

Housing Secretary sets out plan to re-start housing market

- Housing Secretary announces plan to enable people to move home safely and to re-start the housing market in line with social distancing advice
- Estate agents' offices can open; viewings are permitted; show homes can open; removal companies and the other essential parts of the sales and letting process are re-started with immediate effect.
- More than 450,000 buyers and renters have been unable to progress their plans to move since March.
- New guidance to allow extended working hours on construction sites and to make the planning system operate remotely again.
- A 'Safe Working Charter' launched by the Government and the Home Builders Federation, enabling home builders to return to work safely.

From today anyone in England can move home if they follow new guidance published by Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick.

Since lockdown restrictions were implemented in March, more than 450,000 people have been unable to progress their plans to move house. All buyers and renters will now be able to complete purchases and view properties in person, while estate agents, conveyancers and removals firms can return to work while following social distancing guidelines.

In another move to unlock the housing market, the Housing Secretary has announced a series of measures to get the country building homes for the future, including:

- Allowing builders to agree more flexible construction site working hours with their local council, such as staggering builders' arrival times, easing pressure on public transport;
- Enabling local councils and developers to publicise planning applications through social media instead of having to rely on posters and leaflets, helping to unblock the service; and
- Support for smaller developers by allowing them to defer payments to local councils, helping those struggling with their cash flow while ensuring communities still receive funding towards local infrastructure in the longer term.

A new Charter has also been launched by the Government and the Home Builders Federation, helping construction sites reopen in line with latest health and safety guidance.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Today I am announcing new guidelines to allow the housing market to resume. Our clear plan will enable people to move home safely, covering each aspect of the sales and letting process from viewings to removals.

Our step by step plan is based on the latest guidance to ensure the safety and protection of everyone involved.

This critical industry can now safely move forward, and those waiting patiently to move can now do so.

Stewart Baseley, Executive Chairman of the Home Builders Federation, said:

Over the past week or so many house builders have commenced a gradual return to work, in a structured way that ensures the safety of its workforce and the general public.

The industry sustains hundreds of thousands of people in numerous roles and associated sectors, boosting local economies across the country. A resumption of work will play a major part in helping the economy recover as well as delivering the homes the country needs.

It should also provide the supply chain with the confidence it needs to accelerate its own restart. The Charter is the public facing evidence which supports the very detailed protocols individual builders now have in place to ensure safe working on sites.

John Newcomb, Chief Executive Office of the Builders Merchants Federation, said:

Safety has the highest priority as the industry returns to work. Over the past three weeks, since the publication of new branch operating guidelines, we have seen increasing numbers of merchants safely re-opening or expanding operations to support their trade customers.

House builders structured return to site provides even more confidence within the supply chain, and provides further evidence of the construction industry's determination to assist in the recovery of the UK economy.

Guidance from Public Health England must continue to be followed. For

example, anyone advised to self-isolate should continue to do so and not move home.

[Government guidance makes clear](#) that tradespeople including fitters can operate in homes, provided they do so in line with health guidance. Show homes can also re-open, following social distancing guidance.

The Safe Working Charter compliments detailed guidance available from the [Construction Leadership Council](#) on further reducing the risk of infection onsite.

The Government continues to listen to all parts of the housing industry to see what further support may be required.

These measures build on action from the Government to support the economy and protect the capacity of the construction sector, including:

- Introducing more than £330 billion of loans and guarantees to help firms continue operating;
- Deferring self-assessment payments until 2021 – crucial for a sector in which many are self-employed; and
- Providing households across the country with reassurance such as three-month mortgage holidays, including for landlords, alongside a three-month ban on tenant evictions.

Further information

The Health Protection Regulations previously prohibited home moves unless “reasonably necessary”.

The Housing Secretary has announced changes to the planning system to help support safe construction, including:

- Allowing builders to agree more flexible construction site working hours with their local council. This will make it easier to follow public health guidance onsite and stagger builders’ arrival times, making public transport less busy and so reducing the risk of infection.
 - Enabling planning authorities and developers to publicise planning applications through social media instead of having to rely on posters and leaflets, helping unblock the service and allowing it to support new development.
 - Providing local councils with more flexibility to support smaller developers by allowing them to defer Community Infrastructure Levy payments. This will help smaller developers struggling with their cashflow due to the pandemic while ensuring communities still receive funding towards local infrastructure in the longer term.
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Liz Truss kick-starts trade negotiations with Japan

The UK has today (Wednesday 13 May) published its negotiating objectives for a free trade agreement with Japan, with talks beginning shortly.

The agreement will be based on the existing EU-Japan free trade agreement and will aim to secure additional benefits for UK businesses trading with Japan.

More trade is essential in helping the UK overcome the unprecedented economic challenge posed by coronavirus.

We're optimistic that an agreement with Japan can give us security at home and opportunities abroad. It would help improve the resilience of our supply chains through diversity and opening new markets for business, bringing investment, better jobs, higher wages and lower prices, at a time when we need them most.

Manufacturers of textiles and clothing, and professional and financial services providers are among the UK industries expected to be the biggest winners of lowering trade barriers with Japan.

A deal will aim to secure cutting edge provisions on digital trade that in turn maximise trading opportunities across all sectors of the economy, building trust and stability for UK businesses, entrepreneurs and exporters.

These additional provisions, as well as strong copyright provisions, would benefit innovative sectors such as e-commerce and the creative industries. They would also make it easier for the 8,000 small and medium sized businesses exporting goods to Japan.

Government analysis published today shows that the UK economy could benefit from a £1.5 billion boost, as a UK-Japan trade deal could increase trade flows between both countries by £15.2 billion.

UK exporters would benefit from zero or lower tariffs, creating potential savings worth around £33 million per year, while UK workers' wages are expected to increase by £800 million in the long run as a result of the deal.

The agreement would benefit the whole of the United Kingdom, with Scotland, the East Midlands and London expected to benefit the most.

The first round of talks will start shortly using video conferencing, with negotiations continuing to take place remotely until it is safe to travel.

UK-Japan trade talks are also the first logical step towards our joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), helping diversify UK trade and provide opportunities in the world's fastest growing economies.

The government will set out its negotiating objectives for Australia and New

Zealand shortly with the aim of having 80 percent of total UK external trade with countries covered by free trade agreements by 2022.

International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss said:

Japan is one of our largest trading partners and a new trade deal will help to increase trade, boost investment and create more jobs following the economic challenges caused by coronavirus.

Both sides are committed to an ambitious timeline to secure a deal that goes even further than the existing agreement especially in digital and data.

Negotiations with Japan are an important step in CPTPP accession, a key UK priority, which will help us diversify our trade and grow the economy”.

The UK’s overall negotiating objectives for a UK-Japan FTA are:

- Agree an ambitious and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Japan that builds on the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), and secures additional benefits for UK businesses.
 - Increase UK GDP and provide new opportunities for UK businesses, including Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and investors, and facilitating greater choice and lower prices for UK producers and consumers.
 - Increase the resilience of our supply chains and the security of our whole economy by diversifying our supply chains.
 - The Government has been clear that when we are negotiating trade agreements, the National Health Service (NHS) will not be on the table. The price the NHS pays for drugs will not be on the table. The services the NHS provides will not be on the table. The NHS is not, and never will be, for sale to the private sector, whether overseas or domestic.
 - Throughout the agreement, ensure high standards and protections for UK consumers and workers and build on our existing international obligations. This will include not compromising on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards, and ensure both parties meet their commitments on climate change.
 - Secure an agreement which works for the whole of the UK and takes appropriate consideration of the UK’s constitutional arrangements and obligations.
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Four new Cabinet Office Non-Executive Board Members appointed

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Michael Gove, has today appointed Lord Hogan-Howe, Baroness Finn, Henry de Zoete and the Rt Hon Gisela Stuart as Non-Executive Board Members for the Cabinet Office. Baroness Finn and Lord Hogan-Howe have been appointed to the audit and risk committee.

They have been appointed for at least three years and will provide independent advice, support and scrutiny on the department's work. The new board members will work with civil servants and ministers across all areas of the Cabinet Office. They will help focus on the Government's priorities including responding to the coronavirus pandemic, preparing for the end of the EU exit transition period on 31 December 2020, strengthening the integrity of the Union, and improving the efficiency of the public sector.

They join the existing Non-Executive Board Members, Michael Ashley, chair of the department's audit and risk committee, Anand Aithal and Karen Blackett OBE.

Non-Executive Board Members are ministerial appointments. All members of the Cabinet Office Board were appointed following open and fair competition.

Alex Chisholm, Permanent Secretary for the Cabinet Office and Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service said:

Non-executive directors play an important role in ensuring that the Civil Service is well placed to deliver the government's ambitious agenda.

Our new board members bring a wealth of experience and expertise and I look forward to working closely with them.

Rt Hon Gisela Stuart

Served as the Labour Member of Parliament for Birmingham Edgbaston from 1997 until 2017, during which time she was a Health Minister (1999-2001) and member of the Intelligence and Security Select Committee (2015-17). She was formerly co-Chair of Vote Leave and is currently the Chair of Wilton Park, an executive agency of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Henry de Zoete

Is a tech entrepreneur and the co-founder of Look After My Bills, the largest auto-switching service in the UK, which was acquired by GoCo Group PLC (owners of GoCompare) in July 2019. He has previously served on the Board of

grassroots campaigning organisation 38 Degrees (2015-2018), co-founded The Beal Deal in 2014 – which uses tech to facilitate collective bargaining for consumers – and was a Special Adviser in the Department for Education (2010-2014) .

Baroness Finn, of Swansea

Was the Coalition Government's adviser on industrial relations, and subsequently a Special Adviser in the Cabinet Office (2012-2015), the Foreign Office and Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2015-2016). She became a Conservative peer in 2015, and she is the co-founder of FMA Ltd, a consultancy. She also serves on the audit committee of Arbutnot Latham & Co, and is a member of the advisory council of Transparency International, and a trustee of the think tank Demos.

Lord Hogan-Howe, of Sheffield

Served as Commissioner for the London Metropolitan police between 2011-2017. Prior to this he was HM Inspector of Constabulary (2009-2011) and Chief Constable of Merseyside police (2004-2009). He was elevated to the House of Lords as a crossbench peer in 2017. He is a trustee of the Arise Foundation, and a patron of the St Giles Trust.

Business Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 12 May 2020

[Business Secretary Alok Sharma speaking at the daily coronavirus press conference](#)

Good afternoon. I am joined today by Professor Stephen Powis, National Medical Director of NHS England and Sarah Albon who is the Chief Executive of the Health and Safety Executive.

First, I want to update you on the latest data on the coronavirus response.

2,007,146 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 85,293 tests carried out yesterday.

226,463 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 3,403 cases since yesterday.

11,605 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus, up from 11,465 the previous day

And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 32,692 have now died. That's an increase of 627 fatalities since yesterday.

This is of course devastating news for families across the UK, and we all need to stay alert and control the virus.

I just want to remind people of the details of the next phase of our fight against coronavirus that we set out this week.

If we turn to the first slide, in order to monitor our progress, we are establishing a new COVID Alert Level System, with five levels, each relating to the level of threat posed by the virus.

The alert level will be based primarily on the R value and the number of coronavirus cases.

And in turn that alert level will determine the level of social distancing measures in place.

The lower the level the fewer the measures; the higher the level the stricter the measures.

The social distancing measures remain critical in our efforts to control the virus.

Throughout the period of lockdown, which started on March 23 we have been at Level 4.

Meaning, a COVID-19 epidemic is in general circulation, and transmission is high or rising exponentially.

But thanks to the hard work and sacrifices of the British people in this lockdown, you have helped to bring the R level down and we are now in a position to begin moving to Level 3, in careful steps.

As you see on the next slide, we have set out the first of three steps we will take to carefully modify the measures, gradually ease the lockdown, and begin to allow people to return to their way of life – but crucially, while avoiding what would be a disastrous second peak that overwhelms the NHS.

After each step we will closely monitor the impact of that step on the R and the number of infections, and all the available data, and we will only take the next step when we are satisfied that it is safe to do so.

Step 1. From this week:

Those who cannot work from home should now speak to their employer about going back to work.

You can now spend time outdoors and exercise as often as you like.

You can meet one person outside of your household outside provided you stay 2 metres apart.

Step 2. From June 1, at the earliest, as long as the data allows, we aim to allow:

Primary schools to reopen for some pupils, in smaller class sizes.

Non-essential retail to start to reopen, when and where it is safe to do so,

Cultural and sporting events to take place behind closed doors, without crowds.

And then Step 3. No earlier than July 4, and again, only if the data says it is safe, we aim to allow:

More businesses and premises to open, including potentially those offering personal care such as leisure facilities, public places, and places of worship.

Many of these businesses will need to operate in new ways to ensure they are safe, and we will work with these sectors on how to do this.

As you will see from slide 3, having taken the first step in carefully adjusting some of the measures, and our advice to people on what to do, we have also updated our messaging.

We are now asking people to Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives.

Yes – staying alert, for the vast majority of people, still means staying at home as much as possible.

But there are a range of other actions we're advising people to take.

People should stay alert, by:

Working from home if you can.

Limiting contact with other people.

Keeping distance if you go out – 2 metres apart where possible.

Washing your hands regularly.

Wearing a face covering when you are in enclosed space where it's difficult to be socially distant – for example in some shops and on public transport.

And if you or anyone in your household has symptoms, you all need to self-isolate.

As slide 4 shows, if everyone stays alert and follows the rules, we can control coronavirus by keeping the R down and reducing the number of infections.

This is how we can continue to save lives, and livelihoods, as we begin as a nation to recover from coronavirus.

And to underpin this in the workplace, we have published new ['COVID-19 secure' guidance on working safely](#), available to UK employers, across 8 work settings, which are allowed to be open and where their employees cannot work

from home.

This also includes guidance for shops which we believe may be in a position to begin a phased reopening at the earliest from the 1 June.

Firms, unions, industry bodies and the devolved administrations have all fed into this guidance to give businesses and their employees the confidence they need to work safely.

And I believe we have reached a consensus in doing that.

We have also worked with Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive, to develop best practice on the safest ways of working across the economy.

The guidelines outline practical steps for employers to take, including carrying out a COVID-19 risk assessment, in consultation with employees or trades unions.

A downloadable notice is included in the documents, which employers should display in their workplace to show their employees, customers and other visitors, that they have followed this guidance.

We have also provided practical steps for employers to consider such as putting up barriers or screens in shared spaces, creating "fixed teams" or "partnering" to minimise the number of people in contact with one another, and frequent cleaning of work areas and equipment between uses to reduce transmission.

To support employers and employees through this, the government has made available up to an extra £14 million for the Health and Safety Executive, equivalent to an increase of 10% of their budget.

This is for extra call centre employees, inspectors and equipment, if needed.

We know how important the Job Retention Scheme has been in helping businesses through this difficult time.

And today the Chancellor has announced a four-month extension of the scheme to help provide certainty to businesses.

To date, 7.5 million jobs have been furloughed, protecting livelihoods across the nation.

Until the end of July, there will be no changes to the scheme.

Then from August to October the scheme will continue, for all sectors and regions of the UK, but with greater flexibility to support the transition back to work.

Employers currently using the scheme will be able to bring employees back part time.

And, as the economy reopens, we will ask firms to start sharing, with government, the cost of paying people's salaries.

To be clear, the same level of support of 80% of people's current salary, up to £2,500 will continue to be met, but through a shared effort between employers and government.

We will be setting out more details on the changes before the end of the month.

Throughout this pandemic, I have been struck by the way people have looked out for one another.

These measures are produced in that spirit.

So to employers I say: use this support and guidance to know you are doing the right thing and work with your unions and workers to keep each other safe.

And to workers I say: we are looking out for you; we want you to feel confident that you are financially supported and returning to a safe workplace.

Because in this time like no other, we all need to work together safely, as we rebuild our economy.

Thank you.

[Government expands expert team to rapidly roll out coronavirus test and trace programme](#)

- The government has today appointed 2 new members to the team of experts working on the coronavirus test and trace programme
- Tom Riordan and Sarah-Jane Marsh will join the programme which is being chaired by Baroness Dido Harding
- The team will work to rapidly expand test and trace nationwide, backed by the successful scaling up of testing capacity across the country

The government has today announced the expansion of the expert team leading on the rapid nationwide roll out of the coronavirus test and trace programme.

The test and trace programme has been designed to minimise the spread of coronavirus, by identifying people who may have been in contact with the virus.

The programme is backed by increased testing capacity and a contact tracing app developed by NHSX, launched on the Isle of Wight earlier this month.

Today, further experts have been added to the team working on the programme's nationwide roll out for later this month.

Tom Riordan, Chief Executive of Leeds City Council, will be leading on tracing alongside his existing role, and Sarah-Jane Marsh, Chief Executive of Birmingham Women's and Children's Hospital, will be the lead on testing.

The experts will join the test and trace programme chair and Head of NHS Improvement, Baroness Dido Harding.

Both experts have been confirmed by Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock to further draw upon the best British expertise from across the country in the fight against the spread of coronavirus.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I am delighted to welcome Tom Riordan and Sarah-Jane Marsh to our team of experts working to rapidly expand the test and trace programme across the country.

As we respond to an evolving pandemic, their expert leadership will support us to follow each case of the virus within the UK, curbing its spread and saving lives.

Chair of the Test and Trace Programme Baroness Harding said:

Test and trace is a vital element in the next phase of the government's plan to stop the spread of coronavirus.

Expanding the test and trace team to bring in more experts will ensure we can use the very best of our tech, research and people power to help keep coronavirus at bay across the country.

I am very grateful to Leeds City Council and Birmingham Women's and Children's Hospital for their support as Tom Riordan and Sarah-Jane Marsh join the national effort to stop the spread of the virus.

The test and trace team will work closely with National Testing Co-ordinator Professor John Newton. Professor Newton will continue to provide clinical guidance and will support the science of the programme alongside the deputy chief medical officers. His role has been expanded to allow him to ensure coordination between the testing and test and trace programmes, supporting Baroness Harding.