

Former Olympics director leads work to protect clinically vulnerable people

Chris Townsend OBE has been appointed to lead the government's shielding programme to protect those at highest risk from coronavirus, the Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP has announced today (14 April 2020).

Mr Townsend, previously Commercial Director for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, will spearhead the huge cross-government effort to ensure that clinically vulnerable people who are advised to shield will receive the vital food and medicine they need.

The government's shielding effort is already underway, and around 250,000 boxes of essential food have already been delivered by wholesalers to those at highest risk across the country, with hundreds of thousands more to follow in the coming weeks.

In these unprecedented times, delivering support on this scale to protect the most vulnerable is a huge and evolving task bringing together national and local government and the food industry. Mr Townsend's breadth of experience makes him the ideal candidate to champion these efforts to protect the most clinically vulnerable in society.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

I am delighted to confirm Chris Townsend has been appointed to lead the huge cross-government effort to support and protect the most vulnerable during this difficult time.

Our number one priority is ensuring the health and wellbeing of everyone during the coronavirus emergency and Chris brings a wealth of experience with him as he steps in to oversee our shielding programme.

Chris has held a number of major roles including CEO of Broadband UK and Commercial Director at Chelsea Football Club. He played a key role in London 2012 and knows exactly what it takes to recreate the unity and community spirit needed to deliver this vital programme of support to the clinically vulnerable.

Chris Townsend, Chief Executive Officer of the Shielding Programme said:

I am proud to lead the government's shielding programme and determined to do all I can to ensure those most at risk get the support they need.

This is a top priority and I call on everyone to remember the

important role they have to play in stopping the spread of coronavirus and to shield those most at risk.

There are around 1.5 million people who fall into the clinically vulnerable group in England. This includes those with reduced immune systems or with severe respiratory conditions.

As part of a series of measures to protect those at highest risk of coronavirus, the packages, which are being left on people's doorsteps, contain essential food and household items such as pasta, fruit, tea bags, tinned goods and biscuits for those who need to self-isolate at home but have no support network of family or friends to help them.

The number of deliveries of food boxes will increase week on week, as the department works in partnership with the food industry, local government, emergency services and voluntary groups to ensure that essential items can be delivered to those who most need them.

[Chris Townsend OBE Biography](#)

He has left his role as Commercial Director at Chelsea Football Club and volunteered three months of his time to lead the programme.

He will not be paid for this role.

Additional information on shielding

- On Sunday 22 March, we published [guidance for the most at-risk group](#), or 'clinically extremely vulnerable', on shielding and how they can protect themselves from coronavirus.
- Shielding is an advice measure to protect clinically extremely vulnerable people who are at very high risk of serious illness from COVID-19 because of a specific health condition by advising them to stay at home and avoid contact with other people.
- It means taking steps to minimise interaction between clinically extremely vulnerable people and others, limiting their potential exposure to COVID-19 and minimising the chances of them catching the virus.
- The shielding measures include staying at home at all times for a period of 12 weeks including not going to buy food or medicines.
- Expert doctors in England have identified specific medical conditions that, based on what we know about the virus so far, place someone at greatest risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
- There are around 1.5 million people in England who fall into this extremely vulnerable group and require shielding.