

# Government *WORLD*™

*January - March 2026 British Edition*



*(Scarlet Elf Cup Fungi)*

# Government *WORLD*™

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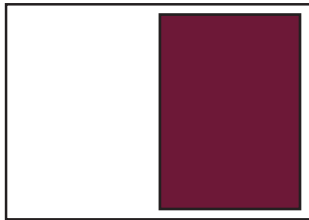
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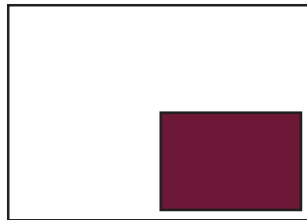
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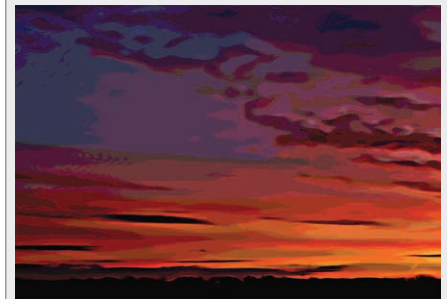
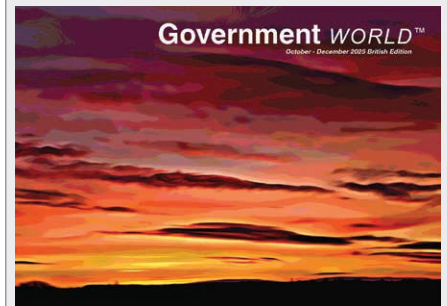
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# News Roundup

*Summary of the main news and sports events over the last three months*

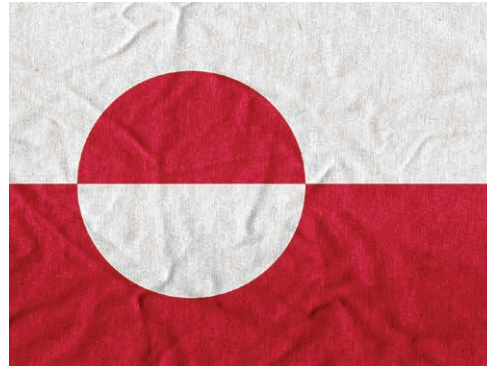
By Paul G Bazeley for Government World

## January News Review

Protestors and police clashed in Minneapolis, United States after an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent shot and killed a civilian woman. The clashes came after rising tensions due to the actions of immigration officers. Later in the month thousands of workers and businesses go on strike in Minnesota to protest the ICE deployment in the state.



Protests took place in Denmark and Greenland in response to comments made by US president Donald Trump where he suggested a United States takeover of the territory.



The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists announced that the Doomsday Clock had been set to 85 seconds before midnight, the closest it has been to midnight. The journal cited rising global tensions for the change.



Sarah Mullally was confirmed as the first female archbishop of Canterbury and primate of the Church of England.

Bulgaria replaced the lev and adopted the Euro to become the 21st member of the eurozone.



Following the 2025 Bondi Beach shooting, the Australian Parliament passed a law to introduce a gun buyback program along with stricter background check and tougher penalties for hate crimes.



The United State withdrawal from the World Health Organisation (WHO) came into effect. They became the first member state to leave.



Gold hit a new all-time high of US\$4,644.56 per ounce. This surpassed December's previous peak of



\$4,644.56.

Italian fashion designer Valentino died at the age of 93. He was most well known for his eponymous



fashion house.

At the 83rd Golden Globe Awards Hamnet and One Battle After Another won Best Dramatic and Best Comedic or Musical Film, respectively. In the TV categories, The Pitt won Best Drama and The Studio won Best Comedy or Musical.

The British government approved a new Chinese embassy at Royal Mint Court in London despite security concerns being raised. The planning decision was seen as compliant and MI5 raised no objections. It will be the largest Chinese embassy in Europe.

The United Kingdom recorded its hottest and sunniest year in 2025. The previous year had an average temperature of 10.09 celsius beating the previous record of 10.03 celsius from 2022.

A high court in South Korea sentenced former president Yoon Suk Yeol to five years in prison. He was found guilty of obstructing justice and excluding cabinet members during his martial law declaration in 2024. He was acquitted of forging documents.

## January Sports Review

Luke Littler retained his PDC World Darts Championship after beating Gian Van Veen 7-1 in the final



In tennis, Venus Williams became the oldest player to participate in the women's singles draw at the Australian Open at the age of 45 years and 7 months. Later in the month, Elena Rybakina from Kazakhstan won her first Australian Open and second major title after defeating Aryna Sabalenka 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in the women's singles title.

Alex Honnold, the American climber, free-solo climbed the Tapei 101 skyscraper in Taiwan to set the record for the highest free solo climb of an urban structure. The event was livestreamed

around the world.



## February News Review

Israel and the United States launched an attack on Iran killing high-ranking Iranian officials including supreme leader Ali Khamenei. President Donald Trump announced a “major U.S. combat

operation” and called on the military to overthrow the government. Israel and the U.S. targeted missile facilities and naval assets. Iran



responded with retaliatory attacks on Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Airspace around the region was closed.

Hannah Spencer, the Green Party candidate, won the Gorton and Denton by-election in Great Manchester. It is the party's first by-election win.



Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor left the Royal Lodge to move to

the Sandringham Estate due to the controversy surrounding his relationship with Jeffrey Epstein. The royal was also arrested by police on charges of misconduct in public office and later released.



Peter Mandelson resigns from the Labour Party and steps down from the House of Lords after the United States Department of Justice released further Jeffrey Epstein files. The files showed that Epstein made payments to Lord Mandelson between 2003 and 2004 and that Mandelson may have leaked sensitive information to Epstein. The police launch an investigation into potential misconduct in public office and then arrest him. He was later released.

United States president Donald Trump revoked the Environmental Protection



Agency's 2009 endangerment finding. The finding classified greenhouse gases as a threat to public health and was the basis for federal climate regulations.

The United Kingdom's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) fined Reddit, the American social media network, £14.5m for "using the data of



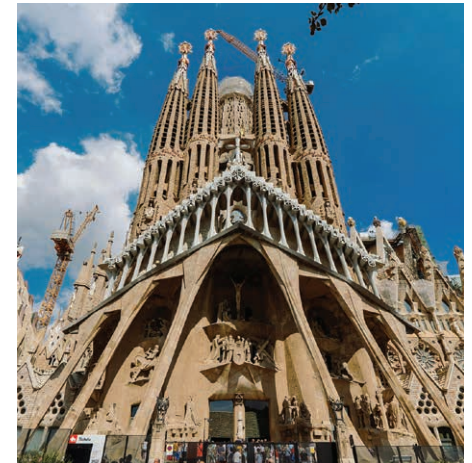
children under the age of 13 unlawfully" and possibly exposing them to "inappropriate and harmful content".

The secret service killed a 21-year-old man who entered president Donald

Trump's Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago while armed.

The 2026 Grammy Awards took place with Bad Bunny winning album of the year for *DebÍ Tirar Más Fotos*, the first Spanish language album to win the award. Kendrick Lamar won five awards and surpassed Jay-Z as the most awarded hip-hop artist in Grammy History.

The Sagrada Família in Barcelona, Spain, reached its designed height of 172.5 metres after construction began in 1882. The main building is expected to be completed later in 2026.



## February Sports Review

Carlos Alcaraz defeated Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open men's single final. The Spaniard won 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5 to win his first Australian Open and become the youngest male to complete the career Grand Slam.

In American football, the Seattle Seahawks beat the New England Patriots, 29-13, to win their second Super Bowl, and their first in 12 years.



The opening ceremony for the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan and Cortina, Italy was held. Later in the month the closing ceremony takes place. At its conclusion, Norway were the highest ranked team in the medal table.

## March News Review

American and Israeli strikes continued on Iran. While Iran continued to retaliate with strikes, with many being aimed at Israel, Kuwait, Cyprus and Arab countries. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer allowed the United States access to UK military bases for defensive strikes only. The PM also made clear that the UK was not a part of the war. Iran also retaliated by effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz, a critical route for global energy trade, by targeting ships and deterring passage. This led to a near-total halt in tanker traffic, triggering a major global energy supply shock and a large surge in oil and other commodity prices. The United States responded with military efforts to reopen the strait amid escalating threats against Iran.



The French president Emmanuel Macron stated that France would increase its stockpile of nuclear weapons for the first time in decades. The announcement cited increasing threats such as the Russian war on Ukraine, China's increasing military power and the US defence priorities.



Four Hatzalah ambulances are set on fire in what appeared to be an anti-semitic arson attack in Golders Green, London. There were no casualties.



A fire occurred in a historic building attached to Glasgow Central railway station. The building collapsed causing the train station to be closed until further notice and impacting shops and businesses.



The U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center reported that Arctic sea ice reached about 14.22 million square kilometers; among the lowest yearly high points recorded in more than four decades.



A police report from New York formally revealed the English street artist Banksy's identity as 51-year-old Robin Gunningham from Bristol.

The King Charles III England Coastal Path, the world's longest coastal footpath, was formally opened by Charles III.



The 98th Academy Awards took place in Los Angeles. The film *One Battle After Another* was the big winner claiming six awards including Best Picture. The film *Sinners* won four awards after being nominated for a record 16.



## March Sports Review

The Winter Paralympics began with the opening ceremony being held in Verona, Italy. The closing ceremony concluded the games with China topping the medal table.

The Iranian sports ministry banned the men's national football team from travelling to "hostile countries". The decision has placed the team's participation in this year's FIFA World Cup tournament in doubt. The Iranian sports minister Ahmad

Donyamali also stated that Iran will not play in this year's World Cup. Later in the month FIFA president Gianni Infantino insisted that the Iranian soccer team would play in the upcoming World Cup.

India won the 2026 Men's T20 World Cup after beating New Zealand by 96 runs. India became the first nation to win and host the competition, win back-to-back titles and win the tournament three times.

It was announced that the Bahrain and Saudi Arabia Formula One Grand Prix will be cancelled due to the ongoing Iran war.

France won the Six Nations Rugby Championship after beating England in Paris, France.



**End**

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# Families to have better access to childhood vaccinations

January

From: Department of Health and Social Care and  
The Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP

A new £2 million pilot will see health visitors reach families facing barriers to vaccines, to ensure more children are protected.

- Government to bring vaccines to doorsteps of families who can't make it to the doctor
- New pilot will reach families facing barriers like travel costs, language difficulties or vaccine hesitancy
- £2 million pilot aims to close gap in healthcare inequalities

Health visiting teams will offer vaccinations to children, providing a vital safety net for families who might otherwise miss out.

The new pilot targets families who've

fallen through the cracks - including those not signed up with a GP, struggling with travel costs, childcare juggling, language barriers or other tough circumstances that stop them getting to the doctor.

By offering vaccinations during routine health visits, the pilot removes these obstacles and ensures more children can access life-saving protection.

Health visitors are specialist public health nurses who support families with children under 5. They provide advice on healthy child development, feeding and family health through regular home visits and clinic appointments.

The 12 pilot schemes will roll out from mid-January across 5 regions of England - London, the Midlands, North East and Yorkshire, North West and South West - designed to boost uptake and protect children from preventable diseases.

While the scheme isn't designed to replace a GP - families should continue to get vaccinated at their local surgery first - it supports families with children who'd otherwise slip through the net.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Wes Streeting, said:

"Every parent deserves the chance to protect their child from preventable diseases but some families have a lot going on and that can mean they miss out.



Health visitors are already trusted faces in communities across the country. By allowing them to offer vaccinations, we're using the relationships and expertise that already exist to reach families who need support most.

Fixing the NHS means tackling health inequalities head-on. By meeting families where they are, we're not just boosting vaccination rates - we're building a health service that works for everyone."

The year-long trial will be evaluated before rolling it out across the country from 2027.

Health visitors on the pilot will get extra training to tackle tricky conversations with worried parents - including those who have doubts about vaccination - and to give vaccinations safely.

Struggling families will be identified by the NHS using GP records, health visitor notes and local databases.

The pilots form part of the commitment to ramp up vaccination programmes, with over 18 million flu vaccines delivered this autumn - hundreds of thousands more compared to this time last year - and over 60,000 more NHS staff also getting their jab.

The government is also investing in better digital services to help families track their child's health and vaccinations. Through the new NHS App, parents will be able to monitor their children's health using 'My Children' - a 21st-century digital alternative to the Red Book.

The pilot builds on the government's commitment to Family Hubs and Start for Life programmes, which provide vital support for families during pregnancy and the early years of a child's life, including health visiting services and parenting support.

From 2 January 2026, children will receive the new MMRV vaccine, protecting against measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (chickenpox) in one vaccine. This replaces the current measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine and offers protection against chickenpox for the first time, while making vaccination simpler for families.

The government's 'Stay Strong. Get Vaccinated' campaign also runs throughout the year to promote confidence in vaccination.



# Thousands of lives to be saved under bold new Road Safety Strategy

January

From: Department for Transport, Lilian Greenwood MP and The Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP

- government announces its first road safety strategy in over a decade, with a plan to reduce deaths and serious injuries on Britain's roads by 65% by 2035
- new consultations on minimum learning period for learner drivers, eye tests for older drivers and lowering the alcohol limit for driving to help prevent causes of collisions
- the strategy will help save thousands of lives and deliver on the government's commitment to growth, safer communities and easing pressure on the NHS

The first road safety strategy in more than a decade will save thousands of lives on the nation's roads by tackling drink driving, improving training for young drivers and introducing mandatory eye tests for older motorists.

Launched today (7 January 2026), the strategy sets out an ambitious plan to reduce deaths and serious injuries on Britain's roads by 65% by 2035, with an even more stretching target of 70% for children under 16.

Approximately 4 people die on Britain's roads every day, with thousands more seriously injured each year, but through targeted action on speeding, drink and drug driving, not wearing seat belts and mobile phone use, thousands of these tragedies can be prevented.

The government will consult on lowering the drink drive limit in England and Wales, which has remained unchanged since 1967 and is currently the highest in Europe.

In 2023, 1 in 6 road fatalities involved drink driving, but a consultation will explore the use of preventative technology, such as alcohol interlock

devices and new powers to suspend driving licences for those suspected of drink or drug driving offences.

This could mean that, in future, some drink drive offenders might be required to have one of these devices fitted to their vehicle as a condition of being allowed to drive again.

Inexperience behind the wheel is costing lives. Drivers aged 17 to 24 represent just 6% of licence holders but are involved in 24% of fatal and serious collisions. To address this, the government will consult on introducing



a 3 or 6-month minimum learning period, giving learner drivers more time to develop their skills in varied conditions, such as night driving, adverse weather and heavy traffic.

With the number of older drivers continuing to rise as Britain's population ages, a consultation on mandatory eyesight testing for those over 70 will be launched, while options for cognitive testing will also be developed to protect all road users.

New measures will also target the growing problem of illegal number plates, including 'ghost' plates designed to fool camera systems, while also cracking down on uninsured drivers and vehicles without a valid MOT.

Secretary of State for Transport, Heidi Alexander, said:

"Every life lost on our roads is a tragedy

that devastates families and communities. For too long, progress on road safety has stalled. This strategy marks a turning point.

We are taking decisive action to make our roads safer for everyone, from new drivers taking their first lessons to older motorists wanting to maintain their independence. The measures we are announcing today will save thousands of lives over the coming decade."

Local Transport Minister, Lilian Greenwood, said:

"Our vision with this ambitious road safety strategy is clear: to ensure that people can travel safely on our roads however they choose.

One of the hardest parts of my job is speaking to families who have lost loved ones on our roads and this is something we as a government are taking action

to prevent. No family should have to endure that loss, and this strategy sets out how we will work to ensure fewer do.

Experts and campaigners have long called for a comprehensive strategy that treats road safety as a shared responsibility – from car manufacturers and town planners to drivers and legislators.

This strategy, the first in over a decade, shows a government that is not just listening, but leading and together, we can build a safer future for all road users."

Independent road safety campaigner, Meera Naran MBE, whose 8-year-old son Dev died in a road traffic collision, said:

"I welcome this much-anticipated road safety strategy and am pleased to see a number of measures set out to reduce road deaths and serious injuries.

I am especially grateful to the Secretary of State for giving me her word that she would honour Dev and recognise the importance of legislative change to adopt the



General Safety Regulations, as Dev's Law and for delivering on that commitment. I look forward to working closely with the department to ensure that the appropriate steps are taken to establish a robust and effective framework.”

Over the past decade, 22 European countries have made more progress than the UK in reducing road fatalities, causing Britain to slip from third to fourth in European road safety rankings.

This strategy, therefore, sets out a new approach to reverse a decade of stalled progress. The bold strategy adopts the internationally recognised Safe System approach, which acknowledges that while human error is inevitable, deaths and serious injuries are not.

Rather than placing responsibility solely on individual drivers, the system ensures that road design, vehicle safety, enforcement and education work together to protect all road users.

A new Road Safety Investigation Branch will analyse collision patterns and inform prevention strategies, drawing on linked police and healthcare data to identify root causes and target interventions more effectively.

The strategy also mandates 18 new vehicle safety technologies, including autonomous emergency braking and lane-keeping assistance. This will ensure drivers and road users in Great Britain benefit from access to these cutting-edge technologies and support growth by requiring manufacturers to meet the same requirements across Europe.

Edmund King OBE, Director of The AA Charitable Trust and AA president, said:

“This is a positively radical reframing of road safety, which is long overdue. We commend the government for its wide ranging and ambitious strategy and ambitious targets, which we hope will save the lives of thousands of people.

Tackling drivers who drive under the influence of drink or drugs, people who don't wear their seatbelts and those getting behind the wheel without



insurance are key to reducing road deaths and serious injuries. We also endorse the mantra of road safety being a lifelong education, not just when learning to ride or drive.”

IAM RoadSmart Director of Policy and Standards, Nicholas Lyes, said:

“After what can be described as a lost decade in terms of reducing the number of killed and seriously injured on the roads, we welcome the government's commitment to ambitious targets and robust policies to make our roads safer.

The strategy focuses on all key aspects, including behaviours, training, vehicle technology and enforcement – all of which play a crucial role in keeping us safe on the road. An emphasis on younger drivers and motorcycle safety is particularly positive, considering these are some of our most vulnerable road users.

We're also pleased to see action being taken on drug driving, which is a growing menace and by giving police additional powers to take action against those caught at the roadside, it will serve notice that such dangerous behaviours will not be

tolerated.”

A new Road Safety Board, chaired by the Minister for Local Transport, will oversee delivery of the strategy, supported by an expert advisory panel drawing membership from local authorities, emergency services, active travel groups and road safety organisations.

Vulnerable road users remain a key focus. Motorcyclists account for just 1% of motor vehicle traffic but 21% of road deaths, while children from the most deprived neighbourhoods face 4 times the pedestrian casualty rate of those in the least deprived areas. To address these disparities, the strategy includes consulting on reforms to motorcycle training, testing and licensing and supporting trials to improve motorcycle safety on rural roads.

An estimated 1 in 3 road traffic fatalities involves someone driving or riding for work, prompting the launch of a National Work-Related Road Safety Charter pilot. This will establish a national standard for employers requiring people to drive or ride for work, covering HGVs, vans, cars, motorcycles, e-cycles and cycles. It aims to help businesses in both the public and private sectors reduce work-related road risk by promoting good practice,

accountability and compliance with existing legislation.

The success of this strategy depends on strong partnerships between government, local authorities, businesses, road safety professionals, emergency services and the public working together to ensure that every journey starts and ends safely.

RAC Senior Policy Officer, Rod Dennis, said:

“We’ve long said the dial needs to be turned up when it comes to reducing road casualties, so we warmly welcome this strategy – and especially the reintroduction of casualty reduction targets, that were scrapped 16 years ago.

The simple truth is that this strategy can’t come soon enough. Britain might have some of the safest roads by international standards, but on average, 4 people are still killed and 76 seriously injured every single day. That’s an unacceptable number of lives being ruined or cut short.

The strategy addresses many areas we know drivers are concerned about, including drink and drug-driving, ‘ghost’ plates and dazzling headlights. The inclusion of a commitment to consult on the use of alcohol interlocks for

convicted drink-drivers – which are internationally proven to save lives – is particularly encouraging, especially given the extent to which drivers are supportive of their use. It’s also positive to see proposals on the table for both improving young driver safety and tackling the scourge of uninsured drivers who push up motor insurance costs for everyone.

It’s important to remember that the ultimate success of any new or updated penalties or laws will depend on awareness among drivers and enforcement. But undoubtedly, this strategy is a real chance to give the whole topic of road safety the focus and public attention it deserves. What we need now is for it to quickly evolve into a set of concrete actions that make the roads safer for everyone.”



# Science supporting cleaner waste incineration

January

From: Government Office for Science

The UK Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is a major climate policy, which helps cut down on pollution. The scheme sets a limit on how much greenhouse gas different industries can release into the air and puts a price on these emissions.

As part of the UK's journey to Net Zero, the government has expanded the ETS to include waste incineration and energy-from-waste (EfW) plants. This move aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions further, but it brought a scientific challenge: how to accurately measure the origin of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) released when waste is burned.



As part of the scheme, waste incineration companies would only pay for the fossil CO<sub>2</sub> they release (which comes from burning plastics and synthetic materials derived from fossil fuels) and not the biogenic CO<sub>2</sub> (which comes from natural materials, like garden waste).

For the policy to be fair and effective, the government needed to know if it was possible for companies to measure which type of CO<sub>2</sub> they were releasing. Science advice was at the heart of this project.

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero turned to the Climate Services for a Net Zero Resilient World team, bringing together scientists, engineers and technical experts. Their aim was to find the best way to monitor and report fossil CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from these plants.

The team used scientific methods to explore different options that could be utilised, including:

- Laboratory analysis using radiocarbon dating to distinguish fossil from biogenic CO<sub>2</sub>
- Chemical techniques to separate materials
- Mathematical modelling to predict emissions
- Fieldwork and practical tests to check what works best in real-world conditions.



They worked closely with plant operators, trade associations, policy makers and other experts to investigate these areas. Through interviews, workshops and questionnaires, they gathered evidence on what was practical, affordable, proportionate and accurate. Science advice guided every step, from project design to interpreting results.

Thanks to excellent science advice, the project delivered clear, evidence-based recommendations. Policy teams gained a deeper understanding of how to measure emissions fairly and reliably. The findings shaped a major government consultation, published in May 2024, which continues to guide how waste incineration is included in the ETS, beginning with a voluntary monitoring and reporting period from 2026.



## Scottish teams' dedication praised during severe winter weather

January

From: Civil Nuclear Constabulary

Police teams across the Civil Nuclear Constabulary's (CNC) Scottish sites have been commended for their professionalism and commitment as they continue to operate through a prolonged period of snow, ice and severe winter conditions.

With further storms forecast, officers and staff at a number of locations, including Dounreay, St Fergus, Garlogie and Torness, have worked through challenging travel and weather conditions to ensure policing and public safety services have continued without interruption.

Chief Constable Simon Chesterman said: "The conditions our officers and staff across Scotland have been working in over recent weeks have been genuinely challenging. Despite this, they have continued to deliver vital policing services safely, professionally and with real determination.

"Many people have gone above and beyond - working longer hours, helping colleagues affected by travel disruption, and taking practical steps to support local communities. These efforts demonstrate the professionalism and resilience of the CNC and our commitment to keeping people safe."

At Dounreay, where heavy snowfall, drifting snow and freezing temperatures have created particularly difficult conditions, teams worked together to keep essential training and operational facilities safe and usable.

Staff carried out extensive clearance work to ensure activity could continue while maintaining high safety standards, with some officers working extended shifts to maintain services despite travel challenges.

Across the area, careful planning

helped ensure work was organised around officer welfare and safety, allowing services to be delivered with minimal disruption despite the severe weather.

At St Fergus and Garlogie, officers adapted to difficult travel conditions by supporting one another and using specialist vehicles to maintain a strong local presence. Teams also carried out welfare checks on isolated residents and helped deliver essential supplies to people who were unable to leave their homes.

Although conditions at Torness have been less severe, officers there have remained on standby and fully prepared to respond should the weather worsen.

The CNC continues to monitor the situation closely and has plans in place to ensure policing and public safety services remain resilient as winter conditions continue.



## Border Force seizes over 250 endangered species

January

From: Home Office, Border Force and Mike Tapp MP

Live snakes, tarantulas and lovebirds have been found crammed into vehicles at the UK border following a global crackdown on wildlife smuggling gangs.

In just one month, Border Force seized more than 250 endangered species and illegal wildlife products at airports, ports and mail depots across the country.

The seizures this autumn were part of an annual international operation to combat illegal wildlife smuggling – representing a 73% increase from 2023.

They include 1 rainbow boa constrictors, which officers found hidden under blankets in a car in Dover. The driver had bought them at a German reptile show without a licence.

Border Force also discovered over 100

endangered birds crammed into a car, including scarlet ibis, green-cheeked counes and lovebirds. Some had died and the rest were kept in filthy conditions, risking the spread of disease.

There has also been a surge in spider trafficking since 2023. In one instance, Border Force intercepted a car transporting over 2,000 live tarantulas from Europe - worth an estimated £70,000. The consignment included



more than 300 protected species without the appropriate licences.

Adult tarantulas can sell for between £50 to £500 depending on the species.

Other items prevented from reaching the black market included an elephant hair ring from the United States, king cobra balm from Thailand and a blacktip shark jaw from Australia.

Wildlife crime is worth up to £17 billion a year globally, making it the fourth largest international crime - behind firearms, drugs and human trafficking.

The intercepted items are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) which is currently marking its 50th year.

Migration and Citizenship Minister Mike Tapp said:

“Wildlife smuggling is serious organised crime. It fuels corruption, drives species to extinction, and undermines our border security.

I congratulate Border Force on this year’s hugely successful operation, which has cut off a major source of funding for dangerous gangs.

But we won’t stop until we’ve broken this business model. Anyone attempting to bring illegal wildlife products into the UK – by air, sea, or post – will be searched and prosecuted.”

DEFRA Minister Mary Creagh said:

“The illegal wildlife trade is vile and destroys the natural world.

By tackling wildlife crime we’re sending a clear message to the criminal gangs that this government will strain every sinew to bring those involved to justice.”

The seizures took place between 13 September and 15 October as part of Operation Thunder - an annual crackdown led by Interpol and the World Customs Organization to dismantle criminal smuggling networks.



Police supported this year’s operation, carrying out inspections across the country. Where sellers could not provide paperwork, officers seized items including shark and crocodile meat, ivory carvings and a tiger claw bottle.

Border Force’s specialist CITES team at Heathrow is recognised as world leaders in detecting and seizing illegal wildlife products.

More than ever before officers are taking an intelligence-led approach - working with international partners to share expertise and shut the trade down.

Where possible, seized items will be rehomed or used for research.

As part of the Plan for Change, the government is determined to strengthen border security and break the business model of organised crime.

Anyone who suspects smuggling and trafficking of any kind can report it online using the report smuggling service.

# New plans to improve welfare for laying hens and lambs

January

From: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and Dame Angela Eagle DBE MP



Laying hens and lambs will benefit from better animal welfare standards under detailed plans set out by the Government today (January 12th).

Under the proposals all colony cage systems across the laying hen sector would be phased out by 2032 including for smaller producers. Proposals for tighter restrictions on sheep mutilation practices such as castration and tail docking, which cause pain to lambs and are often carried out without pain relief, are also being consulted on.

Enriched 'colony' cage eggs supply just over 20% of the UK shell egg production. These cages heavily restrict the movement of British laying hens with up to 80 birds are in each cage, with each bird having space that is no bigger than an A4 sheet of paper.

With the UK's leading retailers, from Sainsbury's to Aldi, already committed to not selling eggs produced from cage

systems and widespread public support – the move announced today is in line with widespread best practice and public opinion.

To improve welfare for lambs, farmers will be expected to take steps to minimise pain when castration and tail docking has to be carried out. This could include through greater use of pain relief and consideration of alternative methods which farmers would get improved access to. This reflects the latest scientific evidence and follows expert advice from the independent Animal Welfare Committee.

Farming Minister Dame Angela Eagle said:

"We are committed to improving the lives of farm animals and to supporting farmers to produce food sustainably, profitably and to the high standards consumers expect.

British consumers want high animal welfare standards and these measures reflect those values, creating healthier livestock and high welfare food production.”

Anthony Field, Head of Compassion in World Farming UK said:

“We warmly welcome the UK Government’s leadership in honouring a key commitment in its Animal Welfare Strategy by swiftly launching a consultation on phasing out the use of cages for laying hens. This marks an important and long-awaited step towards ending the cage age.

We are optimistic that this will be the first of many meaningful and lasting changes. Phasing out cages for the millions of hens kept behind bars every year cannot come soon enough, and we hope the outcome of this consultation will be an ambitious timeline for phasing out these cruel systems.

We also welcome the launch of a consultation to improve the welfare of lambs. Lambs are routinely subjected to painful, unnecessary mutilations. Castration and tail docking are usually carried out without anaesthetic or pain relief, causing great suffering, so this is an extremely encouraging move.

We look forward to seeing positive

changes for millions of other farmed animals in the coming years and to working with Government to achieve this.”

The proposals announced today are a significant first step toward advancing the ambitious animal welfare reforms set out in the Animal Welfare Strategy, ensuring farm animals have greater freedom to express their natural behaviours and dignity.

The Animal Welfare Strategy builds on this Government’s strong track record of delivering reforms for animals, having already introduced world leading zoo standards, and supporting passage of the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Act 2025 and the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Act 2025.

We are committed to working with farmers on any changes as part of our commitment to ensuring a productive and sustainable farming sector.

The proposals will be subject to 8-week consultations, so any impacts on farmers and trade can be fully considered and managed. Both consultations will open today, and farmers, industry and animal welfare organisations are encouraged to share their views.



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# Government seeks views to modernise laws on powered mobility devices

January

From: Department for Transport and Simon Lightwood MP

- 40-year-old laws on powered mobility devices to be brought up to date to better support those who use electric wheelchairs and mobility scooters
- consultation seeks to review size, speed and usage rules to better reflect modern technology and improve safety
- this forms part of the government's wider mission to break down barriers to opportunity and make transport more inclusive and accessible for all

Laws around powered mobility devices, including electric wheelchairs and mobility scooters, could be modernised, as the Department for Transport launches a 12-week consultation today (6 January 2026).

The government is inviting users,

accessibility organisations, industry and the public to share views on how outdated rules should evolve to reflect modern technology and improve safety.

Current legislation, which dates back nearly 40 years, does not reflect the technological advances that have transformed these devices. For example, some modern wheelchairs used by adults and children exceed the current maximum legal weight limit, meaning they can only legally be used on private land.

The consultation seeks views on how regulations should evolve to better support people who rely on powered mobility devices, while ensuring safety for everyone who uses our roads and pavements.

Simon Lightwood MP, Minister for Roads and Buses, said:

“Powered mobility devices give people

independence and freedom and the law should enable their safe use.

This consultation is a chance for users and organisations to help us modernise these outdated rules and ensure they meet today's needs.”

Throughout this consultation, powered mobility device users, accessibility organisations, industry and other members of the public will be able to make their views heard on a variety of areas critical for updating these laws. These include:

- updating terminology in law, replacing outdated terms such as ‘invalid carriages’ with language that reflects modern attitudes and respect for users
- clarifying where powered mobility devices can be used – on roads, pavements, or other spaces

- reviewing size, speed, and age requirements for larger devices
- considering whether 2-person tandem devices should be permitted on UK pavements and roads
- exploring whether other devices, such as powered transporters, should be allowed on public roads or pavements when used by disabled people or those with reduced mobility

Minister for Social Security and Disability, Sir Stephen Timms MP, said:

“We are determined to break down barriers to opportunity for disabled people and improving access to assistive technology, as well as making sure that the laws around its use are up to date, is essential to this.

I encourage disabled people to respond to the Department for Transport’s consultation so their views and voices are used to shape this policy.”

Isabelle Clement, Director of Wheels for Wellbeing, said:

“We are delighted to see the Department for Transport consulting on modernising laws on ‘powered mobility devices’.

Over 10 million people in the UK have mobility-related impairments and existing laws create confusion, restrict market innovation and limit disabled people’s freedom to travel.

New high-quality regulations that meet disabled people’s needs will enable



millions more disabled people to legally use a growing range of existing and innovative safe, convenient, cost-effective, low-carbon mobility devices to move around our communities.

This has the potential to improve the independence, physical and mental health, employment, educational and social options of disabled individuals and our families across the UK.”

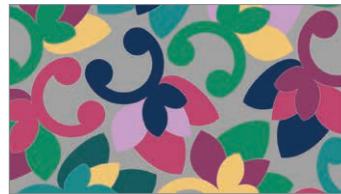
Nick Goldup, CEO, Wheelchair Alliance CIC, said:

“The Wheelchair Alliance wholeheartedly welcomes this government review of powered wheelchair legislation. For too long, wheelchair users have been sidelined by outdated legislation and offensive terminology. Many individuals using wheelchairs over 150kg have been left feeling anxious and worried about breaking the law.

Having worked closely with Simon Lightwood MP for over a year, we are beyond proud that our campaigning has secured this commitment to change. We will continue to amplify the voices of our community to ensure this review delivers a fairer, more inclusive future for all.”



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# Science fiction prepares military for complex and unpredictable future of technology

February

From: Defence Science and Technology Laboratory

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) has unveiled Creative Futures, a new collection of science fiction stories designed to spark fresh thinking about the future of defence and security over the next 100 years.

Edited by Dr Allen Stroud of Coventry



University, Creative Futures brings together leading science fiction authors who worked alongside defence experts to imagine future scenarios stretching as far as 2122.

These stories explore how emerging technologies, societal shifts, and global challenges might shape the world beyond this century.

Themes explored include:

- wars fought by autonomous machines
- quantum technology that can predict the future
- AI making life and death decisions

One of Dstl's key aims is to help UK defence and security prepare for the future by avoiding uncertainty and strategic surprise. By combining scientific rigour and deep technological

understanding with creative storytelling, Creative Futures offers a unique lens to consider alternative futures - both desirable and undesirable.

Professor Tim Dafforn, MOD Chief Scientific Adviser, said:

"Innovation isn't just about inventing new technology - it's about understanding how it will be used, and by whom.

Fiction gives us the freedom to explore those scenarios in ways traditional analysis can't, helping defence prepare for futures that are complex, contested, and unpredictable. If we only plan for what seems likely today, we will be blindsided tomorrow."

Sarah Herbert, Dstl Futures Programme Manager, said:

“Preparing for the future means thinking beyond the next upgrade or system. Science fiction challenges us to consider the human, societal, and geopolitical dimensions of technology.

These stories aim to engage, evoke, and provoke - pushing us to imagine new ways of working and rethink what the future could be. By carrying that creative mindset into the present, we can apply their lessons to real-world challenges and unlock better ways of working today.”

Science Fiction author Dr Allen Stroud, of Coventry University and editor of Creative Futures, added:

“Working with Dstl was an incredible opportunity to merge creativity with real-world expertise. Science fiction isn’t just entertainment - it’s a strategic tool. These stories help us explore the risks and opportunities of emerging technologies beyond today’s horizon that we might otherwise miss.”

The book also includes a timeline into the 22nd century using a variety of academic, commercial and international government-backed studies which includes:

- the trials and implementation of

universal basic incomes across the world

- the rise of antibiotic-resistant infections and diseases
- the first commercial quantum networks and proliferation of AI
- the world’s population peaking and then declining with the global birth rate falling below 2.0
- autonomous and robotic policing
- the impacts of climate change and

swings in economic fortunes amongst nations

Through the power of storytelling, Creative Futures invites defence and security professionals to think beyond the here and now - and engage with possibilities that could redefine our world.

As technology accelerates and global dynamics shift, foresight ensures that the UK remains agile, informed, and prepared for whatever lies ahead.



# How UK Government is building a stronger future for Scotland's farmers, crofters and rural communities

February

From: Scotland Office and Kirsty McNeill MP

The UK Government has reinforced its commitment to help create a more robust, profitable and sustainable agriculture industry in Scotland while maximising economic growth in rural areas.

Addressing the National Farmers' Union Scotland's (NFUS) annual conference today [Thursday 5 February] Scotland Office Minister Kirsty McNeill set out how the UK Government is building



the foundations for a stronger future for Scotland's farmers and crofters.

She underlined the need for closer working between agriculture and food businesses, and highlighted efforts by the UK Government to support the industry.

This includes: supporting the next generation of farmers by increasing the inheritance tax threshold for Agricultural and Business Property Relief; helping to fill labour shortages by giving seasonal agriculture workers more flexibility with visas; and establishing a Farming and Food Partnership Board to bring together the agricultural food system, farmers, food processors, retailers and finance.

The address to NFUS members came following a Rural Affairs Forum hosted by Minister McNeill in Edinburgh on Wednesday [4 February]. This brought together an array of UK Government departments with representatives from

rural communities across the country to discuss growth opportunities and challenges.

Scotland Office Minister Kirsty McNeill said:

“Our farms and farmers are vital to this country as providers of food, guardians of our countryside and significant contributors to the economy and the UK Government is determined to work closely alongside the NFUS to create the right environment for our farming industry to thrive.

Farming and rural affairs are both crucial to delivering economic and community renewal across the country. That's why as well as attending the NFUS conference, I also met with 13 Scottish local authorities and sector representatives this week to discuss growth opportunities and

the challenges we are facing.

The UK Government is determined to work together with the NFUS to build a stronger future for Scotland's farmers and crofters."

Andrew Connon, NFU Scotland President said:

"It's welcome to hear the UK Government acknowledge the vital role farmers and crofters play in Scotland's economy and rural communities. What matters now is delivery. Profitability must be at the heart of policy decisions – from tax and labour to trade and standards.

If government and industry work together in a practical, common-sense way, Scottish agriculture can thrive, invest with confidence, and continue delivering food, jobs and environmental benefits for the whole country.

We'll be following up directly with the Scotland Office on the issues raised by our members today, to ensure those voices continue to shape future decisions."

The Rural Affairs Forum explored, among other issues, the impact of the energy sector, growth in skills, training and job

opportunities for the next generation, and the employment landscape facing rural communities.

It was attended by representatives from Highland Council, Argyll & Bute Council, South Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, North Ayrshire Council, East Lothian Council, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Scottish Borders Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Angus Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Scottish Lifesciences Association, University of Highlands and Islands, South of Scotland Enterprise, Scottish Renewables, SSE Renewables, Salmon Scotland, NFUS, Scottish Whisky Association, Scottish Tourism Alliance, Scottish Land & Estates, Inverness Chamber of Commerce, Dundee & Angus Chamber of Commerce.

Stephen Sheridan, Director of Economic Development and Advancement at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), said:



"It is essential that the UK Government continues to recognise and engage with the distinct opportunities and challenges facing rural Scotland.

UHI works closely with communities, employers and local authorities across the Highlands and Islands, Moray and Perthshire, and we see first-hand the positive impact that coordinated investment in skills, innovation and green growth can deliver.

Forums like this play a vital role in strengthening collaboration between national and regional partners, helping to ensure that rural perspectives inform policies which support sustainable economic prosperity."

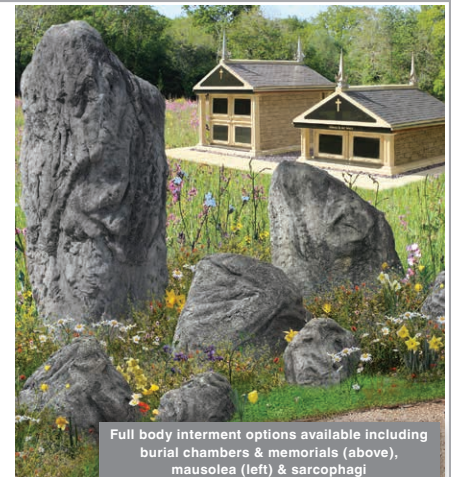
South Ayrshire Council Chief Executive Stephen Penman said:

"South Ayrshire is predominantly a

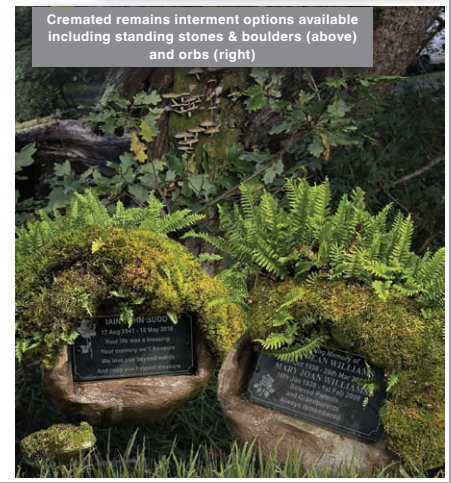
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rural local authority, and this presents both challenges and opportunities. We attract close to one million visitors each year, with tourism generating almost £162 million annually and the sector supporting around 2,500 jobs.

With the stunning Clyde coast as its backdrop, South Ayrshire boasts world-renowned golf courses and award-winning beaches. We are also part of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere and this provides unique opportunities for business, education and land management.

However, we still face some ongoing challenges. Connectivity is an issue, particularly in the south of the region. Another challenge is ensuring those who live in our most rural locations and villages can stay involved and connected, while the ageing population can only be reversed by creating sustainable, high-quality employment across a range of industries.

It is always welcome to share these challenges and opportunities with government and colleagues from across Scotland, and so the Rural Affairs Forum was an ideal opportunity to begin that dialogue.”

# Soldiers to get new AI capable radios, headsets and tablets with futuristic sensor data

February

From: Ministry of Defence and Luke Pollard MP

British soldiers will be able to make faster, better decisions on the battlefield through thousands of new radios, headsets and tablets.

- New communications systems will give commanders faster battlefield information and speed up decision-making.
- MOD awards contract worth up to £86 million to British-based SME for advanced tactical communication systems, such as radios and tablets.
- Contract creates 12 UK defence industry jobs and builds on successful deployment in Estonia.

The contract, worth up to £86 million, has been awarded to UK-based company BlackTree Technologies with the systems rapidly reducing the time it takes for soldiers to receive reconnaissance and intelligence data, boosting lethality and reducing friendly fire incidents.

Known as the Dismounted Data System (DDS), the AI capable equipment includes radios, headsets, display tablets, cables, batteries, pouches and antennas.

They will provide precise information on surroundings and intelligence, meaning increased clarity on who are enemies and who are comrades.

With all soldiers linked to the same network through this equipment, DDS will also be tailored to different scenarios, allowing troops to receive either, or a combination of, voice or visual data, maximising effectiveness across all battlefield situations.

The new systems have already been tested by soldiers on deployment in Estonia. The testing, on NATO's eastern flank, saw the visual information element allowing soldiers to be less distracted by loud noises on the battlefield.

This follows the government committing to the largest sustained increase in defence spending since the end of the Cold War – hitting 2.6% of GDP from 2027 – supporting good jobs and growth in every corner of the nation.

Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry, Luke Pollard MP said:

“The ability to receive, share and deploy accurate information is crucial to battlefield advantage, and this state-of-the-art technology will make our soldiers more integrated and more lethal.

It will begin rolling out to the British Army this year and with the work delivered by a British-based SME, shows that our move to warfighting readiness is being seized as an opportunity to make defence an engine for growth in the UK.”



One of the benefits of the new systems are that they have already been tested by soldiers on deployment in Estonia. The testing, on NATO’s eastern flank, saw the visual information element allowing soldiers to be less distracted from loud noises on the battlefield.

The contract supports this government’s commitment to spend more with UK small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), with the work creating 12 new jobs in locations in Tewkesbury, Hereford and Birmingham.

The DDS will be delivered to the Army in multiple tranches from September, with the full roll out of equipment set to be complete in 2027. An initial £46 million contact has been made by the Army with BlackTree Technologies, with options for a further £40 million.

The contract supports the Chief of the General Staff’s ambition to double the British Army’s lethality by 2027, and it backs delivery of the Strategic Defence Review to move to warfighting readiness.

Head of Tactical Systems, National Armaments Director Group, Brigadier Jeremy Sharpe, said:

“We are delighted to be building on the

successful deployment in Estonia last year and looking forward to working with BlackTree Technologies to bring this game changing capability to more of the British Army.”

BlackTree founder and Managing Director, Neil Clements-Hill said:

“BlackTree are excited to be working with the TacSys team to field this cutting-edge technology to the British Army. Waveforms ensure that the Army can operate in the most demanding environments, when nothing else works.

From initial experimentation under the DSA programme, through the delivery of Project ASGARD in 2025, and now delivering Dismounted Data System capacity, we have been working closely with the Army for many years and are very happy to continue this close relationship and help ensure that they can achieve their vision of modernising their tactical networks.”

The MOD is ramping up support for UK SMEs, with the establishment in January of the Defence Office for Small Business Growth, and the spending target of an additional £2.5 billion with UK SMEs through to May 2028, taking total annual MOD spending with SMEs to £7.5 billion.

# New routes into forestry careers as apprenticeship schemes open

February

From: Scotland Office and Kirsty McNeill MP

The Forestry Commission is recruiting the next cohort of Development Woodland Officers into the Professional Forester Apprenticeship programme, alongside introducing a new scheme to support small forestry employers.

National Apprenticeship Week starts today, and these programmes highlight the positive impact that apprenticeships have in developing a skilled workforce for the forestry sector.

Both schemes are designed to support more people to enter careers in forestry, helping the country meet its environmental targets and supporting economic growth.

David Bole, Head of Green Economy and Skills at the Forestry Commission, says:

“Forestry offers meaningful, skilled

work in the natural environment. Our support for apprenticeships through the Sector Skills Plan demonstrates the government’s ongoing commitment to developing skilled workers and building a resilient sector – making sure we have the foresters we need, now and in the future.”

- New scheme supports small forestry businesses

A new pilot scheme will remove barriers for small forestry businesses, making it easier for them to access skilled talent and build a resilient workforce.

Non-profit organisation Supplytrain



will manage the administrative requirements for Level 3 Forest Craftsperson apprenticeships, including recruitment, HR, payroll and college liaison on behalf of forestry employers.

This means small and seasonal forestry businesses can take on apprentices without the administrative burden. Employers simply pay the apprentice’s wages and provide the work.

The package covers mandatory training including chainsaw, pesticide and forestry first aid qualifications, as well as travel and accommodation support for apprentices to attend college. Apprentices can also be shared across businesses, so employers are not tied to a full 2-year commitment.

- Applications open for graduate

apprentices

8 Development Woodland Officers will be recruited into the Professional Forester Apprenticeship programme, run in partnership with the University of Cumbria.

The 3-year, paid development opportunity is open to school leavers, graduates or anyone looking for a career change and a rewarding job in the natural environment.

Since the scheme started in 2022, 50 apprentices have launched their careers at the Forestry Commission, with another 49 entering the programme from elsewhere in the sector.

Upon completion, successful graduates will earn a Professional Forester Apprenticeship (equivalent to Level 6) and a BSc (Hons) Professional Forester. They will also be able to apply for Chartered Forester status with the Institute of Chartered Foresters.



# Grant boost to cover almost half the cost of installing EV chargers for households and businesses

February

From: Department for Transport, Office for Zero Emission Vehicles and Keir Mather MP

Flat owners, landlords, renters and businesses will be able to get grants of up to £500 per charge point.

- renters, landlords and businesses will be able to claim up to half the cost of installing an electric charger – saving them up to £500 as grants extended for a further final year
- increased charging grants mean installation costs for many drivers will be slashed, unlocking home charging for as little as 2p per mile

- updates to grant offering simplifies system, making it easier for people and businesses to find the right support and access savings

Renters, flat owners, homeowners without driveways and businesses will

be able to save up to £500 when installing electric vehicle (EV) charge points, thanks to an over 40% increase in chargepoint grant amounts announced today (25 February 2026).

The uplift will cover almost half the cost of a typical charge point installation until March 2027, helping thousands more drivers access cheaper domestic electricity rates at home or work to power their car for as little as 2p per mile – that's the equivalent of London to Birmingham for £3.50.

Expanded access to home charging will help more households make the switch and UK businesses gear up for the EV revolution, as latest figures show EV drivers can save up to £1,400 on running costs versus a comparable petrol car when accessing cheaper domestic rates.

The move is the latest in a raft of action from the government to tackle two of the biggest barriers to driving electric – upfront costs and worries about finding somewhere to charge.

Over 55,000 drivers have already saved thousands buying a new EV thanks to the government's £2 billion Electric Car Grant (ECG), which is offering savings of up to £3,750 across some of the biggest auto brands, and backing the UK auto sector, including the Nissan Leaf made at the firm's Sunderland plant.

Aviation, Maritime and Decarbonisation Minister, Keir Mather said:

We're taking action to make EV ownership the affordable choice for

everyone – not just those with driveways. Bigger grants mean families, flat owners, renters and small businesses can now install a charger for almost half the usual cost, with home charging costing as little as 2p a mile.

Combined with our Electric Car Grant which has saved over 55,000 drivers thousands off the price of a new EV whilst boosting sales for carmakers, and record funding for our national public charging network, we're backing the EV revolution for drivers, businesses, and industry.

The updates will also simplify the current EV charge point support schemes available by reducing 8 grant types down to 5, streamlining the system so people can navigate and select schemes and

discounts more easily.

Last year, a £25 million scheme was also launched making it easier for residents without driveways to install home chargers. Accessed through local authorities, the scheme supports the installation of discreet, embedded pavement channels and is additional to the expanded charge point grant. This means those with on street parking could get help with installing the charger and the cross-pavement channel.

The following updates will be introduced from 1 April 2026:

people living in rented accommodation, flat owners, residential landlords, households with on-street parking and businesses will all be able to receive higher grants of up to £500 per charge point, rising from the previous discount of £350

schools will be eligible for grants of up to £2,000 per socket, building on 3,700 sockets installed to date

Read more about grants to help with the cost of buying and installing chargepoints for electric vehicles.



Alongside the ECG and home and workplace charging grants, the government is expanding the national 88,500 strong public charge point network. In total, £600 million was announced last year to accelerate the charging rollout, and this funding builds on the 100,000 additional new public chargers the government is already helping councils install in the coming years.

Councils will receive funding for the next



3 years to help them boost local charging infrastructure, alongside the continuation of a government funded support service for local authorities which helps ensure charge point installations and locations best serve communities.

Last month, the Department for Transport launched its new 'Get that electric feeling' campaign to help drive uptake in EVs by highlighting the benefits of going electric, including savings of up to £1,400 on running costs.

Tina McKenzie, Policy Chair, Federation of Small Businesses said:

Many small businesses want to switch to electric vehicles, with half of small businesses (51%) saying that more charging infrastructure would incentivise them to make the switch.

Small firms want to cut their emissions and reduce their fuel bills and removing or lowering the barriers which currently tip the scales against electric vehicle adoption can only be a good thing – for small businesses, for the economy and for the planet.

Ben Beadle, Chief Executive of the National Residential Landlords Association, said:

Almost 9 in 10 landlords with a suitable property would install EV charge points if a tenant asks them to undertake this work.

Given the extent of landlords' willingness to provide them, we welcome the government's plans to encourage more widespread installation of these points across the sector.

We urge landlords to make best use of the grants now available where it is feasible for them to do so.

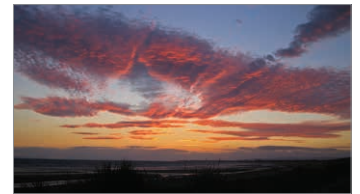
Yselkla Farmer, CEO of BEAMA said:

BEAMA members have already installed well over half a million chargepoints in the UK, and this grant will make it easier than ever for millions of people to access a charge point and access significant savings over driving petrol/diesel vehicles.

This funding will continue to bring much needed market confidence to the sector, and boost demand as record numbers of drivers make the switch to electric vehicles. We must continue to ensure drivers are supported as they make the switch.



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# Passengers save millions as rail fare freeze starts

March

From: Department for Transport, The Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP, Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill CBE, The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP and The Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP

Government freezes rail fares, saving passengers £600 million and easing cost-of-living pressures as it rebuilds a better, more reliable railway.

- passengers to save £600 million as government calls a halt to decades of soaring rail fares, as part of plan to put passengers at the heart of the railway through Great British Railways
- over a billion journeys a year will benefit from the regulated fares freeze, covering season tickets, peak returns for commuters and off-peak returns between major cities
- new fraud tackling measure introduced to protect taxpayers' money and keep it in the railway through changes to ticket refund rules, saving millions annually

Millions of commuters across the country are now benefiting from a freeze on rail fares for the first time in 30 years, helping with the cost of living and supporting economic growth.

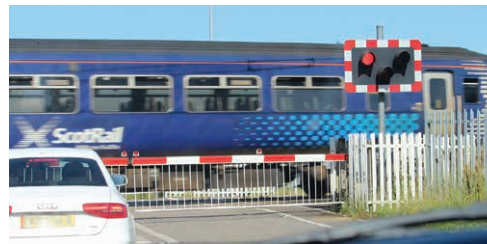
From this week, regulated rail fares across England have been frozen, meaning passengers won't pay a penny more on season tickets, peak returns for commuters and off-peak returns between major cities – benefitting more than a billion journeys.

For years, rail passengers have faced relentless fares hikes – under the previous government, fares rose by 60% between

2010 and 2024 hitting hard working families and commuters.

Had this government not taken the historic decision to step off the escalator of endless fare rises, regulated rail fares would have increased by 5.8% today. Instead, the fares freeze is expected to save existing rail passengers £600 million in 2026/27, putting money back in the pockets of people when they need it most. It is part of the government's wider plan to bring people back to rail, by offering better value for tax and farepayers alike.

The move is saving passengers hundreds of pounds off their season tickets and is supporting growth in town centres across the country, with commuters on some of the busiest routes set to save more than £300 per year. For example, a typical commuter travelling to work 3 days a week using



flexi-season tickets, will save:

- £315 per year, travelling from Milton Keynes to London
- £173 per year, travelling from Woking to London
- £57 per year, travelling from Bradford to Leeds

With transport costs making up 14% of household spending, this cost-cutting move is providing real savings for passengers – delivering on the government's commitment to put more money in people's pockets.

These savings come alongside the government's extension of the £3 cap on bus fares, further helping ease pressures on day-to-day journeys and saving people money when they travel to work or school.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said:

“Affordable, reliable transport links are the gateway to jobs, school, and opportunities. So it's not right that passengers are being priced out of the routes they should rely on because of endless hikes.

This freeze – the first since the 90s – will put more money in working people's pockets. By keeping costs down we are

making journeys more affordable for millions of people - putting train travel back into the service of passengers, not profits.”

Transport Secretary, Heidi Alexander, said:

“Freezing rail fares for the first time in 30 years will help millions of passengers keep more of their hard-earned cash, with commuters on some routes saving more than £300 a year.

As we bring the train operating companies into public ownership, and set up Great British Railways, we are determined to build an affordable railway that the public can be proud of and rely on.”

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, said:

“In the budget I said we would cut the cost of living. For the first time in 30 years, we have now frozen rail fares, saving hundreds of pounds for passengers.

Our economic plan is the right one. By cutting the cost of living, cutting national debt, and creating the conditions for growth and investment in all parts of the country we are building a stronger more secure economy.”

The freeze applies to all regulated fares, including seasons, peak returns for commuters and off-peak returns between major cities, benefitting more than a billion passenger journeys across England.

To drive more passenger improvements like the historic fares freeze, the government is also taking action to tackle the blight of fraud and fare-dodging, protecting passengers' and taxpayers' money and saving around £40 million annually.

Ticket terms and conditions have been changed so from April 1, passengers will only be able to claim refunds for unused tickets ahead of travel.

Rail Minister, Lord Peter Hendy, said:

“Deliberate fare dodging has no place on our railways. It drains much needed revenue and undercuts the trust of passengers who play by the rules.

Changing refund rules will help stamp out fraud, keeping money in the railway – which will ensure we can deliver an improved railway with passengers at its heart.”

These changes are part of the

government's plans to rebuild a publicly owned railway that the country can rely on and be proud of.

The Railways Bill will create Great British Railways (GBR), a new publicly owned company, that will run and manage the tracks and trains used every day – ending years of fragmentation, driving up standards for passengers, and making journeys easier and better value for money.

GBR will be accountable to passengers and taxpayers, bringing fares and ticketing into the 21st century, including through a new GBR website and app – which will be a one-stop shop for passengers to check train times and buy tickets at the best prices across the rail network, without any booking fees – and building on the expansion of successful Pay As You Go and fares trials across the country.



## UK beef hits US shelves for the first time – cutting costs for UK businesses

March

From: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Department for Business and Trade, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, The Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP and The Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP

UK food and farming take centre stage this week after the first shipment of British beef arrived in the US, alongside the launch of the UK's first dedicated agri-food trade mission to Washington DC.

The trade mission will build on a milestone of the UK-US Economic Prosperity Deal, where both countries agreed to implement a reciprocal 13,000 tonne quota for beef. The quota is a major growth opportunity for British farmers, worth up to £70 million a year if fully utilised.

Thanks to the deal, UK beef exporters were given dedicated access to the US market, and the first shipment has now arrived in the US from Northern Ireland's biggest red meat exporter Foyle Food Group, who employ 1,150 people in the

UK. Valued at more than £190,000, the agreement will see nearly £50,000 tariff relief to this landmark shipment alone – easing costs for businesses and supporting growth back home.

The UK's food and drink exports were worth over £25 billion globally last year, £2 billion of which went to the US, with considerable potential to grow the UK's global trade.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds said:

“The UK produces the finest food and drink, and I'm proud to champion our world-leading farmers, producers and exporters on the global stage.

I am leading the first ever dedicated agri-food trade mission to the US to pursue opportunities to grow our trade with the largest consumer market in the world.”

The first agri-trade mission will seize on British food's reputation for high quality and standards, taking the very best of the UK's largest manufacturing sector directly to America's buyers, businesses and decision-makers. In a market of more than 300 million people, the visit will turn international prestige into real commercial opportunity for UK farmers and food producers.

The Environment Secretary will be joined by key UK industry figures on her mission, including representatives from the National Farmers' Union, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, Foyle Food Group, the International Meat Trade Association and the Scotch Whisky Association.

She will attend the US Annual Meat Conference to support five of the UK's largest meat exporters and discuss opportunities for growing the US market, flying the flag for UK meat among American buyers.

Reynolds will then host a major Food and Drink Showcase reception at the Ambassador's Residence, bringing together UK exporters and buyers to sample premium beef alongside other world-class British products such as cheese, seafood, spirits and English

sparkling wine.

Delegates from the Scotch Whisky Association will have opportunity to get their products in front of US buyers, championing one of the UK's most iconic spirits in a market with strong consumer demand.

Business and Trade Secretary Peter Kyle said:

"For the first time, UK beef farmers have exclusive access to a market of over 300 million people, and that is a direct result of the deal we struck with the US last year.

This isn't just symbolic — it's delivering

real results. British beef is world-class, and American consumers deserve access to it. I look forward to seeing more of our farmers seize this opportunity and grow their businesses on the international stage."

Michael Acheson, Business Development at Foyle Food Group, said:

"Foyle Food Group is delighted that the UK has secured a 13,000 metric tonne quota for British beef in the United States through the new UK-US Economic Prosperity Deal.

This agreement provides tariff-free



access to the world's largest beef market. For Foyle Food Group, it means we can now offer British beef to a wide range of customers across the United States. Securing this dedicated UK quota for the first time also allows us to build longer-term business relationships and provide a more consistent and reliable supply into the US market.”

The trade mission also kickstarts the government's ambition to act on Baroness Batters' Farming Profitability Review, which identified expanding export opportunities as essential to supporting farm businesses to improve profitability and driving economic growth across every part of the United Kingdom.

As the Environment Secretary outlined during her address to the National Farmers Union Conference on Tuesday 25 February, the government is committed to dedicated trade missions to showcase British food and drink overseas.

NFU President Tom Bradshaw said:

“As one of the commitments made off the back of the Farm Profitability Review, it's great to see the Secretary of State undertaking this trip in collaboration with industry.

There is a growing demand in the US for a range of UK products, not least British beef but also lamb, dairy and pork. We hope to build on this momentum and champion high quality British produce in new and potential markets.”

Emily Norton, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) Chair, said:

“International trade and access to a broad portfolio of markets are vitally important for our red meat and dairy industry. The appetite for our world-class red meat and dairy produce was underlined last year with record values of UK exports achieved for both sectors.

Central to this success is the importance of connecting with people to help our exports continue to thrive. AHDB's updated report on prospects for UK agri-food exports in North America has highlighted long-term opportunities for premium red meat and dairy products in the USA and the wider region. We welcome the Secretary of State's visit and look forward to continuing working with government and industry to help deliver further success for British red meat and dairy exports.”

Mark Kent, Chief Executive at the Scotch Whisky Association, said:

“It is good to be teaming up with the Secretary of State on her trip to Washington DC. We're proud that Scotch whisky is the UK's biggest food and drink export, and the United States is our most important market, worth £933 million in 2025. Scotch whisky has deep, longstanding ties with the American whiskey industry – not just through our closely connected supply chain, but in our shared commitment to a premium product that's loved around the world.

At a time when global trade is evolving and our sector is seeing increased pressure in crucial markets like the US, the Secretary of State's visit is an important opportunity to build on that historic relationship while championing zero tariff trade which benefits whisky industries, and their supply chain from farmers to barrel makers to the hospitality industry, on both sides of the Atlantic.”



# 100 schools cutting bills with Great British Energy solar panels

March

From: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, Department for Education, Great British Energy, Josh MacAlister OBE MP and The Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP

- First 100 schools across England have now installed Great British Energy solar panels and are cutting their energy bills with clean, homegrown power
- in total, around 250 schools will benefit from Great British Energy's solar roll-out with millions to be reinvested into schools
- schools and colleges set to save up to an estimated combined £220 million over the lifetime of the solar panel

First 100 schools across England have now installed Great British Energy solar panels and are cutting their energy bills with clean, homegrown power in total, around 250 schools will benefit from Great British Energy's solar roll-out with millions to be reinvested into schools schools and colleges set to save up to an

estimated combined £220 million over the lifetime of the solar panel Classrooms and pupils are benefitting from lower energy bills thanks to Great British Energy-funded solar panels, as 100 schools and colleges have now completed their installations – with around 250 schools and colleges in total to have solar panels by Summer.

Great British Energy and government have targeted schools and colleges primarily clustered in areas of deprivation in the North East, West Midlands and North West, ensuring areas in most need get the support, as well as at least 10 schools in each region of England.



Around 250 schools and colleges are set to save up to an estimated combined £220 million over the lifetime of the solar panels, taking pressure off finances and securing more money to be reinvested in classrooms.

Great British Energy and government is investing up to £255 million in total to install solar and complementary technologies, including batteries, on around 250 schools and colleges, around 260 NHS sites and multiple military sites, generating estimated lifetime savings for vital public services of up to £520 million across schools and NHS sites alone.

It comes as the government and Great British Energy published the £1 billion Local Power Plan last month for communities to own and control clean energy projects, creating revenue for places of worship, social clubs and

community centres.

Energy Secretary, Ed Miliband said:

“Great British Energy has now helped 100 schools and colleges to save money on bills, meaning more money for textbooks and technology.

Across the country, solar panels are going up on rooftops to power classrooms with clean, homegrown power.

This is our clean energy mission in action, protecting our public services with lower bills and energy security.”

Great British Energy’s CEO, Dan McGrail said:

“Great British Energy is delivering affordable, clean power where it matters.

Reaching 100 schools is an important milestone in our mission to cut energy bills and means more money can be spent on education.

Our Local Power Plan will build on this success so that by 2030, every community in the UK will have the opportunity to own and benefit from a local energy project.”

Minister for Education, Josh MacAlister said:

“Schools and colleges are saving thousands on their energy bills thanks to our new Great British Solar panels, with the money saved going straight back into our children’s education to support pupils to achieve and thrive.

This is all part of our 10-year plan for a decade of renewal to transform the education estate so children and young people across the country are able to learn in brilliant, climate-resilient classrooms that are fit for the future.

Solar panels are not just good for the planet – they are an investment that keeps paying back into our schools and our children’s futures, and shows our children that they matter.”

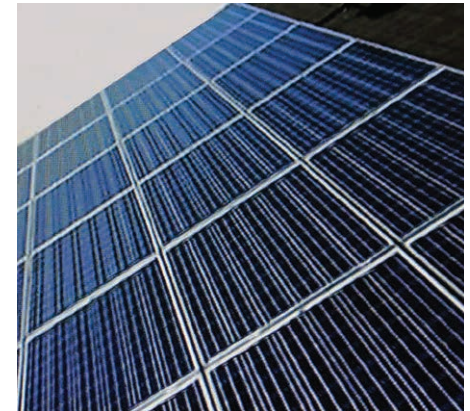
This follows the Education Secretary unveiling the new Education Estates Strategy, which sets out a decade of national renewal to transform schools and colleges across the country, so children and young people have high-quality classrooms that are fit for purpose.

Each region includes a further education college which will work with the contractors appointed to promote

careers in renewables. This will in turn support growth in the construction and renewables workforce. This could be through work placements, skills bootcamps and workshops.

This follows the government’s commitment to curriculum reforms which will strengthen climate and sustainability education across geography, science, citizenship, and design and technology – from primary through to a new Natural History GCSE – helping to ensure pupils understand the planet, climate change and develop the skills for a greener future.

This is alongside the expectation that all education settings have



the opportunity to learn in safe and sustainable settings. The government will continue to support all settings with delivering and implementing climate action plans through the Sustainability Support Programme until at least 2030.

Ms Helen Khinich, Kilburn Grange School's Headteacher, said:

“Over the past 12 months, we have reduced our electricity use by 35%, and the installation of 28 solar panels on our roof is projected to save our school a further £3,000 a year in energy costs. The Great British Energy's solar programme has really helped schools drive down energy costs and provide much needed funds to reinvest into core education, as well as trips and experiences that make a real difference to children.”

Alun Williams, CEO of the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership Trust, said:

“We were delighted for Peasedown St John's Primary School to be part of the Great British Energy solar panels project. We are already seeing the positive impact of the solar panel installation in the form of reduced energy costs. These savings have been reinvested into providing high quality resources for the children at the school.”

# Biggest boat clean-up in a decade underway on Upper Thames

March

From: Environment Agency

Environment Agency plans to remove blight in time for new season “Sunk, wrecked, abandoned – they've got to go” says Deputy Director of Navigation

The Environment Agency is on course to remove over 100 sunk and abandoned vessels from the non-tidal Thames in its biggest push in a decade on tidying up the watercourse. The work has been spearheaded by a newly created task force whose mission is to deal with some of the long-standing challenges that the Thames faces. This includes old and

discarded boats as well as those that are unregistered or left at unauthorised moorings.

So far this year it has already removed 53 abandoned boats that were mostly left on riverbanks on the lower part of the river. This latest operation is to focus on the remaining sunk and abandoned boats across the non-tidal Thames.

Environment Agency Navigation Operations Deputy Director Bill Jephson said:

“Irresponsible boat owners have caused



a blight on the Thames for far too long. We know the impact these boats can have on river users and local residents. It's time to start with a clean slate. Sunk, wrecked or abandoned, they've got to go."

It is actually the owner's responsibility to remove their sunken wrecks and where owners can be identified, the Environment Agency will look to recover costs.

Boats on the river need to be registered and comply with the Environment Agency's requirements including insurance and a valid boat safety certificate. Owners are given ample opportunity to register. It's easy to do and full information and fee details are online at [www.gov.uk/register-a-boat](http://www.gov.uk/register-a-boat)

Jephson continued:

"Our approach to non-registration offences on the Thames has also changed. While we continue to prosecute offenders through our escalation process, we have also begun to remove boats where the owner has previously been prosecuted and continues not to comply. We are currently recruiting more patrol officers to clamp down further. It's time to put pride back into the river."

The task force was established in July 2025 and it removed 35 boats from the Lower Thames over a few days of intensive action in September 2025 & a further 18 this Jan.

# Major renewal of ageing English roads delivered with £27 billion investment

March

From: Department for Transport, National Highways, The Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP and Simon Lightwood MP

Road Investment Strategy 3 will fund major schemes to upgrade and future-proof England's roads over the next 5 years.

- major £27 billion boost for England's motorways and major A-roads over the next 5 years – one of the largest ever road investment plans

- after years of decline, plans will fix the country's ageing roads, fund major schemes like the dualling of the A66 and unlock private investment into the Lower Thames Crossing to improve connectivity and cut congestion

- government also gives green light to 16 key road schemes on local roads, helping create thousands of new jobs and homes across the country

Millions of drivers are set for



smoother, safer journeys as the government today (26 March 2026) commits £27 billion to upgrade and future-proof England's roads.

Spread across 5 years, the plan puts more money into maintaining the network to help deliver smoother, more reliable journeys for drivers, businesses and freight operators by resurfacing roads, fixing potholes, and replacing worn-out stretches of motorway.

The huge investment, known as the Road Investment Strategy (RIS3), will fund major schemes that unlock growth and improve connectivity across the country, and allow National Highways (NH) to resurface over 9,000 kilometres worth of motorway and major A-road lanes – almost a quarter of the network.

These include the dualling of the A66 between Cumbria and North Yorkshire, and government support to bring private investment into the Lower Thames Crossing – a new road crossing east of London that will ease congestion and improve connections across the South East.

The government is also choosing to fix the foundations, investing a record £8.4 billion to repairing and renewing

England's motorways and major A-roads before problems arise, so drivers can have faith in a world-class road network once again.

That's on top of the £7.3 billion already pledged by government at the Spending Review for local authorities to fix potholes and invest in long-term measures to maintain local roads.

To help restore people's pride in their communities, the government is today also giving the green light to a further 16 road schemes on the major road network and local roads, supporting thousands of new jobs and homes in communities across England.

The schemes, including bypasses and junction improvements that local authorities could not deliver alone, have been chosen on their value for money and long-term deliverability, ensuring taxpayers' money goes into projects

that will deliver growth for left behind communities.

To help show the scale of the investment, the government has created an interactive map showing all the schemes that will be progressed during RIS3.

Transport Secretary, Heidi Alexander, said:

“For too long this country has failed to tackle and fix our crumbling infrastructure, but this huge £27 billion investment in our roads will secure the future of our road network for years to come.

Not only are we investing in renewing our roads, meaning smoother and faster journeys for drivers, we are getting on with investing into brand new projects and fixing potholes, which will deliver benefits across the



country from Norwich to Manchester.”

Roads and Buses Minister, Simon Lightwood, said:

“This government is firmly putting its money where its mouth is, and this new funding will be transformational for the millions of drivers and thousands of businesses that rely on our motorways and A roads every day.

By investing in existing infrastructure and new schemes, such as the Lower Thames Crossing and long-awaited dualling of the A66, we are giving everyone the confidence they can get from A to B faster and smoother than ever before.”

National Highways Executive Director Elliot Shaw said:

“This major investment will help boost economic growth by improving and maintaining motorways and major A roads which keep the country moving.

When roads are well maintained, businesses and communities feel the benefit, so this funding enables us to tackle an ageing network head-on and keep drivers safe.

Our focus on renewing vital infrastructure

will keep people connected to their loved ones, support the delivery of new homes and jobs, and give industry the confidence to plan and invest in the UK.”

The £27 billion investment supports the government’s central mission of kickstarting economic growth, giving businesses and regions the long-term certainty they need to invest and create jobs. Improved road reliability will also help keep supply chains moving and support the freight networks that keep goods and prices stable for consumers.

RIS3 sets stretching targets for National Highways on safety, journey reliability,

network condition and environmental performance, allowing the government to hold them to account on delivery over the 5-year period.

While today the government has committed to tackling potholes on motorway and major A-road surfaces, it also recently committed to investing over £7 billion over the next 4 years to help councils tackle their potholes. We have also introduced a new rating system so people can see for themselves whether their local council is using their funding to deliver for their communities.



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# COVER OPTIONS

