

Further support for children affected by domestic abuse

Organisations supporting children affected by domestic abuse have been given a £3 million funding boost.

Today (Tuesday 28 April) the Home Office has announced £3.1 million will go to specialist services for children who have both been directly and indirectly affected by domestic abuse. This can include one-to-one and group counselling sessions to improve the mental health of children affected and early intervention schemes.

It comes as the ground-breaking Domestic Abuse Bill will be debated by MPs at the Bill's second reading today.

The new funding will be split between local authorities, children's charities and Police and Crime Commissioners across England and Wales.

Minister for Safeguarding Victoria Atkins said:

It is unacceptable that some children have to witness appalling abuse carried out in their home by those they should trust the most.

This funding will go towards supporting these children, healing their emotional scars, and ensuring they can move forwards and have a positive future.

Recipients of the funding include Barnardo's, Cambridgeshire County Council and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria.

Sarah Crawley, Director of Barnardo's Cymru, said:

We are delighted that funding for our Opening Closed Doors service will continue for another year. Domestic abuse is an epidemic with devastating effects on children and their families. It leaves families in a state of trauma, with significant impact on their emotional and mental health.

Sadly the pandemic has seen incidents of domestic violence escalate still further and has highlighted the importance of support for families.

The Domestic Abuse Bill will introduce a wide range of measures to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse as well as ensure perpetrators are punished. Some of the measures included in the Bill include:

- create a statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising it can be more than just physical violence
- establish the role of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner in law
- provide police with new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and Domestic Abuse Protection Notices
- place a statutory duty on local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse
- prohibit perpetrators from cross examining witnesses in family courts in England and Wales
- ensure victims of domestic abuse receive special measures in criminal courts, such as allowing them to provide evidence by video link

In addition to the funding and measures in the Bill, the government has provided additional support to help those at risk of domestic abuse during the coronavirus outbreak.

Earlier this month, [the Home Secretary launched the #YouAreNotAlone domestic abuse public awareness campaign](#) which has reached more than 120 million people online, and pledged a further £2 million to bolster domestic abuse charities online support services.

Further measures include:

[Sellafield lab creates hand sanitiser for site and communities](#)

News story

Hand sanitiser created in our Sellafield on-site laboratories is being delivered to our communities to help combat the Coronavirus.



You need hands, from left to right: Mark Hayter, Stephen Kirvan, Doug Cragg with the first batch of their hand sanitiser.

We all know that keeping our hands clean is a vital way to avoid contracting the virus.

With worries that there might not be enough hand sanitiser to cope with demand on-site, the strategy and technical team within Analytical Services developed their own. They worked with colleagues from the Analytical Services process and shift teams to help with sourcing of materials, and design capability in Risley for health and safety assessments.

The team normally carries out studies and supporting decision making in the labs and for the analytical services programme – including looking at new instrumentation for the current lab and the replacement analytical programme, one of the first 3 projects to be delivered under the programme and project partners agreement.

Head of strategy and technical in analytical services, Dawn Watson, said:

The test batch of 10 litres was a success. It is made using the World Health Organisation method, and is over 62 % alcohol which is required to kill the virus.

Making it is like baking, mixing the chemicals together and stirring to create a liquid. We're limited by the supply of chemicals but are aiming to supply up to 25 litres a week, which would support the site requirement.

With Sellafield's supplies currently okay we have transferred it to the local Multi Agency Support team for distribution and use in West Cumbria.

We are now sourcing ingredients to continue with this production for either the site or the community for as long as the need is there.

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[Bridging payments give cash injection for stewardship customers](#)

News story

Countryside Stewardship and Environmental Stewardship claimants will be offered bridging payments for the 2019 claim year.



The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has confirmed today that farmers and land managers will be offered bridging payments for unpaid claims on their stewardship agreements.

The interest-free loans will cover Countryside Stewardship and Environmental Stewardship 2019 payments to ensure farmers and land managers are paid for the important work they do to protect the environment.

Eligible claimants will receive a payment in May for 75% of the current estimated value of their claims to help with farm business cash flow while the remaining processing is completed on their claims.

This builds on the announcement made yesterday to extend the claim window for 2020 as part of a suite of measures the RPA is undertaking to help rural businesses affected by coronavirus.

RPA Chief Executive Paul Caldwell said:

We are committed to driving up performance on the Countryside Stewardship and Environmental Stewardship schemes, but these bridging payments will help to tide farmers and land managers over in May before their claims are paid.

We know this is a difficult time for farmers and rural businesses, and our focus remains on processing the remaining claims so they can be paid as quickly as possible.

A bridging payment is an interest-free loan to customers ahead of their full payment, providing them with 75% of the current estimated value of their claim. Once the full payment has been processed and made, the amount already issued through a bridging payment will be held back.

As the vast majority (99%) of Basic Payment Scheme claims have already been paid in full to customers, the RPA will not be making bridging payments to BPS customers this year. The RPA is working quickly to resolve the few outstanding applications where payment is due.

The RPA will be writing directly to farmers and land managers to provide an update on bridging payments and on how these payments will be calculated.

[Planning Inspectorate casework continues as first pilot digital hearing to take place in May](#)

With the UK into its sixth week of lockdown measures, the Planning Inspectorate's services continue to operate but the progress of some casework is affected. This update explains what you can expect from our service over the short and medium term.

What to expect from our service in England

We are continuing to issue decisions where we can and 1,625 have been issued across all case types since lockdown restrictions started. Not being able to visit sites and hold public events has, however, clearly had an impact on our ability to process cases and the time it is taking to reach a decision.

As [explained in our guidance](#), to limit the spread of the Coronavirus we have postponed site visits up to the middle of May, as well as most hearing and inquiry physical events where these would otherwise have taken place in May. Our case officers have notified parties of event postponement until further notice. We will be issuing updated information on arrangements for postponed events as soon as practicable in line with latest government advice.

We have been able to progress cases where:

- the physical event was concluded prior to lockdown restrictions;
- no physical event is required to make a decision; or
- a physical event is still further in the future and preparatory activity can continue (e.g. via telephone case conferences).

New cases continue to arrive at normal levels and are being registered and processed as far as possible. As at 23 April, there were 9,591 open cases. In the last three weeks we have seen the number of open cases rise by 337. See our [latest statistical release for more data on casework performance](#).

Implementing digital events

Ensuring we can continue to provide our service is important to the planning sector and economy – to provide certainty on planning decisions.

If you have [read our recent updates](#), you may be aware of the work taking place behind the scenes to implement digital events. These are hearings and

inquiries held via telephone or video conferencing.

Whilst this had been planned for later in the year to build on the successes of the Rosewell review, we have prioritised implementing digital events to progress cases during this unprecedented time. The latest on this work includes:

- The first fully 'digital' hearing is due to take place on 11 May.
- We are preparing for additional cases to be heard by digital hearings/inquiries in May/early June with a view to scaling up digital events further over June/July.
- We are assessing postponed cases to establish whether they can proceed by digital, traditional or a 'hybrid' approach, in order to re-arrange these in due course accordingly.
- A trial of 'virtual site visits' is underway involving thirteen Inspectors.
- Five local advisory visits have taken place remotely (critical for helping Local Planning Authorities to progress local plans and reduce the length of examinations).

We must ensure this approach works and maintains the standards of fairness, public access and inclusion for the four main groups involved: the appellant/agent, the Local Planning Authority (LPA), the Inspector and any interested parties such as local communities. Getting this right will provide an improved model which works now and after the current crisis and ensures we continue to issue fair and robust decisions and recommendations.

Naturally, there are challenges to overcome such as access considerations and capacity among local planning authority staff who may be stretched during the COVID-19 outbreak. We are engaging with the Law Society, National Infrastructure Planning Association (NIPA), Planning and Environment Bar Association (PEBA), Planning Officer's Society and Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) on this work. We are also learning from the local government experiences of running public digital meetings.

Following the current trials our aim is to:

Three months: Roll out good practice widely both in terms of number of events as well as types of casework covered, with supporting training, templates and communications.

Six months: Develop the capability to conduct fully digital and hybrid events fairly and robustly across all casework areas and for most cases.

What to expect from our service in Wales

Our [latest advice for casework arrangements in Wales is available on GOV.Wales](#).

Can I still submit an appeal?

Yes, you can submit your appeal via the [Appeals Casework Portal](#). Whilst we can still receive hard copy post, we are presently experiencing substantial delays. We recommend to utilise electronic methods for sending any documents wherever possible to ensure timely receipt.

[Students in England encouraged to apply now for student finance](#)

News story

Students in England are being encouraged to apply for student finance as soon as possible to ensure their finances are in place for the new academic year.



Students in England are being encouraged to apply for student finance as soon as possible to ensure their finances are in place for the new academic year.

That's the message from the Student Loans Company (SLC) which has ensured that the application service has remained open to students as part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

From this week, SLC is contacting returning students to remind them to reapply for their next year's student finance before 19 June. New students are being asked to submit their applications before 22 May 2020. They don't need a confirmed place on a course to apply, they can use their first choice of course and update their application later if this changes.

The easiest way to apply is online at [gov.uk/studentfinance](https://www.gov.uk/studentfinance) and SLC has produced the following guide and a video to help with the process: [student finance quickguide](#)

[How to Apply](#)

There is also a dedicated resource for parents and partners who are supporting applications here <https://studentfinance.campaign.gov.uk/>

Derek Ross, SLC's Executive Director of Operations said: "We recognise that students will have much to consider at the moment. However, for those going to University this autumn, it is important that they make applying for student finance a priority. SLC has worked hard to ensure the continuity of the application service throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the message is still that students should get their applications in ASAP to ensure that their student finance is in place for the new academic year."

Student Finance England has more information on the online student community forum, [the student room](#) and also on a dedicated area on the [UCAS website](#)

This information is designed to help new students and their parents find out everything they need to know about the application process. Students can also follow SFE at [facebook.comSFEngland](https://www.facebook.com/SFEngland), twitter.com/SF_England or [youtube/SFEFILM](https://www.youtube.com/SFEFILM) to keep up with all the latest news alerts.

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