

Oxfordshire joins as sixth trailblazer for charging reform

- Oxfordshire joins five other local authorities as a trailblazer for government's charging reform
- Trailblazers will implement the new adult social care charging reform system early ahead of national roll out in October 2023
- Charging reforms will mean no one will have to face unpredictable care costs in the future

Oxfordshire is the latest local authority to join as a trailblazer for the government's social care reform. It will implement the changes of the charging reform early to end unpredictable care costs for local care receivers.

To ensure a smooth transition from the current charging system Oxfordshire joins Wolverhampton, Blackpool, Cheshire East, Newham, North Yorkshire to make changes early ahead of national roll out in October next year. This will include the lifetime cap for care costs of £86,000 for anyone receiving care in England, and a more generous means test to determine financial support from local authorities.

The government selected the six local authorities to ensure there was a representative cross section of communities so that any insight, evidence and lessons learned from this initiative would be helpful to all providers, local authorities and areas across England.

Minister for Care and Mental Health, Gillian Keegan, said:

It's great to have Oxfordshire join our trailblazers to implement the charging reform early.

Oxfordshire, along with our other trailblazers, will pave the way ensuring we learn from any insight, evidence and lessons to help providers and local authorities across England in the future. We're looking forward to working with them to make the ambitious change a reality.

Councillor Tim Bearder, Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care said:

We know reform in adult social care is needed to remove the unpredictable care costs people face as they get older.

Oxfordshire is a national leader in adult social care and being a part of this small group of early adopters gives us the opportunity to influence how the programme will be rolled out and share our

best practice with national government.

The government's charging reform will be funded by the Health and Social Care Levy, which is set to raise more than £5.4billion including £3.6billion to reform the way people pay for their social care.

From October next year, no-one starting to receive care will pay more than £86,000 over their lifetime and no-one with assets of less than £20,000 will have to make any contribution from their savings or housing wealth – an increase from £14,250.

Means-tested support will be available for people with assets between £20,000 and £100,000, with this upper limit more than four times the current limit.

The trailblazers will shape the government's approach to the implementation of the charging reform across England, by allowing the Department of Health and Social care to trial key aspects of the reforms.

The initiative will produce valuable insight, evidence and lessons to aid the government in monitoring progress and identifying challenges to improve understanding of how it'll work in practice.

These six local authorities will work with the department to educate and inform other local authorities with a series of events taking place before the final rollout.

[£41 million contract for bomb disposal protection supports 100 UK jobs](#)

News story

Personnel disposing of suspected bombs in the UK are being equipped with next-generation digital protection.



- New critical protection for personnel working with explosives
- Technology obstructs detonation airwaves from enemy devices
- £41 million contract supports local SMEs and 100 UK jobs

Military specialists called on to dispose of suspected bombs in the UK are being equipped with next-generation digital protection against remotely-triggered devices.

The life-saving technology will search the airwaves for remote control signals that may be attempting to detonate an explosive device, allowing skilled Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel to block them using this cutting-edge digital technique.

A £41 million contract placed with Leonardo has created 10 jobs with 100 roles supported around the country, including 35 at Leonardo in Basildon and Southampton. Around 50% of the contract value will be delivered by small and medium-sized enterprises across the UK.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Jeremy Quin, said:

Our personnel work in hostile environments on dangerous tasks to keep our nation and its people safe. This multi-million-pound contract with Team Endure not only delivers crucial innovative protection for our Armed Forces but is in large part being delivered by UK SMEs.

The British Army's 11 EOD team, Search Regiment of the Royal Logistic Corps and the Royal Naval Fleet Diving Squadron will be provided with vehicle-mounted and portable systems.

DE&S CEO, Sir Simon Bollom said:

This British Army regiment carries out high risk duties often in direct protection of the public and it is essential that we provide them with the tools needed to carry out their job safely and effectively. Crucially the system is open architecture so it can be updated across its lifetime to ensure advancements in hostile technology can be countered.

First deliveries of the new equipment are due to take place from Autumn 2024, with a view to deploying the technology across the whole of Defence's specialist units responsible for explosive device and munitions disposal in 2025.

Major General Robin Anderton-Brown, UKStratCom Director Capability, said:

This capability shows the MOD exploiting the best available technology from our innovative SMEs here in the UK. In a system designed for the information age, the procurement approach and open architecture will allow us to upgrade, at pace, to respond to new threats and technology. This cutting edge, modular capability will ensure our personnel are best able to deal with the threats they face, now and into the future.

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Leicestershire operator to pay penalty for illegal abstraction

The Environment Agency (EA) has imposed a Variable Monetary Penalty (VMP) on JRM Hire and Leasing Limited for illegally taking water from Sapcote Quarry in Leicestershire.

The VMP was issued on 22 June 2022 and will see the company pay £8,510, plus the Environment Agency's investigation costs of £7,482.77.

Since November 2018, Environment Agency officers have been receiving regular reports regarding the illegal abstraction of water from the base of Sapcote Quarry and carrying out their investigations.

The quarry is situated close to the town of Sapcote, Leicestershire, and had filled up naturally since quarrying ceased in the early 1990s.

The quarry is owned Mr John R Mac whose company JRM Hire and Leasing Limited operates from the quarry.

Abstraction of water from any source is regulated by the Water Resources Act 1991. Under Section 27 of the Act anyone can abstract up to 20 cubic metres of water per day for any reason without the need for an abstraction licence. JRM Hire and Leasing Limited has never held an abstraction licence at Sapcote Quarry.

The EA requested the company voluntarily attach a water meter to the pump to show the abstraction was below 20 cubic metres per day. During a site visit to Sapcote in May 2019 to inspect the abstraction, EA officers observed the pump operating at the base of the quarry with the water meter detached and

concealed nearby beneath a towel.

During May and November 2020, EA officers were successful at collecting evidence of non-compliant water abstraction from the quarry. A warning letter was issued for the May offence, but the continued non-compliance resulted in the penalty being issued.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

We take our responsibility to protect the environment very seriously. Where there is evidence, the Environment Agency uses a full range of enforcement options.

A variable monetary penalty (VMP) is a proportionate monetary penalty for the more serious cases of non-compliance.

We rely on communities to report pollution and environmental issues to us and urge people to report issues to us on our 24/7 incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

How much is a VMP?

The maximum amount for any VMP is £250,000 for each offence. The exact amount is calculated using the methodology in Annex 1 of the [EA Enforcement and Sanctions Policy](#).

When can VMPs be used?

A variable monetary penalty can be used in following situations:

- when there is evidence of negligence or mismanagement
- when there is an environmental impact
- to remove an identifiable financial gain or saving as a result of the breach
- where it is not in the public interest to prosecute.

What happens to the money once the VMP has been paid?

The money is transferred to Her Majesty's Treasury – The Environment Agency does not keep the money to fund its own activities or have a say in how the money is used. The Environment Agency is however, able to recover its costs,

using an Enforcement Cost Recovery Notice.

Defence demonstrates significant progress made for women in the Armed Forces

Today marks the year anniversary of the recommendations made by Rt. Hon. Sarah Atherton MP in her report '[Protecting Those Who Protect Us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life](#)'. A year on, Defence have taken on these recommendations and introduced an extensive programme of work alongside the work that was already being undertaken to tackle unacceptable sexual behaviour, improve the experience for women in the Armed Forces and build trust in the Service Justice System.

Most recently Defence has launched three new measures that provide clearer direction to prevent and address incidents. These are the [Zero Tolerance to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(SEA\) Policy \(JSP 769\)](#), the [Zero Tolerance to Unacceptable Sexual Behaviour: A Victim/Survivor Focused Approach Policy \(2022DIN01-073\)](#) and the [Tackling Sexual Offending in Defence Strategy](#). These policies will ensure that Defence continues to tackle unacceptable sexual behaviour and is a place where people are proud to work and have faith in their justice system.

In parallel to the recently published policies, a significant programme of work has been delivered across Defence and was set out in the [Government's Response](#) to Sarah Atherton's Inquiry. This includes training developments, transformation of the Service Complaints System, the stand-up of the Defence Serious Crime Unit HQ, delivery of improvements to uniform and equipment, and the Servicewomen's Health Improvement Sprint.

Recruitment

Defence has set a Level of Ambition to achieve a 30% inflow of women to the Armed Forces by 2030. It is recognised that 30% is a very challenging level of ambition, and one which has not yet been achieved by many of our NATO partners. In meeting this ambition, a Whole Force approach has been developed including tailored recruiting activities, women-focussed marketing campaigns and making greater use of Servicewomen as recruiters. Defence, however, recognises that recruitment alone is not enough and recognises that a greater focus on retention, behaviour and inclusion continues to be vital.

Women's Health

As part of the commitment to improving health and wellbeing for women in the Armed Forces, the Servicewomen's Health Improvement Focus Team (SHIFT) was

established to deliver the six-month Women's Health Sprint, bringing together military and civilian skills and experiences to deliver key women's health policies and initiatives. This includes menstruation disposal bags and a urinary support device, which are currently under procurement. Furthermore, a series of blogs on women's health has been published by the SHIFT, with the aim of normalising the discussion of women's health topics. These have received thousands of views and positive comments from Servicewomen, who feel like their voices are finally being heard and acted upon, and by others who welcome the opportunity to better understand and support their Servicewomen colleagues.

Diversity & Inclusion

A thorough training needs analysis was undertaken and a common standard introduced. Active Bystander Training continues to be an important part of the training offering, with the course being streamed 135,000 times, and we introduced a new Holistic Allies Training package in March 2022.

April 2022 saw the implementation of climate assessments across Defence and work continues to upskill our diversity and inclusion Advisers and Practitioners to better support our people.

Uniform and Equipment

As part of the pledge to improve the uniform and equipment offerings for women in the Armed Forces, the Services have all made amendments to uniform and clothing that address women's sizing, body shape and body changes. This includes the development of the [Narrow Scalable Tactical Vest \(STV\)](#). Wider revisions to uniform and clothing for each of the Services is in progress and rollout will commence in Summer 2022 and complete in 2023.

Service families

In recognition of the requirement to support a modern and diverse workforce, the [UK Armed Forces Families Strategy](#) was launched in January 2022. As part of the support to service families there are currently six pilot locations running the [Wraparound Childcare \(WAC\) scheme](#), with full rollout in September 2022, with almost 2000 Service children benefiting from free before and after school childcare.

Service Compliant & Service Justice Reform

In June this year we published the [Service Complaint Reform](#) which introduces a range of reforms and improvements to the existing Service Complaints system for Service Personnel. This is a new system that will increase efficiency; make the system more independent through the introduction of Central Admissibility Teams; improve the support available for those who engage with the process and increase trust and confidence in the system and its decision makers.

In order to address the recommendations regarding the investigation of serious crime the [Defence Serious Crime Command](#) was established in April this

year and the Defence Serious Crime Unit (DSCU) will be fully operational by December 2022.

Defence continues to build trust in the Service Complaints System and Service Justice System through a revised approach to the [publication of official statistics](#). This is part of a commitment to being transparent and continually seeking to develop and improve policies and support to serving personnel.

Understanding behaviours

We have also launched several targeted interventions to enable Defence to improve our understanding of unacceptable behaviours. These have included the implementation of recommendations from the '[Wigston Review into Inappropriate Behaviours](#)' and the subsequent [Gray Review](#). April 2022 saw the implementation of Climate assessments across Defence and work continues to upskill our diversity and inclusion Advisers and Practitioners to better support our people.

These delivered measures ensure that Defence continues to be a place where people are proud to work and have faith in their justice system. However, this is only the beginning and we are continuing to develop and improve policies to ensure our brave and dedicated serving personnel are proud to be part of the British Armed Forces.

More than a million businesses now eligible for Help to Grow as software scheme receives a boost

- The government's Help to Grow: Digital scheme is nearly tripling in reach, supporting up to 1.2 million UK businesses to adopt the latest digital technology
- businesses with 1 to 249 employees can now access discounts worth up to £5,000 on approved software
- from today, eCommerce software has been added to the scheme, helping businesses to sell online and reach new markets

A flagship government scheme that slashes the price of leading software, boosting productivity and growth of the UK's small businesses, will benefit even more firms from today (Monday 25 July).

With Customer Relationship Management software proven to boost firms' productivity by 18% on average, the Help to Grow: Digital scheme offers businesses discounts worth up to £5,000 on approved software.

Previously, only businesses with more than 5 employees were eligible for the scheme. From today, businesses with at least 1 employee are now eligible to benefit. This boosts the number of eligible businesses by 760,000 so that it now reaches up to 1.24 million.

Today it's also announced that eCommerce software is available through the scheme to help businesses ramp up sales of products and services online. This includes helping them to manage their inventory, take payments and gather data and insights on customers' needs. Businesses which adopt eCommerce software see on average [a 7.5% increase in employee sales over 3 years](#).

This means businesses can now access a £5,000 discount on 30 software solutions from 14 leading technology suppliers for eCommerce, Digital Accounting and CRM software.

Additionally, the government has announced that Help to Grow: Digital will support one-to-one advice for SMEs on how best they can adopt digital technology. The government will be launching applications for advice platforms to partner with the scheme from today, and the advice service will go live later this year.

Business Minister Lord Callanan said:

"Boosting productivity isn't some abstract concept to be sniffed at – for individual SMEs it means bigger sales and breaking into new markets. It can add £100 billion to the British economy overall, creating jobs and opportunity across the country.

"Adopting the latest technology is proven to help businesses make the most of their potential, and by making more than one million firms eligible for the scheme, we're helping to level up the UK economy and bolster the ability of our businesses to compete with the best worldwide."

Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury Alan Mak said:

"Extending our Help to Grow: Digital scheme will enable thousands more SMEs to become more innovative, more competitive, and more profitable.

"Helping them adopt new technology to support customers, manage accounts and sell online will save them time and money. This will boost productivity and help create jobs and prosperity across the UK."

The Help to Grow: Digital sits alongside the Help to Grow: Management scheme as the government's flagship programme to help small and medium-sized businesses to scale-up and grow. Help to Grow: Management offers business leaders 50 hours of leadership and management training across 12 weeks, with government covering 90% of the costs involved.

The schemes help businesses to boost their productivity and grow, which can lead to more high-skill, high-wage jobs. This is part of the government's commitment to grow the economy to address the cost of living and level up opportunity across the UK, alongside standing behind businesses by cutting fuel duty and raising the Employment Allowance.

Martin McTague, National Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) said:

“We are very pleased to have worked hard with BEIS to adopt our ask to expand the eligibility criteria of the Help to Grow: Digital scheme to support more small businesses getting the software they need.

“Our research shows the smallest firms are least likely to have adopted tech products because of the lack of resources although they would make the most productivity gains through adoption.

“It’s good that Ministers are listening. Together with the addition of e-Commerce software and one-to-one advice for SMEs on technology adoption, this will help small businesses enhance their operations and drive efficiency and growth.

Murray Lambell, Vice President and General Manager, eBay UK said:

“This is extremely welcome news for a significant number of the 300,000 small businesses who use eBay every day to grow their business. Many of our commercial sellers are micro-businesses who are extremely entrepreneurial but inevitably time poor.

“Being able to purchase e-commerce and other productivity-enhancing software at a discount could really help give rocket boosters to what are already fast-growing businesses. And given that three quarters of our small businesses are based outside London and the South East, this also has the potential to boost the government’s Levelling Up agenda.”

Notes to editors: