proposals that will reenergise the peace process.

And this must be based around support for a two state solution – and an acknowledgement that the final status of Jerusalem must be subject to negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Migration

On migration, when we leave the European Union we will be taking back control

of our own borders and laws, so we will be free to decide our own approach independently of the EU.

But as part of the new partnership we want to build, I made it clear at this Council that we will continue to play our full part in working with the EU on this shared challenge.

So we will retain our maritime presence in the Mediterranean for as long as necessary.

We will work with Libyan law enforcement to enhance their capability to tackle people smuggling networks.

And we will continue to address the root causes of the problem by investing for the long term in education, jobs and services – both in countries of origin and transit.

Education

When it comes to education, Mr Speaker, our world-leading universities remain a highly attractive destination for students from across the EU, while UK students also benefit from studying overseas.

UK and EU universities will still want to work together after we leave the EU. And indeed to cooperate with other universities from around the world. We will discuss how to achieve this in the long term as part of the negotiations on our future deep and special partnership.

But in the meantime I was pleased to confirm at this Council that UK students will be able to continue to participate in the Erasmus student exchange programme for at least another three years – until the end of this budget period.

Brexit Negotiations

Turning to Brexit, the European Council formally agreed on Friday that sufficient progress has been made to move on to the second stage of the negotiations.

This is an important step on the road to delivering the smooth and orderly Brexit that people voted for in June last year.

And I want to thank Jean-Claude Juncker for his personal efforts, and Donald Tusk and my fellow leaders for the constructive way they have approached this process.

With Friday's Council, we have now achieved my first priority of a reciprocal agreement on citizens' rights.

EU Citizens living in the UK will have their rights enshrined in UK law and enforced by British courts. And UK citizens living in the EU will also have their rights protected.

Mr Speaker, we needed both and that is what we have got – providing vital reassurance to all these citizens and their families in the run-up to Christmas.

On the financial settlement, I set out the principles for the House last week and the negotiations that have brought this settlement down by a substantial amount.

Based on reasonable assumptions, the settlement is estimated to stand at between £35 billion and £39 billion in current terms.

This is the equivalent of around four years of our current budget contribution, around two of which we expect will be covered by the implementation period.

And it is far removed from some of the figures that had been bandied around.

On Northern Ireland, as I set out in detail for the House last week, we have committed to maintain the Common Travel Area with Ireland; to uphold the Belfast Agreement in full; and to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland while upholding the constitutional and economic integrity of the whole United Kingdom.

And we will work closer than ever with all Northern Irish parties and the Irish government as we now enter the second phase of the negotiations.

Mr Speaker, the guidelines published by President Tusk on Friday point to the shared desire of the EU and the UK to make rapid progress on an implementation period, with formal talks beginning very soon.

This will help give certainty to employers and families that we are going to deliver a smooth Brexit.

As I proposed in Florence, during this strictly time-limited implementation period which we will now begin to negotiate, we would not be in the Single Market or the Customs Union, as we will have left the European Union. But we would propose that our access to one another's markets would continue as now, while we prepare and implement the new processes and new systems that will underpin our future partnership.

During this period we intend to register new arrivals from the EU as preparation for our future immigration system. And we will prepare for our future independent trade policy by negotiating – and where possible signing – trade deals with third countries, which could come into force after the conclusion of the implementation period.

Finally, the Council also confirmed on Friday that discussions will now begin on trade and the future security partnership.

I set out the framework for our approach to these discussions in my speeches at Lancaster House and in Florence.

We will now work with our European partners with ambition and creativity to

develop the details of a partnership that I firmly believe will be in the best interests of both the UK and the EU.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, since my Lancaster House speech in January we have triggered Article 50 and begun and closed negotiations on the first phase.

We have done what many said could not be done – demonstrating what can be achieved with commitment and perseverance on both sides.

And I will not be derailed from delivering the democratic will of the British people.

We are well on our way to delivering a smooth and orderly Brexit.

That is good news for those who voted leave, who were worried the negotiations were so complicated it was never going to happen.

And it is good news for those who voted remain, who were worried that we might leave without being able to reach an agreement.

We will now move on with building a bold new economic relationship – which together with the new trade deals we strike across the world – can support generations of new jobs for our people, open up new markets for our exporters and drive new growth for our economy.

We will build a new security relationship that promotes our values in the world and keeps our families safe from threats that increasingly do not recognise geographical boundaries.

And we will bring our country together – stronger, fairer, and once again back in control of our borders, our money and our laws.

Finally, Mr Speaker, let me say this.

We are dealing with questions of great significance to our country's future, so it is natural that there are many strongly held views on all sides of this Chamber.

And it is right and proper that we should debate them – and do so with all the passion and conviction that makes our democracy what it is.

But there can never be a place for the threats of violence and intimidation against some Members that we have seen in recent days.

Our politics must be better than that.

And on that note, I commend this Statement to the House.