

Major step forward for RAF Lossiemouth upgrades as runway refurbishment finishes early

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) awarded a £75-million contract for the airfield operating surfaces project to VolkerFitzpatrick in August 2019. The project was expected to be completed in spring 2021 but fast work allowed the runway to be handed over to RAF Lossiemouth on 15 December 2020, following successful completion of pre-use checks.

Resurfacing works are one of many improvements being made at RAF Lossiemouth, future-proofing the Moray base for years to come. Other improvements include accommodation for personnel, a new Air Traffic Control Tower, upgrades to drainage and electrical supplies, and upgraded facilities for IX (Bomber) Squadron.

For most of the runway work, which started in earnest in January 2020, aircraft continued to operate from RAF Lossiemouth. This work required the RAF's new P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft being delivered to nearby Kinloss Barracks and operating from there during the majority of the runway works. A short period of relocation was also needed for Lossiemouth's Typhoon aircraft while the intersection between the Station's two runways was resurfaced; this started in August 2020 and saw the Typhoons also operating from Kinloss Barracks as well as Leuchars Station. The intersection resurfacing finished in October 2020, allowing the P-8As and Typhoons to return and operate from their home station.

The P-8A Poseidon is a submarine hunter which locates and tracks potentially hostile submarines. Home to four fast-jet squadrons flying the Typhoon, it has been some time since RAF Lossiemouth has regularly operated a larger aircraft such as the P-8A Poseidon. The P-8As represent a new era in operations from this station and a significant investment in Scotland which introduces a new UK Defence capability.

Russ Liddington, DIO's Project Manager for the resurfacing works, said:

The completion of the runway works months ahead of schedule is a testament to the hard work and collaborative attitude of everyone involved in the project, whether from DIO, VolkerFitzpatrick, RAF Lossiemouth or one of the subcontractors. The runway resurfacing and associated works, such as installing new drainage and airfield lighting, will see the runway life extended by up to 25 years. I'd also like to thank the local community for their support which is much appreciated by us all.

It is fantastic to see the works completed so quickly and a pleasure to see the RAF using much improved airfield facilities in

support of defence.

Wing Commander Pete Beckett, Director of the Lossiemouth Development Programme, said:

The completion of the runway work here at RAF Lossiemouth represents the first major upgrade to be delivered by the Development Programme and to have such a complex project delivered some three months early in the challenging context of 2020 cannot be under-estimated. My congratulations must go to both DIO and VolkerFitzpatrick in achieving this milestone.

For the wider Programme though, this is just the start. We already have one major project in delivery and expect to start another five projects in the first half of 2021. While we have secured the Station's operational output through the new operating surfaces, we now turn more towards the people-focussed improvements where we are going to upgrade both working and living accommodation across the unit. The exciting times continue!

Representatives from DIO, VolkerFitzpatrick and RAF Lossiemouth mark the handover of the completed runway. DIO Crown Copyright, 2020.

Station Commander RAF Lossiemouth, Group Captain Chris Layden, said:

It's been a privilege to see our newly resurfaced runway so busy since its early completion.

We've already conducted joint training with F-35B Lightning aircraft from 207 Squadron and been joined by a large US Navy detachment. That is of course in addition to our usual 24/7 Typhoon and Poseidon operations. Lossiemouth now really is a next-generation maritime patrol and fighter station!

My thanks go to my team, and contractors VolkerFitzpatrick for their hard work in successfully delivering the main runway ahead of schedule.

Keith Maplethorpe, VolkerFitzpatrick development director, said:

Completing the works ahead of schedule has been a collaborative effort and is testament to the ongoing commitment of our teams to ensure that key projects can continue throughout this pandemic. We are looking forward to the next project at RAF Lossiemouth.

As a defence critical project, upgrade work at RAF Lossiemouth has continued despite the difficulties presented by coronavirus, with various safety measures taken to make the site COVID secure.

[Chair of the ring-fencing and proprietary trading independent review panel announced](#)

News story

Keith Skeoch has been appointed by HM Treasury as chair of the independent review panel with responsibility to oversee and deliver two statutory reviews on the operation of ring-fencing legislation and proprietary trading.



The ring-fencing regime is a key domestic regulatory reform, introduced in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, following recommendations from the Independent Commission on Banking in 2011, to strengthen the resilience of the UK banking sector. The regime, which came into force in January 2019, separates core retail banking services from investment banking activities, particularly to protect depositors from risks arising elsewhere in the banks and in the financial system.

The Financial Services (Banking Reform) Act (FSBRA) 2013 requires the Treasury to appoint an independent panel to review the operation of the legislation relating to ring-fencing.

FSBRA also requires the Treasury to appoint an independent panel to review banks' proprietary trading activities. Proprietary trading involves activity where a bank trades in financial instruments or commodities as principal, requiring the use of the bank's own capital and/ or liquidity resources.

The independent review panel is required to submit its reports to the Treasury, including any recommendations.

The Treasury will announce the appointments of the remaining members of the panel and publish the terms of reference for the reviews in due course.

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[Moving to the next level of project leadership across government](#)

Today, (21 December), the Government has signed a new contract to deliver the Project Leadership Programme (PLP), as part of the plans to drive a step change in the delivery of government projects set out in the [National Infrastructure Strategy](#).

[Cranfield University School of Management](#), PA Consulting Group and The Project Academy (TPA), working together as a consortium, have been awarded the contract to update and refresh the training programme for project leaders. This supports the government's aim to create a highly skilled cadre of government project leaders.

The Project Leadership Programme (PLP), first launched in 2015, is designed to provide project leaders with the technical capability and leadership skills needed to deliver complex and innovative government projects successfully.

It forms a central part of Government's long term plan to put in place a more rigorous approach to training and accreditation for government project delivery professionals, from foundation skills through to mastery, under the new Government Projects Academy.

Over 900 senior leaders across over 30 departments have completed the previous programme successfully. The redesigned curriculum will equip current and future project professionals in government with the expert project leadership skills and understanding of modern, sustainable practices needed to deliver world class projects.

The relaunched course will welcome participants from Spring 2021.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office, Lord Agnew, said:

"Many of our projects and programmes are the most complex and innovative projects in the world. To deliver them we need the very best leaders. The refresh of the Project Leadership Programme is an example of this government's determination to invest in building world class professional expertise and drive a step change in project delivery"

Nick Smallwood, Chief Executive of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority

and Head of the Government Project Delivery Function, said:

“We know that having leaders with the right skills and experience is a fundamental factor in delivering successful project outcomes: the more complex the project, the more important this becomes. We want to invest in the future of our leaders and build world class delivery skills for the future.

“Our vision is to accelerate project delivery skills, and the Project Leadership Programme is a cornerstone of this vision. I look forward to continuing to work with Cranfield University on the programme.”

Mike Bourne, Professor at Cranfield University and Director of the Project Leadership Programme said:

“Project leadership skills are critical for implementing Government priorities and so we are delighted to be delivering the refreshed Project Leadership Programme. Over the last 5 years Cranfield University, together with PA Consulting and The Project Academy, have collaborated with Government to develop over 900 project leaders.

“Our team looks forward to continuing to build on this capability, with further cohorts of project leaders prepared to face the challenges of delivering Government’s most complex projects.”

Further information

- The current programme has been run by Cranfield University for 6 years. This programme will be refreshed early in the new year.

Government pledges further £310 million to tackle homelessness

- Funding targeted at areas with high numbers of homeless people, those at risk of homelessness, or those living in temporary accommodation
- Increase of £47 million on this year, bringing total funding to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping next year to more than £750 million
- The Homelessness Reduction Act has already prevented and relieved over 270,000 households from becoming homeless

Councils will receive additional government support to prevent vulnerable people becoming homeless, the Communities Secretary has announced.

£310 million will be targeted at areas with high numbers of homeless people, those at risk of homelessness, or those living in temporary accommodation - helping them to rebuild their lives.

The funding represents a £47 million increase on this year and can be used to offer financial support for people to find a new home, to work with landlords to prevent evictions, or to provide temporary accommodation to ensure families have a roof over their head.

This underlines the government's commitment to fully enforcing the Homelessness Reduction Act by ensuring councils have the funding they need to prevent homelessness and help more people sooner.

The funding is part of overall investment of more than £750 million to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping next year.

And this builds on the ongoing 'Everyone In' campaign, which is protecting thousands of lives during the pandemic by housing rough sleepers. By September, it had supported over 29,000 vulnerable people, with two-thirds now moved into settled accommodation.

To provide further help for those at risk of homelessness, the government has also ensured there is no bailiff enforcement action over the Christmas period apart from in the most serious cases. This builds on protections announced earlier this year, including six-month notice periods and new court rules meaning judges will prioritise the most serious of cases.

Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick said:

As we look back on an incredibly challenging year, everyone who has helped protect rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness during this pandemic should be proud of the role they have played in our internationally recognised response.

Today I am announcing £310 million to help councils protect those at risk of homelessness in the year ahead. We have a moral duty to help some of the most vulnerable people in our society rebuild their lives and look forward to a brighter future, and this funding will help us to realise that ambition.

Minister for Housing and Rough Sleeping Kelly Tolhurst, said:

All of the charities, councils, housing providers and support groups have truly gone the extra mile this year to protect the most vulnerable in our society throughout the pandemic and I want to wholeheartedly thank all of those who have made this possible.

This new funding will play a vital role in helping councils provide better support to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place as we look to end rough sleeping once and for all.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 ensures people at risk of becoming homeless get help more quickly, with councils receiving funding to support

them in these duties.

Since this came into force, over 270,000 households have had their homelessness successfully prevented or relieved through securing accommodation for more than six months.

This investment builds on more than £700 million government is spending on homelessness and rough sleeping this year. This has included the £15 million 'Protect Programme' scheme for councils which required extra support during the national restrictions and throughout winter to provide accommodation for rough sleepers.

We have also allocated £91.5 million to 274 councils in September to fund immediate support and interim accommodation for vulnerable people, as well as the £10 million Cold Weather Fund for councils to help to keep rough sleepers safe this winter.

The department has today published 2 [evaluation reports](#) carried out by independent researchers on the Housing First pilots in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region and the West Midlands.

The first report presents findings from research in the first year of the Housing First pilot, prior to the pandemic, which shows securing commitment at the highest level across all partners is essential for effective implementation and that relationships also need to be established with housing providers as early as possible.

The second report covers the impact of Covid-19 on the pilots and shows the organisation has worked hard to establish safe approaches to supporting clients and staff by introducing remote communications and providing enhanced emotional and wellbeing support.

See the [full breakdown of funding provided to councils in England](#).

[COVID-19 \(SARS-CoV-2\): information about the new virus variant](#)

Main points

Data from Whole Genome Sequencing, epidemiology and modelling suggest the new variant 'VUI – 202012/01' (the first Variant Under Investigation in December 2020) transmits more easily than other strains.

We currently have no evidence that the variant is more likely to cause severe disease or mortality – but we are continuing investigations to understand this better.

The way to control this virus is the same, whatever the variant. It will not spread if we avoid close contact with others. Wash your hands, wear a mask, keep your distance from others, and reduce your social contacts.

Is there any evidence that the variant is more serious?

We currently have no evidence that this variant causes more severe disease or higher mortality – but we continue to study cases to understand this better. We know that mortality is a lagging indicator and we will need to continually monitor this over the coming weeks.

Why is this more transmissible?

We know that mutations in the spike protein, the part of the virus that makes it infectious, can change how the virus interacts with human cells. However, we do not yet know the mechanism for this increase in transmission.

The evidence shows that infection rates in geographical areas where this particular strain has been circulating have increased faster than expected, and the modelling evidence has demonstrated that this variant has a higher transmission rate than other variants in current circulation.

How long has this variant been in circulation?

All viruses mutate over time and new variants emerge regularly.

Backwards tracing using the genetic evidence suggests this variant emerged in September 2020 and then circulated at very low levels in the population until mid-November.

The increase in cases linked to the new variant first came to light in late November when PHE was investigating why infection rates in Kent were not falling despite national restrictions. We then discovered a cluster linked to this variant spreading rapidly into London and Essex.

Evidence of increased transmissibility was provided to [NERVTAG](#) and ministers on December 18.

Is this strain resistant to the Pfizer vaccine?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that the Pfizer vaccine would not protect people against the new strain.

Further laboratory work is currently being undertaken as a priority to understand this.

How widespread is the variant geographically?

144 Lower Tier Local Authorities have identified at least 1 case genomically,

although the vast majority of cases identified are in London, the South East and the East of England.

Can tests detect this new variant?

Labs have been issued with guidance to adapt processes to ensure that PCR tests can detect this variant.

PCR tests can be adapted rapidly to respond to the new variant.