

Today's figures show the Government's abysmal record on living standards is getting even worse – Debbie Abrahams

Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Debbie Abrahams, commenting on today's Labour Market Statistics, **said:**

"While we welcome the fall in unemployment, today's figures show the Government's abysmal record on living standards is getting even worse.

"Real wages are now stagnating under the Tories and working families are worse off as a result.

"The Government has also failed to close the employment gap faced by women, disabled people and ethnic minority groups, who are all less likely to be in work. Labour will stand up for all working people.

"We will introduce a Real Living Wage of £10 per hour and reverse cuts to in-work support that could see some families worse off by £2,600 a year."

Ends

Press release: New crossing to provide transport and jobs stimulus

A new crossing beneath the River Thames will unlock billions of pounds worth of economic benefit and create thousands of jobs, Highways England's Chief Executive said today as he welcomed the Government's announcement of the preferred route for a new Lower Thames Crossing.

Jim O'Sullivan said the new crossing east of Gravesend and Tilbury would improve journey times and dramatically increase capacity for traffic crossing the river east of London.

The existing Dartford Crossing, with the Dartford Tunnel and the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge, are the only way to cross the Thames by road east of London.

Highways England will be responsible for delivering the crossing, which will see a new tunnel constructed, easing pressure on the existing Dartford Crossing – currently the only road crossing of the River Thames east of

London

The new crossing will be linked to the road network by a new road north of the river, which will join the M25 between junctions 29 and 30, and a new road south of the river which, will join the A2 east of Gravesend.

Highways England chief executive Jim O'Sullivan said:

This route will greatly improve journeys as well as unlocking more than £8 billion of economic benefits and create some 6,000 jobs.

The decision for a new crossing east of Gravesend and Tilbury is underpinned by years of studies, assessments and careful consideration of the record breaking response to our 2016 consultation. As we progress there will be further consultation and opportunities to be part of shaping the detail for the area, now and for future generations.

The Dartford Crossing is already over capacity – the new Lower Thames Crossing will relieve this.

The scheme will cost £4.4 billion and the new 70mph, 13 mile route and crossing will improve journeys for drivers. Capacity for vehicles crossing the Thames east of London will increase by 70 per cent.

Around 55 million journeys are made each year on the Dartford Crossing, six million more than it was designed for, and it suffers from closures due to incidents almost daily. This announcement provides a huge boost for local businesses, of which many agree that the new crossing will help their business to grow and employ more people.

While the Dart Charge system has helped to relieve congestion, a new Lower Thames Crossing has been needed for some time.

More than 47,000 people responded to a consultation about the proposals last year, to help the Government reach this decision.

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.

Last call for applications for two Property Development Funds

The £7m Property for Business Development Grant Fund and the £7m Property Infrastructure Fund are both designed to support business growth and job opportunities with a primary focus on projects in Enterprise Zones, Local Growth Zones and City Regions.

Both Funds also aim to bridge the financial viability gap that exists in parts of Wales between the cost of building, expanding or refurbishing properties and the completed market value of the property.

It is expected that each will attract £13m of private sector investment and help stimulate the market to meet the needs of businesses.

Together the schemes will deliver around 51,100 sq. mt. (550,000 sq. ft.) of new and refurbished floor space in areas that will provide tangible benefits to local economies, address market needs and support business growth.

Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure Ken Skates said:

“There has been considerable interest in both Funds which have the potential to make a real impact in terms of improving and expanding the availability of industrial units and office accommodation in target areas around Wales. I would advise anyone interested in learning more about the Funds and applying for support to do so before applications close on 30 April.”

Both funds are for new build, refurbishment, extensions and adaption projects. The Property Infrastructure Fund is aimed specifically at advanced build development and the Property for Business Development Grant Fund is targeted at supporting businesses with bespoke expansion projects. The maximum grant intervention rate for both funds is 35%.

Stage 1 applications that provide brief information on the project requiring support need to be submitted by 30 April in order to be considered for a provisional application of funding. For more information please email gde.pdg@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

Press release: Joint Statement on the

recent violence in Libya's south

Joint Statement by the Ambassadors to Libya of the People's Republic of China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America on the recent violence in Libya's south

In light of recent violence in Libya's south, including near the Tamanhint airbase, which risks escalating into renewed conflict.

Recalling relevant UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs), including UNSCRs 2213, 2259 and 2278, and Reiterating our determination to support the implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) in order to alleviate the suffering of the Libyan people, and our grave concern about the terrorist threat in Libya.

We underline the difference between acts against the terrorist threat and acts that can lead to further deterioration of the situation in Libya. We call for full de-escalation on the basis of broad inclusive political dialogue and avoiding provocative actions.

News story: Home Secretary commits more support to victims of slavery

The Home Secretary has announced radical reforms to boost support for slavery victims in the UK as a new elite multi-agency intelligence unit starts work to tackle human trafficking.

Amber Rudd revealed more will be done to ensure victims get the help they need as she visited the new £1 million government-funded Joint Slavery Trafficking Analysis Centre. The dedicated unit – made up of analysts from the National Crime Agency, police, Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, HMRC and the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority – mirrors a joint working model successfully used to gather vital intelligence on terrorism.

The Home Secretary observed its first days of operation as it brings together a multi-agency team of analytical experts who will be embedded in the National Crime Agency to help tackle cross-border and domestic slavery.

Ms Rudd revealed the first focus of the centre, that will see expert analysts from each partner join forces to maximise results, will be on adult victims of sexual exploitation.

The Home Secretary said:

It is exactly this kind of cooperation between the police, Border Force, the National Crime Agency and others that will be our way of getting at the people traffickers.

The Centre will enable us to have a co-ordinated push against the organised crime groups that are at the heart of the trade in human beings and human misery. Our message to the perpetrators is clear; we are coming after you, and there is nowhere to hide.

The launch comes as new NCA figures reveal the growing scale of the global crisis, with victims referred for help in the UK now coming from 108 different countries in just one year. Many have also been exploited from within this country, with the UK the third most common country of origin.

More victims of slavery than ever before are now receiving help. The Home Secretary welcomed the 17 percent rise as more potential victims are identified and have the confidence to come forward, but acknowledges the need to shake up the current system to ensure they have the support they need.

The Home Secretary added:

In this country alone, there are thousands of poor souls being exploited and abused. Many of them will have come here on the promise of a better life; those hopes will have been crushed.

New figures this week show that over 3,800 potential victims – from 108 different countries – were referred to support in 2016, through the National Referral Mechanism, which is the system we established for identifying victims.

As a country, I think we are rightly proud of what we have achieved. That's more potential victims than ever being helped. But being proud of what we have done so far isn't the same as being complacent about it. That's why today I am committing us to go further in making sure that we have the right system in place to help those in the trap of modern slavery find a way out of it.

The Home Secretary pledged to transform the National Referral Mechanism system that currently provides a package of support to suspected slavery victims. The findings of an 18 month pilot that examined ways of improving the current system will be published later this year, with the Home Secretary announcing work to identify more victims and streamline the process of helping them.

The reforms, [revealed by the Home Secretary in an article today](#) (PDF, 87.6KB, 2 pages) , will encourage more professionals to refer potential victims and ensure they receive the support they need to exit slavery for good.