

# Health Secretary sees how the South West is battling the backlog

- Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid visits the South West region as part of his week-long national 'Road to Recovery' tour
- Javid opens government-funded £56.7 million ground-breaking facility at Porton Down tackling COVID-19 and future health threats
- Visits follow government and NHS publishing COVID Backlog Recovery Plan to reduce waiting times, give patients more control over care and recover from COVID-19

Innovative health and technology hubs were the focus of the Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid's visit to the South West today (17 February 2022), as he continues his 'Road to Recovery' tour across England.

Mr Javid toured three major facilities to meet amazing staff who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic and see how the region is building back from COVID-19 and working through the backlog.

This visit comes just a week after the government and NHS published their electives recovery plan to boost recovery, tackle long waits for care with a massive expansion in capacity for tests, checks and treatments.

The government will also join up health and social care services and give people access to the right care, in the right place at the right time. The Integration White Paper published last week will improve health and care systems for the 21st Century, boost the health of local communities, and make it easier to access health and care services.

The Health and Social Care Secretary's ambitious agenda on day 4 (Thursday 17 February) of his tour included visiting:

- A new £4.4 million eye care unit at Musgrove Park Hospital, where he met with staff to thank them for their work during COVID-19 and hear their feedback on the new state of the art facilities.
- Dorset Health Village, a purpose-built centre on the top floor of Beales Department Store in Poole helping to tackle COVID-19 waiting lists.
- Porton Down, where he opened a new facility that will help to tackle both COVID-19 and a broad range of emerging health security threats.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

It's been a privilege to talk with people from Somerset to Dorset and see first-hand the innovative new approaches and technological breakthroughs that will underpin our recovery from COVID-19 and help tackle the COVID backlog currently facing our NHS and social care system.

Our COVID Backlog Recovery Plan, along with the excellent work I

have seen today, are necessary to radically rethink how our health service delivers operations, treatment and checks as we look beyond the pandemic and learn to live with COVID-19.

We are committed to tackling the COVID-19 backlog and building a health and social care system that works for everyone across our country.

As part of his commitment to recovering from COVID-19 and tackling the NHS backlog, the Health and Social Care Secretary visited the newly completed £4.4 million eye care unit that has opened at Musgrove Park Hospital in Somerset. The development is one part of Musgrove 2030 – an ambitious programme to transform the hospital's facilities and ensure people are cared for in the right place to meet their health needs. He met with staff to thank them for their work during COVID-19 and to hear their feedback on the new state of the art facilities.

The Health and Social Care Secretary then travelled to Dorset Health Village, a purpose-built centre on the top floor of Beales Department Store in Poole. Using lessons learnt from the creation of the Nightingale Hospitals at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mass vaccination centres, the floor has been completely transformed into a clinical area, including an ophthalmology lane, a breast screening unit and 16 clinical rooms which can be adapted for different clinics. This will ensure local people will get seen more quickly, in a convenient way for them.

Finally, the Health and Social Care Secretary, alongside Dr Jenny Harries, Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency, opened a new ground-breaking facility at Porton Down . The two-storey, 22,000sqft building is one of two that make up a new £65 million Vaccine Evaluation Centre, built to help develop and licence new vaccines and cement the UK as a global leader in testing against future variants of the virus.

Here, teams are currently sequencing over 1,500 positive PCR tests every day to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and guard against new variants as we learn to live with the virus, as well as shaping our understanding of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

Technologies like those at Porton Down are vital to tackling both COVID-19 and a broad range of emerging health security threats, and this has been recognised by the government's £10 million UK aid funding to progress research into vaccines to help future-proof the world from diseases.

Professor Dame Jenny Harries, CEO of the UK Health Security Agency, said:

It was a pleasure to be able to tour these new world-class facilities, with the Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid, which will help further establish the UKHSA and its Porton Down site as a global leader of vaccine testing and variant research in the fight against COVID-19.

The work undertaken at the Vaccine Evaluation Centre will define the UK's future pandemic response as we help develop the next generation of vaccines to protect against this ever-mutating virus.

Vaccines are one of the most important weapons we have against COVID-19 and they have prevented countless deaths and hospitalisations through this pandemic. Our teams will use these new facilities to ensure we stay on the front foot in protecting against future threats.

The Health and Social Care Secretary will use this regional tour to help focus these existing plans for recovery and reform, and inform future plans which are expected within the coming months.