

[News story: Nowruz 2017: Prime Minister's message](#)

I send my warmest wishes to everyone celebrating the festival of Nowruz in Britain, Iran and around the world.

At this time of year families and friends will be gathering to celebrate the New Year and mark the start of spring.

To everyone celebrating Nowruz in the UK – I wish you a happy, healthy and peaceful new year.

Har ruzetan Nowruz, Nowruzetan piruz.

[Press release: Prisons and Courts Bill to improve access to justice and better protect the vulnerable](#)

Plans to revolutionise the courts to make them more straightforward and efficient, and deliver swifter justice for victims, will be outlined by the Justice Minister Sir Oliver Heald QC today.

The Prisons and Courts Bill, which also contains a range of measures to help boost the reform of our prisons, will be debated by MPs in the House of Commons this week (week commencing 20 March 2017).

Measures in the ground-breaking Prisons and Courts Bill will mean that more cases can be progressed securely online and through video and telephone conferencing, eradicating the need for many administrative hearings to take place in the traditional courtroom setting and reducing the need for travel.

To ensure justice is also open and seen to be done, video booths will be installed in courts across England and Wales to allow members of the media and public to observe virtual hearings from court buildings anywhere in the country. Lists and results of cases that have taken place online, as well as those concluded in a physical courtroom, will also be available digitally.

Justice Minister Sir Oliver Heald QC said:

Britain has the best justice system in the world, but it should also be the most modern. Victims and the most vulnerable are at the centre of our changes, which will help deliver swifter and more

certain justice for all.

We want courts that are efficient and fit-for-purpose, with facilities across the entire estate that are modern, user-friendly, and work in favour of our hard-working and dedicated judges and magistrates.

The Prisons and Courts Bill underpins this vision – building on the good progress we have already made in improving the experience of all users and cementing our reputation for global legal excellence so victims get the justice they deserve as quickly as possible.

The Prisons and Courts Bill proposes an extension to the use of video links and virtual hearings which allow victims to take part in cases without having to meet their alleged attacker face-to-face.

Under our virtual hearings measures a further 60,000 pre-trial hearings in the magistrates' court and 17,000 contested bail hearings can also take place by video, along with 30,000 pre-trial hearings in the crown court. This will save around 34,000 hours of courtroom time. Proposals to introduce online convictions for some limited offences will also benefit the courts. Potentially around 8,000 offences – including 7,000 cases of people travelling without a train and tram ticket, and a further 1,300 cases of people fishing without a licence – could be handled online, taking away the need to be in a courtroom.

Bill measures will also mean around 420,000 summary and triable either way offences can be progressed without the need for administrative hearings to take place in a court. For example, offenders will be able to enter a plea online reducing the need to go to court until they need to attend trial or a hearing where they can be sentenced.

Discussions between the court and legal representatives about issues such as trial location will be able to take place via email or telephone or video conferencing, instead of being in a courtroom.

The government is also removing the requirement for indictable only offences to have a 'first appearance' in the magistrates' court, instead sending those cases straight to the crown court.

The Prisons and Courts Bill underpins our investment of over £1 billion for a modern justice system. The government is investing over £850 million to modernise and digitise the courts, and preserve the full majesty of the physical courtroom for cases that require it, in addition to around £250 million to deliver a fully connected criminal courtroom. This will result in savings of £252 million a year for the taxpayer.

We will move from too many underused and badly maintained buildings to fewer, better buildings with modern facilities. More modern and robust technology will be put in place in courts, such as Wi-Fi, modern telephony and screens for sharing evidence, to make the lives of our excellent judiciary and legal professional users easier.

The Prisons and Courts Bill also provides courts with the power to put an end to domestic violence victims being cross-examined by their alleged attackers in the family courts, calling time on what the Justice Secretary has described as a “humiliating and appalling” practice.

Car insurance premiums will also be cut by around £40 a year, with new fixed tariffs capping whiplash compensation pay-outs and a ban on claims without medical evidence, helping to crack down on the compensation culture epidemic.

In addition, the legislation sets in law for the first time that a key purpose is to reform offenders as they are punished for the crimes they have committed.

Notes to editors

1. [The Bill](#) was introduced on 23 February 2017. Follow its progress on the Parliament website.
2. Recent announcements:
3. [Impact assessments](#)

[Press release: Foreign Secretary appoints new GCHQ Director](#)

Today Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson announced that Jeremy Fleming has been appointed to succeed Robert Hannigan as Director GCHQ, with the agreement of the Prime Minister.

Jeremy Fleming has been Deputy Director General of MI5 since 2013. He will succeed Robert Hannigan, who announced in January his decision to step down once a successor was in place. He will take up his post around Easter. The appointment was made following a recruitment process chaired by National Security Adviser Sir Mark Lyall Grant.

Announcing the appointment, the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said

Jeremy Fleming is a dedicated public servant whose work over two decades in the intelligence services has helped to keep our country safe. I congratulate Jeremy on his appointment as Director of GCHQ at an important time for the service. I know that he will continue the excellent work of Robert Hannigan in leading this outstanding organisation, when the skill and ingenuity of the UK intelligence community are critical to defending Britain from cyber attacks, terror plots and other activities that threaten us and our allies.

National Security Adviser Sir Mark Lyall Grant said:

Jeremy Fleming emerged from a strong and competitive field as the outstanding candidate to become the next Director, GCHQ. He is a national security professional of the highest standard, who is widely respected across the national security community, in the UK and overseas. I would also like to thank Robert Hannigan for his excellent leadership of GCHQ over the last 3 years, including for the important role he played in preparations for the 2017 Investigatory Powers Act and in the setting up of the National Cyber Security Centre.

New GCHQ Director, Jeremy Fleming said:

It is a great privilege to be asked to lead GCHQ as it approaches its centenary in 2019. The organisation has a distinguished past and an increasingly important role to play in keeping Britain safe in the digital age. From managing cyber risks posed by nation states to preventing terror attacks, keeping our children safe online and supporting our Armed Forces, the exceptional men and women of GCHQ operate on the new frontline of global challenges.

I'd like to pay tribute to Robert Hannigan, who over the last few years has led GCHQ through the transformation of some of our most important national security capabilities. I look forward to building on his legacy and in particular, the role he has played in increasing the transparency of GCHQ's crucial work and in expanding its cyber mission through the work of the National Cyber Security Centre.

Outgoing GCHQ Director, Robert Hannigan said:

I'm delighted that the Foreign Secretary has appointed Jeremy Fleming to be the new Director. I've known Jeremy for many years and he is a great friend and colleague. He comes with deep intelligence experience and expertise.

Notes to editors

- Jeremy Fleming biography: Jeremy Fleming joined government from the private sector in 1993. He is a career MI5 officer with significant professional experience of national security and intelligence work, including international and Northern Ireland counter-terrorism, counter-espionage, cyber, and protective security. Jeremy joined the Board of MI5 in 2005 with responsibility for Technology. He was seconded to the Home Office in 2007 to be the Director of Strategy for the newly formed Office for Counter Terrorism and led on the revision of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST. On return to MI5, he became the Director for intelligence Collection, overseeing a significant uplift in

digital capabilities. He was promoted to Assistant Director General in 2011 and led MI5's preparations for the London 2012 Olympics. Jeremy was appointed Deputy Director General of MI5 in April 2013, with responsibility for the agency's core operational work. He has played a lead role in shaping the organisation to disrupt the changing face of the threat from terrorist groups and hostile state actors.

- All questions should be directed to GCHQ press office: 01242 221461 ext 33847; pressoffice@gchq.gsi.gov.uk

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[Green Party: Invest in public transport instead of new roads to fight congestion](#)



20 March 2017

The Green Party is calling on the Government to invest in public transport, walking and cycling after a study revealed new roads built in England have almost all failed to either relieve congestion or boost local economies [1].

Caroline Russell, Green Party transport spokesperson and London Assembly member, said:

“Constant expansion of the road network will trap more and more people into depending on cars for their daily journeys, which simply creates new gridlock in different places and drives a perpetual cycle of demand for ever more roads.

“We need a complete rethink of our transport system with serious investment in buses, trams and trains along with safe routes for walking and cycling.

People need an alternative to car use and we must protect our towns, cities and countryside from the pollution and congestion that comes with new roads.”

Notes:

1. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/20/new-roads-create-more-traffic-fail-local-economies-cpre?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Tweet

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