

# Press release: Intimidation in Public Life: Committee publishes report

The independent Committee, which advises the Prime Minister on standards of conduct across public life, has made a package of recommendations to address the threats and intimidation experienced by Parliamentary candidates and others. The recommendations include:

This level of vile and threatening behaviour, albeit by a minority of people, against those standing for public office is unacceptable in a healthy democracy. We cannot get to a point where people are put off standing, retreat from debate, and even fear for their lives as a result of their engagement in politics. This is not about protecting elites or stifling debate, it is about ensuring we have a vigorous democracy in which participants engage in a responsible way which recognises others' rights to participate and to hold different points of view.

The increasing scale and intensity of this issue demands a serious response. We are not alone in believing that more must be done to combat online behaviour in particular and we have been persuaded that the time has come for the government to legislate to shift the liability for illegal content online towards social media companies, and to consult on the introduction of a new electoral offence.

We believe that the parties themselves must show greater leadership. They must call out members who engage in this appalling behaviour, and make sure appropriate sanctions are imposed swiftly and consistently. They have an important duty of care to their candidates, members and supporters. Intimidation takes place across the political spectrum, both in terms of those engaging in and those receiving intimidation. The leadership of political parties must recognise this.

We have heard evidence that intimidatory behaviour can stem from our current political culture, with low levels of trust in politicians and a feeling of frustration and alienation by some people. Against that backdrop, it is down to all in public life to play their part in restoring and protecting our public political culture by setting a tone which respects the right of every individual to participate and does not, however inadvertently, open a door to intimidation.

Many of the recommendations we are making today are not limited solely to election periods but will have wider relevance across our public life.

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## Press release: Strong year of investment by social housing sector – HCA publishes Global accounts

The 2017 Global accounts of private registered providers, published today by the Regulator of Social Housing, shows that the sector delivered another strong year of investment in new and existing social housing properties.

Based on analysis of submitted regulatory returns and statements, the annual publication provides an overview of the financial status of private registered providers of social housing who own or manage at least 1,000 homes.

The main findings for 2017 are:

- The sector invested £10bn in new housing supply (including social housing, as well as investment in properties for sale, and market rent) and £1.6bn in existing stock. Total investment of £11.6bn represents a 15% increase on 2016.
- Of this, investment in new and existing social housing stock was £7.9bn, including £6.3bn in new rental supply – an increase of £0.7bn on 2016. Investment was funded by past surpluses, debt and grant and resulted in the completion of 41,000 social homes for rent.
- Turnover was unchanged at £20 billion, as providers have implemented the 1% rent reduction on general needs units (required under the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016), offset by additional rental income from new properties.
- Operating margins have increased by 2% to 30%, through reductions in operating expenditure – social housing costs per unit decreased by 7% to £3,698, with reductions in both management and maintenance costs.
- Total debt held by the sector increased by £2.9bn to £69.6bn.
- Interest cover was again strong at over 200% excluding one-off breakage costs, servicing existing debt and supporting additional investment
- The underlying net surplus was £3.5bn – a 7% increase on 2016, with reported net surplus of £4.1 billion. The reported net surplus is increased by the one-off gains reported on mergers of £0.6bn and is not indicative of recurring performance.

Fiona MacGregor, Director of Regulation said:

This year's figures show that the social housing sector is continuing to invest substantially in existing stock and new supply and as a whole is well-placed to respond to the changing operating environment. The sector has consolidated over recent years and there are now a small number of very large providers; significant changes in these providers can have a material effect on sector results.

The year-on-year decrease in management costs and major repairs expenditure demonstrate how the first 12 months of rent reductions have been managed. While the lower repairs spend partly indicates the progress being made towards reducing non-decent stock we will continue to encourage providers to have a rigorous, evidence-based approach to expenditure and investment, which ensures that housing is sustainable for the long term, responds to tenant needs and gives good value for money.

The 2016 Global Accounts were published in February 2017. In response to sector feedback that an earlier publication date would help providers to compare their performance against their peers more easily, we have brought forward the publication date compared to previous years.

The [annual Global Accounts of housing providers](#) are available on the website. The headline social housing unit cost data, based on 2017 submissions, is included in the Global Accounts data file.

1. This is the second year of the Financial Reporting Council Accounting Standards where the presentation of financial statements has changed in areas such as accounting treatments for government grant, the valuation of housing properties and the measurement of financial instruments. These are presented under the new Financial Reporting Standard 102 and the Housing Statement of Recommend Practice 2014.
2. Under International Financial Reporting Standards most mergers in the sector are accounted for using the purchase accounting method. This requires the receiving organisation to report the fair value of the net assets acquired – effectively the balance sheet – as a gain (or profit) in the year of acquisition. The gain will usually be considerably more than the annual trading surplus generated by the merging organisation, and so will inflate reported surpluses in the year of acquisition. Subsequent years will not be affected.
3. A small number of providers who have risen above the 1,000 unit threshold have been added to the Global Accounts dataset for the first time in 2017.

4. The Homes and Communities Agency is the single, national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England, and is the regulator of social housing providers. As regulator, its purpose is to promote a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It will do this by undertaking robust economic regulation, as enshrined in legislation, focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer.

For more information visit the [HCA website](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#).

Our [media enquiries page](#) has contact details for journalists.

For general queries to the HCA, please email [mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk](mailto:mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk) or call 0300 1234 500.

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## **Press release: Highways England's intelligent network of the future**

In a vision of the future outlined today the government company said an intelligent network coupled with connected vehicles would improve how efficiently roads are maintained and at the same time improve safety. In another development drones could also be used to fly overhead and report back on incidents, improving response times.

In its [Strategic Road Network Initial Report](#), published today (13 December 2017), the company says technology will play an increasingly major role in keeping people moving, and the country connected.

It also stresses the importance of keeping existing roads properly maintained, and that it does so in a way which minimises disruption to road users and local communities. The report will be used to inform the government's next road investment strategy which begins in 2020.

Highways England Chief Executive, Jim O'Sullivan, said:

We are delivering a record £15 billion of government investment to give people safe, efficient and reliable journeys, and provide businesses with the links they need to prosper and grow.

Because people's journeys are important to us we are setting out our high level aspirations which will help ensure the network continues to drive economic growth, jobs and prosperity, and keeps traffic moving today, and into the future.

We encourage people to read our report and feedback through the Department for Transport's consultation, which is also launched today.

Since it was created in 2015, Highways England has completed 18 major road improvements and has a further 15 currently in construction.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

This government is making people's journeys better, faster and safer to give people better access to jobs, schools and their community.

We are planning to spend more than ever before to upgrade England's motorways and major A roads from 2020 through to 2025.

The Initial Report outlines eight aspirations for the next road period:

- focus on operations, maintenance and renewals
- build the smart motorway spine of the network
- roll out expressways
- undertake transformational investments
- deliver a balanced programme
- renew focus on small schemes
- deliver through refined designated funds
- prepare for the future

The Department for Transport has also today launched its consultation, into Highways England's Initial Report. Their consultation will run until Wednesday, 7 February 2018.

The results of it will be used by the department to help develop the next Road Investment Strategy which the government is expected to publish in 2019. It is then that detail on specific road projects will be outlined.

## **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.

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## **Speech: "Today's conditions in the Rakhine state do not yet allow for the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees to their homes"**

Thank you Mr President.

And I'd like to begin by thanking our briefers, and if I might particularly say to Special Representative Patten what a profound and incredibly moving testimony you have given this Council. And your final words that inaction must not be allowed to take place is vital for us all. I think you've brought to life a truly horrifying picture, so I commend you for that.

And I'd like to thank Undersecretary-General Feltman for his update on the situation one month after this Council adopted an important Presidential Statement, which included calls for an end to the violence, a safe returns process, humanitarian access, and for the root causes of the crisis to be

addressed. I am grateful to you for your continued engagement on this crisis. It is vital that the UN continues to remain engaged.

Because the stark reminder, if anyone needed it, that Special Representative Patten has given us is of the horrors that these Rohingya refugees have suffered, a stark reminder that this is first and foremost a human tragedy, and which this Council must keep its attention.

Over the past month, we have seen some initial steps in response to this Council's Presidential Statement, which we welcome.

In particular, the recent agreement concerning the voluntary repatriation of refugees, signed by the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh on 23 November.

The Government of Myanmar's continued commitment to the Annan Commission recommendations and to the development of Rakhine State through the Union Enterprise mechanism are also worth highlighting. And we welcome the announcement of the new Advisory committee. We support initiatives that promise to build a better future for all communities in Rakhine, without discrimination and regardless of religion or ethnicity. The Commission's recommendations remain a particularly important blueprint for the future given their wide support.

However, Mr President, there remains much more to be done and it is right that the situation remains on our agenda.

I want to draw particular attention to the agreement concerning voluntary repatriation of refugees. Now, this is a step in the right direction, but today's conditions in the Rakhine state do not yet allow for the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees to their homes that this Council called for last month.

1,000 to 3,000 people are still fleeing in fear from the Rakhine state into Bangladesh every week. There are continued reports of intercommunal tensions and arson attacks, as Undersecretary-General Feltman set out. As we have said many times before the violence and human rights violations must stop.

While we recognise the desire to move forward quickly, we can only support returns which are safe, voluntary and dignified. This will require independent, international monitoring to ensure the conditions are met.

The rights of the Rohingya must be respected by the Burmese Government, including freedom of movement and access to basic services and livelihoods. They must be allowed to return home, not to prolonged stays in IDP camps, and be given a pathway to citizenship.

The responsibility for making progress lies primarily with the government and security forces of Myanmar. And the actions they must take are already set out in the Presidential Statement agreed unanimously by this Council.

Mr President, let us recall that in that statement, this Council called for the UNHCR to be invited to be a full participant in the returns process. Myanmar recognises UNHCR's expertise but so far has resisted giving them the

necessary role.

In that statement, we called for transparent investigations into allegations of serious human rights abuses and violations. Not just because those responsible must be held accountable, but also so that refugees have confidence in their eventual return. So far, all we have seen is a whitewash by the military.

In that statement, we called for full and unhindered access to Rakhine state for UN agencies, their humanitarian partners, and the media. But the government continues to severely limit access to Rakhine, making it impossible to deliver vital humanitarian assistance or verify the situation on the ground.

Mr President, the situation regrettably means that we must continue supporting refugees where they are right now.

The Government of Bangladesh, along with UN agencies and other humanitarian partners, continues to play a vital role, providing life-saving shelter and assistance. Unfortunately, it is likely that Bangladesh will need to play this role for longer than any of us would like.

It is critical, therefore, that longer-term plans are put in place to protect and provide for refugees in Bangladesh and internally displaced people in Rakhine state. And it is critical, too, that these plans are properly funded.

On top of an annual program of \$210 million to Bangladesh, the UK has contributed \$79 million to the UN's current Humanitarian Response Plan, providing life-saving assistance and protection to the refugees and Bangladeshi host communities. But the plan is still only partially funded and in any case, it runs out in February 2018. We encourage the international community to step up its contributions.

Mr President, I want to turn briefly before concluding to the Secretary-General's appointment of a Special Envoy. It will be an important, sensitive role, so we support the Secretary-General in deliberating over the appointment carefully. When he or she is appointed, we call on Myanmar to engage with them openly and in good faith.

Mr President, I said at the beginning that SRSR Patten's briefing was a stark reminder that this is a human tragedy that the Council must not turn its attention from. We cannot change the horrors, the crimes that have already been committed. But that is all the more reason, then, that this Council must remain engaged, must remain seized of the situation, and must be ready to take further action if necessary to ensure the protection, justice, and progress.

Thank you.