

Sustainable warmth: protecting vulnerable households in England

News story

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has today published a strategy to further drive down levels of fuel poverty in England.



There are now 1.2 million fewer low-income households living in the least energy efficient homes – that is, those with Energy Performance Certificates in Band E, F or G – compared to 2010.

Today (11 February 2021), the government published its strategy, [Sustainable warmth: protecting vulnerable households in England](#), helping to drive this down even further, reducing energy bills for hundreds of thousands of households.

It sets out a plan to increase help for vulnerable energy consumers with fuel bills and green upgrades to their homes, that will help put as much as £500 back into the pockets of low-income families.

Measures in the strategy include offering more help with energy bills, by extending the £140 Warm Home Discount to an extra 750,000 vulnerable fuel poor homes, helping a total of 2.7 million households, and by tackling the energy efficiency of all fuel poor homes. This will be done by increasing the amount energy suppliers invest in energy efficiency measures for low-income households. The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) will now be extended until 2026, with its value boosted from £640 million to £1 billion a year.

The new strategy also sets out a more meaningful measure of fuel poverty, following significant feedback from those in a public consultation that the current 'high cost' indicator of energy bills above the median cost needed modernising.

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Scottish Secretary speech on Scottish farming

We farmers are nothing if not innovators, early adopters of new technology and ways of thinking which we adapt to deliver tangible results.

The story of farming in Scotland is one of continuous improvement and progress and we stand now in the foothills of what I believe is an exciting new era for agriculture, one filled with genuine opportunity.

We have now left the EU and are out into the wider world. We are making decisions for ourselves and we are in charge of our own destiny.

And this should hold no fears for us.

As a skilled and efficient sector of the economy, farming is well placed to thrive in this new environment and we have every reason to expect a very bright future.

Brexit offers new challenges, yes – but it also offers many new opportunities to do things not just differently but better; to do them in new ways, to do them in a way that is custom-built to suit us in Great Britain.

That does not mean that Europe is closed to us at all – far from it.

Diligent and painstaking, work by the UK Government ensured that we left with a deal.

And let's make no mistake a deal which is good for Scotland and good for the whole of the United Kingdom.

It is so good that critics – right until the eleventh hour – said that it couldn't be done.

In fact, we have secured the first free-trade agreement the European Union has ever entered into based on zero tariffs and zero quotas.

And we should not underestimate how useful that is for agriculture and how much heft a global and outward-looking Britain now yields on the world stage.

We in government stand ready to help businesses capitalise on the opportunities created by this deal – helping to boost productivity and to unlock investment.

As part of this, we will continue to engage with businesses and help them to adjust and continue to compete successfully on the global stage.

Of course, the major change for farming is that we are now out of the Common

Agricultural Policy.

It is worth taking a moment to talk about that as it marks a huge sea-change.

The UK Government is ensuring that we provide you with the foundations to grasp the opportunities that are laid out before all of us.

We have a huge opportunity in Scotland to now change and grow – and that will require stability.

While agriculture is devolved to the Scottish Government as we all know, the United Kingdom met our commitment to guarantee the current annual budget to farmers in every year of this Parliament.

We have set the overall annual spending envelope at £595 million for Scotland every year for the remainder of the Parliament and that is a solid commitment on which to build.

While the amount of remaining EU funding varies across different areas of the United Kingdom, we have adopted a consistent approach, topping up European Union receipts with Exchequer funding to the level we promised.

This ensures that the promise to guarantee the current annual budget is met right across our United Kingdom. And at the same time, the European Union CAP budget has been cut by around 10 per cent.

So if Scottish farmers were still under the CAP rules, the industry would be around £60 million worse off this year than we were last year – and this would be the case for every year until at least 2024.

Part and parcel of that commitment to you is the 2019 Bew Review into farm funding.

The UK Government has met its commitments to implement Lord Bew's recommendations in their entirety.

An additional £51 million of funding will be coming to Scotland, and this is over and above the CAP replacement funding.

And to ensure that we continue to implement the Bew recommendations, we will be undertaking a programme of engagement with the Scottish Government ahead of the next Spending Review, to assess what will be required to meet our commitments from 2022/23 onwards.

Now, this time last year, Douglas Ross spoke to you amid concern about the availability of seasonal workers. I am delighted to report that thanks to close co-operation between the NFUS and the Scotland Office, we have together secured access for around 30,000 workers and that is a result we can all welcome

There was much misinformation about Brexit, not least in the field of agriculture, so it is important to set the record straight.

Critics claimed that Brexit was some sort of race to the bottom, that we in Britain would abandon quality in favour of quantity to accept anything offered to us.

And you will have all heard the scare stories about 'chlorinated chicken' being foisted upon us.

And it made for good headlines, but the truth is very, very different indeed.

Rather than the EU being the only stewards of high standards, in fact British legislation on livestock husbandry and food production in many cases exceeds those on the Continent.

We now have the chance to continue to drive for quality, setting our own high standards and that means no to the 'chlorinated chicken' and some of the things on other people's imagination.

No products, other than potable water, are approved in the UK to wash poultry.

Existing food safety provisions on the decontamination of poultry were transferred onto the UK statute book and they continued to operate independently in United Kingdom law.

The UK, and especially Scotland, can be rightly proud of our world-leading standards.

The UK Government has been clear that in all of our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental, animal welfare and food standards.

Those standards are enshrined in law and remain unsurpassed.

It was a pleasure to work closely with NFU President Minette Batters as we brought forward the Agriculture Bill.

This was the first major piece of domestic legislation on agriculture in over 70 years and Minette was right to hail it as a blueprint for food and farming for generations yet to come.

And I was delighted to be able to facilitate a meeting for her with the Prime Minister and together we agreed that the trade and agriculture commission should be put into statute.

All in all, we are providing a firm basis for maintaining the same high level of protection for both domestic and imported products.

All agri-food products imported into the UK will, as now, have to comply with our import requirements.

The independent advice of our food regulators, and our rigorous processes, will continue to ensure that food imports into the United Kingdom are safe and meet the relevant UK product rules and regulations.

The UK Government remains committed to promoting robust food standards both nationally and internationally, to protect consumer and producer interests, and ensure the public have confidence in the food that they buy.

Let me reassure you that we will stand firm in trade negotiations. Any future trade deals will live up to the values of farmers and consumers alike across the whole United Kingdom.

We will not sign trade deals that compromise our high environmental protections, our animal welfare and food standards, and claims to the contrary are just unhelpful scaremongering.

We are a world leader in these areas and that will not change.

I want to turn now to new horizons where we are already seeing benefits, but first want to touch briefly on the domestic situation.

As you well know, Scotland sells more to the rest of the UK than she does to the rest of the world combined. The provisions in the UK Internal Market Act are designed to protect and strengthen this market, to boost our economic recovery, and to protect jobs and enhance investment.

Its principles of mutual recognition and non-discrimination ensure a level playing field UK-wide, and offers certainty for businesses.

Looking further afield, we have already struck trade deals with more than 63 countries around the world, worth £217 billion a year.

This includes deals with Canada, Japan and Singapore – and with many more in the pipeline.

Let's take our Free Trade Agreement with Japan, where we can be judged by our deeds.

Here is an example of a UK Government deal which has boosted the agricultural sector in Scotland and I am pleased the NFUS agree with us on that evaluation.

It offers more generous access for malt and recognition of more geographical indications – potentially up to 70. It underpins access for UK goods, almost 99 per cent tariff-free, exported to Japan.

We are forging ahead, ensuring sensitive sectors will be protected, and Japan is just one example of the new opportunities we can maximise for the first time in 50 years.

We also need to make up for lost time and the UK Government is surging ahead.

Our new tariff regime will make our economy more competitive, and will cut red tape for traders.

The new Free Trade Agreements we strike, like those we are already negotiating with the US, Australia and New Zealand, will grow our GDP,

increase our trade with the rest of the world, create fresh opportunities for our exporters and deliver better choice and value for our consumers.

We are now seeking accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and that will open up further opportunities for our exporters.

British produce is renowned for its quality and is highly competitive in the global marketplace.

We want trade deals that present new opportunities for farmers to sell their brilliant products.

This includes some of the world's biggest consumer markets in the Americas and the Pacific – while protecting British agriculture and its very high standards.

All in all, we are rebalancing our trading relationships towards the fastest-growing parts of the world, ensuring that the UK is well placed for the global economy of the future.

Taken together these deals will give Scotland's rural communities an opportunity on the global market not available to us in the last 50 years.

Scotch beef, Orkney Cheddar, from barley to venison – we will be at the forefront of the UK's Global Britain programme.

On red tape, you will be aware that some in the seafood sector have faced significant issues in exporting their goods to the EU and some meat exporters have also had problems.

We have been working round the clock to solve the issues, many of which lie on the other side of the Short Straits. I am pleased to report that, working as partners, we are getting through these temporary difficulties and everything is being done to ensure our vital export trade experiences minimal disruption.

Seed potatoes are, I know, a concern for many of you and we are making Herculean efforts here, reaching out to the EU to seek a change to its unjustified stance on another quality Scottish product.

I began by mentioning innovation where we are world leaders.

In my own constituency we have a major egg producer who uses the chicken droppings to both heat the barns and provide power for the farm.

The resulting ash is useful for fertiliser.

It's just one of dozens of examples of farmers harnessing technology to deliver high-quality products while stewarding the environment for future generations.

We have a golden opportunity to plan for the future and to set the direction

we want – industry and government in partnership.

My office values our excellent relationship with the NFUS highly.

And I can assure you that your voice is heard at the very highest levels of the United Kingdom Government.

This helps to make sure that UK Government policy in agriculture continues to benefit Scotland.

And we look forward to working with you to make life outside the EU the great success that we all know it can be.

So, I would conclude by saying I am confident that agriculture, in common with other sectors of our economy, has nothing to fear and has everything to gain in the years ahead.

[Protecting heritage in the City of London](#)

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[Thousands more NHS patients to get life-saving COVID-19 treatment](#)

- COVID-19 patients are to receive second life-saving treatment for hospitalised patients outside of intensive care
- Thousands more lives could be saved as UK clinical trials show tocilizumab reduced the risk of death by 14% for patients on oxygen on top of benefits from dexamethasone

- Treatment will help reduce pressures on hospitals and improve outcomes for patients

Thousands more NHS patients who are hospitalised due to COVID-19 will be able to receive life-saving treatment tocilizumab, the government has announced.

The drug reduced the relative risk of death by 14% and reduced the time spent in hospital by 5 days when used for patients on oxygen and in addition to the corticosteroid dexamethasone.

The roll-out of this treatment could also contribute significantly towards reducing pressures on hospitals over the coming weeks and months.

Scientists discovered the drug was effective during the RECOVERY clinical trial, funded by the UK government through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Last month, the international clinical trial REMAP-CAP, also funded by the government, found that tocilizumab and sarilumab reduced the risk of death for patients when administered within 24 hours of entering intensive care.

The latest findings by RECOVERY, run by the University of Oxford, show a much larger group of hospitalised patients can also benefit from the drug if it is given to those outside of intensive care with oxygen deficiency and showing signs of worsening – meaning potentially thousands more lives could be saved.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Today's excellent news is further proof the UK is at the forefront of the global mission to find safe and effective treatments for this terrible virus.

I want to thank all those who have played a part in generating these tremendous results – from the British scientists and researchers behind the trial, to the thousands of patients who took part across the country.

We are working quickly and closely with colleagues across the health system and sector to ensure every NHS patient who needs this treatment should be able to access it – reducing further pressures on the NHS and potentially saving thousands of lives.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer Professor Jonathan Van-Tam said:

These results present another important advance in our fight against COVID-19 and are good news for patients and clinicians around the world – it's a combination of both effective therapeutics and vaccines that will mean an end to this pandemic.

The data published today mean many more patients in hospital with

COVID-19 will have access to a proven treatment, speeding up their recovery and reducing the risk of mortality significantly.

It's because of the UK's world-class clinical trials infrastructure, including NIHR infrastructure in NHS hospitals, and the generosity of UK patients to volunteer even though they are ill themselves, that trials like RECOVERY are able to deliver definitive evidence that will save lives, and I am hugely grateful to all those involved.

Professor Stephen Powis, NHS national medical director, said:

Throughout the pandemic where the NHS leads, the world has followed – from vaccinating the first patients outside of clinical trials to helping get dexamethasone into frontline care, and now to driving forward research on another breakthrough treatment.

I am immensely proud that the NHS is delivering another breakthrough treatment that will significantly increase the chances of survival for COVID patients being treated in England's hospitals.

This is another positive development in our continued fight against the virus and alongside the roll-out of the biggest and fastest vaccination programme in our history, with over 10 million people receiving protection so far, we can start to look to the future with hope.

The government is working closely with the manufacturer Roche to ensure the drug is available across NHS healthcare settings.

This is the second treatment that RECOVERY, the world's largest randomised controlled clinical trial, has found to be effective against COVID-19. It follows its discovery of the world-first treatment dexamethasone in June last year, which reduces the risk of death by 20% for patients on oxygen and 35% for ventilated patients.

RECOVERY has now found the benefits of using tocilizumab with dexamethasone are in addition to the benefits shown by dexamethasone alone.

Updated guidance will be sent to NHS trusts and clinicians on Monday, recommending they use this drug for hospitalised patients who may benefit from the treatment.

Throughout the pandemic, the government has supported British research with millions of pounds of funding for clinical trials into the most promising and innovative medicines in our fight against the virus, including for the RECOVERY trial.

The considerable success in large-scale clinical trials, like RECOVERY, is

due to the UK's world-class researchers, life sciences industry and research infrastructure, and the willingness of the public to volunteer, as well as existing NIHR infrastructure in NHS hospitals across the country.

With over 35,649 participants, RECOVERY is the largest randomised clinical trial anywhere in the world and will continue to trial other medicines, such as colchicine and baricitinib.

Marius Scholtz, Chief Medical Officer at Roche Products Ltd, said:

Today's news is a positive step that increases our collective scientific understanding of COVID-19. It means that doctors across the NHS have access to a medicine that can help save the lives of hospitalised patients with severe COVID-19 and signs of inflammation. We are proud to have been part of a wide-ranging group, including academia, industry, the NHS, NIHR and government, that came together in an unprecedented way to fight this disease.

Tocilizumab (Roche), trade name RoActemra, is an anti-inflammatory monoclonal antibody, approved globally for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis among other conditions.

Tocilizumab was added to the RECOVERY and REMAP-CAP trials in April.

The RECOVERY trial has demonstrated a 14% reduction in relative mortality and a 5-day reduction in hospital stays when tocilizumab is used in addition to standard of care. This is an absolute difference of 4%.

Previous results from the REMAP-CAP government-funded trial published on 7 January showed tocilizumab and sarilumab reduced the relative risk of death by 24%, when administered to patients within 24 hours of entering intensive care.

The RECOVERY trial investigates a different patient cohort to REMAP-CAP, meaning that its findings are relevant to patients in an earlier stage of the disease with oxygen deficiency, rather than those in ICU as for REMAP-CAP.

RECOVERY indicates efficacy for a patient cohort consisting of hospitalised patients who are receiving dexamethasone, are on oxygen, and have high levels of C-reactive protein (CRP) which is a marker of inflammation in the blood. Clinical guidance will be sent to trusts and clinicians shortly.

RAPID-C19 is the collaboration between the NHS, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), NIHR and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), which will coordinate the advice to clinicians on appropriate use of tocilizumab.

A single UK-wide process to prioritise COVID-19 research as Urgent Public Health (UPH) research was established by NIHR early in the pandemic which prevented duplication of effort and ensured the UK ran large enough trials to get definitive answers to key questions. NIHR and the Medical Research

Council (MRC) have worked together on this.

The NHS will ensure supply is maintained for current use for the drug's current indications, such as rheumatoid arthritis.

[Detention of Zaza Gakheladze in the Georgian breakaway territory of South Ossetia: UK statement](#)

World news story

Nicola Murray, Deputy Head of Delegation, expresses UK concern at the detention of Georgian citizen Mr Gakheladze at the OSCE Permanent Council.



I'd like to thank my Georgian colleague for raising this issue today.

In July, the UK joined other States in this council in expressing our concern at the detention and alleged shooting of Georgian citizen Mr Gakheladze in the Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia. Today we reiterate that concern as we note that Mr Gakheladze has been arbitrarily imprisoned for 12.5 years, and we call for his immediate release.

All Georgian citizens should have the right to travel within Georgia's internationally recognised borders. These ongoing detentions and so-called "borderisation" activity (which has continued despite the current pandemic) are specifically designed to destabilise the region and have a direct negative impact on civilians living on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines. This must stop.

We note the importance of the work of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia in this context and we call on Russia to allow them to fulfil their full mandate to monitor on all sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines.

We remain unwavering in our support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and we encourage all parties to implement the six-point agreement of 2008 and its Implementing Measures in full. The recent European Court of Human Rights judgment in the case of Russia and Georgia reinforces the calls for Russia to stop its continuing violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you.

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