

JANUARY NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the latest edition of the Police and Crime Commissioners' Treasurers Society newsletter, produced by the Technical Support Team.

The newsletter provides details of major announcements and consultations relevant to police finance, as well as a summary of recent news stories affecting police and local government.

Further news articles of relevance to members, Finance Update Reports presented at PACCTS meetings and member briefings detailing funding developments and announcements can be found on the [PACCTS website](#).

For further information please follow the links provided, or contact the Technical Support Team via the details at the bottom of each page.

Please click on the appropriate heading to be taken straight to the relevant part of the newsletter.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Settlement

The 2021-22 Provisional Settlement was announced on 17 December in a [written statement](#) by the Policing Minister, Kit Malthouse.

Full details of the Settlement can be found on the Home Office [gov.uk](#) pages. The Welsh Government also published information for the Welsh forces on their [website](#).

Headlines

Given the recent publication of the 2020 spending review (published much later in the year than previous SR's), some of the settlement was already known. The headlines below build upon with headlines from SR2020:

- Core Grant (including the PUP grant) increases from 7.8bn to 8.2bn, a difference of 413.6m an increase of 5.3%.
- £15 precept flexibility for all PCCs, or equivalent.
- 75% of council tax losses (due to Covid-19) to be compensated. More information to be released in the coming days.
- £87.4m (8%) decrease in reallocations from £1.1bn in 2020-21 to 1.03bn in 2021-22.
- Flat cash pension grant allocations compared to 2020-21.
- Capital grant remains cash flat for PCCs at £12.3m
- £52.3m capital funding for national priorities and infrastructure

Response

On 14 January the TST submitted a [response](#) to the Home Office on behalf of PACCTS. The response was generally favourable towards the settlement, thanking the HO for the recognition of the demand pressures that forces are facing. The response also welcomed the early announcement of the £15 precept in the CSR.

However, as has been mentioned in previous settlements, the response highlighted the disparity between forces when increasing council tax. For example, increasing the precept by £15 would give Northumbria a 10.8% increase over last year, followed by West Mercia with a 9.1% increase. In contrast, residents in Surrey would only see an increase of 5.4% and North Yorkshire of 5.5%. This was followed by an offer to work with the HO to make "*increases in income locally both more equal and equitable in terms of net budget requirement*"

The response also asked for greater transparency with regards to reallocations and further clarification for future pension funding. The full response can be found at the link below.

- 🔗 PACCTS Website: [Briefing](#)
- 🔗 PACCTS Website: [Response](#)

PUBLICATIONS

HMICFRS Inspection Activity Communication

Published: 18 January

On 18 January, Sir Thomas Winsor, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, wrote to colleagues with an update regarding HMICFRS Inspection activity.

Following the announcement of restrictions, caused by the pandemic, the HMICFRS board members considered the impact of these restrictions on inspected sectors. These included the reported higher transmission rates of the virus variants and the progress made with remote inspection activity over the previous months. The board concluded that in-person inspection activity should be suspended where possible, opting only for virtual methods until 22 February 2021.

There are exceptions to the rule and the board will continue to discuss inspection plans against the changing landscape to ensure they remain appropriate.

 APCC Website: [Letter](#)

Safer Streets

Published: January

According to a briefing circulated by the APCC, the Home Office have issued invitations to PCCs for the launch of a second round of the Safer Street Fund (SSF) on 28 January. The launch event will allow PCCs to pose questions on the fund.

The Provisional Settlement announced a £20m second round of the Safer Street Funds for 2021-22 across England and Wales. However, last year a consultation was conducted by the APCC to inform the process of the fund, an opportunity that is not present this time around. Despite this, officials have considered some feedback that was submitted during the early stages of the first round of the SSF.

The APCC have therefore created briefing outlining some of the draft proposals that were considered. PCCs that are interested in attending the event must contact saferstreets@homeoffice.gov.uk to register.

 APCC Website: [Briefing](#)

Impact of Local Government Finance Settlement 2021/22 and Local Government Covid Support Package for 2021/22 on PCCs

Published: 18 January

On 18 January a note was circulated around for PCCs to show the impact of the support packages for forces.

The note goes through the Local Tax Income Guarantee scheme, the Collection Fund Deficit phasing and the Local Council Tax Support Grant in some detail. The document also offers a myriad of questions and answers that may be of use to CFOs.

 PACCTS Website: [Overview](#)

Response to an inspection of the Home Office's use of sanctions and penalties

Published: 12 January

The Home Office issued a response to the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) report regarding the Home Office's use of sanctions and penalties. The inspection covered *"the completeness, consistency of application and the deterrent effect of sanctions and penalties applied by the BICS Directorates"*. Additionally, it also examined the reason for the introduction of each sanction and penalty and the frequency of their use.

The ICIBI made two recommendations. Firstly, The Home office should *"carry out a co-ordinated review of current BICS sanctions and penalties, starting with a clear statement of the specific objective(s) of each measure and how the Home Office will monitor and report its performance and outcomes"*. This was partially accepted by the HO with an acknowledgement that there is more that needs to be done.

The second recommendation from the ICIBI was to *"ensure that the quality and extent of record-keeping and data collection are sufficient to provide clear insights into the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes supporting each sanction and penalty currently in use and, where this is not the case, take whatever actions are necessary to fix this in the shortest possible timescale."* This was accepted by the HO, stating that they had already made progress across all areas of the report. They also recognised that there was more that needed to be done to improve record keeping and data quality.

The full response can be found at the link below.

 GOV Website: [Response](#)

Letter to Commissioners for Domestic Abuse and Victims about coronavirus

Published: 7 January

On 7 January, the Home Secretary responded to a [joint letter](#) (from 4 November) from the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, Dame Vera Baird QC, and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs regarding support for victims of domestic abuse during the coronavirus restrictions. The original letter highlighted issues regarding the lockdown and domestic abuse stating that *"[lockdown] has created a conducive context for [domestic abuse] to happen"*. The letter called for the government to "double down" on efforts to tackle domestic abuse and called for the continuation of vital support for services through to the end of the financial year.

In response the Home Secretary recognised the premise, that despite domestic abuse always existing regardless of restrictions, domestic abuse victims may be feeling particularly isolated during this time. The response went on to restate some of the funding the government has committed to domestic abuse, including £76 million that was allocated by the government for charities supporting victims of domestic abuse with over £25 million having been paid out. Additionally, the response stated that the HO *"is providing £945,000 to 31 domestic abuse organisations which have previously received Home Office COVID-19 funding"*.

Furthermore, the response made reference to a £125 million fund that will be allocated to local authorities for 2021-22 to fund the new duty to provide support to domestic abuse victims in safe accommodation. This is as well as £40 million for victims and support services.

 GOV Website: [Letter](#)

Three-year local tax collection fund deficit phasing

Published: 4 September

Updated: 18 January

On 2 July 2020, Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government gave a [statement](#) regarding local government funding. The statement also included an announcement that *"the repayment of collection fund deficits arising in 2020-21, will be spread over the next three years rather than the usual period of a year, giving councils breathing space in setting budgets for next year"*.

A [letter](#) was sent out to Finance Directors on 5 November confirming that the Regulations were laid before parliament and are due to come into force on 1 December. The regulations amend the rules governing the apportionment of collection fund surpluses and deficits for council tax and non-domestic rates set out in the [Local Authorities \(Funds\) \(England\) Regulations 1992](#) and the [Non-Domestic Rating \(Rates Retention\) Regulations 2013](#)

MHCLG have produced a [paper](#) outlining the new regulations and how to implement these changes.

The Government published their "COVID-19 funding for local government in 2021-22: consultative policy paper" on 17 December. Further details can be found in the consultation section and the publication above, outlining the impacts for PCC finances. However, Julie Strange of Dorset has summarised the Local Tax Income Guarantee Scheme in a concise manner and was circulated through the PACCTS network, included below.

Summary of the Scheme


"The Local Tax Income Guarantee Scheme was first announced at the Spending Review where an estimated £720m was set aside to compensate local authorities for 75% of irrecoverable losses in council tax and business rates in 2020-21. Shortly after the provisional settlement the technical detail was published setting out how the compensation would be calculated. The consultation on this closed on 14 January 2021 and we await the confirmation of the final scheme.

In respect of council tax, the scheme considers irrecoverable losses as council tax liability that was expected at budget setting for 2020/21 but did not materialise. Most typically this will be increases in the cost of Local Council Tax Support (not including the hardship relief payments) and growth built into the taxbase that didn't materialise. It does not provide compensation for council tax that was due but has not been collected, as this is deemed recoverable irrespective of how long it takes.

The scheme will vary from force to force but it will not automatically provide compensation for 75% of your collection fund deficit. For Dorset I have an 'exceptional balance' (deficit) for 2020/21 of £1.4m but am only expecting to get £81,000 compensation from the income guarantee scheme, having worked through the technical detail methodology.

Another complication is that the final amount due will be based on actual outturn data rather than estimates therefore we won't know the final compensation until the summer at the earliest. My billing authorities have been able to provide me with estimates of their outturn data which have enabled me to calculate my expected compensation, but the scheme is considerably less generous than was perhaps first envisaged."

 LGA Website: [MHCLG Paper](#)

 GOV Website: [Consultative Paper](#)

CONSULTATIONS

OPEN

Reforming the Mental Health Act

Published: 13 January

Closing: 21 April

In 2017, the government asked Professor Sir Simon Wessely to lead an Independent Review of the Mental Health act 1983 to examine issues surrounding the use of the act and to propose recommendations for its modernisation. The [final report](#) was published in December 2018 and concluded that the act does not always work as well as it should for patients, nor their families and carers. According to the report, *"the current legislation goes too far in removing people's autonomy and does not do enough to protect and support the ability of people to influence or make decisions about their own care."*

The government are therefore proposing changes to rebalance the act with 4 principles.

1. *"Choice and autonomy – ensuring service users' views and choices are respected"*
2. *Least restriction – ensuring the act's powers are used in the least restrictive way"*
3. *Therapeutic benefit – ensuring patients are supported to get better, so they can be discharged from the act"*
4. *The person as an individual – ensuring patients are viewed and treated as individuals"*

The government is also aiming to make the following practical changes:

1. *"People are detained for shorter periods of time, and only detained when absolutely necessary"*
2. *When someone is detained the care and treatment, they get is focused on making them well"*
3. *People have more choice and autonomy about their treatment"*
4. *Everyone is treated equally and fairly, and disparities experienced by people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are tackled"*
5. *People with a learning disability and autistic people are treated better in law and reduce the reliance on specialist inpatient services for this group of people"*
6. *The government wants to consult on these principles asking a range of questions regarding mental health policy. The consultation is extensive and covers many areas"*

The [White Paper](#) is split into three main parts: Legislative reforms, reforming policy and the government's response to the independent review.

 GOV Website: [Consultation Papers](#)

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Call for Evidence

Published: 10 December

Closing: 19 February

On 10 December, the government released a consultation seeking views to help inform the development of the governments "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy". Primarily, the consultation is concerned with hearing views of those who feel that they have been underrepresented in previous strategies and feel that their circumstances are not currently supported by existing services.

www.paccts.org.uk
technicalsupportteam@somerset.gov.uk

The full consultation can be found on the government website. Consultation submissions should be sent to VAWGStrategy2021@homeoffice.gov.uk by 11:45pm on 19 February. Responses can be also be submitted [online](#).

 GOV Website: [Consultation](#)

CLOSED

COVID-19 funding for local government in 2021-22: consultative policy paper

Published: 17 December

Closed: 14 January

Alongside the Local Government provisional settlement, MHCLG published what is referred to as a "COVID-19 funding for local government in 2021-22: [consultative policy paper](#)" on some elements of the settlement, namely:

- The £1.55bn of un-ringfenced grant to manage the immediate and long-term impacts
- £670m to enable councils to continue reducing council tax bills for those least able to pay
- An extension of the Sales, Fees and Charges scheme to June 2021
- Guarantee scheme for 75% of 2020-21 irrecoverable local tax losses

Something that may have been of interest for members was the "£670m Local Council Tax Support" and the "Local Tax Income Guarantee Scheme for 2020-21."

£670m Local Council Tax Support

According to the consultation, this funding has been badged as being compensation for a depleted tax base and also to keep council tax bills low for those who have been hardest hit by the pandemic.

The ministry proposed to distribute the funding on the basis of each billing authority's share of the England level working-age local council tax support caseload, adjusted to reflect the average bill per dwelling in the area. Indicative allocations and methodology can be found [here](#).

The caseload data will be taken from Q1 and Q2 of 2020-21 – waiting to use all quarters of data would delay allocations and payments.

Allocations between billing and precepting authorities will be apportioned based on their share of the council tax requirement in the area for 2020-21. If this method is used then the MHCLG could make lump sum, upfront payments, as early as April 2021.

Local Tax Income Guarantee Scheme for 2020-21

Often referred to as the "75p" scheme, the MHCLG propose measuring the eligible deficit by comparing council tax requirement and an adjusted Net Collectable Debit (or NNDR1 and NNDR3 for business rates).

 GOV Website: [Consultation](#)

NEWS ARTICLES

ECONOMY AND PUBLIC FINANCE

Council chiefs call for mental health services funding

Local authority leaders have urged the Government to ensure that councils' mental health services receive the funding they require to meet 'unmet demand' in response to a landmark reform of mental health laws.

The Government published the long-anticipated Reforming the Mental Health Act white paper, which builds on the recommendations made in 2018 by Sir Simon Wessely's Independent Review of the Mental Health Act.

The white paper stressed the importance of empowering individuals to have more control over their mental health treatment. It also promises to deliver parity between mental and physical health services.

More information can be found in the consultations section of the newsletter.


 Please access the news article [here](#)

'Dismay' over continuing lack of detail on UKSPF

Senior councillors have expressed growing alarm that almost a fortnight after UK completed its exit from the EU they are still in the dark on vital details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund intended to replace EU funding for the regions.

A meeting of the Local Government Association's people and places board also heard that the government had yet to set up a promised taskforce bringing central and local government to co-design the fund while there are concerns that rather than devolving more powers to councils, the fund could end up drawing existing responsibilities away from them as it covers a wider remit than current EU funds.

A paper prepared for the meeting warned of an "urgency" to the issue as current EU funding winds down, with all funding programmes completed by the end of 2023.

 Please access the news article [here](#)

Extra cash made available for self-isolation support

An extra £20.4m is to be provided by the government to extend the current self-isolation support grants scheme to the end of this financial year after many councils reported running out of the discretionary funding provided so far.

Just over half of the funding is to go towards extending the national £500 scheme to support those on in-work benefits required to self-isolate while councils will also be handed an additional £10m of discretionary funding. This is paid to those on low incomes required to self-isolate by NHS Test & Trace who could suffer financial hardship as a result of not being able to work but who do not meet the criteria for the separate £500 payment.

However, there are still understood to be concerns in the sector that the £500 national scheme is not capturing all those in need as the eligibility criteria too tight, and this is putting pressure on discretionary budgets.

🔗 Please access the news article [here](#)

Tax reforms 'would raise more than wealth tax'

In a presentation to the Local Government Association's annual finance conference, David Phillips, associate director at the IFS, warned that a wealth related levy could harm the UK's economic recovery from the pandemic.

He said that trying to capture tax on people who have saved during the pandemic could have a dampening effect on the economy, as the recovery will be reliant on the public spending money.

Phillips said: "Rather than trying to introduce a new wealth tax for a long-term boost to government revenues, it actually makes sense to reform some of the existing taxes, including income tax, capital gains tax, council tax, inheritance tax, so they are actually more efficient, fairer, and raise more for the long-term."

🔗 Please access the news article [here](#)

OECD says public will not accept austerity post-Covid-19

Unprecedented stimulus measures taken by governments to fight the pandemic have changed the public perception of spending and debt, meaning sharp tax hikes or spending cuts would risk popular backlash, the OECD's chief economist has said.

Laurence Boone told the Financial Times that public officials will struggle to argue for austerity during the recovery from Covid-19 and may not be in a position to pay for certain measures – such as those to combat climate change.

"People are going to ask where all this money has come from," she said, referring to the programmes rolled out by governments to address the coronavirus pandemic.

She said countries should continue to use higher spending and low taxes to help their economies throughout the recovery period, taking a lesson from the last global financial crisis.

🔗 Please access the news article [here](#)

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Detective shortage leads forces to target January blues for recruits

Forces across the country have used the traditional January window when people consider career changes to launch recruitment drives for detective roles.

Two approaches are being made; tempting current officers to move forces or going to the wider public for direct entry training through fast-track programmes.

Cheshire Constabulary is among those to opt for the fast track approach, for the first time, enabling new recruits to opt for the role of trainee detective constable. The force is opening the opportunity for the Uplift trainees that are part of the national recruitment programme.

 Please access the news article [here](#)

Hampshire police boss admits all-white senior team is 'not OK'

The chief constable of the police force where five policemen were sacked for "abhorrent" racist language has said "it is not OK" that her senior officers are all white.

Olivia Pinkney of Hampshire police said she was very aware that her senior leadership team "look the way they do" and admitted that she was concerned by the lack of diversity. The highest-ranking black officer in the county is a chief inspector.

Ms Pinkney criticised her own force after detectives in a serious organised crime unit were sacked for racist and sexist language.

 Please access the news article [here](#)

Three quarters of police officers say they are not paid enough to deal with coronavirus hazards

Almost eight out of 10 police officers in Gloucestershire feel they are not paid enough to deal with all the added complications the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to their jobs.

A survey carried out by the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) found that 79 per cent of Gloucestershire Police officers felt they did not receive a fair wage to deal with the hazards they have faced this year.

It comes as the pandemic has introduced new responsibilities to policing, such as enforcing lockdown rules, while coping with the added risk officers face of contracting the virus.

 Please access the news article [here](#)

POLICE FINANCES

Khan proposes 9.5% rise in GLA precept

Proposals from London mayor Sadiq Khan would see annual bills rise by more than £31 on average in 2021-22, with £15 to help fund the Metropolitan Police and £15 for Transport of London subsidies for children and over 60s.

The remaining £1.59 per-household would go towards helping the fire service respond to changes recommended by the Grenfell Tower inquiry.

However, in order to implement the proposed increases for TfL, the GLA requires approval from the government to amend its referendum limits as the increase would be greater than its current 2% limit before a referendum was required.

 Please access the news article [here](#)

Commissioner launches Council Tax Precept Consultation

Police and Crime Commissioner, Peter McCall is seeking the views of the people of Cumbria to help to maintain and improve policing services which includes an increase in the policing part of the council tax.

The police council tax precept is an essential part of the council tax that contributes alongside a central government grant to the total funding available to provide policing, community safety and victims' services.

Police and Crime Commissioner, Peter McCall said: "Over the last three years working with the Chief Constable and with your support as council tax payers, we have been able to improve the policing service here in Cumbria and make a real difference in tackling crime in our communities.

"Funding for policing does not all come from government grant alone and it is not enough to allow us to recruit further officers, deploy dedicated officers into the community where you want to see them, and pay for our existing service, without an increase in council tax. The government has recognised this and is allowing Police and Crime Commissioners to increase the council tax precept by up to £15 per year for a Band D property."

 Please access the news article [here](#)

Police funding set to rise as Home Office unveils provisional settlement

The Home Office has announced a police funding package that could see overall budgets rise by more than £600 million compared to last year.

A total of £15.8 billion is being made available for policing for 2021/22. The package includes more than £400 million to recruit 20,000 extra officers by 2023, building on the success of the first year of the uplift which has already delivered almost 6,000 additional police officers.

The funding settlement also aims to provide additional resources to tackle serious violence and increase the number of specialist officers tackling terrorism and serious organised crime, including child sexual abuse and drug trafficking.

 Please access the news article [here](#)

POLICE DEMAND

The mental health effects of Covid will last for a decade

In the normal course of his work as a GP Gavin Francis would expect to spend about a third of his time dealing with the mental ill health of his patients. The pandemic has changed that. "Consultations about mental health vary from week to week, but are commonly at double what they were before the pandemic," he says.

From his position at the grass roots of the response to Covid-19 Francis has witnessed the spread of the virus at a community level. Some days every call he has taken was about loneliness, self-harm and the contagion of mental health problems.

In a memoir of the past year he describes panic and anxiety as "the virus's dark refrains, a second pandemic leaching into everyone's lives". When I ask how long he expects this to last he is unequivocal. "For years."

 Please access the news article [here](#).

Mental Health Act reforms aim to tackle high rate of black people sectioned

Reforms to the Mental Health Act will help tackle the disproportionate number of black people sectioned, the government has announced.

Black people are more than four times more likely to be detained under the act and more than 10 times more likely to be subject to a community treatment order.

The package of reforms includes piloting culturally appropriate advocates so patients from all minority ethnic backgrounds can be better supported to voice their individual needs and allow sectioned people to nominate family members to represent their best interests if they are unable to do so themselves.

 Please access the news article [here](#).

Online child sexual abuse material soars to record levels

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) said it processed a record number of reports of online child sexual abuse in 2020.

The IWF, the UK charity responsible for finding and removing images and videos of child sexual abuse from the internet, has also seen a dramatic 77 per cent increase in the amount of 'self-generated' abuse material as more children, and more criminals, spend longer online in 2020.

Susie Hargreaves OBE, chief executive of the IWF, warned that children were at greater risk of being approached or groomed by strangers online than ever before.

The coronavirus pandemic forced many people to work and learn from home in 2020, and the IWF saw a surge in public reports to its hotline.

 Please access the news article [here](#).

POLICE GENERAL

'High bar' for postponing local elections in England, MPs told

There should be a "high bar" for postponing local elections in England this year, a minister has told MPs. Cabinet Office minister Chloe Smith said the position would be kept "under review".

She said work was under way to ensure people could cast their ballots in a "COVID-secure" way - but Labour has raised concerns a "lack of preparation" could force people to "choose between their health and their right to vote".

 Please access the news article [here](#)

Police under fire for outdoor coronavirus clampdown

Police were accused of trying to stop people enjoying themselves during lockdown as members of the public said it was "incredibly unclear" what they were allowed to do outside.

Essex police caused anger after issuing a Facebook post saying they had “cause to speak with” a number of men, all aged over 30, after they were spotted hunting the animated characters on the mobile app Pokemon Go.

The social media post came attached with guidance from Essex council about abiding by lockdown rules.

 Please access the news article [here](#).

Priti Patel wants police to explain unpopular decisions

The home secretary is preparing to force police chiefs and police and crime commissioners to do more to explain controversial operational decisions.

This month Priti Patel will publish the recommendations of a review into PCCs, which were introduced by David Cameron in 2012 to make the police more accountable.

The recommendations include drawing “brighter” lines on what constitutes operational independence and moving to first past the post for PCC elections after the next polls in May.

 Please access the news article [here](#).

Police chief pledges major crackdown on burglaries - 'we ignore them at our peril'

Northants Chief Constable Nick Adderly said his force would “hit hard” sex offenders, those who peddle drugs, commit burglaries and engage in anti-social behaviour. His pledge comes after the public were ignored for too long. Former naval officer Mr Adderley said forces, including his own, had not paid enough attention to victims of crime and the people they served...

 Please access the news article [here](#).

New Nottinghamshire police team armed with guns to prevent serious crime

For the first time outside of the armed response unit, specially trained officers will be armed with weapons as part of the new roads crime policing team to target serious criminal activity across Nottinghamshire.

Armed police will be used in the force’s operational support department to predominantly to prevent criminals bringing weapons and drugs into the county and keep the area safe.

Officers will work alongside Operation Reacher teams who work in each of the county’s neighbourhoods to support local anti-crime initiatives.

 Please access the news article [here](#).

JUSTICE

MoJ fails to hit financial management targets

The Ministry of Justice failed to meet either of its financial management targets outlined in the 2015 Spending Review, according to the National Audit Office.

In its departmental overview of the ministry, the NAO said that two five-year targets of savings had not been met by the end of 2019-20.

In 2015, the MoJ was asked by the Treasury to produce overall savings of 15% by the end of last financial year, but spending rose by £1.3bn in 2019-20 compared with 2015-16, the NAO said.

The increase in spending was in part down to unanticipated increases in demand for services, the review said.

 Please access the news article [here](#).

TECHNOLOGY

Criminals publish stolen council data online

Data stolen from Hackney LBC in a cyber-attack has been published online by the criminals responsible. The 'serious cyber-attack' last year affected the council's IT systems and services.

Experts supporting the council said the data was not visible through search engines or on any widely available public forum.

 Please access the news article [here](#).

Researchers use NCA data to model predatory offending during pandemic

Researchers at the University of Birmingham are using data on sex offenders' crime patterns compiled by the National Crime Agency (NCA) to assess how their behaviour has changed in response to the Covid-19 outbreak.

The project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), as part of UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to COVID-19 will enable the team to examine extensive data on sex offenders collated by the Serious Crime Analysis Section (SCAS) of the National Crime Agency.

 Please access the news article [here](#).

PRISONS

Investing in yet more prison places is not the way to cut crime

With the dismaying announcement that the government plans to fund 18,000 more prison places by 2026, we are forced to ask, once again, why crime prevention fails to get the same emphasis as punishment.

The chancellor announced more than £4bn in capital funding – spread over four years – largely dedicated to funding these new prison places in England and Wales. This makes it clear that the government is clearly pressing ahead with a much more authoritarian stance on crime and punishment.

 Please access the news article [here](#)

FIRE

Firefighters' Covid response 'prevented and delayed' by health and safety row, report finds

Firefighters were prevented from carrying out roles supporting the response to coronavirus because their "hands were tied" by union lobbying over safety protections, a report has found.

HM Inspectorate of Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) said "restrictive" working arrangements agreed between employers and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had "prevented or delayed" some humanitarian deployments.

An inspection of how England's 45 fire services responded to the pandemic accused the FBU of urging firefighters not to volunteer to support the NHS Test and Trace system or the Covid-19 vaccination programme. The FBU denied the allegations.

 Please access the news article [here](#).

Cladding flat owners told not to talk to press

Flat owners applying to a fund to help pay to remove flammable building cladding will be told not to talk to the press without government approval.

A draft agreement says that even where there is "overwhelming public interest" in speaking to journalists, the government must be told first.

The government said the wording was "standard".

 Please access the news article [here](#).