

Press release: New government backed advisory panel commits to help eradicate rough sleeping

Leading experts from homelessness charities and local government met for the first time today as part of the government's new rough sleeping advisory panel and committed to work together to help eliminate rough sleeping within a decade.

The new panel chaired by Homelessness Minister Heather Wheeler will help develop the national rough sleeping strategy to halve rough sleeping over the course of the Parliament and eliminate it altogether by 2027.

Made up of experts, charities and local government, the panel will draw on their considerable experience and individual successes to support the upcoming Ministerial Taskforce. This will bring together ministers from key departments to provide a cross-government approach to preventing rough sleeping and homelessness.

The panel members agreed key priority areas including what works best in terms of prevention such as housing-led approaches and the most effective ways of intervening with someone already experiencing rough sleeping.

Following the first panel meeting, Heather Wheeler said:

We cannot accept rough sleeping as a stubborn problem that will always be with us.

That's why we are providing over £1 billion of funding, supporting those who are homeless and rough sleeping and bringing in the most ambitious legislation in decades that will mean people get the support they need earlier.

Tackling homelessness is complex, but no one should ever have to sleep rough.

The new panel is clear we need to act swiftly to realise our shared determination to help the most vulnerable in society and eliminate rough sleeping for good.

The panel will meet monthly and will report back to the Taskforce in the summer with a series of recommendations.

Among the key themes the panel will pursue are:

- Prevention activity to stop people from rough sleeping in the first place.

- Programmes and interventions to target both the drivers of rough sleeping and support vulnerable people at risk of rough sleeping.
- Recovery and long-term support to help people maintain sustainable tenancies.
- The role of wider society, business, the voluntary sector and the general public to tackle street culture.
- Better data and clearer accountability to ensure the right structures are in place at the local and national level.

Government action to date on tackling homelessness and rough sleeping

- As part of the £1 billion of funding we are providing £315 million to local authorities for their work on homelessness, and an additional £402 million in Flexible Homelessness Support Grant funding, which local authorities can use to work more strategically to prevent and tackle homelessness pressures in their areas.
- Government has also provided funding for the 'No Second Night Out' approach which identifies new rough sleepers and helps them off the streets immediately. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has funded its national roll-out through the £20 million Homelessness Transition Fund and most local authorities have committed to the programme.
- Announced £28 million for 3 Housing First pilots in Manchester, Liverpool and the West Midlands. The pilots will support long-term rough sleepers off the streets and help them to end their homelessness. Individuals will be provided with stable, affordable accommodation and intensive wrap-around support. This will help them recover from complex health issues, for example substance abuse and mental health difficulties and sustain their tenancies.
- Government is investing £9 billion to build more social housing, including council homes. This government is committed to fixing the broken housing market and our Housing White Paper sets out measures to do just that.

Members of the Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel

Chair

- Heather Wheeler, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Homelessness sector

- Jon Sparkes, CEO Crisis
- Polly Neate, CEO Shelter
- Jeremy Swain, CEO Thames Reach
- Howard Sinclair, CEO St Mungos
- Jean Templeton, CEO St Basil's
- Rick Henderson, CEO Homeless Link

Mayors

- Andy Street, Conservative Mayor for West Midlands
- Andy Burnham, Labour Mayor for Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- James Murray, London Deputy Mayor for London Housing and Residential Development

Local government and Housing Federation

- David Orr, CEO National Housing Federation
- Mark Lloyd, CEO Local Government Association
- Mark Meehan, Director of Housing for Croydon and Chair of the London Council Housing Needs group
- Gillian Douglas, Bristol City Council
- Cathy Hadfield, Cornwall Council

International expert

- Peter Fredriksson, advisor on Housing First to the Finnish Government

Sector experts

- Lord John Bird, founder of the Big Issue
- Brooks Newmark, previous Minister for Civil Society

Background

Terms of reference

The government aims to halve rough sleeping over the course of the Parliament and eliminate it altogether by 2027.

The Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Heather Wheeler, will chair the Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel which will support government to produce a national rough sleeping strategy. The strategy will take action to reduce rough sleeping now, and ensure the structures are in place to eliminate rough sleeping by 2027.

Over the coming months the Advisory Panel will:

- meet with the Minister for Housing and Homelessness on a regular basis to advise on how we can reduce the numbers sleeping rough
- support the senior Ministerial Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Reduction Taskforce
- support the rough sleeping team in MHCLG to develop and test policy options
- test approaches, share feedback, best practice and studies from across the sector to inform policy development

Rough Sleeping is a chronic issue and the Advisory Panel will consider a wide range of interventions to ensure we take action now. The Panel will also look at how the government can embed integrated systems in the long term to ensure that no one has to sleep rough. The review will take into account the

experiences and successes of previous interventions, and highlight good practice.

The following lines of inquiry will be pursued:

- Prevention activity to stop people from rough sleeping in the first place.
- Programmes and interventions to target both the drivers of rough sleeping and support vulnerable people at risk of rough sleeping.
- Recovery and long-term support to help people maintain sustainable tenancies.
- The role of wider society, business, the voluntary sector and the general public to tackle street culture.
- Better data and clearer accountability to ensure the right structures are in place at the local and national level.

News story: Huge new Atlas aircraft hangar opened by Defence Minister

A £70 million hangar large enough to contain three of the RAF's new Atlas transport aircraft at the same time was officially opened by Defence Minister Guto Bebb at RAF Brize Norton today. Crown copyright.

The Atlas maintenance, repair and overhaul facility, which covers 24,000 metres squared and is 28 metres high, is now fitted out and fully operational in support of RAF transport operations all over the world.

Minister for Defence Procurement Guto Bebb said:

From deploying troops and armoured vehicles to a war zone, to getting vital support to humanitarian disasters, our Atlas fleet plays a global role and it needs a home to match.

This huge hangar provides exactly that, and will see Brize Norton ready our Atlas fleet for action wherever they are needed in the world.

A £70 million hangar large enough to contain three of the RAF's new Atlas transport aircraft at the same time was officially opened by Defence Minister Guto Bebb at RAF Brize Norton today. Crown copyright.

The hangar was built under Defence Infrastructure Organisation contracts and has cost approximately £70 million including fit-out work, with activity on the facility ramping up since late 2016 when it was handed to Defence

Equipment and Support, the MOD's procurement organisation.

The hangar is designed to make Atlas maintenance easier, safer and more efficient. The internal layout is the result of extensive feedback from support delivery teams and has been designed to be highly adaptable with easy access to specialist tools and equipment.

Support for the UK's Atlas fleet is enabled through a £410 million agreement between DE&S and Airbus Defence and Space – part of the UK's ongoing commitment to the Atlas programme which is sustaining 8,000 jobs across the national supply chain.

RAF Atlas aircraft, a familiar sight in the skies above RAF Brize Norton where they are based, recently formed part of the UK's relief response to Hurricane Irma in the Caribbean where they made shuttle flights from Barbados to destinations across the region to deliver key support, including to the British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos and Anguilla.

Defence Equipment and Support Director Air Support, Adrian Baguley, said:

The Atlas programme is delivering a world-class fleet for the RAF, offering the UK next-generation transport and airlift abilities for operations all over the world.

Expert support on the ground in the UK is an essential part of that capability and this new facility will ensure that work continues for decades to come.

The aircraft can carry up to 37 tonnes over a range of 2,000 nautical miles. It is able to deploy troops and equipment between and within theatres of operation either by parachute or by landing on short, potentially unprepared airstrips.

Atlas can also carry armoured vehicles, drastically reducing the time it takes for a deploying force to be ready to fight. For humanitarian roles, it is capable of deploying mobile cranes, excavators and large dump trucks for disaster relief operations– for example clearing earthquake sites.

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Wing Commander Ed Horne, the Officer Commanding 70 Squadron RAF which operates the UK's Atlas aircraft said:

This new hangar provides us with a world-class maintenance facility to match the world-beating capability of the Atlas aircraft.

The UK has ordered 22 Atlas aircraft for the RAF, 18 of which have been

delivered. The entire fleet is due to be delivered by 2022.

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News story: VOA Accounts Payable moves to HMRC Financial Shared Services

From 1 March 2018 the VOA Accounts Payable function will transfer to HMRC Financial Shared Services.

What this means for you:

From 1 March 2018, all payments and related documents from the VOA will be issued by HMRC, and HMRC will be your first point of contact for any payment queries.

The Accounts Payable email addresses will be:

Our bank account or other details will not change.

Also from 1 March 2018, we will correspond with you electronically instead of by post. Please contact HMRC at accountspayable.voaqueries@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk if you wish to amend your contact details.

These changes are automatic and you do not need to do anything.

Press release: Brighton woman imprisoned for laundering £1.4m as part of family fake sex drug operation

A woman has been sentenced today following a long running investigation into the sale of counterfeit and unlicensed drugs which convicted 12 individuals in 2015. The defendant received a prison sentence of 2 years and 3 months.

The medicines, which were sold predominantly over the internet, have an estimated value of £11 million with a suggested annual turnover in excess of £3 million.

She facilitated payments for the purchase of unlicensed erectile dysfunction medicines and claims that she received 10% of the 'earnings' laundered through her account but was unaware that the money was for the unlicensed medicine, Kamagra.

Samples of the products were found to contain potent, active medicinal ingredients with potential serious side effects and are classified as prescription only. Supply without medical supervision is dangerous as the contents of unlicensed medicines are unknown and untested.

Alastair Jeffrey, MHRA Head of Enforcement said:

Selling medicines outside of the regulated supply chain is a serious criminal offence. If you buy medicines online, you are potentially trusting a criminal to look after your health".

Always seek professional help and visit your GP if you are ill. These criminals are motivated by greed and have no concern about your welfare.

MHRA is currently running the #FakeMeds campaign to warn people against buying potentially dangerous or useless unlicensed medicines sold by illegal online suppliers.

Visit www.gov.uk/fakemeds for tips on buying medicines safely online and how to avoid unscrupulous sites.

Press release: JD.com commits £2 billion to bring UK products to Chinese consumers

From luxury British couture and tea, to chocolate, beauty products, home appliances and other items, UK products have gained popularity in China in recent years. To meet this growing demand, JD.com, China's largest retailer, has announced plans to sell £2 billion of UK goods to Chinese consumers in the next 2-3 years.

The agreement signed today between JD.com and the British Government's Department of International Trade (DIT), is focused on making it easier for British companies to access the China market via JD.

"Many British brands recognise the huge potential of China's enormous e-

commerce market” said Richard Burn, Director-General of DIT China. “JD truly understands what Chinese consumers want and has the resources to help British brands ensure success in the region. We’re looking forward to working with JD to bring more British brands to China in the future.”

Prime Minister Theresa May, who is on her first official state visit to China since becoming Prime Minister, met with JD Chairman and CEO Richard Liu at the Residence of the British Ambassador to China. Among the topics Liu and May discussed were JD’s plans to help more UK brands reach JD’s 266 million customers.

The number of UK brands on JD.com has doubled over the last two years, with sales in 2017 growing 100% year-on-year. World famous brands Dyson, Clark’s, Johnnie Walker and Lipton are among the brands that have been popular with JD consumers. Over the past three years, Dyson sales on JD have increased by over 60 times.

In order to push even greater sales of British goods, JD will launch special campaigns for seasonal products and undertake other activities to give brands more opportunities to reach Chinese consumers. JD will kick off with a 24-hour “Celebrate Britain” sales promotion for UK products this April to introduce the “Best of Britain” to Chinese customers.