

News story: £19 million package to mark armistice centenary

An extra £10 million will go to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to support veterans with mental health needs that are not being addressed through current services. The Trust already receives £10 million a year, so for this centenary year, as the Chancellor announced at the recent Budget, this will be doubled. The Covenant Fund Trust makes grants to a wide range of hugely deserving organisations who support the armed forces community.

To ensure that young people are given the opportunity to learn about the sacrifices made by previous generations, the Chancellor is also making an additional £1 million available to support First World War battlefields tours for school students. This will build on the success of the existing First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme which gives one teacher and two students from every state-funded secondary school in England a free accredited battlefield tour to the Western Front.

And to make sure local communities can continue to remember the sacrifices of generations past, the Chancellor is also providing up to £8 million to help with the cost of repairs and refurbishments to village halls and Miners' Welfare and Armed Forces Organisations facilities.

Many of the 16,000 village halls across the UK were built as memorials to local people who lost their lives in the first world war, and also serve as vital social hubs. Armed Forces Organisations, such as the Royal British Legion, provide a focus in the community for veterans, and can support improvements to health and wellbeing.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond said:

We owe the men and women who have served their country a huge debt of gratitude, and I am determined to do everything I can to help remember their sacrifice.

Through this funding, we are ensuring that young people can learn from previous generations and keep the memory of their service alive. By preserving our history, we can also provide vital social hubs for local communities. And by caring for today's veterans we can show that their selfless service, and their sacrifices, will always be remembered, and are hugely valued by a grateful nation.

Press release: Tax rules for second-homes to be reviewed by ministers

A business rates 'loophole' which could be costing English councils millions in lost Council Tax is to be reviewed by ministers with a consultation launched today (7 November 2018).

Currently, second-home owners pay Council Tax on their properties including when the property is available to rent infrequently during the year.

Properties are valued for business rates when owners declare their property is available to let as 'holiday accommodation' for 140 days or more in a year.

Any property registered for business rates, rather than Council Tax, is likely to qualify for small business rate relief. This provides 100% relief from business rates, so no tax is due on properties with a rateable value of £12,000 or less.

Around 47,000 holiday lets in England are liable for business rates, of which circa 96% have rateable values of £12,000 or less. Currently there is no requirement for evidence to be produced that a property has actually been commercially let.

Genuine businesses can claim the relief to which they are entitled. However, the government is aware of concerns that owners of second homes which do not fall into this category, could exploit the system by not paying Council Tax, whilst still using local services.

Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak MP said:

We're aware of concerns that the current arrangements for valuing second homes for business rates and claiming relief do not provide strong enough protections against abuse.

We are seeking views on whether we should strengthen the checks already in place to ensure second-home owners have to pay Council Tax, while ensuring genuine holiday let businesses are able to demonstrate they are eligible for business rates relief.

The consultation will seek views on whether the current criteria should be strengthened to ensure second home owners are contributing to the local economy through the proper payment of council tax, or, for those genuinely renting out their property and supporting tourism, business rates.

View the [consultation](#) on this website – it will run until 16 January 2019.

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[Press release: PM call with President Ghani: 7 November 2018](#)

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

This afternoon the Prime Minister spoke with President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan. The Prime Minister reiterated the UK's firm commitment to Afghanistan and congratulated President Ghani on the achievement of the first Afghan-led and secured election since 2001, praising the courage of the Afghan people who voted. The Prime Minister and President Ghani agreed that the elections mark an important step forward.

The Prime Minister commended President Ghani for his offer to the Taliban of talks without preconditions and the leaders agreed that the prospects for peace are more promising than they have been for a number of years. The Prime Minister pledged the UK's continuing support for a political settlement.

Both the Prime Minister and President Ghani paid tribute to the sacrifices made by UK and Afghan military personnel in Afghanistan and their continuing efforts in pursuit of peace.

News story: Minister Adams honours courageous Armed Forces at his first official engagement in Wales.

At his first official engagement as UK Government Minister for Wales, Nigel Adams will mark the bravery and commitment of our servicemen and women, past and present at the opening of the Welsh National Field of Remembrance at Cardiff Castle today (Wednesday 7 November).

Paying tribute to those who have fought and continue to do so, Mr. Adams will deliver a reading and plant a wooden cross bearing his own personal tribute to those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

UK Government Minister for Wales, Nigel Adams said:

In this centenary year it is more important than ever that we pause to think of every man and woman who has lived, fought and died defending our freedom. That is why I urge people from communities all over Wales to come together at this significant time of remembrance to ensure that the sacrifices made by our servicemen and women, and continue to make, are not forgotten.

“It is with great honour that I pay my personal tributes to those courageous men and women who have pledged their lives to the service of our country today, your commitment and bravery does not go unnoticed.”

News story: HMCTS public event – 6 November 2018

We hosted our second public event today (6 November 2018), inviting those who represent public court users to see first-hand the progress public user organisations have helped us to make over the last year.

The event itinerary was influenced by what attendees told us last year, offering longer activity sessions for guests to immerse themselves in our latest project developments. With both market stalls and hands on activity sessions available, over 160 participants were given the opportunity to engage with 27 project teams, attending across all jurisdictions.

Justice Minister Lucy Frazer said:

I was delighted to welcome so many stakeholders today and thank them for their invaluable contribution to our reform programme so far.

Their expertise and insight is vital as we continue to build a modern, world class justice system fit for the 21st century, and this was an opportunity for them to see the difference their time and commitment has made – even interacting with some of the products they have helped design.



Some of the attendee quotes included:

It's amazing how HMCTS projects have progressed compared to last year.

There was lots of good discussion around vulnerable defendants. I've gained a wider understanding of their access to services and how they access online plea.

Everyone that came to the Crime room really embraced the challenge questions that the projects were posing. There were some really great suggestions which the projects will take back and feed into their services.

So many active discussions going on – people were so engrossed that they were forgetting to move round to see other projects!