

# PM press conference statement: 24 May 2020

Good afternoon.

I want to begin by answering the big question that people have been asking in the last 48 hours. And that is – is this Government asking you – the people, the public, to do one thing while senior people here in government do something else?

Have we been asking you to make sacrifices, to obey social distancing, to stay at home while some people have been basically flouting those rules and endangering lives?

And it is because I take this matter so seriously and frankly it is so serious that I can tell you today I have had extensive face to face conversations with Dominic Cummings and I have concluded that in travelling to find the right kind of childcare, at the moment when both he and his wife were about to be incapacitated by coronavirus. And when he had no alternative, I think he followed the instincts of every father and every parent. And I do not mark him down for that. And though there have been many other allegations about what happened when he was in self-isolation and thereafter, some of them palpably false.

I believe that in every respect he has acted responsibly, and legally, and with integrity, and with the overwhelming aim of stopping the spread of the virus and saving lives.

And I stress this fundamental aim, because it is thanks to this country's collective resolve in achieving that aim that we continue to make progress.

So let me give you today's figures:

- 3,458,905 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 110,401 tests carried out yesterday
- 259,559 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 2,409 cases since yesterday – a smaller increase than we were seeing over the last few weeks
- 8,951 people are in hospital with COVID-19 in the UK, down 11% from 10,085 this time last week

And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 36,793 have now died. That's an increase of 118 fatalities since yesterday.

And each of those fatalities represents a family in mourning, the grief of friends and relatives. And as we mourn them we resolve again to beat this virus and get our country back on its feet. We can and we will.

Two weeks ago I set out the Government's roadmap to begin easing the measures we put in place to control the spread of coronavirus.

I said that we would do so in a safe and controlled way, based on our assessment of progress against the five tests we set for adjusting the lockdown.

We're going to set out that assessment in detail in the coming days, but today I can confirm that I do believe we will be in a position to move to step 2 of our plan.

As part of Step 2, we set out plans for a phased reopening of schools.

Because the education of our children is crucial for their welfare, their health, for their long term future and for social justice

And so in line with the approach being taken by other countries, we want to start getting our children back in the classroom in a way that is manageable and as safe as possible.

So we said this would begin with early years settings and reception, Year 1 and Year 6 in primary schools.

Today I can announce that it is our intention to go ahead with that as planned on June 1st, a week on Monday.

We then intend, from June 15th, for secondary schools to provide some contact for Year 10 and Year 12 students to help them prepare for exams next year, with up to a quarter of these students in at any point.

By opening schools to more pupils in this limited way, we are taking a deliberately cautious approach.

And this comes after a constructive period of consultation with schools, teachers and unions, led by the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson.

I want to thank all the Education and childcare staff who have stepped up to the challenge and kept schools open throughout this crisis.

The Department for Education will engage with teaching unions, local authorities and school leaders in the coming days, giving them an opportunity to ask questions and probe the evidence behind our plans.

And the final decision will be taken as part of the formal review into lockdown measures which the law requires us to undertake by Thursday. We will of course continue to consider all the evidence (as we said we would do), and will continue to work hard with those bodies over the course of the coming week.

However, I think it is important for us to be clear about the Government's intentions now, so that teachers and parents can plan in earnest for schools to reopen a week on Monday.

Now I acknowledge that a 1 June opening may not be possible for all schools, but the Government will continue to support and work with the sector to ensure that any schools experiencing difficulties are able to open more

widely as soon as possible.

Detailed guidance has been published by the Department for Education on how schools can open in a way which is safe for children, teachers and parents.

While of course we recognise that full social distancing may not be possible, especially when teaching young children, our guidance sets out a range of protective measures to keep children and staff safe. This includes:

- reducing the size of classes and keeping children in small groups without mixing with others
- staggered break and lunch times, as well as drop offs and pick ups
- increasing the frequency of cleaning, reducing the used of shared items and utilising outdoor space

All children and staff, and their families, will have access to testing if they display symptoms. This will enable children and staff to get back to school if they test negative, and if they test positive we will take the appropriate reactive measures.

We will continue to work with the sector to support them to prepare for wider opening and ensure all children and young people can continue to receive the best care, education and training possible.

We will set out what moving to step 2 means for other areas, such as non-essential retail and more social contacts, over the course of the next week.

And let me stress once again: we are making good progress.

But that progress is conditional, provisional.

We must keep reducing the incidence of this disease.

We must keep that R down below 1.

And that means we must remember the basics.

Wash our hands, keep social distance, isolate if you have symptoms – and get a test.

We are beating this thing, but we will beat it all the faster if we stay alert, control the virus and save lives.

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**PM confirms schools, colleges and nurseries on track to begin phased**

# reopening

Schools, colleges and nurseries across England remain on track to open to more children from 1 June, the Prime Minister confirmed today (24 May 2020).

Primary schools will welcome back children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6, while nurseries and other early years providers will begin welcoming back children of all ages.

Secondary schools, sixth forms and colleges will also provide face-to-face contact for Year 10, Year 12 and equivalent 16-19 further education students to help them prepare for exams next year. It is expected this will begin from 15 June, with around a quarter of these secondary students in at any point.

The Prime Minister today praised teachers, childcare workers and support staff for the brilliant work they have been doing throughout the pandemic.

This includes providing remote education for those not in school, as well as continuing to provide face-to-face education for the children of priority groups, including vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

He also acknowledged that some schools may not be able to reopen immediately, and committed the government to continuing to work with the sector to ensure any schools experiencing difficulties are able to open as soon as possible.

In line with our roadmap setting out how the UK will adjust its response to the virus, our approach to schools remains a cautious, phased one. It is also broadly in line with other European countries.

We continue to consider all the evidence, as we said we would, and will continue to work with schools, teachers and unions over the coming week before making a final decision.

It also remains the case that schools will only reopen to more children if the government's five tests are met by Thursday 28 May.

In the coming days, the Prime Minister will set out the government's progress in meeting these five tests, which are:

1. Protect the NHS's ability to cope. We must be confident that we are able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment right across the UK
2. See a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates from COVID-19 so we are confident that we have moved beyond the peak
3. Reliable data from SAGE showing that the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels across the board
4. Be confident that the range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand, with supply able to meet future demand
5. Be confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections that overwhelms the NHS

Today's announcement comes after a constructive period of consultation with schools, teachers and unions, led by the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson.

Clear, detailed guidance has been published by the Department for Education on how schools can open in a way which is safe for children, teachers and parents.

While we recognise that full social distancing may not be possible, our guidance sets out a range of measures to protect children and staff. This includes:

- reducing the size of classes and keeping children in small groups without mixing with others
- staggered break and lunch times, as well as drop offs and pickups
- increasing the frequency of cleaning, reducing the used of shared items and utilising outdoor space

All children and staff, and their families, will also have access to testing if they display symptoms. This will enable children and staff to get back to school if they test negative, and if they test positive a test and trace approach can be taken.

Children will also be encouraged not to travel on public transport where possible, in line with the advice to the wider population.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

This has been a difficult time for the entire country. Education and childcare staff have stepped up to the challenge, making sure children and young people have continued to be supported throughout the past ten weeks.

Our priority is the education and welfare of all children and young people across the country. That is why we want to start a phased wider opening of nurseries, school and colleges is informed by the best possible scientific and medical advice.

We will continue to work with the sector to support them to prepare for wider opening and ensure all children and young people can continue to receive the best care, education and training possible.

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**[6000 new supported homes as part of](#)**

# Landmark commitment to end rough sleeping

- Thousands more homes to be made available for vulnerable rough sleepers
- Commitment is unprecedented and most ambitious of its kind with single biggest injection of specialist accommodation since the Rough Sleeping Initiative began;
- It will be backed by £433 million of government funding with 3,300 homes to be made available in next 12 months
- Dame Louise Casey highlights 'extraordinary opportunity' to end rough sleeping for good

Radical plans to provide thousands of long-term, safe homes for vulnerable rough sleepers taken off the streets during the pandemic have been unveiled today (24 May 2020) by Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP.

This ambitious commitment – the biggest of its kind since the government's Rough Sleeping Initiative began – will be backed by £160 million this year and will support many of the thousands of rough sleepers currently housed in emergency accommodation to move on to more sustainable, long-term housing.

By accelerating plans for the £381 million announced for rough sleeping services at Budget – now extended to £433 million – the funding will ensure that 6,000 new housing units will be put into the system, with 3,300 of these becoming available in the next 12 months. In addition to accelerating this capital spend for investment in housing stock, the government is also increasing the revenue support of the total programme by 37% to make sure that the rough sleepers have the support they need to stay off the streets for good.

Once in their new home, rough sleepers will be supported by specialist staff to access the help they need, such as support for mental health or substance abuse problems, so they can rebuild their lives, move towards training and work, and remain off the streets for good.

Thanks to the efforts of charities, local government and other partners, in just over two months, more than 90% of rough sleepers known to councils at the beginning of the pandemic have now been offered accommodation where they can remain safe and able to protect themselves during the crisis.

The plans are being pulled together by the Rough Sleeping Covid 19 Response Taskforce, led by Dame Louise Casey, bringing together local government, charities, faith groups, public sector partners and businesses in order to use the coronavirus crisis and current successful work so far in bringing 'everyone in' as a catalyst towards ending rough sleeping for good.

As part of this commitment, Homes England, in partnership with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has pledged to work hand-in-hand with leading housing associations and local authorities to fast-track thousands of units of longer-term accommodation for rough sleepers needed now.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP said:

We have offered accommodation to over 90% of known rough sleepers in order to help them stay safe during the pandemic. This has been possible because of an incredible effort by the government, councils and charities. Thousands of lives have been protected as a result of the shared commitment to protect the most vulnerable in our society throughout this national emergency and we continue to fund this vital project.

This government wants to end rough sleeping for good, and we now have a real opportunity to deliver on this moral mission. I'm backing this effort with £433 million to fast-track the longer-term and safe accommodation needed to ensure as few rough sleepers as possible return to the streets. This is an unprecedented commitment – the most ambitious of its kind and the single biggest injection of specialist accommodation since the rough sleepers initiative began.”

This will be completely transformative and changes the lives of thousands of rough sleepers for the better.

Dame Louise Casey said:

The goal is ambitious – together, we want to do everything possible to ensure that vulnerable people who were sleeping rough and have come inside during this pandemic – some for the first time in a very long time – do not go back to the streets.

The effort so far has been immense – councils, charities and health providers have all worked tirelessly to support some of the most vulnerable during these unprecedented times. I want to thank all of those who have already stepped up to support rough sleepers so far and those who are pledging accommodation and future support.

We know this safe harbour is just the start – we have here an extraordinary opportunity to end rough sleeping for good.

Nick Walkley, CEO Homes England said:

The steps taken to reduce homelessness have been one of the few silver linings in recent months. The opportunity to work with Dame Louise Casey to build on these recent successes and work towards ending rough sleeping for good is something everyone at Homes England is supportive of. We look forward to working closely with MHCLG and our partners to support the Taskforce.

Over the coming weeks, government will work in partnership with councils, local leaders and the property sector to ensure this new generation of housing for some of the most vulnerable in society is delivered as quickly as possible and in the most cost-effective way. Interim accommodation is also being committed by the YHA, the YMCA and some universities. The taskforce will continue to work with partners on this so that nobody has to go back to the streets.

Ministers have also announced a further £6 million for frontline homeless charities to directly support their important, vital work. In addition, the Department for Education will be providing more than £700,000 for councils to support care leavers at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Last month the Communities Secretary appointed Dame Louise Casey to spearhead a specialist taskforce to lead the next phase of the government's support for rough sleepers during the pandemic. The taskforce will work hand-in-hand with councils, charities, faith groups and other partners across the country on plans to ensure rough sleepers can move into safe accommodation once the immediate crisis is over. The taskforce will also ensure the thousands of rough sleepers now in accommodation continue to receive the physical and mental health support they need over the coming weeks and months.

The £160 million is part of the £381 million announced at Budget for accommodation for rough sleepers over a four year period. We have brought a substantial proportion of the funding forwards into this year to meet local need given the changed circumstances brought about by Covid-19 and the opportunity this presents. Support funding will still be profiled over 4 years to ensure people get the long term support they need. The means overall funding increases to £433 million as a result of accelerating the programme.

As a result of this announcement, the devolved administrations will receive up to £18 million of additional capital funding in 2020 to 2021 through the Barnett formula. This means up to £9.2 million for the Scottish Government, up to £5.6 million for the Welsh Government and up to £3.1 million for the Northern Ireland Executive.

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# £50 million boost to support the recovery of our high streets

- New £50 million fund for councils across England to prepare for the safe reopening of high streets and other retail spaces
- This new money will support practical measures so businesses can re-open quickly when they are allowed to, staff get back to work and customers return to shops confident it is safe.

A new £50 million fund for councils to support their local high streets get safely back to business announced today by High Streets Minister Simon Clarke (24 May 2020).

To prepare for the reopening of non-essential retail when the scientific advice allows, the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund will help councils in England introduce a range of safety measures in a move to kick-start local economies, get people back to work and customers back to the shops.

It will also support a range of practical safety measures including new signs, street markings and temporary barriers. This will help get businesses get ready for when they can begin trading safely, not only in high streets and town and city centres, but also in other public spaces like beachfronts and promenades.

Councils will also be able to use this money to develop local marketing campaigns to explain the changes to the public and reassure them that their high streets and other commercial areas are safe.

It is the government's ambition to reopen non-essential retail in a phased way from 1 June, subject to the scientific advice. The government will set out further detail on how and when these can reopen safely shortly.

High streets are critical to the economic recovery of our towns and cities and this new fund builds on longer-term funds already in place to support their revival and boost their economic fortunes including the [Future High Streets](#) and [Towns Funds](#).

High Streets Minister Simon Clarke MP said:

As we begin to slowly return to normality, the re-opening our high streets will be key to kick-starting our economic recovery.

Levelling up the regions and supporting our high streets has always been central to the mission of this government.

Many businesses have already introduced creative ways of trading such as contactless collection or taking orders by instant messaging and shows that they are ready for the challenges ahead.

That's why we are providing an extra £50 million for councils to support a range of safety measures that will help get these businesses back on track and ensure that people can enjoy their time visiting their local high street safely again.

Today's £50 million funding comes from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) that the government is making available to councils to support businesses to re-open safely following [guidance published on 13 May](#) to help adapt urban centres and green spaces for social distancing during the pandemic. The money will be allocated to councils on a per capita basis and will be ready to spend from 1 June 2020. Further information can be found in the [Reopening High Streets Safely Fund guidance](#)

The Fund is in addition to the [£3.2 billion package](#) of support announced for councils to help them deal with the immediate pressures they have said they are facing.

The government has already introduced a comprehensive package of support for business and workers during the economic emergency including:

- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme where small and large employers are eligible to apply for a government grant of 80% of workers' salaries up to £2,500 a month, backdated to March 1. The scheme will continue until end of October 2020.
- £330 billion worth of government backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses including a new Bounce Back Loans scheme, which will provide loans of up to £50,000 available to the smallest businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic.
- Businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors in England will not have to pay business rates for the 2020 to 2021 tax year.
- A deferral of the next quarter of VAT payments for firms, until the end of June 2020 – representing a £30 billion injection into the economy.
- A £12.3 billion package for local authorities to deliver grants of up to £25,000 to eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors; and
- New temporary measures to safeguard the UK high street against aggressive debt recovery actions during the coronavirus pandemic.

The High Street Task Force, backed by government and run by the Institute for Place Management has already started delivering support for the coronavirus recovery effort and is aligning its work to provide expert advice, training and long-term planning and guidance to councils, business and community leaders. More about the work the Task Force are doing to help plan for recovery from the pandemic can be found on the [High Streets Task Force website](#).

The government has published COVID-secure guidelines for people work in or run shops, branches, and stores. This guidance supports shops that are currently open, such as supermarkets and pharmacies, but will also be useful for those in non-essential retail to consider now for when they are allowed to open.

See the full list of councils receiving funding:

PDF, 349 KB, 8 pages

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The £50 million Fund is supported by the England European Regional Development Fund as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme 2014-2020. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is the Managing Authority for European Regional Development Fund. For more information visit the [European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme 2014-2020 page](#).

Due to the coronavirus emergency, we have recently extended the deadline for the submission of final business cases for the latest round of Future High Streets Fund and have written to local authorities to inform them of this.

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## [UK Government announces three more charter flights for British travellers](#)

Hundreds more British travellers are set to return home from Nigeria on three flights chartered by the UK Government.

More than 1,700 British travellers have already returned to the UK on special charter flights in April and May – from Lagos and Abuja.

Details of the new flights are:

- Friday 29 May: Lagos – London
- Monday 1 June: Lagos – London
- Saturday 6 June: Abuja – London

There will be a separate internal charter flight from Port Harcourt to Abuja, to collect British travellers for the Abuja flight on 6 June.

Minister of State for Africa, James Duddridge, said:

Brits in Nigeria will now have access to additional repatriation flights, meaning hundreds more will be able to fly home.

We've already arranged for around 1,700 people to return home to their friends and family and continue to support British nationals who remain in the country.

Catriona Laing, the British High Commissioner to Nigeria, said:

I am delighted to announce a third wave of flights to take our British travellers home from Nigeria – on top of the 1,700 people we've already helped since airports closed on 23 April.

If you are eligible and wish to return to the UK, I'd urge you to book seats on these flights as they are likely to be the last charter flights available.

For further information and to book a ticket, British travellers should visit the Nigeria Travel Advice pages.

The UK Government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to bring British travellers home as part of the plan announced by the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on 30 March – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers.

So far, charter flights have returned British travellers from countries including India, the Philippines, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nepal, Ghana, Tunisia, Algeria and Peru.

## **Further information**