

Independent batch release testing of COVID-19 (coronavirus) vaccines by the NIBSC



As is the case for current, licensed vaccines, the quality of each batch of any potential COVID-19 vaccine will be evaluated by an independent laboratory. The independent laboratory will also carry out a thorough review of the manufacturer batch documentation that describes the production process and quality control testing performed by the company.

In the UK, this independent testing is performed by the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC), an expert centre of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

Before any batch can be released for deployment, the NIBSC will issue a certificate confirming that the independent testing has been performed and that the batch is compliant with the relevant specifications for the product.

See [the NIBSC's statement on independent batch testing of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca](#).

[Further information on independent batch release testing](#).

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1. 8 January 2021

Added a link to the NIBSC's statement on independent batch testing of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca

2. 22 December 2020

First published.

Survey seeks views on contingency arrangements



The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) is seeking views from all law firms and providers of legal aid services as part of a survey on contingency measures.

Providers of legal aid services will be able to tell the LAA about how the supervision and office requirements contingency arrangements have been used and leave feedback on these arrangements.

This follows the LAA's decision that virtually all COVID-19 contingency measures would be extended to 31 March 2021.

In relation to supervision and office requirements, however, we have decided to extend contingencies until the 31 January and review what shape these measures should take from February onwards.

Providers of legal aid services will have until Monday 11 January to complete the survey.

The LAA is asking all providers with a legal aid contract to complete the survey, whether they have made use of the contingency arrangements or not, so that a complete picture can be built up.

The survey can be [completed online](#).

More details on the extension of contingency arrangements can be found on our [COVID-19 contingency page](#).

Further details about supervision and office requirements can be found on our [contract management and assurance page](#).

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1. 22 December 2020

Edited text to include 'supervision and office requirements'.

2. 22 December 2020

British Army family gets new home for Christmas as they move into the first refurbished houses

Corporal Stewart Angus of 1st Battalion the Mercian Regiment moved into the upgraded property at Larkhill along with his wife Sarah and children Paige, aged 11 Bradley, aged 4, and 3 year-old Oscar.

Their new home has been completely upgraded by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and contractors Amey, thanks to £200-million of funding for military accommodation which was announced by the Chancellor and Secretary of State for Defence in July.

The Angus family are the first of around 3,500 military families who will be able to live in newly upgraded homes because of the funding.

Cpl Angus, Sarah and their children will benefit from a house which has been refitted, with a new kitchen, bathroom, downstairs toilet, heating pipework and radiators, boiler, electrical wiring and fittings and flooring.

Corporal Angus with his wife Sarah and children Paige, Bradley and Oscar at their new home. DIO Crown Copyright, 2020.

Artex ceilings were removed, walls were completely re-plastered and new carpets and curtains were added. In addition, the house got a new roof, windows and doors, external lights and some new fencing. New loft insulation and external wall insulation were also added, greatly increasing thermal efficiency to save energy, reduce the family's heating bills and make sure it's a warm family home through the winter.

The Government's funding totals £200-million for accommodation improvements for armed forces personnel. Of this, £122-million is being spent on upgrading 3,500 service homes throughout the UK. Some properties are receiving a full refurbishment, like Cpl Angus' family home, while others will see smaller but still significant improvements with a minimum investment of £25,000 per property.

Around 800 homes which have been empty for a long time are being targeted first to reduce disruption to families. A number of play parks in military housing areas will also see significant investment, giving many children improved places to play.

Air Commodore James Savage, DIO's Head of Accommodation, has welcomed the family to their new home.

He said:

It's great to see Corporal Angus and his wife and children become the first of many military families across the country to benefit from improvements to Service Family Accommodation. This funding allows us to target some of the homes most in need of improvement and really make a difference to the home lives of thousands of servicemen and women and their families.

It's a condition of the funding that it must be spent within 18 months, so my team and our industry partners, Amey, have had to work very quickly to identify where the money can be best spent and then to put our plans into action.

Corporal Angus' new home is the first of many and I hope he and his family are very happy there.

Corporal Angus said:

Moving house is always stressful, especially with three children, but it certainly helps to be moving to somewhere that I know is practically a new house in many ways. We're really pleased to be moving to a property with all of these new and upgraded features, particularly just in time for Christmas!

Tim Redfern, Amey's Managing Director Defence said:

Amey and DIO have a shared vision of providing the military community with secure, warm and energy-efficient homes, and this huge boost in government funding will enable us to further support the MOD in their commitment to improve the quality of armed forces living accommodation, and enhance the economic, sustainable and social performance of the Defence estate.

Additionally, it allows our supply chain partners to preserve the resilience of their own business during the pandemic and provide a much-needed boost to their local community.

We're absolutely delighted that Corporal Angus and his family are pleased with the upgrades to his property and we look forward to welcoming many more families into their newly-refurbished homes.

Alongside the spending on family homes, DIO is investing £38-million of the £200-million funding on a nationwide Net Carbon Accommodation Programme and £6-million on refurbishing accommodation at Longmoor Training Camp. This will

improve facilities for troops when they are training away from their permanent base. The remaining £34-million will be used for improvements to some Single Living Accommodation facilities in Army barracks, RAF stations and naval establishment.

This investment programme will provide work to dozens of companies, many of which will be small and medium enterprises local to the area. It is expected to sustain around 2,000 jobs in the construction sector.

Watch the YouTube video to hear directly from the Air Commodore James Savage and Corporal Angus: <https://youtu.be/lZPojyMNvW8>.

Read the full transcript: [Army family get Christmas wish granted with fully upgraded Service Family Accommodation](#) (ODT, 5.75KB)

Service update – CICA festive opening hours

News story

An update on CICA's telephone helpline opening hours over the festive period.



Our telephone helpline will be closed between 3pm on Thursday 24 December until 10am Tuesday 29 December and from 3pm on Thursday 31 December until 10am Tuesday 5 January.

Our telephone helpline will be open during the following hours:

- Tuesday 29 December – 10am until 3pm
- Wednesday 30 December – 10am until 3pm
- Thursday 31 December – 10am until 3pm

We will return to our opening hours of 10am to 3pm, Monday to Friday from 5 January 2021.

You can continue to use our [online application service](#) throughout this time.

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Mid Wales Growth Deal Reaches Key Milestone

Press release

The UK Government and other partners sign Heads of Terms for the Mid Wales Growth Deal.



Simon Hart and David TC Davies signed the Heads of Terms with other partners

The Mid Wales Growth Deal reached a significant milestone this week (Tuesday, 22 December) with the signing of the Heads of Terms by the UK Government, Welsh Government and the region's local authorities.

The signing demonstrates a commitment by both governments and the local authorities to work together to deliver a deal to support the economy of the region.

It also commits both the UK and Welsh Governments to back the growth deal with a £55m investment each, totalling £110 Million.

The region can now progress to the next stage which includes bringing forward more detailed proposals in the form of a Portfolio Business Case which will be developed from eight priority areas for intervention, including digital connectivity, applied research and innovation, energy, skills and employment, business support, transport, agriculture, including food and drink and a strengthened tourism identity.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

The UK Government is working to bring greater investment and growth to communities across Wales and today's signing represents real progress in achieving those aims.

The Mid Wales Growth Deal is a significant opportunity to transform the region. We will build back better from the pandemic and bring opportunities and jobs to our communities which is why we have already committed £55m to this exciting portfolio of investment.

We will continue to work with our partners to develop the growth deal and ensure it delivers for the people and businesses of Mid Wales.

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