

Press release: Defence Secretary shows commitment to Armed Forces mental health with over £220-million funding and new helpline

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson has today (25 February) pledged to increase funding for Armed Forces mental health services to £220-million over the next decade and launched the new 24/7 Military Mental Health Helpline.

The new number – 0800 323 4444 – will be open and ready to take calls from midday today (Sunday). It will be backed up by a major internal communications campaign on mental fitness across the services.

The Armed Forces mental health services will also be boosted by an extra £2million a year, it was announced today.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Every hour of every day our safety, security and way of life are protected by our courageous Armed Forces personnel. They are always there for us – often risking life and limb and making huge personal sacrifices – and we must be there for them in their own time of need.

Mental illnesses caused by life on the battlefield can have a devastating impact on our brave heroes and their families. It is our moral and professional duty to ensure that we do all we can for our world class troops.

That's why we have commissioned the new 24/7 Military Mental Health Helpline and will spend an extra £2-million a year on mental health services for the next decade on top of the £20-million we already spend each year.

I will personally be working with all the service chiefs to make sure there isn't a single person in the forces who doesn't know where to turn in times of trouble.

0800 323 4444 will be targeted at serving personnel and their families – allowing them to access the help, advice and support they need anywhere, anytime.

Surgeon General of the British Armed Forces Major General Martin Bricknell said:

This number will complement the range of mental health services, including our Departments of Community Mental Health, which we provide for our serving personnel. It is important to deliver a holistic service to ensure our Armed Forces have every opportunity to access the help and care they need and deserve. We must do all we can to provide easy access to the support available.

0800 323 4444 will act as a memorable and accessible gateway to mental health services for service personnel and their families.

Combat Stress – the leading veterans mental health charity – has been commissioned to run the new helpline service for serving troops 24 hours a day. The new line will be backed up by a deeper partnership between the MOD and the charity and run by a team of specially-trained professionals. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) will provide additional funds to enhance Combat Stress' existing service – predominantly aimed at veterans – and are working together to develop information sharing processes with the military to ensure any serving service personnel in crisis are provided with the appropriate support tailored for their needs.

Chief Executive of Combat Stress Sue Freeth said:

We welcome the opportunity to work with the MOD to provide mental health support to serving personnel. A significant minority of servicemen and women develop mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. We know they can delay seeking treatment while in the Armed Forces, with some preferring to come forward for help after they have left the military.

Left untreated, mental health problems can become more complex and have a devastating impact on those with the condition, as well as their loved ones. It's vital that people seek help as soon as they notice a change in their mental health.

Combat Stress has delivered a 24-hour Helpline service since 2011. With almost a century's experience of supporting veterans with mental health issues, we have the knowledge, expertise and understanding to assist serving personnel.

The Combat Stress helpline is the only service in the country, tailored towards the Armed Forces community, which talks to callers whilst simultaneously providing practical help by calling the emergency services if needed.

Alongside this announcement, the Defence Secretary has also agreed to spend an extra £2-million a year for the next ten years to improve mental health services in the Armed Forces on top of the £20-million per year that is currently committed. The additional money, which brings the total planned spending to £220-million over the next decade, will be put towards an

increase in mental health specialists and bolstering existing provision.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

Wellbeing is not just about physical fitness but mental fitness too. Perhaps as we can't see it, and are less inclined to step forward, mental fitness has not received the attention it deserves. The brain is just another muscle we must look after.

By choosing to work with Combat Stress, we are deliberately choosing to work with the leading organisation in the country for providing this specialist mental health service. We are changing the stigma associated with mental health.

It's a complex science and there is always room for improvement. Therefore we will be building a stronger and deeper partnership with Combat Stress to deliver the best possible service for our people.

The MOD currently has a network of 20 'hub and spoke' mental health centres, comprising of 11 hubs and a further nine teams. Regular visiting clinics are also held at other military centres across the country.

Last year the MOD launched its Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy focusing on preventative measures to protect our personnel. MOD also partnered with the Royal Foundation, a charity setup by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, to improve training and education alongside the strategy to promote mental fitness.

There are a range of services provided by partners working with MOD and through the Armed Forces Covenant, including the NHS, other Government departments and charities which serving personnel, veterans, and their families can access.

Ends

Notes to editors:

- You can read Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson's OpEd [here](#).
 - Defence images can be found on www.defenceimagery.mod.uk.
 - The UK Armed Forces Mental Health Annual Statistics: Financial Year 2016/2017 can be found [here](#).
 - For more information, please contact the MOD press office on 020 7218 7907.
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News story: UN Security Council: explanation of vote on the Syria resolution

On 24 February the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2401 demanding a cessation of hostilities in Syria to enable delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of Resolution 2401 and in particular we applaud your work, together with Sweden as penholders.

But this is not a moment for self-congratulation. It's taken us far too long to agree this resolution. While we have been arguing over commas, Asad's planes have been killing more civilians in their homes and in their hospitals, imposing unbearable suffering. And despite the amount of time we have spent in this chamber over many years discussing the devastating humanitarian crisis, we have still not been able to achieve the peace and security that the Syrian people so desperately need.

As the conflict enters its eighth year, the situation in Eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in the country is far worse than we ever thought imaginable. The barbarity and depravity of the Asad regime shows no limits.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the pictures we see and the stories we hear from this comfortable chamber are the agonising reality for hundreds of thousands of civilians. For men, women and children who are being forced to eke out an existence underground to avoid being killed by a regime that commits daily atrocities against its own people.

I've heard some say that the information about the situation in Eastern Ghouta is propaganda. A doctor in Eastern Ghouta, having heard these comments, said this morning: "Amid the chaos and the bombs, it is the not being believed that almost hurts the most. We are dying here every day and when people say that they do not believe us, that is pain upon pain.

This isn't propaganda; it is a living hell for hundreds of thousands of residents of Eastern Ghouta. As we have repeated many times, the intentional and systematic targeting of civilians and civilian objects not only violates international humanitarian law, it is a war crime. And the UK will be unrelenting in our campaign to ensure accountability.

By voting in favour of this resolution today, we are standing up and saying that we will not stand by and let this happen. In the face of escalating violence, devastation and suffering, we must all now take practical steps to improve the situation for those living and dying in a hell of one man's making. This resolution demonstrates our resolve to put a stop to the brutal violence. It demands all parties cease hostilities without delay. That means

right now; immediately.

The role and responsibility of this Council does not end with the passage of this resolution. Quite the opposite. All UN Member States, but particularly Council Members, must now take responsibility for ensuring that this resolution is implemented in full, without delay.

The resolution calls for the Council to review implementation within 15 days, but we must all be active in supporting and monitoring implementation from the moment we step out of this room.

If we see any of the parties violate the terms of this resolution, we must bring it back to the Council immediately.

Those with any influence over the Syrian regime – Russia, Iran – have a particular responsibility to ensure that this ceasefire is respected in full and without delay, that all sieges are ended and that humanitarian aid is delivered. This is the absolute minimum that the people of Syria deserve.

As much as we welcome the passing of this resolution today, it is only a small step.

Just as 1 aid convoy in 3 months to a besieged area cannot even begin to address the humanitarian crisis, one resolution alone cannot solve the situation in Syria. We must do everything in our collective power to ensure that this resolution is effective in delivering for those whom we have failed to date. And we must all send a clear message to the Asad regime: abandon your attempt to pursue a military strategy; stop fighting and engage seriously in UN-led political talks in Geneva.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the words of my Foreign Secretary. The entire world is looking at the Asad regime, Russia and Iran: you hold the keys not only to the end of this obscene conflict, but to the safety, humanitarian aid and basic medical treatment that is being denied to millions of people right now in Syria. For the mother giving birth underground in Eastern Ghouta, for the child unable to learn as schools are closed for yet another day, for the doctor battling airstrikes to treat patients in Idlib, all of us sitting here today owe it to the people of Syria to work together, with renewed and unyielding energy, to achieve a political solution that will bring peace to the Syrian people.

Press release: New money to build homes stalled by planning

New funding to help speed up planning decisions and help deliver, quality new homes has been announced by Housing Minister Dominic Raab today (24 February

2018).

The first wave of the [Planning Delivery Fund](#), totalling £15.8 million, has been awarded to enable councils to process more applications, implement new reforms and also train planners to tackle the housing challenges faced by their local area.

This funding boost will support local authorities working together on ambitious new joint local plans and core strategies, which will engage residents on how future development will take place in their areas and outline the locations suitable for new homes where demand is high.

The funding will also support greater best practice and innovation within councils as they decide planning applications, resulting in more being determined over a shorter period of time.

Money awarded to bidders will also allow local authorities to access the latest expertise on design and town planning, driving up the quality of new homes built.

Housing and Planning Minister Dominic Raab said:

This cash boost ensures councils have the resources needed to make quicker decisions on planning applications, delivering quality housing at a faster rate.

It's part of our strategy to build the homes this country needs whilst also supporting residents to have their say on the kind of development that takes place in their area.

This first wave of funding has been split into 3 streams that will assist in delivering new homes across England: The Joint Working Fund (£9.4 million), Design Quality Fund (£4.82 million) and Promoting Innovation Fund (£1.07 million).

A total of 68 projects from Gateshead to Cornwall will receive funding from the Planning Delivery Fund across all 3 streams, from 2017 until 2019. This will help enable:

- Bath and North East Somerset council to deliver a new master plan and implement an independent design review, receiving £310,000
- London Borough of Hackney to implement new planning applications manager software following an award of £212,000, which will increase the rate of application decisions made
- Dudley Metropolitan borough council to bring forward a second Black Country Joint Core Strategy, which will receive £570,000 and support the development needs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton
- The Greater Manchester Combined Authority to deliver a new Place Team, create new Mayoral Development Corporations and provide additional resource to deliver investment and will receive £950,000

The launch of this fund will give successful councils a greater capability to implement the government's reforms of the planning system and comes as the Ministry for Housing prepares to launch its revised National Planning Policy Framework later this spring.

Further information

See a full list of successful projects:

PDF, 155KB, 1 page

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Three third party organisations were also awarded funding: the Royal Town Planning Institute (to provide training bursaries), Urban Design London (to deliver tools and training to increase capacity) and the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (to provide a wildlife protection tool).

The successful bids make up the first wave of funding is part of the £25 million [Planning Delivery Fund](#). Allocations of the remaining fund for the year 2019 to 2020 will be subject to a further bidding round to be announced at a future date.

The Planning Delivery Fund was initially announced in December 2017. The £15.8 million of the £25 million budget was allocated following a significant level of interest being shown by bidders, with 383 applications for funding received before the deadline of 11 January.

[Press release: Alun Cairns: "Wales must seize the opportunities to sell its brand to the world"](#)

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns will urge Wales' best businesses and cultural organisations to seize the opportunities to promote Wales on a global stage during the Wales Week in London initiative, which launches today

(24 February).

Wales Week in London aims to promote Welsh interests in London via a series of activities and events from 24 February to 10 March, from a number of sectors and locations in the UK's capital.

During the fortnight, the Welsh Secretary will urge Welsh businesses to take their products and services to the world market at the Department for International Trade and Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Celebrating Welsh Trade event.

The Secretary of State will also host a reception at Gwydyr House to celebrate the strength and diversity of Welsh culture, and recognise the contribution the arts industry makes towards Wales' growing tourism industry in a speech at a National Museum Wales pop up event.

UK Government Minister Stuart Andrew will chair a meeting with tourism industry experts to discuss how the UK Government can further support the burgeoning market in Wales.

As part of the celebrations, the Welsh Secretary will also attend a St David's Day reception at No10 Downing Street for leading Welsh figures from the worlds of business, media, tourism and sport.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Wales Week in London is an excellent opportunity for Welsh businesses and organisations to make their mark on a global stage. We have some of the strongest industries in the world in the fields of aerospace, agriculture and the food and drink market.

This is the second year running where we have united all St David's Day related events in London under one umbrella title, which shows the strength of our country's brand to the wider world.

This campaign ties in with the ambitions of the UK Government's Industrial Strategy in facilitating greater trade and investment opportunities between Wales, the United Kingdom and the world. It's my job to champion those Welsh interests, and I look forward to playing my part in representing the Welsh brand and its culture throughout the week.

Wales Week in London was formed by Dan Langford and Mike Jordan, two Wales-based business people with strong business ties to London.

Dan Langford, Chair of Wales Week in London said:

We have a terrific programme of events this year – over 70 different activities and events covering all aspects of Welsh life and business; celebrating and promoting Wales whilst commemorating

St David's Day across London.

The support from the UK Government, led through the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales and importantly, also involving a number of other government departments has been tremendous; and together with the Welsh Government, we're working collaboratively with a shared ambition to promote a modern Wales to the rest of the world.

Huge thanks also goes to those people and organisations, drawn from the Welsh diaspora in London as well as from Wales, who are leading on many of the events taking place. Together we'll be making a huge amount of Welsh noise in the heart of one of the most important capitals in the world.

Through a calendar of events for two weeks centred around St David's Day, the festival will showcase activities of existing London-based Welsh communities and promote the best of Wales in London, helping organisations in all sectors to promote their products and services while broadening their networks and audiences.

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[News story: Programme: EU-UK Article 50 negotiations](#)

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