

Government future proofs Britain's energy system with launch of new body to boost energy resilience

- Government to create new Future System Operator (FSO) to oversee UK energy system
- new body will boost security and resilience of UK energy supplies and support transition to net zero emissions
- proposal follows consultation with industry who backed the creation of a new public body

The government has today committed to delivering a new public body to strengthen the resilience of Great Britain's energy system.

The Future System Operator (FSO), to be launched once legislation is passed and timelines have been discussed with key parties, will look at the Great Britain's energy system as a whole, integrating existing networks with emerging technologies such as hydrogen.

The FSO will be a new public body founded on the existing capabilities of the Electricity System Operator (ESO), and, where appropriate, National Grid Gas (NGG). It will work with energy suppliers and networks to balance the UK's electricity systems and ensure continued energy resilience and security of supply for households and businesses. It will also provide strategic oversight of the UK gas system by taking on longer-term planning in respect of gas (but not real-time operation, which will remain with NGG).

With high global wholesale gas prices and renewed pressure on energy networks following Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, consumers are facing increased costs and there is an urgent need to safeguard and boost domestically produced energy.

Today's announcement comes ahead of the forthcoming Energy Security Strategy to be published later this week which will set out our approach to ensuring greater clean energy independence for Britain. Government, Ofgem, National Grid and the ESO have agreed a joint statement published alongside this announcement, which sets out their shared vision for the FSO and their commitment to working together to deliver it.

Energy Minister Greg Hands said:

Russia's appalling aggression in Ukraine amid escalating global gas prices has shown the vital importance of strategic change to the UK energy system. We need to boost our energy resilience, reduce our dependence on expensive imports and slash emissions. The FSO will do just that.

Jonathan Brearley, chief executive of Ofgem, said:

A fully independent system operator will help to transform Great Britain's energy system and cut customers' energy bills. Critically, the FSO will ensure that we will build a smart, efficient and flexible system that will mean that Britain moves to a secure low carbon and low-cost system.

We look forward to working with National Grid, government and the wider industry to implement this important change in the way the energy system is managed.

Fintan Slye, Executive Director, Electricity System Operator, said:

We warmly welcome today's announcement that the ESO will be at the heart of the system operator of the future. Building on our track record and skills as a world leading system operator, together with industry and government and regulators we will help deliver an affordable, reliable and clean transition for all.

The ESO will continue working closely with all parties involved in the coming weeks and months to enable a smooth and successful transition.

The move aims to further build the resilience that energy providers and billpayers need. This will deliver greater energy security whilst ensuring the clean energy produced by the UK's burgeoning renewables sector gets to the homes and businesses which need it across the country.

As a trusted and expert body at the centre of the gas and electricity systems, the FSO will take a significant role in shaping the energy system and facilitating competition, overseeing new projects and integrating them with existing energy supplies.

The announcement follows extensive consultation with the energy industry, where there was broad agreement that Great Britain needed a new public body with operational independence from government, to oversee developments across the UK's energy networks.

The operator will take a whole-system approach to coordinating and planning the network, looking across electricity, gas and other emerging markets such as carbon capture, usage and storage, as well as offshore wind networks.

The FSO will also have a duty to provide independent advice and technical input to the government and industry regulator, Ofgem, to inform key strategic policy decisions.

The consultation responses, published today, also give Ofgem a new strategic function overseeing energy companies' governance codes. This decision is

expected to result in a long-term net benefit for industry and consumers, by ensuring that the detailed technical and commercial rules which guide energy providers keep pace with our net zero ambitions and deliver for UK consumers.

The creation of the FSO and the government's reform to the governance arrangements of the energy codes are set out in the official response to the consultations launched in July 2021.

Stakeholders broadly endorsed the proposed changes in consultation, with many arguing for these high levels of ambition and citing a clear need for more coordinated, strategic and whole systems planning.

We will work closely with National Grid, NGG and ESO over this period with a view to the FSO starting operations as early as is consistent with a smooth transition whilst avoiding disruption to current energy system operation activities.

There are other proposed roles for the FSO which are closely linked to other strategic work being undertaken by BEIS and/or Ofgem, which respondents agreed needed further consultation and engagement as the details are further developed.

The consultation responses also set out our decision to create a new governance framework for the energy codes, which will entail granting Ofgem new strategic code functions, including the ability to select and license code managers, in order to better enable strategic change to the codes and create a more responsive regulatory landscape.

This decision is expected to result in a long-term net benefit for industry and consumers, with no adverse material impact on consumer energy bills.

Health and Social Care Levy to raise billions for NHS and social care

- From today the Health and Social Care Levy will begin raising billions to tackle Covid backlogs and reform routine services
- £39 billion over the next three years will put health and care services on a sustainable footing
- Levy will deliver biggest catch up programme in NHS history and end spiralling social care costs

From Wednesday 6 April, the Health and Social Care Levy will come into effect and begin to raise billions to help tackle the Covid backlogs and reform the adult social care system.

Over the next three years, a record £39 billion will be invested in the

health and social care system to ensure it has the long-term resource it needs to provide world-class care, while delivering the biggest catch up programme in the NHS' history.

The pandemic put unprecedented pressure on the NHS. The number of people waiting for elective care in England is over 6 million – up from 4.4 million before the pandemic – and this is expected to rise, as up to 10 million people didn't come forward for treatment during the pandemic.

The necessary, fair and responsible Levy will reduce waiting times and deliver millions more scans, tests and operations, while reforming the way routine services are delivered so the NHS is fit for the future.

This means the NHS resource budget will increase to over £160 billion in 2024-25, including £5.9 billion of capital investment to support diagnostics, technology, and elective recovery.

The Levy will also reform the social care system, backed by £5.4 billion. It will end spiralling social care costs, provide a limit to the cost of care for everyone in the adult social care system for the first time, and significantly increase state support.

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said:

We must be there for our NHS in the same way that it is there for us. Covid led to the longest waiting lists we've ever seen, so we will deliver millions more scans, checks and operations in the biggest catch-up programme in the NHS' history.

We know this won't be a quick fix, and we know that we can't fix waiting lists without fixing social care. Our reforms will end the cruel lottery of spiralling and unpredictable care costs once and for all and bring the NHS and social care closer together. The Levy is the necessary, fair and responsible next step, providing our health and care system with the long term funding it needs as we recover from the pandemic.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The pandemic put unprecedented pressure on the NHS and is causing the Covid backlogs. This investment will go into tackling those backlogs and will help make sure everyone can get the care and treatment they need.

We can't have business as usual, which is why we are rolling out Surgical Hubs and Community Diagnostic Centres up and down the country to deliver millions more scans, checks and operations.

This vital funding will ensure the NHS is equipped to not only reduce waiting times but also tackle the big challenges we face –

from cancer to heart-disease and dementia. We will also reform the adult social care system, invest in the workforce and protect people from catastrophic care costs.

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak said:

This Government will not shy away from the difficult decisions we need to take to fix our social care system and slash NHS waiting times. The Health and Social Care Levy will fund a third more elective care, over 17 million extra diagnostic tests and a cap on the cost of care so people no longer live in fear of losing everything to pay for care.

The British people deserve the best health care in the world and delivering that is our top priority.

The record funding will help deliver:

- Around 30 per cent more elective activity in three years' time than before the pandemic.
- 17 million more diagnostic tests over the next 3 years.
- The expansion of operating theatres and diagnostic centres for cancer and other conditions.
- Better control for patients over their care, with more information and access to specialist teams. For example through the My Planned Care platform, now available to 5.5 million patients to find the average waiting time at their local hospital. In future the service will include advice on stopping smoking, diet and exercise, to help patients get ready for surgery and make sure they recover as quickly as possible. GPs and primary care teams will also be able to access the information, helping them to have more informed conversations with patients.
- A fair cost of care, £1.36 billion will support local authorities in England to move towards paying a fair cost of care to adult social care providers, ensuring market sustainability and preparing markets for reform.
- Charging reform, an £86,000 cap on care costs will be put in place in October 2023 so people can have certainty over how much they will need to pay, a measure backed by a further £2.2 billion.

Patients will also be offered the right to choose and more information on average waiting times at the point of referral. Those waiting the longest will be contacted by the NHS to be given the opportunity to change provider to reduce their wait. The NHS will support patients with travel costs if feasible and will engage with the independent sector so all options available. By the end of this year, all patients that have been waiting for 18 months or more will be contacted to discuss the choices they have about changing provider.

The Levy will end unlimited and unpredictable care costs. Currently, anyone with assets over £23,250 pays their care costs in full. From October 2023,

anyone with assets under £20,000 will have their care costs fully covered by the state.

The cost of care is capped at £86,000 and raises the point at which people meet the full cost of their care from £23,350 to £100,000 – this is nearly four times higher than the current system.

People working in adult social care in England will also benefit from at least £500 million to improve recruitment, retention, progression and staff wellbeing. This will fund measures including continuous professional development budgets, investment in social worker training, and wellbeing and mental health support.

Work is already underway to deliver more tests and scans through up to 160 community diagnostic centres by 2025, which are more efficient and closer to home for patients. Seventy-three centres are already open, and another four are opening by the end of May. They have already delivered over 700,000 additional scans and tests, with around 30,000 tests a week.

The latest figures, due this week, are expected to show three quarters of a million additional tests were delivered for patients in need by the end of March. Alongside this, new surgical hubs will be added to the network of over 40 standalone hubs already operating across the country, helping to reduce waits for procedures such as cataract surgery or hip replacements.

The Levy will initially be based on national Insurance contributions (NICs) and from 2023 will be legislatively separate.

Every individual will contribute according to their means. Those who earn more pay more, with the highest 15 per cent of people paying over half the revenues.

Low earners will be shielded from the levy following action taken by the Chancellor in the Spring Statement last month. From July, the level at which people pay National Insurance on their income will rise to £12,570, saving a typical employee over £330 a year. The change does not affect the funding available to Health and Social Care.

This means that the NHS gets the vital funding it needs to clear the Covid backlogs but it's paid for by those with the broadest shoulders, whilst those on low and middle incomes are protected.

[UK to donate fleet of ambulances to Ukraine](#)

A fleet of NHS ambulances will provide urgent care for those injured by

Russian attacks in Ukraine following a donation from the UK.

- UK NHS trusts donating around 20 ambulances to the Government of Ukraine
- donations will help replace Ukrainian ambulances lost to Russian bombardments and provide urgent care to injured
- Ukraine's health services stretched as Russian attacks hit civilian shelters and hospitals

The donation of around 20 NHS ambulances will help bring vital lifesaving care to Ukrainians remaining in towns and cities under attack from Russian bombardments.

This donation will help replace those Ukrainian ambulances lost to Russian attacks, bolstering the existing fleet's resilience as the barbaric war goes on.

It is estimated more than 12 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance across Ukraine.

The conflict has stretched Ukraine's health services, with Russia's indiscriminate attacks targeting civilian shelters and even hospitals.

South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SCAS) is leading the way, donating four of its ambulances, with further donations from NHS trusts across the country soon to follow.

The first ambulances will arrive in Ukraine this week, destined for Lviv in the west of the country, where they will be transported on to those areas most in need.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

We have sadly seen day after day the horrific impacts of Putin's cruel war on the people of Ukraine, including evidence of appalling acts by Russian troops in towns such as Irpin and Bucha.

The UK has been among the biggest aid donors, providing food, medicines and generators to help those affected. These world class NHS ambulances will now help bring lifesaving care directly to those injured in the conflict.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid, said:

The UK government has stood shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine and provided them with the lifesaving medical equipment they need.

The invasion has damaged key medical infrastructure and the generous donation of four ambulances by South Central Ambulance Service will ensure people in Ukraine can receive urgent care. It

marks the first of many ambulances the UK government and the NHS is donating to Ukraine in the coming days

Paul Kempster, SCAS Chief Operating Officer said:

Ambulance Trusts around the country have been rallying to provide ambulances and we in SCAS are immensely humbled to also be able to support those in need in Ukraine.

We hope that this small gesture goes some way to helping provide immediate frontline healthcare support to the many people who desperately need it.

This latest funding and donation comes in addition to the nearly £400 million (£394 million) already pledged by the UK for the conflict in Ukraine, including [£220 million of humanitarian aid](#).

To date, the UK has [donated more than 5 million items of medical supplies](#) to Ukraine to help the country cope with the medical emergency caused by the Russian invasion. Last month the UK government also [brought 21 Ukrainian children with cancer to receive care](#) through the NHS in England.

1. UK NHS trusts have donated ambulances to the Government of Ukraine, following a request from HM Government. The NHS's national ambulance service fleet strategy requires the replacement of ambulance vehicles every 5 years. After this time, vehicles are decommissioned and either kept back for resilience, given to approved charities or sent to auction. All vehicles and medical supplies are checked before being sent to ensure they meet the standards required.
 2. To date the UK has donated 5.29 million items of medical supplies to Ukraine, including:
 - nearly 3,000 adult resuscitators
 - around 220,000 wound care packs
 - over 550,000 sterile needles
 - over 50,000 packs of bandages
 - 1,600 pieces of equipment for ventilators
 - over 75,000 cannulas
 - around 380,000 packs of medicines – around 2.8million doses – including antibiotics and painkillers
 - 72,000 packs of gloves
 - 28,000 FFP3 masks
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“Blame game” ends as no-fault divorce comes into force

- Changes remove unnecessary conflict to ease stress on couples and children
- New minimum wait of 20 weeks between application and conditional order of divorce
- Part of wider action to improve the family justice system

The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act (2020), represents the biggest shake up in divorce law for more than half a century. It ends completely the need for separating couples to apportion blame for the breakdown of their marriage, helping them to instead focus on key practical decisions involving children or their finances and look to the future.

Previously, one spouse was forced to make accusations about the other’s conduct, such as ‘unreasonable behaviour’ or adultery, or face years of separation before a divorce could be granted. This was regardless of whether a couple had made a mutual decision to separate.

The changes mean that a spouse, or a couple jointly, can now apply for divorce by stating their marriage has broken down irretrievably. It removes unnecessary finger-pointing and acrimony at a time where emotions are already running high, and spares children from witnessing their parents mudslinging.

Importantly, it stops one partner from vindictively contesting a divorce and locking their spouse into an unhappy marriage. In some cases, domestic abusers can use their ability to challenge the process to further harm their victims or to trap them in the relationship. The reforms will put an end to this behaviour.

The Act also introduces a new minimum timeframe of 20 weeks between the start of proceedings and when individuals may apply for a conditional order of divorce. This will offer time to reflect, and potentially turn back, or where reconciliation is not possible to agree important arrangements for the future – such as those involving children, finance and property.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab said:

The breakdown of a marriage can be agonising for all involved, especially children. We want to reduce the acrimony couples endure and end the anguish that children suffer.

That’s why we are allowing couples to apply for divorce without having to prove fault, ending the blame game, where a marriage has broken down irretrievably, and enabling couples to move on with their lives without the bitter wrangling of an adversarial divorce

process.

Specifically, the measures from the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act that come into force today include:

- Replacing the current requirement to evidence either a conduct or separation 'fact' with the provision of a statement of irretrievable breakdown of the marriage (for the first time, couples can opt to make this a joint statement).
- Removing the possibility of disputing the decision to divorce, as a statement will be conclusive evidence that the marriage has irretrievably broken down, except on limited technical grounds.
- Introducing a new minimum period of 20 weeks from the start of proceedings to a conditional order of divorce being made, allowing greater opportunity for couples to agree practical arrangements for the future where reconciliation is not possible and divorce is inevitable.
- Simplifying the language of divorce to make it more understandable. This includes replacing the terms 'decree nisi', 'decree absolute' and 'petitioner', with 'conditional order', 'final order' and 'applicant'.

Following the implementation of the Act the government has also committed to look into further the law around financial settlements after a divorce, such as the dividing of assets or maintenance payments.

Juliet Harvey, National Chair of Resolution said:

This historic change will mean the end of the blame game for divorcing couples, removing the outdated and unnecessary need for them to find fault with their ex on the divorce petition.

Our members help couples facing separation and divorce to minimise conflict and find constructive, lasting solutions, putting the best interests of any children first. For years, the previous divorce law made this more difficult, with the need to apportion blame often introducing or exacerbating conflict unnecessarily – this ends today.

After more than 30 years of campaigning by our members, we are delighted to see this reform finally come to pass, which will result in a kinder, less adversarial divorce process in England and Wales.

Aidan Jones, Chief Executive at Relate, said:

The new legislation represents the biggest shake-up in divorce law for 50 years. It is an important step in moving away from animosity and blame being the norm, to a place where the welfare of those involved – particularly children – is at the forefront of the process. Introducing a minimum time from petition stage to ‘Decree Absolute’ is also welcome, allowing both partners to reflect on the decision and to access support such as counselling and mediation if appropriate.

This is far from the end of the journey, though. As a society we must encourage healthy relationships, reduce parental conflict (whether parents are together or not) and in turn improve children’s wellbeing and life chances. Relationship support services are vital to this.

The reforms are part of wider government efforts to reduce conflict in the family courts, to protect children from harm and divert suitable cases away from the courtrooms.

This includes a landmark mediation voucher scheme helping thousands of families resolve disputes without the need for often lengthy and costly courtroom battles.

The government also launched a new investigative approach pilot in North Wales and Dorset which aims to improve information sharing between partner agencies to better deal with cases involving domestic abuse. It is also reviewing the presumption of parental contact in cases where abuse is alleged to ensure children are kept safe.

Notes to editors:

- The new online system for divorce goes live at 10am on Wednesday, 6 April.
- In January 2022, the government announced £1.3 million in funding for a [Family Mediation voucher scheme](#), bringing the total amount to nearly £3.1 million with thousands of families benefiting from free out of court mediation.
- In August 2021, the government announced a [call for evidence on dispute resolution](#), seeking views on the best ways to settle family, business and other civil disputes away from the court room. A response will be published in due course.
- In November 2020, a [review of the Presumption of Parental Contact](#) was

launched. It examined how courts balance child safety with the right to family life. This work is ongoing.

[As Russia is forced into retreat, its brutality is laid bare: UK statement at UN Security Council](#)

I will now make a statement in my capacity as the Representative of the United Kingdom.

President Zelenskyy, by video, Secretary-General, Colleagues,

The United Nations was created in the wake of a European war of aggression that laid waste to Europe and engulfed the world.

All of us who signed the UN Charter committed to ending the scourge of war, to fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person, the equal rights of nations large and small, to justice, and respect for international law.

Yet now, we are facing another war of aggression in Europe.

We have heard today, again, the devastating impact of Russia's unilateral and illegal military action in Ukraine. Its impact on surrounding countries and the region, and on the security and prosperity of the wider world, as it seeks to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

- thousands killed
- millions displaced
- cities razed to the ground
- hospitals bombed
- citizens cut off from food, water and medicine
- blockaded sea ports and the rapid increase in wheat prices

- pressure on already stretched humanitarian resources

And now, as Russia is forced into retreat from areas around Kyiv, the brutality of the invasion is laid bare. We have all seen the horrific images from the towns of Bucha and Irpin of civilians deliberately killed in areas from which Russian forces have recently withdrawn – and the video we saw earlier underlined that horror.

These acts, and other credible incidents, must be investigated as war crimes, and the UK fully supports the work of the International Criminal Court and the work of the Ukrainian Prosecutor General and other national prosecutors.

Colleagues, as we, and so many others, have said so many times, all of this could be stopped if the Russian Federation ended this war now.

I resume my function as President of the Council.