

Speech: Lead Commissioner Sara Khan on the work of the Commission

Thank you Fiyaz for inviting me to speak on this important issue.

I also want to thank you for all that you do in challenging extremism, often at great expense to yourself.

I know how hard you work. Your commitment is nothing short of inspirational.

I also know how difficult it has been for you – the threats, abuse and hatred you receive from all sides.

Thank you for all that you do.

It is exactly one year today since my appointment as Lead Commissioner.

I didn't realise at the time that 24 January is also national compliment day.

I wasn't the only one.

The Home Office had barely made the announcement when the calls came for me to resign.

Racist and misogynistic abuse was unleashed on social media, including sadly from my fellow Muslims. Disinformation and outright lies circulated in the press.

Fiyaz asks if we're winning the battle against extremism.

I'm still here one year later – and I'll go on to talk about the work I have done and am about to do.

I want to begin by saying above all what gives me the strength is the courage I see all around me.

I want to tell you about an event I attended last week.

Golders Green Mosque was planning to host an exhibition about the 71 Albanian Muslims who had protected Jews during the Holocaust.

It's a wonderful, yet little known story of bravery and courage.

Sadly, a small yet loud group of Jews and Muslims did not want the exhibition to go ahead.

The Mosque came under intense pressure and the exhibition was cancelled.

To many of us, it felt as if those who wanted to burn bridges and build walls had won.

However, a small handful of activists were determined to not give in.

So, they put on the exhibition, called Love Thy Neighbour, at Eton Road Mosque in Redbridge last week.

Despite attempts to intimidate the mosque, the event was a massive success.

I want to share with you the words of the Chairman, Mr Bashir Chaudhry, a grandfather, who like my dad came to this country in the early 1960s – he said:

This exhibition opened my eyes to how Jews and Muslims worked together in that difficult time. For the last couple of weeks, I've had emails and calls saying I shouldn't be hosting this event in a Muslim centre. I said to them 'no YOU are wrong'.

I doubt Mr Chaudhry would ever describe himself either as a counter extremist or as fighting the battle against extremism.

But his civility, dignity and refusal to give in, in the face of intimidation is what countering extremism looks like.

And if that wasn't enough to qualify him as a hero, he also managed to arrange the best curry spread I've had for a long time.

I want to share what I've learnt in the last 12 months about extremism and the many people, like Mr Chaudhry, bravely pushing back.

I launched the independent Commission on Countering Extremism last March.

My priority was to engage widely.

I've sat down with nearly 500 people from across the country; both with critics and supporters alike.

From teachers to youth workers, academics to government officials, police to campaigners and tech companies to faith leaders.

I've visited 14 towns and cities across England and Wales – hearing first-hand the impact that extremism is having on individuals, communities and wider society.

Yesterday I was in Cleveland in the North East, speaking to the police, the council and civil society groups who shared what extremism looks like in their area. They are worried about growing Far Right extremism.

I've also carried out polling of people's views on extremism.

We've conducted a review of academic literature on extremism.

We've been examining the latest data on hate crime, Prevent referrals to Channel, social media trends and other indicators.

I want to share with you four messages coming out of my early work.

The first is that there is widespread concern about growing extremism, intimidation and intolerance in our country.

Our polling showed that 73% of Britons are worried about rising levels of extremism.

In every area I've visited, examples of extremism and hostility were shared.

The harms of extremism go wider than terrorism.

Academic research points to the breakdown of community cohesion and reduced trust in our institutions, social exclusion and isolation.

But there is also the harm to individuals – the suppression of people's human rights, the denial of one's humanity and freedom.

Youth workers have warned extremists are seeking to recruit young people not only through social media but in communities.

Charities have told me how repeated far right marches have left refugees too scared to leave their homes. These are people who've fled war torn countries because they were affected by extremism – only to be targeted by extremists of a different kind here.

Practitioners and Muslim groups have described to me how Far Right extremists are exploiting local tensions to evoke anti-Muslim hatred or conspiratorial anti-establishment sentiment.

I have heard how Islamist extremists claimed that the terror attack at Finsbury Park and even the fire at Grenfell Tower was an example of the West conducting its war against Islam and Muslims.

I've met people in faith communities, such as the Sikh community, who have been labelled a traitor because they are standing up to the religious fundamentalists in their own community.

These examples are just some of the warning signs I have seen.

But my second message is that we don't know the full scale of extremism in our country or the harms it is having.

When the Commission carried out its review of current academic literature, we were struck by not what we know about extremism, but in fact, the many things we don't know about extremism.

How much of a problem is extremism in schools and in other regulated settings?

What is the size and influence of extremist groups?

What drives extremism in our country – whether at an individual, societal or institutional level?

How is extremism mainstreamed and normalised in our society? What positive role can media play?

What are the evolving tactics of extremists? We have seen they are increasingly becoming professionalised and are intellectualising extremism.

How they are exploiting social media to spread disinformation and conspiracy theories, mainstreaming and normalising their propaganda in wider society?

We need to understand what the most effective ways are to counter extremism.

What may work in one part of the country, may not necessarily work in another.

What may be effective in countering one form of extremism, may not have the same effect in countering another form of extremism.

What does countering extremism look like online?

We're at Twitter. Social media companies have stepped up their work to take down illegal terrorist material.

But what about the kind of content that concerns us all?

The kind of legal far right extremist content which radicalised Darren Osborne? Or the kind of legal extremist content that people like Anjem Choudary produced which helped radicalise hundreds if not thousands of people?

We are still grappling with how to deal with legal extremist content that is online.

We are seeking to answer some of these questions as part of our study into extremism in England and Wales.

The third message is about the good work being delivered by those countering extremism.

I've met so many inspiring and compassionate individuals who are challenging hatred and championing equality, human rights and our fundamental freedoms.

Organisations – who despite the lack of funding are still pushing back against extremist groups in their area.

Young people who are passionate in advocating for diversity.

Councillors who are prepared to put their principles before political fall-out.

Faith leaders who are not afraid to challenge the extremists within their own community.

There are so many unsung heroes who care about our country, our communities and our democracy and are not prepared to stand by while extremists are

actively propagating hatred and conspiracy theories.

That gives me hope and optimism.

Never under-estimate the power of an individual or a small group to bring about effective change.

In the North East I heard from one man who told me he had managed to stop a Free Tommy rally from being organised because he had convinced his mates – what Tommy Robinson really stood for. The effort and impact of just that one individual cannot be over-estimated.

My fourth message is that if a movement of people standing up to extremism and hatred is to thrive, we must address the fact that public debate itself is toxic, angry and polarised.

Too many people experience abuse, threats and intimidation across our country simply for standing up for what they believe in or for carrying out their daily business.

This toxic climate has become part of daily life for not just MPs like Anna Soubry but also for academics, activists and anyone who simply wants to share their opinion.

This is creating a chilling effect on freedom of expression and it is having an impact on our democracy.

This lack of civility in our country creates a climate favourable to extremists.

We all need to, as the Archbishop of Canterbury recently stated, learn to disagree well.

I believe that has to start with politicians from across the political divide. They need to set the highest of standards.

These are some of the challenges facing us in countering extremism today.

I believe we need a movement against hatred and extremism – a diverse coalition of all those committed to championing our fundamental freedoms.

I want to give more people the confidence to speak out.

I want to give those on the frontline the confidence to navigate these complex issues – and policy makers the confidence to back them.

I want to give academics the confidence to dig into the issue of extremism without fear.

There is more that can be done to support – both financially and emotionally – organisations who are trying to push back.

Too many operate on a shoestring. That too was my experience when I used to run Inspire, a small counter extremism NGO. We never knew if we would exist

by the end of the financial year, because we struggled for funding.

I want to give funders the confidence to back vital counter extremism work.

How do we do this?

My focus is to bring together a wide range of data and evidence – so we can have a civilised debate and make the case for this work.

That includes evidence from our public consultation – the first one ever on extremism.

I can reveal that we've already had more than 1500 submissions from across the country.

Thank you to everyone who has shared their experiences and views.

We want to hear from as many people as possible.

This is a unique opportunity to have your say on extremism and what we should do about it. I would really encourage you to respond to our call for evidence which ends on the 31st January.

But that's not all we are doing.

We are giving academics the chance to bid to write papers on extremism.

We have requested information from Government departments and regulators so that we can analyse data on indicators of extremism.

To understand the harms extremism is having in our country, we are organising workshops, visits and testimonies.

We have also begun work on a nationally representative survey on extremism.

I look forward to sharing our findings with you later this year.

I want to end by stressing that how we work is as important as what we work on.

Our work will be transparent, impartial and evidence-driven.

Extremists want to shut down debate – we have to let it flourish.

That is why we have to listen to differing views.

That is why we cannot shy away from difficult discussions.

We have to ask, in the current political climate, if extremists will exploit Brexit.

We met with experts and those on the ground earlier this month to start this very discussion.

We have to accept that there are many people who worry about the definition of extremism – that it may capture genuine protest or simply minority or unfavourable views that fall out of the mainstream.

That is why in our consultation we are asking if the government's definition is helpful – and if not what it should be.

Finally, my Commission is underpinned by human rights principles and a belief in equality.

As a long-standing counter-extremism campaigner and as someone who studied human rights, I recognise that states sometimes use the banner of "extremism" to silence legitimate dissenting voices.

I am very alive to this which is why the Commission has embedded the principles of human rights and equality in our work.

But what isn't often acknowledged enough is how extremists threatens the human rights of many – women, minority groups and others.

And make no mistake: if there is one thing extremists of all backgrounds and persuasions have in common – it is a fundamental opposition to the very notion of human rights and equality.

In conclusion: there is no doubt there are serious challenges facing us in our struggle against extremism.

These challenges are significant and grave.

In an era of polarisation and division, the rise of populism across the world, the influence of social media in spreading disinformation and fake news – we have our work cut out in pushing back against extremists who thrive in precisely such an environment.

But there is hope.

There are many of us who are committed to diversity, equality and mutual respect pushing back against those who are contributing to extremism.

All of us can and must play our part. It is on all of us to defend the liberties, diversity and freedom that our country represents: the human rights that have been the bedrock of our democracy for centuries. Extremists seek to undermine our values, our society and our country. It is down to all of us to stand up and defend those values and our democracy.

Thank you.

[News story: Switzerland and UK to sign post-Brexit Insurance deal](#)

The insurance sectors of the UK and Switzerland are set to continue trading freely with one another after the UK has left the EU, thanks to an agreement signed today (25 January) at Davos by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Phillip Hammond, and President of the Swiss Confederation and Head of the Federal Department of Finance, Ueli Maurer.

The new arrangement will replicate the effects of the existing EU agreement with Switzerland, and is part of the UK's continued efforts to cement closer relationships with some of the world's most important financial markets as it prepares for a future outside of the EU.

The agreement will come into force when the current EU-Swiss Direct Insurance Agreement ceases to apply to the UK.

The signing of the agreement is part of a series of meetings the Chancellor is having with leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Despite its relatively small population, Switzerland is one of the world's most significant financial centres. In 2016, Swiss investment in the UK's financial services sector was over £11 billion, making the country one of the world's largest investors in UK finance – second only to the USA.

The UK-Swiss Direct Insurance Agreement, like the Direct Insurance Agreement with the EU, allows firms to branch into each other's jurisdiction with greater ease thanks to the mutual recognition of each other's Insurance regulations. It will therefore ensure continuity for UK and Swiss insurers to access each other's markets both now and in the future, consistent with the terms of the original EU-Swiss Direct Insurance Agreement.

Further information

In December last year HM Treasury agreed the terms of the US-UK Covered Agreement with the US Department of the Treasury and the Office of the US Trade Representative. The arrangement will provide continuity of the effects of the existing EU agreement with the US, once the UK leaves the EU.

[Speech: Chloe Smith speech at SOLACE](#)

Thank you very much indeed for asking me to be here today, it's an absolute pleasure to come back and see many of you and Louise thank you for the invitation.

It's very good to see a number of familiar faces in the room, but also I understand some new members, so I hope you all had a very good conference morning.

There is a lot that we do together, and first of all I would like to thank Dave Smith all of his work in the last year, and to welcome Louise to the role for Elections and Democratic Renewal. It's a role where I really hope we will be able to achieve together.

As the past few years have clearly demonstrated, facilitating and sustaining a flourishing democracy is a very important thing – it is essential that we all understand the weight behind all of our democratic decisions and that everyone has their say.

We all recognise our shared responsibility to inspire participation and tackle democratic exclusion among under-registered groups.

When I was here twelve months ago, I set out the approach the government is taking to these issues following the publication of our 'Every Voice Matters' Democratic Engagement Plan.

It was the first time government had announced a comprehensive strategy for addressing exclusion in our democratic system.

Today, we are publishing a ['One Year On' update](#), so I want to tell you what we have achieved, but also what we hope to do, to respect, protect and promote our democracy.

Because there is still so much more to do.

As I look at what's possible in the coming years, I know that we cannot achieve our aims alone.

Meeting the challenges that our democracy faces, and reaching the many different groups that we all must serve, requires us to work collaboratively with a range of experts across the public, private and third sector.

So today I have come here to ask you all for your continued commitment to helping citizens have confidence in our historic, strong and successful electoral system.

It is you who hold local knowledge and relationships. I really thank you for the tremendous work of your elections teams supporting their Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers.

You do that hard work and I would love for that gratitude to be passed on to the teams behind you.

Local authorities – you and your teams – are the frontline of our democracy.

Our approach to democracy has to be one based on respect – underpinned by the principle of fairness, of course.

We believe everyone in this country should have confidence that their vote matters, that they are making a difference, and that their voice is being heard.

Votes of course should not carry any more weight for one than for another.

That is why the government is committed to making our democratic system fairer by supporting the independent and impartial reviews from the Boundary Commissions, which will deliver equal representation for voters across the UK at the next scheduled general election.

Channeling a culture of respect and inclusion should be a priority for anyone involved in the democratic sphere at this critical time.

For if we, at the forefront of the democratic agenda, do not promote a culture of respect – how can we expect those we serve to follow it?

As a Member of Parliament, I have been lucky enough to travel to places like Myanmar and countries in East Africa where they are only just beginning their journeys to full democracy.

As last year's Suffrage Centenary reminded us, the UK's democracy has come a long way.

But 100 years on since some women won the right to vote and 90 years since women received equal voting rights in this country, there is a lot more still to achieve.

I am playing my part in this journey by working to ensure that everyone understands and respects the need for debate that is robust and healthy.

At a time of rising levels of intimidation in public life, it's important we work to prevent this worrying trend from stopping talented people going into public service.

I think our politics will be the poorer if talented people do not get involved, whether as candidates or campaigners, or indeed in local authorities, because they see the unacceptable abuse hurled at those who do volunteer for public life.

That is why last year we launched a consultation on [Protecting the Political Debate](#) which sought views on new measures to tackle this growing trend. We are analysing the evidence that we received back from that consultation and I look forward to publishing our response and next steps early this year.

Respect for our democracy is also rooted in the public having confidence that our processes and systems are secure – that elections will always take place on a level playing field. And so I take my responsibility to protect our democracy very seriously indeed.

We have taken action across a range of areas.

Part of the consultation I just touched on also looked at the requirement for

digital campaigning material to include the details of who has produced it and paid for it.

We believe voters should be able to see which organisation or individual is targeting them, and thus be informed and empowered.

Protecting our democratic processes also means recognising the importance of cyber security – a point the newly appointed Government Chief Security Officer has made in a letter to the President of SOLACE this week.

My colleagues in the Government Security Group will also be providing much advice through the Local Government Association's weekly bulletin – which I hope you'll be able to see in the coming weeks.

All of us have an important role to play then, in protecting the operation of our elections from from those who seek to undermine them.

For example, electoral fraud is not a victimless crime.

We must work together to stamp this problem out.

We can do so through a solution so simple it is already used by people everyday – and I'm referring to showing ID at the polling station. We do of course already use ID in many, many walks of life and showing ID to prove who you say you are before you vote is a common sense approach to tackling voter fraud.

Indeed, voters in Northern Ireland have been required to show a form of ID since 1985 without adverse effect on turnout or participation.

So, last May local authorities held Voter ID pilots in five local elections. Both our own evaluation and that of the independent Electoral Commission showed that the trials were a success. The overwhelming majority of people were able to cast their vote without any problems.

It is a real credit to the local authorities involved that their awareness-raising campaigns were effective in making voters aware of the change. So it's a big thank you to those Chief Executives and Returning Officers who helped deliver those five pilots last year. And thank you to those who have agreed to hold pilots again or for the first time.

I am delighted by the collaborative, supportive work between each pilot authority and my staff to ensure the success of the 2019 pilots. Doing so will no doubt benefit you by improving your preparedness for national roll-out. It will also help us prepare for that moment because the more pilots and subsequent data we have to analyse and learn from, the better the final proposal for Voter ID will be. So I would urge everyone here to think about following in their footsteps by volunteering to pilot in future.

I do think this work is absolutely essential to be able to look those arriving at polling stations in the eye and tell them: 'your vote is yours and yours alone'. But we have to get it right, which is why I am also currently holding meetings with representative groups from a broad range of

charities and civil society organisations.

My conversations with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Stonewall, Shelter, Operation Black Vote and Age UK – to give some examples – will ensure that we fully understand the impact of voter ID and the needs of all voters in our country.

That positive engagement with groups which reflect our diverse society reflects our broader approach towards driving up participation. As well as respecting our democracy and protecting it, we must also promote it. We have made excellent progress in this area.

Reforms to our electoral registration system now completed have resulted in record levels of people registering to vote. Nevertheless, this year's Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement showed that just a third of people believe they can affect political change by getting involved. So we must always be reminding ourselves that our democracy is only ever as strong as the people who are part of it. That's why I've made it my ambition to make the next general election more accessible.

As things stand, for example, there are just over one million people with a learning disability who are of voting age in the UK. I'm very concerned that less than a third of those are exercising their democratic right to vote – and I've been determined to do what I can to change this.

Last year we launched a [call for evidence on access to elections](#) and have since worked out a number of steps to improve the voting experience of disabled people.

We are making polling stations more accessible – physically speaking.

We are improving the accessibility of the Register to Vote website – including by introducing an 'Easy Read' guide on the homepage of the service to enable people with learning difficulties to apply online without so much trouble.

And we have updated the Certificate of Visual Impairment so that local authorities are better able to help those with sight loss register to vote and then vote at elections.

I would also say that disabled people are also not sufficiently represented in public office.

To help address this, in December 2018, government also launched the interim EnAble Fund for Elected Office. This is a £250,000 commitment to support disabled candidates – primarily for the forthcoming local elections in May. It will help cover disability-related expenses people might face when seeking elected office.

I really hope this money will encourage more disabled people to become candidates and enrich our public life as a result.

As a further example of opening up elections, we have changed the law,

allowing anonymous voter registration to help protect survivors of domestic violence and others.

As you will know, we want to help make legislation match more closely to the way people need to make those requests.

Another group facing unnecessary obstacles to participating in our democracy are those UK nationals who live overseas – our expats.

We think that no matter how far you have travelled, participation in our democracy is still a fundamental part of being British.

This is why in Parliament we are supporting the Overseas Electors Bill, which will end the current 15-year time limit on British expats voting in UK Parliamentary elections, delivering on votes for life, and why we are pursuing bilateral arrangements with EU Member States – to secure the voting rights for UK nationals living in the EU and vice versa.

It is right that both sides of this are considered together – that is both UK citizens living abroad and EU citizens living in the UK.

It is right in this time of change that we provide certainty to EU citizens living here where we can – many of course who are citizens who play an active role in our society and our democracy.

So I can therefore confirm that EU citizens currently living in the UK will retain their voting and candidacy rights in the next local elections in May.

I have been working closely with my colleagues in other departments, and earlier this week we announced an agreement with Spain that will allow UK nationals living in Spain, and Spanish nationals in the UK, to continue to vote and stand in local elections.

This agreement is the first of its kind and it secures the democratic rights of over 300,000 UK nationals living in Spain – the country with the biggest population of British expats living in the EU.

One final area of progress I want to highlight is our proposed reform of the annual canvass, which will make the process easier for citizens, and for your teams.

It will deliver the most accurate electoral register to date, while saving £27 million a year.

I know that the current canvass process is seen by EROs and others as too paper-based, too prescriptive, and too complex.

I am aiming to modernise it, allowing for a data-led approach and giving EROs more flexibility over their use of communications channels – and to target your precious resources where it is most needed to the properties where household change has occurred.

My team will shortly be communicating plans for Local Authorities to start

preparing to use their own data and to test the data match step in early 2020.

I encourage you to support your electoral services teams in accessing and using local data, whether it is local authority owned or third party, where they are keen to do so. Including local data in the data match test will provide important information on the accuracy and usefulness of those data sets. This will be highly beneficial when it comes to the full roll-out of canvass reform.

I hope to legislate to allow for the reformed canvass to be implemented in 2020.

We make these changes as part of our broader commitment towards promoting a more inclusive democracy.

The [Democratic Engagement Plan](#) that I was able to speech about last year, charted a course towards that goal by identifying and tackling barriers that prevent some people – particularly those in under-registered groups – from participating in our democracy.

The [update we will be publishing later today](#) sets out the government's future approach to democratic engagement – it outlines the role the government plays as a legislator, funder, convenor for registration activity and in promoting good practice.

I ask you – as leaders – to consider the significant role you can continue to play in sustaining a flourishing democracy, by encouraging improvement and building capability within your own organisations.

Good practice is at the heart of building capability.

I was pleased to begin to discuss this with Louise yesterday, and I am looking forward to continuing to work together to identify and promote good practice so that it becomes embedded in all of our teams.

Today's publication makes clear how government intends to convene the various parts of the electoral community to make best use of our evidence, skills, knowledge, and our resources.

I see that the Cabinet Office role includes supporting others' capability to lead and ultimately to act independently, to encourage people to register, to participate and to vote.

For instance, the Cabinet Office published details of what works on student registration; a brokering role that the government undertook as part of implementing the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

The government will share more examples this year where we are best placed – for example we are leading on research on how to remove registration barriers for people who are homeless or move frequently. I really look forward to sharing the results of this.

But there is much to learn and benefit from at a local level. So let's do this together.

As part of this, I am pleased to launch the [Atlas of Democratic Variation](#) – a collection of maps which, for the first time in this format, displays the geographical data variations on electoral registration – and data relevant to that.

The project was a collaboration between government and the Office for National Statistics.

I hope that it allows EROs, you and your colleagues, the wider electoral community, democracy organisations and others to:

- examine the variations in the data, and
- seek to identify any trends or relationships between registration activity and population demographics, and use it to inform and support the development of your democratic engagement strategies

In other words, to get more people involved.

I don't see it as being used to evaluate EROs performance nor the quality of the registers, we encourage stakeholders and interested parties to examine the maps included in the Atlas, to reflect on how they can support their democratic efforts.

This publication also highlights our commitment to ensuring everyone can make their voice heard free from abuse, making voting easier and more accessible for vulnerable and under-registered groups, and introducing measures to protect electors' votes.

Government has a unique role to play in respecting, protecting and promoting our democracy.

I understand that in order for you to accommodate the very diverse needs of voters in your communities, there are certain things that only government can progress on your behalf.

Government naturally has a large impact in facilitating funding and promoting good practice.

We are working with counterparts in Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that funding for delivery of elections at both local and national level is effective.

Also, only government, with the Parliament and the Devolved Administrations, can change the law. And I do hope to make the most important changes to keep our body of electoral law up to date and effective – even if I can't do all the change that some call for.

But such things form only part of the equation and together we are greater than the sum of our parts.

It is essential to me that government creates an environment in which democracy can thrive: one which enables our democratic partners – such as yourselves here today – to put your unique knowledge, skills and resource, to work for your voters.

My message to you today is that I am committed to working with all of you to respect, protect and promote our democracy.

I look forward to doing that and I thank you for having me today.

Press release: Environment Secretary proposes tougher labelling laws for allergy sufferers

Proposals to overhaul allergen labelling laws and give consumers clearer information on the food they buy have been unveiled by Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

Subject to a consultation launched today, food outlets selling pre-packaged food directly for sale could be required to follow new rules designed to give the UK's two million food allergy sufferers greater confidence in the safety of their food.

Under current rules, food prepared on the premise in which it is sold is not required to display allergen information on the package – but the proposed rules could go as far as seeing full ingredients labelling required by law.

The moves follow the tragic death of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse, the teenager who died after suffering an allergic reaction to a Pret a Manger baguette.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Natasha's parents have suffered a terrible loss, and I want to pay tribute to Nadim and Tanya for their inspirational work to deliver Natasha's law.

We want to ensure that labels are clearer and that the rules for businesses are more consistent – so that allergy sufferers in this country can have confidence in the safety of their food.

Many businesses are already bringing changes on board independently, and in the meantime they should continue doing all they can to give consumers the information they need.

The proposed reforms cover labelling requirements for foods that are packed on the same premises from which they are sold – such as a packaged sandwich or salad made by staff earlier in the day and placed on a shelf for purchase.

Currently, these foods are not required to carry labels, and information on allergens can be given in person by the food business if asked by the consumer.

Food businesses and allergy sufferers are being invited to have their say on four options put forward to improve the way allergy information is provided for these foods, including:

- mandating full ingredient list labelling
- mandating allergen-only labelling on food packaging
- mandating 'ask the staff' labels on all products, with supporting information for consumers available in writing
- promoting best practice around communicating allergen information to consumers

Food Standards Agency Chairman Heather Hancock said:

It's essential for those of us with a food allergy or intolerance to know that we can trust the food we eat. Accurate and reliable labelling is vital, and this consultation is firmly aimed at improving the confidence we have in it.

In recent years choice, trust and availability has really improved for people with food allergy. We want those improvements to continue, so it's important that we hear from everyone affected, as part of this consultation. We're determined to keep on making life better for you.

CEO of [Allergy UK](#), Carla Jones, said:

We welcome this announcement and the commitment shown by the Environment Secretary on this issue. At Allergy UK we believe that whilst those living with allergies must be vigilant on their own behalf, the broader food industry needs to do more than just the bare minimum when it comes to catering for the allergic community. We encourage all those living with allergies to engage with this consultation to ensure their views on this important issue are heard.

The Environment Secretary and Food Minister David Rutley [met allergen groups](#) and retailers late last year to discuss the proposed options around allergen labelling laws.

The Environment Secretary has also met the parents of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse to discuss their campaign for a change in food labelling laws.

A number of food businesses have already begun to implement changes to their provision of allergen information and the [Food Standards Agency](#) will continue to provide food businesses with guidance on allergens. In September the FSA launched Easy to Ask, a campaign to empower young people to ask food businesses about allergens when eating out so they can make safe food choices.

The consultation can be responded to on Defra's [gov.uk page](#).

[News story: Roads designed for future vehicles: apply for funding](#)

Technological advances, including low carbon, connected and autonomous vehicles, will transform how people travel – and significantly change how the UK's transport network operates.

While our roads have been evolving, the biggest opportunities will come from planning ahead longer term to anticipate and respond to the requirements of future vehicles.

Working with Innovate UK, [Highways England](#) has up to £20 million for UK organisations with projects to change the way UK roads are designed, managed and used.

The competition is being run via the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI).

Proving and testing an idea

There are 2 parallel competitions for:

- feasibility studies for ideas that are unproven and at a low [technology readiness level](#)
- feasibility projects that have already been proven and are at a mid to high technology readiness level

In both competitions, projects should tackle the transport challenges in Highways England's [Connecting the country: planning for the longer term](#) (pdf).

They must cover one of 6 core themes:

- design, construction and maintenance, including:
 - greater automation of the design process
 - greater automation of construction work, including the inspection and management of assets

- adopting more modular construction techniques
- expanding and improving data collection
- creating a unified asset management system
- increasing the use of advanced materials that are self-maintaining and extend the asset lifecycle
- connected and autonomous vehicles, such as maximising their safety and capability and increasing uptake
- customer mobility, such as improving experiences for road users and connections with other modes of transport
- energy and the environment, which covers electric and other clean energy sources as well as the impacts that road networks have on neighbouring environments
- operations, from customer service and traffic management, to roadworks and incident and severe weather response
- air quality, particularly targeting oxides of nitrogen and other air pollutants

A project can focus on different types of road or road use, and be either location-specific or generic, so long as it is applicable to Highways England's [strategic road network](#).

Proving the feasibility of an idea

There is £8 million for the feasibility studies competition. This is across 2 phases and will be split across the 6 themes.

The first phase has up to £2 million for up to 20 projects to evidence and determine the feasibility of an idea.

In phase 2, the most promising projects from the first phase can get funding to develop and evaluate a prototype. A total of £6 million will be available.

Competition information

- the competition opens on 11 February 2019, and the deadline for registrations is at midday on 1 May 2019
- organisations of any size are eligible to lead a project, working alone or collaborating with others
- in phase 1, projects can last up to 2 months with total costs of up to £75,000 including VAT. They can last up to 9 months and have costs of up to £1 million including VAT in phase 2
- there will be a webinar briefing on 14 February for applicants to find out more about the competition

Ready for further development

Up to £12 million is available for projects where the feasibility has already been proven and are at the development phase.

They should be ready for imminent on-road testing and deployment, having met necessary safety assurances.

The expectation is to fund 12 projects across the 6 themes.

Competition information

- the competition opens on 11 February 2019, and the deadline for registrations is at midday on 1 May 2019
- organisations of any size are eligible to lead a project, working alone or collaborating with others
- projects are expected to start by September 2019 and last up to 12 months
- total eligible project costs can be up to £1 million including VAT
- there will be a webinar briefing on 14 February for applicants to find out more about the competition