

Press release: Welsh Secretary to mark centenary of Battle of Passchendaele

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns will today (31 July) travel to Belgium to join thousands of descendants of First World War soldiers in services of remembrance for those who fought and died in the Battle of Passchendaele.

The battle of Passchendaele was fought near Ypres between 31 July and 10 November 1917, in battlefields that turned to liquid mud. It is remembered as one of the bloodiest of the First World War and one that took the lives of 2,992 soldiers from The 38th (Welsh) division.

Welsh poet Hedd Wynn, who was killed on the first day of Passchendaele, will also be honoured at the services.

The Secretary of State for Wales will honour the memories of the fallen Welsh soldiers at the UK Government and Welsh Government's centenary commemorations.

Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns said:

The centenary commemorations of Passchendaele offer a unique opportunity to bring us together as a nation – to honour the lives and bravery of all those who served in the war – both in the military and on the home front.

I am privileged to be here to pay my own personal respects to the Welsh soldiers who played a pivotal role in the bloodiest of battlefields.

Whether we reflect on the horrors of war, remember family members who served, or visit a memorial, the centenary of the First World War provides an opportunity to better understand our past – and how it still shapes us today.

With no living veterans of the First World War, their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren stand at the heart of the UK Government's official centenary commemorations which will be held amongst the 12,000 gravestones and the Memorial Wall to the Missing at the Tyne Cot Cemetery.

Mr Cairns will then travel to the Wales commemorations at the Welsh National Memorial in Flanders where he will lay a wreath at the feet of the red bronze dragon on behalf of the UK Government. He will later join the First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones on a tour of Artillery Wood Cemetery where Hedd Wyn was laid to rest.

Ahead of his visit to Belgium, the Welsh Secretary took the opportunity to

meet with veterans at the Cardiff branch of the Royal British Legion to underline the gratitude and respect the people of Wales have for the sacrifices they made.

Mr Cairns added:

We are privileged to have a long and proud military history in Wales and it is a huge honour today to meet with Welsh veterans that have lived through a range of conflicts over the years.

The work that the British Legion does to improve the lives of the armed forces community cannot be underestimated. It plays such a critical role from awarding grants, offering emotional support and comradeship and ensuring the nation comes together to remember. These veterans truly are an inspiration. They gave so much and for that we owe them a great deal.

Notes to editors

- The Centenary of Passchendaele, the Third Battle of Ypres is a key part of the UK Government's four year programme to commemorate the First World War.
- The Welsh Memorial is located at Boezingestraat 158, 8920 Langemark-Poelkapelle, Belgium.
- During the action of the Third Battle of Ypres three Welshmen won the Victoria Cross, Sergeant Ivor Rees 11th South Wales Borderers, Corporal James Llewellyn Davies 13th Royal Welsh Fusiliers and Sergeant Robert Bye 1st Welsh Guards.

Press release: Universal broadband to reach all parts of the UK

Homes and businesses from all parts of the UK are set to benefit from universal high speed broadband, the UK Government announced today.

BT has put forward an offer to voluntarily provide this service across the country, which would largely be delivered by Openreach. The offer has been received after the government committed to introduce a Universal Service Obligation (USO) through regulation to give every home and business in the UK

the right to request a high speed connection of at least 10 Megabits per second (Mbps). That's the speed that will meet the typical needs of a family for them to be able to stream films, carry out video conferencing and browse the web at the same time.

The BT proposal would mean many premises will receive substantially more than 10Mbps – homes and businesses are also expected receive connections more quickly than could be delivered under a regulatory approach. The Government will now consider this offer alongside a consultation on the regulatory USO – which is being launched today.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

The UK Government is committed to ensuring the UK is leading the way in broadband provision. Successful broadband partnerships are creating a lasting legacy in Wales, which will play a key role in the future prosperity of our communities. The Government will now consider the proposals carefully to ensure the final decision provides the best outcomes for the people of Wales.

Culture Secretary Karen Bradley said:

The government is taking action to ensure that people everywhere in the UK can get a decent broadband connection as soon as possible. We warmly welcome BT's offer and now will look at whether this or a regulatory approach works better for homes and businesses.

Whichever of the two approaches we go with in the end, the driving force behind our decision making will be making sure we get the best deal for consumers.

The communications regulator, Ofcom, has advised that 10Mbps, with quality requirements to limit delays and support uploading content as well as downloading it, meeting the needs of a typical household. It will also provide improved connectivity for many small businesses. A regulatory USO would provide a safety net, meaning that fast and reliable broadband was available to everyone, regardless of where they lived. Our consultation opening today will outline detailed proposals for how this new right to request a connection would work in practice.

This will help Government take a decision on the best way to get better broadband in hard to reach areas. No decision has been taken, and the Government will carefully weigh the merits of the two approaches. Unlike under a regulatory USO, the proposal from BT is to proactively build the necessary network infrastructure to connect the majority of households and businesses rather than wait for this to be done on request.

It is also proposed that BT would fund this investment and recover its costs through the charges for products providing access to its local access

networks. The approach to recovering these costs will be considered in Ofcom's current wholesale local access review.

BT Chief Executive Gavin Patterson said:

We are pleased to make a voluntary offer to deliver the Government's goal for universal broadband access at minimum speeds of 10Mbps.

This would involve an estimated investment of £450m – £600m depending on the final technology solution.

This investment will reinforce the UK's status as the leading digital economy in the G20. We already expect 95% of homes and businesses to have access to superfast broadband speeds of 24Mbps or faster by the end of 2017. Our latest initiative aims to ensure that all UK premises can get faster broadband, even in the hardest to reach parts of the UK.

The Government will now work with BT over the coming months to develop the proposal – which, if it is accepted, will be legally-binding. The Government will make a decision following its consultation on the regulatory USO.

Notes to editors:

1. BT proposes to use a range of technologies to deliver this, including fibre to the cabinet and fibre to the home.
 2. It proposes to use fixed broadband technologies to take the UK's 10Mbps fixed coverage to 99 per cent. It expects to complete the build of this fixed network by either December 2021 or December 2022 depending on the mix of technologies used, some of which are subject to trial and industry consultation.
 3. However, BT plans to launch the fixed wireless service before then so that the UK will have 10Mbps coverage to around 99% by the end of 2020. Fixed wireless will be made available at an affordable price for hard to reach premises.
 4. All of these technologies will come with quality standards including a minimum 1Mbps upload speeds, and requirements to minimise delays from contention and latency.
 5. The number of premises that will only have satellite as an option is expected to be 0.3% by the end of 2022.
 6. Today, over 93 per cent of UK homes and businesses can already get superfast broadband (24 Mbps+), and as a direct result of the Government's Superfast Broadband Programme, this will increase to 95 per cent by the end of this year.
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Press release: Attorney General helps record number of victims and families get justice

New statistics released today show the Attorney General's Office has helped more victims and their families get justice than ever before, after 141 criminals had their sentences increased under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme in 2016.

The ULS scheme allows victims of crime, prosecutors and members of the public to ask for certain sentences to be reviewed. The Attorney or Solicitor General then asks the Court of Appeal to review the sentence to have it increased if they believe the Court made an error in sentencing.

32 criminals, including an arsonist, someone carrying a firearm and 2 men found guilty of child neglect, all had their community sentence quashed and replaced with an immediate custodial sentence. Of these, 17 sex offenders who originally escaped prison are now serving time behind bars.

1 rapist and 1 attempted murderer had their determinate sentence replaced with a life sentence and now can only be released with permission from the Parole Board.

The Attorney General Jeremy Wright QC MP said:

"The Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme allows victims of crime, their families and the public to challenge sentences that they believe are too low, and last year we saw a record number of sentences increased.

"A sentencing exercise is not an exact science and in the vast majority of cases, judges get it right. The scheme is available to ensure that the Solicitor General and I can independently review those cases where there may have been an error in the sentencing decision."

From 8 August, the scheme will cover an additional 19 terror-related offences including supporting extremist organisations, encouraging acts of terror or failing to disclose information about a terrorist attack. This extension is a first step to extending the scheme even further.

In 2016, 837 referrals were received by the Attorney General's Office, a 17% increase from the previous year. The Attorney and Solicitor General referred 190 cases to the Court of Appeal that they thought needed looking at again, compared to 135 in 2015.

Of the 141 offenders who had their sentences increased, these related to crimes in the following categories:

Grievous Bodily Harm with intent	19
Robbery	16
Firearms	11
Drugs	8
Burglary	7
Kidnapping	6
Manslaughter	6
False Imprisonment	6
Perverting the Course of Justice	4
Blackmail	3
Child Neglect / Cruelty	3
Arson	2
Death By Dangerous Driving	2
Conspiracy to cause explosions	2
Causing or allowing the death of a vulnerable adult	2
Attempted Murder	1
Murder	1
Threats to kill	1

141 cases resulting in sentence increases is a small proportion of the 80,000 Crown Court cases heard each year, but the ULS scheme is there to allow adjustment of those sentences where an increase is warranted.

The scheme was brought about after the public outcry that happened after the 1986 Ealing Vicarage rape case where 21 year old Jill Saward was brutally raped by a gang of robbers at her father's vicarage.

Press release: Universal broadband to reach every part of the UK

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[News story: Foreign Secretary condemns missile test by North Korea](#)

The Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, said:

The UK strongly condemns North Korea's second test of an intercontinental ballistic missile and calls on the regime to immediately stop all activity that breaches UN Security Council resolutions.

The UK will stand alongside our allies and partners as we confront the growing threat North Korea poses to regional and international security. Once again North Korea shows no regard for its international obligations.

We urge the DPRK regime to put the well-being of its own people ahead of the illegal pursuit of nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.