

News story: War Pension Scheme payments increases from April 2017

Updated: Correct timescale for receiving pension letter included.

The new rates of pensions and allowances payable under the War Pension Scheme from 10 April 2017 have now been announced and are [available here](#).

The rates have been increased by 1%, in line with the September 2016 Consumer Prices Index figure.

Those currently getting a War Pension or War Widows(er)'s Pension will receive a letter confirming their new pension details between 13 March 2017 and 15 July 17.

Please note if you are a local authority or council office, please be aware of the timescales above, the letter confirms a breakdown of the pension and the new rates. This is a system generated letter.

For more information on the War Pension Scheme and other compensation payable for injuries, illnesses or disablement related to service, please see www.gov.uk/claim-for-injury-received-while-serving.

News story: MOD builds links with SMEs in North East

The North East makes a key contribution to the UK's defence. A&P Tyneside delivered blocks used in the innovative modular construction of the Royal Navy's new Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers, which are being constructed in Rosyth; as well as manufacturing key parts for the Astute nuclear submarine programme in their shipyard at Hebburn, sustaining jobs and bringing work worth some £7 million to the region.

Today's event took place at Pearson Engineering's cutting-edge Armstrong Works. Alongside eight other defence companies based in the north and north east, Pearson Engineering is part of the extensive UK supply chain for the Ajax Armoured Fighting Vehicle programme, the biggest order of armour for the British Army in a generation. Ajax has substantially better firepower, mobility and protection than any of its peers worldwide. The Army will take delivery of the first production vehicles in 2017.

Partnerships between Defence and North East industry over the last year include:

- BAE Systems Global Combat Systems' construction and support of the Royal Engineers' Terrier armoured combat engineer vehicle.
- Cook Defence Systems Ltd's construction of armoured vehicle tracks and support.
- UK Docks Marine Services North Ltd's support for the UK's maritime capability across the world.

As the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is aiming to increase the share of its contracts with SMEs from 19% to 25%, the Minister led discussions with 12 companies in the Northern Defence Industries trade group (NDI) on how Defence and businesses of all sizes can work together. In particular, they looked at how to grow exports, drive innovation and support the UK supply chain.

Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin said:

The North East makes an important contribution to our national security and economy. From the Ajax armoured vehicle to our new carriers, the companies I've met are delivering the equipment and services our Armed Forces need to keep Britain safe.

Here in Newcastle today, we looked at how the businesses based here can help make Britain one of the most innovative, most prosperous countries globally, for an economy that works for everyone.

The Minister's SME roundtable was hosted at Pearson Engineering's cutting-edge Armstrong Works in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. The Works, which reopened in 2015 following a £20 million refurbishment. It is a great example of the invaluable role that northern Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are playing in the Defence supply chain.

Managing Director of Pearson Engineering and Chairman of NDI, Craig Priday said:

It has been a pleasure to welcome the Minister for Defence Procurement to Pearson Engineering today, particularly at a time when the MOD is in the process of renewing its industrial policy.

NDI's member companies make an enormous contribution to the capabilities of our armed forces and it is reassuring that the Department is taking the time to consider the views of the UK defence community right across the supply chain as it formulates its future intentions in this regard.

Andy Collier, NDI Director, said that:

This has been a great opportunity for MOD to engage further with the UK supply chain.

This sort of engagement is crucial to ensure that MOD can establish the means through which we, as an industry, can work ever more closely with the Department in the best interests of the UK economy.

Press release: Suez to pay £505,000 for pollution at Cornwall's largest landfill

The waste company, Suez Recycling and Recovery UK Limited, has been ordered to pay more than £500,000 in fines and costs for a series of offences at Connion Bridge landfill site near Liskeard.

In 2012 the Environment Agency became increasingly concerned at Suez's management of leachate (contaminated water) at the site. Heavy rain caused leachate levels to rise rapidly beyond limits specified by the site's environmental permit.

In January 2013, following reports from members of the public, Environment Agency officers visited the site and found two nearby watercourses, the Widowpath and Connion Streams, smothered in sewage fungus for a distance of approximately 4km. Sewage fungus is a sign of organic pollution.

Local residents started complaining of unpleasant odours caused by inadequately controlled emissions of landfill gas at Connion Bridge. It was apparent the site operator was struggling to regain control of the landfill. Investigations by the Environment Agency found that there had been spillages of leachate onto uncontained areas of the site. Surface water had been contaminated by leachate, and leachate had compromised water quality in a groundwater drainage culvert beneath the site.

Suez resorted to unauthorised methods of disposal in an attempt to remove large volumes of contaminated surface water from the site, pumping it onto adjacent fields.



Contaminated surface water was pumped onto nearby fields

The Environment Agency started monitoring the impact of the leachate spillages on the Widowpath and Connong Bridge Streams and concluded it was the worst outbreak of sewage fungus in the area for 20 years.

Investigators also became increasingly aware of the impact of odour pollution from the landfill site on the surrounding community. As the odour problem worsened, evidence was collected from people's homes.

Simon Harry, of the Environment Agency, said:

People living close to Connong Bridge landfill will not have forgotten the appalling odours that emanated from this site in 2013. The negligent failings of the landfill operator resulted in pollution both by odour and to local watercourses. The judge in this case acknowledged, in particular, the distress caused to the local community by the odour.



Officers found that uncapped areas of the landfill contributed to the release of foul odour

Mr Harry paid tribute to local residents for their 'forbearance' and said:

We take pollution incidents very seriously and this case should send a strong message to all industrial operators of the potential consequences of failing to take adequate steps to protect the environment.

At a sentencing hearing at Truro Crown Court on Friday, 3 February 2017, Suez Recycling and Recovery UK Limited was fined £180,000 and ordered to pay £325,000 costs after pleading guilty to 6 offences under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 including failure to comply with leachate level limits specified by an environmental permit, allowing leachate to overflow from a leachate extraction point, unauthorised emissions of contaminated water, failure to comply with water quality emission limits, failing to notify the Environment Agency and causing odour pollution.

The sentencing hearing marked the end of a lengthy and complex investigation lasting 4 years. The costs awarded by the court reflected the work that went into investigating and prosecuting this complicated technical case.

Note

At the time of the offences, the defendant was known as SITA UK Limited. The company now trades as Suez Recycling and Recovery UK Limited.

China to improve drug policy for better medical services

The Chinese government has decided to improve policy on the production, distribution and use of drugs.

A document released by the General Office of the State Council proposed systemic reform to improve the quality and therapeutic effect of drugs, and to ensure that supplies are timely and prices reasonable.

Improving the quality and therapeutic effect of drugs is the key task, according to the document, which called for stringent rules for the review and approval for new drugs.

The document said the review and approval of drugs in clinical demand should be streamlined, in addition to supporting generic drugs that had passed conformity assessments, as well as cracking down on offences in the producing and selling of counterfeit and low quality drugs.

The document suggested creating and expediting a network led by major and key enterprises, but supported by small and medium-sized enterprises.

In order to improve drug price transparency, a mechanism to ensure factory prices' traceability was proposed.

Public hospitals should prioritize essential medicines, which must be available to the public at all times, in adequate amounts and at affordable prices.

It said the markup on drugs should be contained, and medical insurance's role should be strengthened, with payment methods improved.

China plans to provide comprehensive medical care across the country through medical reform that will benefit both urban and rural residents.

The top legislature has been working with authorities on a law to help pharmacists properly prepare and allocate medicine, according to the country's health authorities.

In December, the State Council approved two documents, one on improving health care and medical service and another on medical reform, for the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020).

More improvements will be made to the medicine supply system, and the supply of low-price medicine, children's medicine, as well as urgent medicine will be ensured.

News story: Britain and Italy stand together to tackle security threats

In meetings with his counterpart Roberta Pinotti, Sir Michael Fallon said Britain was a key ally of Italy and would not be stepping back from European defence and security commitments following the Brexit vote.

They reviewed their partnership within the NATO alliance in particular. After the UK has spearheaded NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force this year, Italy will take on the responsibility in 2018.

The UK and Italy are also working closely to tackle illegal mass migration. The Defence Secretary confirmed the UK is considering providing more training to Libya's Coastguard as part of support to Operation Sophia, which focuses on tackling human smugglers and arms traffickers who endanger the lives of migrants seeking travel to Europe.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

In leading NATO's high readiness force and tackling illegal migration in the Mediterranean, Britain stands together with Italy to tackle threats to our security.

The Royal Navy has played a key role in training the Libyan Coastguard and we're now looking at extending this training alongside Italy and other European partners.

A small team of specialist Royal Navy personnel successfully trained members of the Coastguard before Christmas in the southern Mediterranean. They were taught search and rescue techniques and how to sail alongside, board and inspect vessels.

The purpose of the training, led by the Italians, is to increase Libya's ability to secure its own borders by increasing their Coastguard's ability to disrupt people smuggling and illegal arms trafficking in and around Libya.

Elsewhere, the UK has also supported NATO counter migration efforts in the Aegean Sea, and HMS Mersey recently returned home following six months supporting this task, contributing to nearly twelve months of Royal Navy presence in the Aegean. She will now undertake maritime security operations around the UK, maintaining the integrity of home waters.

Sir Michael added:

NATO is the cornerstone of our Defence, and the UK remains

committed to European security, working with Italy and our European friends to tackle threats.



Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon today met with his Italian counterpart Roberta Pinotti. Picture: Ministero della Difesa Italiana – Ufficio Pubblica Informazione.

The Defence Secretary and Defence Minister Pinotti also discussed the development of the UK – Italian Defence industrial relationship, and potential trade options in the future. Sir Michael extended an invitation to host his Italian counterpart in the UK.

Sir Michael also recognised Italy's contribution to peace operations around the world and domestically, including support to disaster relief operations after earthquakes and heavy snowfall.

- HMS Echo continues to spearhead the UK's role in Operation Sophia, and Royal Navy ships have rescued more than 15,000 of the 32,000 lives saved since operations in the Mediterranean began.
- Echo has already rescued nearly 2,000 people and was involved in a rescue incident as recently as last week, when more than 500 migrants were saved.
- Royal Navy vessels have destroyed more than 140 smuggler vessels, and in addition to Echo, several other ships have been involved: HMS Enterprise, HMS Bulwark, HMS Diamond, HMS Richmond and RFA Mounts Bay.