

Welsh Secretary looks to year ahead on St David's Day

In the week we celebrated St David's Day, we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel after two years of collectively fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. Vaccines – many manufactured in Wales – have been a game-changer, playing a big part in allowing society to open up again. Children are back in school, town and city centres are getting busy again and the Six Nations rugby is taking place in front of big crowds at last.

At the same time as we have celebrated our Welsh national day, our patriotism and freedom, we can reflect that these values are ones that both we and the people of Ukraine share and hold dear.

As Ukrainians defy President Putin's aggression, the UK has committed £40 million of humanitarian aid among a comprehensive package of ongoing support.

As the Prime Minister has said, the world has witnessed awe-inspiring displays of bravery and heroism from the Ukrainian people and the UK will not turn its back in Ukraine's hour of need.

Closer to home, we marked this St David's Day by appointing Wales' first Veteran's Commissioner. Colonel James Phillips will enhance support for veterans in Wales, be an independent voice on veterans' issues, and champion their interests. The Armed Forces have a long, important tradition in Wales and our ex-servicemen and women and their families deserve recognition and respect throughout the duration of their service and beyond.

As we look ahead into 2022, the UK Government's priority is to continue our recovery from the pandemic and to level up every part of the UK. The people of Wales share a profound sense of pride in their communities, and rightly so. Industrial Wales powered the UK through the industrial revolution and its seaside towns and mountain scenery are beloved by tourists from across the world – not least the slate landscape of north west Wales which became a Unesco world heritage site last year. Wales is a unique place with an incredible history and even greater potential.

But not everyone in Wales has the same opportunities as each other or with people in other parts of the United Kingdom.

As a government we recognise that this is wrong and our levelling up plans are already seeing us work with councils, communities and the Welsh Government to reverse the geographical inequalities that have plagued Wales and the wider UK.

This includes making great strides in gigabit broadband and 5G rollout, and moving research and development spending out of the south east of England so other areas have the funding they need to prosper.

Every part of Wales is now covered by four Growth Deals – North Wales, Mid

Wales, Swansea Bay and Cardiff Capital Region – which are also key to our levelling up ambitions. The UK Government has invested £790m, alongside the Welsh Government and local authorities to create thousands of jobs in the coming years.

And we are funding communities directly – providing investment through the Levelling Up Fund, Community Renewal Fund and Community Ownership Fund. Late last year more than 175 projects right across Wales received more than £165 million in direct funding for schemes. These range from transforming the seafront and promenade in Aberystwyth, revitalising the Montgomery Canal and reopening the Muni Arts Centre in Pontypridd, to rejuvenating Haverfordwest Castle, among dozens of projects right across Wales.

And this was just the first round of funding. Many more projects, places and communities will benefit further by the end of 2022.

Across the economy the UK Government has set a course for recovery, prosperity, jobs, growth and a green industrial revolution. We have a huge job to do and we are focused as a government on getting the UK back on course. But we want to work with Welsh Government and see them deliver on their plans for the people of Wales which is why we have provided them with the largest ever settlement from the Treasury, £18 billion a year, so they can deliver devolved services like health, education and flood protection.

We know that the increasing cost of living will strain many household budgets which is why we have our Plan for Jobs, which has seen youth unemployment at a record low, and the £200 discount on bills this autumn for domestic electricity customers.

Covid-19 and the cost of living difficulties are still with us, but we can nevertheless look forward with optimism. Defence remains a vital employer in Wales and the MoD is making a £320m investment in the Army estate in Wales, including the retention of Brecon Barracks and basing a new regiment in Caerwent by 2028, while there will also be a new RAF aircraft contract for Broughton.

And just this month the Ministry of Justice announced it would be moving 500 jobs to locations across Wales. The UK Government wants to make full use of the talent and potential of the Welsh workforce and relocating more civil service roles helps us achieve that.

We are facing an uncertain time with our focus currently very much on the terrible situation in Ukraine. But I hope the year ahead will be one of optimism and recovery for all our communities.

Knighthood conferred and Privy Council Appointment: March 2022

Press release

A Knighthood has been conferred on the Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson CBE MP and Baroness Williams of Trafford will join Her Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council.



Knighthood

The Queen has been pleased to approve that the honour of Knighthood be conferred upon The Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson CBE MP.

Privy Council

The Queen has been pleased to approve that Baroness Williams of Trafford be sworn of Her Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council.

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Tower site sale to address concerns in telecoms merger

The decision by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) comes after an in-depth Phase 2 investigation into the proposed deal.

Cellnex is an independent supplier of telecommunications infrastructure, currently active across several European countries, and CK Hutchison is a multinational conglomerate that currently owns and operates the Three mobile

network in the UK.

The proposed deal, in which Cellnex has agreed to buy CK Hutchison's UK passive infrastructure assets, forms part of a broader set of transactions – worth £8.6bn (€10bn) in total – involving assets in several European countries. Passive infrastructure assets are structures, such as towers and masts, that mobile network operators and other wireless communication network providers attach electronic equipment to in order to operate their networks. This includes the sites that the structures are built on.

The CMA launched an inquiry into the proposed deal in May 2021 and it was referred for an in-depth investigation by an independent Inquiry Group in July.

In keeping with its provisional findings issued in December 2021, the CMA has found that the sale of the CK Hutchison business to Cellnex would raise significant competition concerns. The sale of the business to Cellnex would prevent the emergence of an important alternative competitor in the supply of passive infrastructure, leaving mobile networks facing higher prices and more onerous contracts in future contract negotiations. This, in turn, could result in higher prices or lower quality services for users of mobile networks across the UK over a period of time.

In order to address these concerns, Cellnex proposed the sale of all of its existing sites that geographically overlap with the CK Hutchison assets it has agreed to buy. This would result in a package of over 1,000 passive infrastructure sites being sold to a purchaser approved by the CMA.

Having assessed this remedy in detail, the Inquiry Group concluded that it would effectively address the competition concerns identified by the investigation, meaning the merger could proceed.

Richard Feasey, Chair of the independent Inquiry Group, said:

Our decision today helps protect competition in infrastructure that mobile phone operators rely on. The sale of this significant package of assets will allow a major supplier to compete against Cellnex when mobile networks look to negotiate new contracts in future.

This, in turn, stops the threat of higher prices or worse terms for the operators and their customers as a result of this deal.

For more information, visit the [Cellnex/CK Hutchison merger inquiry page](#).

1. All media enquiries should be directed to the CMA press office by email on press@cma.gov.uk, or by phone on 020 3738 6460.
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Appointment of Baroness Gisela Stuart to the post of First Civil Service Commissioner

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has today confirmed Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston as the new First Civil Service Commissioner.

Baroness Stuart served as a Labour Member of Parliament from 1997 until 2017. During her twenty years in Parliament, she worked as a government minister in 1999-2001, sat on the Security and Intelligence Committee and chaired Vote Leave in 2016.

From 2017, Baroness Stuart has contributed to public life with non-partisan roles. This includes roles at the Royal Mint, Birmingham City University and as the lead Non Executive Board Member at the Cabinet Office. Baroness Stuart now sits as a Crossbench Peer where she operates independently, outside of a party-political framework.

The appointment follows a fair and open recruitment process following the requirements of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010. Pre-appointment scrutiny by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) took place and the Committee published its report endorsing the appointment.

Following the recommendations of the last review of the Civil Service Commission, the criteria for appointment emphasised the need to act independently of the Civil Service and for a broad range of experiences from outside of Civil Service roles. Candidates were also required to demonstrate how they would uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life.

Ian Watmore stepped down as First Civil Service Commissioner on 30 September 2021 as his five-year, non-renewable term ended. In the interim, the Prime Minister had authorised Rosie Glazebrook to carry out the functions of First Commissioner from 1 October 2021 until the vacancy was filled.

The Rt Hon Steve Barclay, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, said:

I am delighted to confirm that Baroness Stuart is now appointed to the role of First Civil Service Commissioner. Baroness Stuart has all the attributes, experience and independence of judgement needed to lead the Civil Service Commission highly effectively.

I would like to thank Rosie Glazebrook for carrying out the functions of the office so effectively while we undertook the recruitment process.

I am also grateful to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee for carrying out pre-appointment scrutiny to

provide additional assurance to this process and thank them for their report.

Baroness Stuart, the new First Civil Service Commissioner, said:

I am honoured to be appointed as First Civil Service Commissioner. I look forward to leading the important work of the Civil Service Commission in upholding the impartiality of the Civil Service, and ensuring that we have a highly skilled and diverse Civil Service that can deliver effectively for the citizens of the United Kingdom".

In the role of First Civil Service Commissioner, Baroness Stuart will lead the Civil Service Commission.

Following the preferred candidate announcement on 9th December, Baroness Stuart stepped down as the Cabinet Office Lead Non-Executive Board Member.

In addition to the First Civil Service Commissioner, the Civil Service Commission is currently composed of ten Commissioners.

The Civil Service Commission is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Cabinet Office. The Civil Service Commission exists to provide assurance that civil servants are selected on merit on the basis of fair and open competition; and to help safeguard an impartial Civil Service.

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee held a hearing with Baroness Gisela Stuart on 3rd February 2022 where they asked a range of questions including about motivation to apply, how she would ensure impartiality and independence of the Commission and balancing this role with her other responsibilities.

The PACAC report was [published online on 7 February](#) and it endorsed the appointment of Baroness Stuart to the role.

[Invocation of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism to address Russia's invasion of Ukraine: UK statement](#)

Mr Chair, I wish to make some additional remarks in my national capacity to supplement the [joint statement delivered by Canada](#) on behalf of 45 participating States, including the UK.

The United Kingdom strongly supports the joint decision to invoke the Moscow Mechanism. We have grave concerns about the humanitarian impacts of Russia's invasion and the potential for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

We mentioned in our statement earlier today just some of the many heinous incidents that have already occurred since the start of Russia's unprovoked, premeditated and entirely unjustifiable invasion.

We spoke of the Russian government's disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas. The bombardment of Ukrainian villages, towns and cities. The use of heavy artillery in densely populated areas causing civilian casualties. A number of these attacks have also affected critical civilian infrastructure. The schools and kindergartens which have been damaged, and residential buildings which have been destroyed. The horrific loss of civilian life.

Mr Chair, The actions Russia has chosen to take in Ukraine is having severe and far-reaching consequences. It is important that the mission that is being invoked today establishes the facts and circumstances of what Russia is unleashing on Ukraine, and that information or documentation derived from that mission is delivered to other appropriate accountability mechanisms, as well as national, regional, or international courts or tribunals that have, or may in the future have, jurisdiction.

Mr Chair, Russia will be held to account for its actions.