

POLICY BRIEF

Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview Scrutiny Committee

22 February 2023



Government

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has announced the creation of [four new Government departments](#):

- The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
- The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
- The Department for Business and Trade
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Alongside this a reshuffle has also taken place:

- Lucy Frazer has been appointed Secretary of State in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Frazer was previously Minister for Housing and Planning
- Michelle Donelan has been appointed Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Donelan was previously Secretary of State for Digital, Culture Media and Sport
- Grant Shapps has been appointed Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Shapps was previously Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy,
- Kemi Badenoch has been appointed Secretary of State for Business and Trade, she will remain President of the Board of Trade and Minister for Women and Equalities, Badenoch was previously Secretary of State for International Trade
- Greg Hands has been appointed Minister without Portfolio in the Cabinet Office, Hands was previously Minister for Trade Policy

[How to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate](#)

DLUHC has published information on how to apply for a photo ID to vote (called a 'Voter Authority Certificate'). Individuals will be able to use the Voter Authority Certificate to vote in person in some UK elections and referendums, however, it cannot be used as proof of identification for any other reason. Individuals only need to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate if:

- they do not have accepted photo ID
- they no longer look like the photo on their ID
- the name on their photo ID is different to their name on the electoral register

DLUHC has also published forms to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate by post and for individuals who are living abroad, in the armed forces, a Crown Servant or a British Council employee.

Plymouth City Council has enacted its comprehensive communications plan with a social media campaign and has purchased some billboard and media advertising. As of 13 February 2023, 130 applications for a Voter Authority Certificate have been received and processed by the Council. The deadline for applications is 25 April 2023.

Transport

[£200 million to improve walking and cycling routes and boost local economies](#)

Active Travel England is inviting local authorities in England to apply for funding to make improvements to enable people to choose active travel, which can help them save money and stay healthy.

Plymouth City Council will be submitting a bid. The details of the submission are currently in development.

Local Government

[Government confirms £60 billion for local authorities to deliver vital services](#)

The final settlement makes available up to £59.7 billion for local government in England, including a new one-off funding guarantee, ensuring all councils will see at least a 3% increase in their Core Spending Power before any local choices to increase Council Tax rates. DLUHC has also published details of the final allocations of the [New Homes Bonus](#) for 2023 to 2024.

On 23 December, DLUHC wrote to councils in England to provide information about the administration of the £100 million Council Tax Support Fund which was announced on 19 December 2022 alongside the provisional local government finance settlement.

On 21 December, DLUHC wrote to councils to provide information on business rates in England.

Plymouth will receive a Revenue Support Grant of £11.655m. The increase includes rolled in grants totalling £0.497m. Excluding this the increase represents a CPI increase of 10.1% (£1.020m).

The final Settlement increased our Services Grant allocation by £93,000 to £2.433m.

Plymouth's allocation for New Homes Bonus payment in 2023/24 is £0.022m. This allocation settlement is for one year only and there is still no indication of what the replacement will be.

The Council Tax Support Fund is intended to reduce Council Tax bills for those customers in receipt of Council Tax Support. Plymouth is yet to confirm the details of its Council Tax support fund for 2023/24, particularly around the discretionary element of the scheme. Business rates grant income will increase by £10.123m in 2023/24 to a total of £75.253

Funding and Welfare

[Hundreds of thousands more workers to receive job support boost in spring](#)

The Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET) determines which group a Universal Credit claimant is placed in based on how much they earn. This in turn impacts the level of support they receive to find work. From the end of February, an increase to the threshold will mean more Universal Credit claimants will be moved from the 'Light Touch' group to the 'Intensive Work Search' group.

The impact of this change in relation to Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support claims is unknown at this point, however a Universal Credit claimant in an 'intensive work search' group will be more likely to have a change in their earned income as they will be expected to look for more work hours or a better paid job. A change that results in increased earned income may then result in a change to any Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support entitlement.

Community Safety

[Police grants in England and Wales: 2023 to 2024](#)

Following a period of consultation the Government has published the final allocations of grants to police and crime commissioners in England and Wales for 2023 to 2024.

Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner received: £218,072,709 for 2023/24 an increase of £701,712 on the previous year.

[Government acts to overhaul Prevent in the fight against radicalisation](#)

The Home Secretary has committed to delivering wholesale and rapid change across Prevent following a major independent review into the programme. The Home Secretary will deliver on all 34 recommendations made by William Shawcross, who led the Independent Review of Prevent, ensuring a robust and proportionate focus on radicalising influences rather than wider issues such as mental health.

Plymouth's Prevent Partnership undertook a localised risk assessment in January 2023 and is now developing a 3-year Plymouth Prevent Action Plan, with annualised reviews and alignment to the Counter Terrorism Local Profile.

The plan will be developed alongside the regional Home Office employed Regional Prevent Advisor and considered in line with the review findings and recommendations where possible. The Prevent Action Plan will be published later this year. The Council is currently reviewing the report and exploring what this will mean for Plymouth.

Housing and Homelessness

[Regulator of Social Housing publishes initial findings on damp and mould in social housing](#)

RSH wrote to larger registered providers of social housing and asked them to provide information on damp and mould in their homes. Initial findings show that:

- Most social landlords understand the extent of damp and mould in their tenants' homes and take action to tackle it, but could strengthen their approach.
- However, living with damp and mould can have a serious impact on tenants' health and wellbeing. It is essential that landlords identify and address these issues promptly and effectively.
- While the picture is incomplete, RSH's best estimate is that less than 0.2% of social homes have the most serious damp and mould problems, 1-2% have serious damp and mould problems, and a further 3-4% have notable damp and mould.

Typically, Plymouth City Council tackles the hazard of excess cold through working with landlords to improve heating systems and insulation - this assists in reducing the likelihood of mould growth. Plymouth has agreed (as an initial action) to have particular regard category 2 damp and mould hazards by paying additional attention to properties where the vulnerable group (under 14's), is present, or where there is evidence of respiratory ailments at the property. This action has already been implemented.

[Consultation on the new safety regime for occupied higher-risk buildings](#)

The Government has provided a response to consultation covering the proposed changes to building regulations under part 4 of the Building Safety Act 2022. The document sets out the findings from the accountable person and the key building information sections of the consultation on the new safety regime for occupied higher-risk buildings. This document also sets out the government's response. Further documents will be published in due course.

The Council is aware of the publication and relevant matters. Work continues locally with key partners through the High Rise Building Team and feeds into national pieces of work to ensure local views are considered when informing national practice.