

# Speech: PM statement to the House of Commons: 26 February 2019

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the Government's work to secure a Withdrawal Agreement that can command the support of this House.

A fortnight ago I committed to come back before the House today if the Government had not by now secured a majority for a Withdrawal Agreement and a Political Declaration.

In the two weeks since, my Rt Hon Friends the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the Attorney General and I have been engaging in focused discussions with the EU to find a way forward that will work for both sides. We are making good progress in that work.

I had a constructive meeting with President Juncker in Brussels last week, to take stock of the work done by our respective teams.

We discussed the legal changes that are required to guarantee that the Northern Ireland backstop cannot endure indefinitely.

On the Political Declaration, we discussed what additions or changes can be made to increase confidence in the focus and ambition of both sides in delivering the future partnership we envisage as soon as possible – and the Secretary of State is following this up with Michel Barnier.

I also had a number of positive meetings at the EU-League of Arab States Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, including with President Donald Tusk.

I have now spoken to the leaders of every single EU member state to explain the UK's position.

And the UK and EU teams are continuing their work and we agreed to review progress again in the coming days.

As part of these discussions, the UK and EU have agreed to consider a joint work stream to develop alternative arrangements to ensure the absence of a hard border in Northern Ireland.

This work will be done in parallel with the future relationship negotiations and is without prejudice to them.

Our aim is to ensure that, even if the full future relationship is not in place by the end of the implementation period, the backstop is not needed because we have a set of alternative arrangements ready to go.

I want to thank my Hon and Rt Hon friends for their contribution to this work and reaffirm that we are seized of the need to progress that work as quickly as possible.

President Juncker has already agreed that the EU will give priority to this work. And the Government expects that this will be an important strand of the next phase.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the EU will be having further discussions with Michel Barnier and we will announce details ahead of the Meaningful Vote.

We will also be setting up domestic structures to support this work, including ensuring we can take advice from external experts involved in customs processes around the world, from businesses who trade with the EU and beyond – and, of course, from colleagues across the House.

This will all be supported by civil service resource as well as funding for the Government to help develop, test and pilot proposals which can form part of these alternative arrangements.

Mr Speaker, I know what this House needs in order to support a Withdrawal Agreement.

The EU knows what is needed.

And I am working hard to deliver it.

As well as changes to the backstop, we are also working across a number of other areas to build support for the Withdrawal Agreement and to give the House confidence in the future relationship that the UK and EU will go on to negotiate.

This includes ensuring that leaving the EU will not lead to any lowering of standards in relation to workers' rights, environmental protections or health and safety.

[Political content removed].

Not only would giving up control go against the spirit of the referendum result, it would also mean accepting new EU laws automatically, even if they were to reduce workers' rights or change them in a way that was not right for us.

Instead, and in the interests of building support across the House, we are prepared to commit to giving Parliament a vote on whether it wishes to follow suit whenever the EU standards in areas such as workers' rights and health and safety are judged to have been strengthened.

The Government will consult with businesses and trade Unions as it looks at new EU legislation and decides how the UK should respond.

We will legislate to give our commitments on both non-regression and future developments force in UK law.

And following further cross-party talks, we will shortly be bringing forward detailed proposals to ensure that as we leave the EU, we not only protect

workers' rights, but continue to enhance them.

Mr Speaker, as the government committed to the House last week, we are today publishing the paper assessing our readiness for No Deal.

I believe that if we have to, we will ultimately make a success of a No Deal.

But this paper provides an honest assessment of the very serious challenges it would bring in the short-term – and further reinforces why the best way for this House to honour the referendum result is to leave with a deal.

As I committed to the House, the Government will today table an amendable motion for debate tomorrow.

But I know Members across the House are genuinely worried that time is running out, that if the Government doesn't come back with a further meaningful vote or it loses that vote, Parliament won't have time to make its voice heard on the next steps. I know too that members across the House are deeply concerned by the effect of the current uncertainty on businesses.

So today I want to reassure the House by making three further commitments.

First, we will hold a second Meaningful Vote by Tuesday 12 March at the latest.

Second, if the Government has not won a Meaningful Vote by Tuesday 12 March then it will – in addition to its obligations to table a neutral, amendable motion under section 13 of the EU Withdrawal Act – table a motion to be voted on by Wednesday 13 March at the latest, asking this House if it supports leaving the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement and a framework for a future relationship on 29 March.

So the United Kingdom will only leave without a deal on 29 March if there is explicit consent in this House for that outcome.

Third, if the House, having rejected leaving with the deal negotiated with the EU, then rejects leaving on 29 March without a withdrawal agreement and future framework, the Government will, on 14 March, bring forward a motion on whether Parliament wants to seek a short limited extension to Article 50 – and if the House votes for an extension, seek to agree that extension approved by the House with the EU, and bring forward the necessary legislation to change the exit date commensurate with that extension.

These commitments all fit the timescale set out in the Private Members Bill in the name of the Rt Hon Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford.

They are commitments I am making as Prime Minister and I will stick by them, as I have previous commitments to make statements and table amendable motions by specific dates.

Let me be clear, I do not want to see Article 50 extended. Our absolute focus should be on working to get a deal and leaving on 29 March.

An extension beyond the end of June would mean the UK taking part in the European Parliament elections. What kind of message would that send to the more than 17 million people who voted to leave the EU nearly three years ago now? And the House should be clear that a short extension – not beyond the end of June – would almost certainly have to be a one-off. If we had not taken part in the European Parliament elections, it would be extremely difficult to extend again, so it would create a much sharper cliff edge in a few months' time.

An extension cannot take no deal off the table. The only way to do that is to revoke Article 50, which I shall not do, or agree a deal.

Now, I have been clear throughout this process that my aim is to bring the country back together.

This House can only do that by implementing the decision of the British people.

The Government is determined to do so in a way that commands the support of this House.

But just as government requires the support of this House in delivering the vote of the British people, so the House should respect the proper functions of the Government.

Tying the Government's hands by seeking to commandeer the order paper would have far-reaching implications for the way in which the United Kingdom is governed and the balance of powers and responsibilities in our democratic institutions.

And it would offer no solution to the challenge of finding a deal which this House can support.

Neither would seeking an extension to Article 50 now make getting a deal any easier.

Ultimately the choices we face would remain unchanged – leave with a deal, leave with no deal, or have no Brexit.

So when it comes to that motion tomorrow, the House needs to come together, as we did on 29 January, and send a clear message that there is a stable majority in favour of leaving the EU with a deal.

A number of Hon and Rt Hon Members have understandably raised the rights of EU citizens living in the UK.

As I set out last September, following the Salzburg Summit – even in the event of no deal, the rights of the three million EU citizens living in the UK will be protected.

That is our guarantee to them.

They are our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues. We want them to stay.

But a separate agreement for citizens' rights is something the EU have been clear they do not have the legal authority for.

If it is not done in a Withdrawal Agreement, these issues become a matter member states unless the EU were to agree a new mandate to take this forward.

At the very start of this process the UK sought to separate out this issue, but that was something which the EU has been consistent on.

However, my Right Hon Friend the Foreign Secretary has written to all of his counterparts and we are holding further urgent discussions with member states to seek assurances on the rights of UK citizens.

I urge all EU countries to make this guarantee and end the uncertainty for these citizens.

I hope that the government's efforts can give the House – and EU Citizens here in the UK – the reassurances they need and deserve.

Mr Speaker, for some Hon and Rt Hon Members, taking the United Kingdom out of the European Union is the culmination of a long and sincerely fought campaign.

For others, leaving the EU goes against much that they have stood for and fought for with equal sincerity for just as long.

But Parliament gave the choice to the people.

In doing so we told them we would honour their decision.

Mr Speaker, that remains the resolve of this side of the House.

[Political content removed.]

This House voted to trigger Article 50, and this House has a responsibility to deliver on the result.

The very credibility of our democracy is at stake.

By leaving the EU with a deal, we can move our country forward.

Even with the uncertainty we face today, we have more people in work than ever before, wages growing at their fastest rate for a decade and debt falling as a share of the economy.

If we can leave with a deal, end the uncertainty and move on beyond Brexit, we can do so much more to deliver real economic progress to every part of country.

So I hope tomorrow this House can show that...

...with legally binding changes on the backstop...

...commitments to protect workers' rights and the environment...

...an enhanced role for Parliament in the next phase of negotiations...

...and a determination to address the wider concerns of those who voted to leave...

...we will have a deal that this House can support.

And in doing so, that we send a clear message: That this House is resolved to honour the result of the referendum and leave the European Union with a deal.

And I commend this statement to the House.

---

## [News story: Payment scheme for former British child migrants](#)



The payments are being made in respect of the harm done to former British child migrants in being separated from their families and sent overseas as part of the UK government's historic participation in child migration programmes.

Payments will be made to all former British child migrants, regardless of whether they suffered abuse.

Applications for payment will open on Friday 1 March and [will be handled by the Child Migrants Trust](#).

Each eligible former child migrant will receive a payment of £20,000.

To apply, you must have been sent from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man before 1971 when you were below school leaving age.

You must have been sent by a voluntary care agency (or local authority in some cases), without your parents, to Australia, Canada, New Zealand or the former Rhodesia.

The payment scheme is not open to those who migrated as part of any voluntary

family, single parent or youth migration scheme.

For example, the scheme does not apply to those who:

- travelled on the one or two parent schemes to Fairbridge in Australia in the late 1950s, 1960s or 1970s
- were sent under a youth migration scheme (such as the Big Brother Movement) and placed immediately into employment on arrival
- travelled on an assisted immigration scheme
- were sent to relatives living abroad
- were evacuees during the war years
- were sent from Malta

The scheme has been set up by the government after a recommendation made in the [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse \(IICSA\) interim report](#) and its [report on child migration programmes](#), which were both published in spring 2018.

The government announced that it would set up a payment scheme in its [response to the inquiry](#) in December 2018, in recognition of the fundamentally flawed nature of the historic child migration policy.

Published 26 February 2019

Last updated 26 February 2019 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 26 February 2019 Added Channel Islands and Isle of Man to the list of places that claimants must have been sent from in order to be eligible for the scheme.
2. 26 February 2019 First published.

---

## [Press release: Chance to have your say on dualling the A1](#)

Highways England is asking for views on a scheme which will dual around five miles of the A1. The consultation opens on Monday 25 February and anyone with an interest in the route is encouraged to take part.

The consultation – which can be viewed here – will run for six weeks until Monday 8 April and there will also be a series of public events.

Highways England project manager Mark Stoneman said:

We are holding four public consultation events across the area which will provide people with an update on the progress we have made since the last consultation in November 2016 and the preferred route announcement which was made in September 2017.

The events will also provide an opportunity for people to understand the proposals in more detail and provide feedback which we may be able to incorporate into our preliminary design for the scheme.

In September last year it was announced that the orange option was the preferred route between Alnwick and Ellingham. It will include a new junction at Charlton Mires.

Highways England is planning to upgrade sections of single carriageway in Northumberland as part of a £290m investment, creating a dual carriageway on the entire stretch of the route between Newcastle and Ellingham.

These improvements will provide additional capacity, and improve journey times and safety while supporting economic growth in the region.

Junction improvements north of Ellingham have already started. Work has been completed at Adderstone and work has started at Fenham and Outchester. Work is due to start at Old Mousen and Newstead in March 2019.

Six other junctions, Cheswick, Warenford, Station Road, Haggerstone Castle, Purdy Lodge and Fenham Hill will be started by the end of March 2020.

Work on the section between Morpeth to Felton is continuing and the Development Consent Order, similar to planning permission is due to be submitted in summer 2019.

Consultation events for Alnwick to Ellingham will be held at the following:

- Rennington Village Hall – Thursday 7 March, 3pm – 8pm, Rennington, Northumberland, NE66 3RR
- Rennington Village Hall – Saturday 16 March, 10am – 3pm, Rennington, Northumberland, NE66 3RR
- Willowburn Leisure Centre – Wednesday 20 March, 3pm – 8pm, Willowburn Avenue, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 2JH
- Willowburn Leisure Centre – Saturday 30 March, 10am – 4pm, Willowburn Avenue, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 2JH

We will also be at Heighley Gate garden centre, Morpeth, NE61 3DA, on Friday 1 March between 9am and 11.30am and then between 1pm and 4pm in Alnwick main square to highlight the upcoming consultation events taking place.

## **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

## **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

---

## [News story: Improving service to customers: The recruitment drive and a better online service](#)

With the aim of meeting our customers' expectations in the time we take to process appeals, we are making improvements to ensure we provide our services in the most efficient way.

Whilst feedback from customers who use our service the most, predominantly appellants and local planning authorities (LPAs), shows that they highly rate our quality and rigor in deciding cases, 9 in 10 think we are not quick enough from submission to decision. The feedback also shows that progress of appeals is difficult to track with main parties needing more information about the progress of cases.

The [recent independent review by Bridget Rosewell CBE](#) says the average time to decide a planning appeal inquiry could be reduced from 47 to 26 weeks. The report made 22 recommendations. These range from a more proactive approach by the Planning Inspectorate to managing the inquiry process appointing inspectors earlier, through to more active case management and better technology solutions such as a new online portal. The recent recruitment effort should also allow more resources to be focused on processing important inquiry casework. We welcome the findings of the report. Bringing our performance on track is an absolute necessity and we wanted to share some of the work going on behind the scenes to improve our service.

### **What has caused performance issues?**

There are several factors that have contributed to this. Demand has increased by around 5% each year across all areas of casework, exacerbated by 1350 'telephone kiosk' cases over the financial year 2017/18.

Demand for our more complex infrastructure and local plan work has also increased and will continue to do so this year. Supply, which is directly linked to the number of inspectors, has been impacted by budget restraints, coupled with difficulties in recruiting inspectors, and generally more complex casework.

Currently it is also difficult for us to accurately predict future demand effectively and therefore manage the number of people needed to carry out the work. The absence of more sophisticated management information has hindered our ability to understand the situation, make effective decisions and predict future performance.

## The recruitment drive

One of the priorities in addressing the backlog is our recruitment drive to employ more planning professionals.

As the UK's largest employer of planners, the Inspectorate handles a wide array of planning matters from section 78 planning appeals, enforcement appeals through to specialist case work such as rights of way orders, local plan examinations and applications for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs).

However, our most experienced inspectors are in high demand. Complex inquiries into large scale developments or local plan examinations can take many weeks to conclude. The same 'band' of inspectors are also appointed to panels to examine applications for nationally significant infrastructure projects.

With more appeals arriving daily requiring technical expertise, the demand for our services has outstripped the supply for some time resulting in both a backlog of cases awaiting the appointment of an inspector and elongated casework processing times.

Part of the solution is to employ more skilled inspectors. Since the start of 2018, we have recruited 53 new inspectors and this figure is due to rise following an extensive recruitment campaign at the end of last year. This intake represents 16% of our current pool of inspectors. New inspectors, who typically join at band 1, where they will decide all but the most complex cases, undergo intensive and on-going training. Working remotely in all regions of England and Wales, they are assigned to cases at the outset with mentoring and quality assurance provided by experienced inspectors.

Our latest external [recruitment drive](#) aims to bring over 60 inspectors at Band 1 and a further 15 inspectors at band 2. We are also promoting a large cohort of Band 1 inspectors to Band 2. Extending the pool of highly skilled inspectors whom we can appoint for NSIP applications is vital to ensure examinations are resourced adequately.

Training is fundamental to equip inspectors with the latest policy knowledge so they can develop and lead on more complex casework. We place great importance to ongoing training programmes which we provide through workshops, training events and digital based guidance.

Inspectors attend the Inspectorate's Annual Training Event

Our performance improvement strategy also includes contracting the services of non-salaried inspectors (NSIs) who provide an important and flexible on-demand service. Our latest procurement drive at the end of last year brought the team of NSIs up to 84 from around 40 and, having recently received training, are now working on cases.

Despite the steady stream of new recruits joining our organisation we have, in the past, struggled to recruit the number we need to stay on top of

demand. One of the significant challenges we face is recruiting from a finite pool of qualified planners in the public and private sectors. Consequently, we need to think creatively and differently about how we can source our inspectors of tomorrow. We have therefore embarked on a new model through appeals planning officers (APOs).

APOs, like inspectors, work remotely and perform a similar role but are assigned to the lower level more straight forward planning and enforcement appeals that follow the written representation procedure. Although they do not make the decision on the case (this is taken by an inspector, based on a recommendation) the role provides an excellent career development opportunity for less experienced planners and to benefit from the depth of experience in the organisation.

Like inspectors, APOs will receive an extensive training programme that will develop their skills and knowledge of the planning system to either become an inspector or to further their careers outside the Planning Inspectorate. Our recent recruitment efforts yielded 82 applications for 20 positions.

## **Better online service**

An important aspect of providing a better service is the work to redevelop the Appeals Casework Portal.

The Portal is the primary way the various parties in an appeal submit information to the Planning Inspectorate but it has a number of key issues:

- **One in three appeals we receive have documents missing or are invalid.** This causes considerable delays while our staff follow up with appellants to obtain the missing files we need to start the appeal. The existing Portal needs updating to ensure we effectively capture all the information on submission and help people to "get it right first time".
- **Difficulty to track appeal progress.** One of the key issues appellants raise is the inability to find out where their appeal is in the process. Whilst the existing Portal provides an indication of key stages, we want to provide better notifications to give service users greater transparency on their appeals.
- **Digital service standards.** Whilst the current Portal has seen a number of developments over the years, the way government delivers services has moved on with greater emphasis on creating a better user experience through digital. The new Portal is being developed, and will operate, to the [digital service standards](#) outlined by the Government Digital Service to offer a better online experience for customers.

On top of this, there are aspects of the process that are completed outside the Portal which causes an administrative burden and frustrates users. An

example is the questionnaire we ask LPAs to complete for each appeal.

The prototype website we are building is based on extensive user research and testing involving the input of planning agents, unrepresented appellants, LPAs and interested parties. Our team work closely with these groups to ensure the prototype meets user needs and that we can move into a beta phase with a clear direction.

Feedback indicated that users want clearer guidance when submitting appeals and the new Portal will contain more succinct on-page guidance. Our team of content writers are testing it with the user groups to ensure it meets the need and users get it right first time.

## **Appellants – getting it right first time**

The structure of the appeal submission form is crucial to helping users get it right first time. Inspired by the 'Task List' in other digital services across government, we received positive feedback from users on this method for collecting data. The new form makes it easier for users fill in different sections of the form in the order that they wish to.

As the appeals process is both lengthy and complex, users felt a timeline showcasing the progress of their appeal would benefit them. This applied to both one-time users (unrepresented appellants) to help them navigate the process, as well as LPAs who are likely to be managing multiple appeals at once.□

The eventual design of the timeline was inspired by the design patterns used in the HMRC Self Assessment Tax Return service□.

## **Local Planning Authorities – understanding my appeals**

As we engaged with LPAs, who handle multiple appeals at any one time, we understood their need to be able to quickly understand the progress of appeals.

Introducing the timeline to the LPA 'case view', as well as clearly laying out key appeal information, enables LPAs to quickly see their available actions relating to this appeal.

The questionnaire is one of the most important evidence collecting devices the Inspectorate uses and as such it's vital it is easy to complete for LPAs.

By ensuring that evidence is clearly requested only when needed, as well as simplifying the language used, we can ensure the process is not overly complex for LPAs.

(Please note that the screenshots above show the prototypes in development and is indicative of the look and feel of the site. The live product may not

look identical to this.)

## **Introducing the new service**

We are aiming to launch a trial of this new service in Summer before rolling out to all planning appeals by the end of the year.

## **Investment to improve**

Our recruitment and online service improvements are realistic and achievable but investment is critical in any upcoming projects and developments aiding improvement. In November, our sponsor department, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), brokered a principle investment subject to the 2019-20 budget being finalised. Whilst MHCLG has given us the go ahead to proceed, we still need to rely on the final investment agreement going through before committing to all our ambitions.

The investment is about improving our performance across all casework areas and then, when achieved, staying on top of it. Critically, it also allows us to invest in improved management information and a Strategic Workforce Planning capability. Put simply this will allow us to better predict and manage our future work as well as giving the public better access to the data we hold.

If you'd like to hear more about our service improvements and related news then sign up for GOV.UK notifications or follow us on Twitter and LinkedIn.

---

## **[News story: Almost half a million new keys exchanged with Help to Buy](#)**

430,000 of these completions were made by first time buyers, who benefit from the £3,000 government top up on their savings.

Quarterly Help to Buy statistics released today (Tuesday 26 February) show that:

- 494,108 completions have taken place using one or more Help to Buy schemes, over 93% of which took place outside of London
- the average house price purchased through the schemes is £202,815
- first time buyers have now opened 1.4 million Help to Buy: ISAs, offering government bonuses of up to £3,000 on top of their savings

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond said:

This government supports those who dream of owning their own home,

and wants to help them take the first step onto the property ladder. That's why we've cut stamp duty and extended the Help to Buy equity loan scheme to run until March 2023, supporting half a million more home purchases.

Minister of State for Housing, Kit Malthouse MP, said:

This government is committed to helping more people get on the housing ladder as we power through to delivering 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s.

Our Help to Buy: Equity Loan scheme has supported more than 190,000 households in purchasing their home, helping to make the dream of home ownership a reality for a new generation.

The most completions using the Help to Buy: ISA continue to take place in the North West and Yorkshire & the Humber. In total, 194,379 completions have taken place across the UK since its launch in December 2015. The London Help to Buy scheme – which provides an equity loan of up to 40% for buyers in the capital with a 5% deposit – has helped 15,056 buyers across 33 boroughs purchase their own property between February 2016 and September 2018.

Find out more about all the different ways the government can [help you to buy your own home](#).

**Further information:**

To find out more about today's Help to Buy figures visit our [statistical release](#).