£184 million loan funding for urgent hospital upgrades

The Health Secretary has today approved £184 million of capital loan funding from the department to go towards some of the most urgent hospital upgrades to protect vital frontline patient care.

The funding will be shared with 13 trusts in England, including:

- King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust: £26 million to upgrade IT, replace medical equipment and fund critical upgrades to help the trust continue providing the best possible services for patients

- University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust: £11 million to replace 2 existing theatres in the main block at Queen's Hospital Burton

- Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust: £21 million to replace equipment, including defibrillators and CT scanners and imaging, as well as funding its radiology, endoscopy and nephrology departments

These loans will be vital in supporting hospital staff to provide the best quality care and reduce any safety or infrastructure risks.

It follows the approval of over £70 million in loans for NHS trusts by the Health Secretary in September.

The loans will ensure that trusts are able to upgrade critical infrastructure and maintenance on buildings, as well as provide the right equipment for staff to carry out their work and provide better patient outcomes.

Loans are issued at National Loan Fund (NLF) rates, which means the cost is equivalent to the government's cost of borrowing.

The government is determined to make the NHS estate fit for the future. Since July, it has committed £4.8 billion in additional capital funding to build over 40 new hospitals, upgrade existing buildings, and provide facilities with state-of-the-art technology and equipment.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

> These loans will make sure hospitals continue to deliver vital services to patients in buildings that are safe and have the right equipment to deliver world-class care.

Since July, we have injected £4.8 billion capital funding into the NHS – helping refurbish hospital wards, replace old medical equipment and maintain NHS buildings.

Trust	Region	Loan (in thousands)
Barts Health NHS Trust	London	35,800
University Hospitals Of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust	North West	34,000
King’s College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	London	25,903
Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	East of England	20,874
Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	North West	14,900
University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust	Midlands	11,000
Queen Elizabeth Hospital King’s Lynn NHS Foundation Trust	East of England	9,015
Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust	London	9,012
Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	North West	8,000
East Kent NHS Foundation Trust	South East	4,950
Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	South West	4,950
Wye Valley NHS Trust	Midlands	3,822
Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust	Midlands	1,622
Total		183,848

Senior Traffic Commissioner outlines proposals to help operators with no deal EU exit

The Senior Traffic Commissioner is today (22 October 2019) outlining proposals for additional guidance for standard licence holders on meeting financial standing, should the UK exit the EU without a deal.

In that scenario, traffic commissioners will look to assist responsible businesses, particularly smaller operators, who are experiencing short term issues meeting the mandatory financial requirement.

The guidance will encourage traffic commissioners to approve requests from standard licence holders for a period of grace, provided there are no other outstanding road safety issues.

A period of grace gives time to operators who are experiencing issues with the availability of finance.

If the UK leaves the EU without a deal, the guidance will apply for six months.

The Senior Traffic Commissioner’s guidance helps lorry, bus and coach operators to manage their commercial vehicle activities.

Hauliers and commercial drivers will also need new documents in a no deal Brexit. Check www.gov.uk/Brexit-hauliers

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Government-funded activities to help UK businesses prepare for Brexit: veterinary medicines

The National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) has developed some government-funded activities to help UK businesses prepare for Brexit – “Animal Health – are you ready for Brexit?”

These include webinars, seminars and advice packs on the following areas that can all be downloaded from the NOAH website.

Trader Readiness – tariffs & customs:

- Webinar held on 18 October
- Advice pack based on the webinar is available on the NOAH website/Brexit section

Veterinary Medicines – regulatory and Pharmacovigilance:

- Webinar held on 21 October

Supply Chain for Animal Health Products:

- Four seminars for animal health professionals; vets, SQPs, practice managers, buyers, wholesalers, distributors, retailers in preparation for Brexit with a focus on supply and use of veterinary medicines; Birmingham 21 Oct, Newport 22 Oct, Edinburgh 24 Oct and Belfast 25 October

Key messages from the seminars will be delivered via a social media campaign as well as in the veterinary press.

Published 22 October 2019

Forces Help to Buy scheme extended for a further three years

The Forces Help to Buy scheme has lent over £280 million to over 18,000 armed forces applicants since its introduction in 2014.

The scheme allows military personnel to borrow a deposit of up to half of their annual salary, interest free, to contribute towards buying a home, building an extension on their current one or moving to another property.

The programme has proved popular amongst service personnel and will now be extended for a further three years.

The Forces Help to Buy scheme was set up to provide more flexible support to personnel by offering a larger advance of salary to facilitate a home purchase.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

> The extension of this scheme demonstrates the value we put on our Armed Forces and means service personnel can continue to realise the ambition of owning their own home or borrowing to extend.
>
> It has already proven very popular amongst the Armed Forces community and by extending it further we will be able to help many more service personnel make those first steps on the property ladder or expand their home to fit their family.

Regular personnel can borrow up to 50% of their salary (capped at £25,000), interest free, to buy their first home, extend their current one or move to another property on assignment or as their needs change. The loan can be used towards a deposit and other costs such as solicitor and estate agents' fees, and can be repaid over a period of 10 years.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

> The extension of the Forces Help to Buy Scheme is fantastic news for all those wanting to take that first step on to the property ladder.
>
> The Scheme helps to provide stability for our Armed Forces personnel and families, as a thank you for their commitment to their service for this country.

Last month the MOD announced the official launch of the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) pilot, which was rolled out at HMNB Clyde. FAM will provide financial support to service personnel at HMNB Clyde who want to rent or buy a home within a 50 mile radius of the base, giving personnel more choice where and with whom they can live.

The scheme forms a part of the Armed Forces Covenant, which is a promise from the nation that those who serve or who have served, and their families, are treated fairly and not disadvantaged.

The MOD also sub-lets some surplus vacant houses to the general public to generate income through short-term lets on the private market. The properties are rented at market rates and are available at 60 sites.

Government needs to do more to improve the welfare of separated families

A report published today by the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) calls on the government to do more to ensure that after parents separate, the social security and child maintenance systems supports the welfare of both parents and their children.

There are 2.5 million separated families, including 3.9 million children, in Great Britain. Separation is often an extremely difficult and challenging life event, which carries an increased risk of negative outcomes and poorer life chances for children and parents involved. The report considers the experience of separated parents and their children in the social security and child maintenance systems. It particularly looks at the experience of parents who are not the main carers, but who want a continuing parental role – a group who are often overlooked. Overall, it recognises the difficult public policy choices faced by governments but asks whether separated parents are getting the support they need through a challenging and stressful time in their lives.

The report finds that many separated parents share caring responsibilities for their children. However, those who need to claim social security can struggle to share care because the system assumes there is one main carer and so only one parent can be entitled to child-related benefits. The other parent can only receive single adult benefits which do not factor in the inevitable costs of caring for children even if parents are sharing care.

In particular, young non-resident parents may struggle to share care, as housing support in the private-rented sector typically only covers a room for an adult in shared accommodation. This can make it difficult, or impossible in some cases, for a parent to have their child or children to stay overnight.

Much of the existing research has understandably focused on the parent with whom the children live most of the time and highlights the severe negative impact that separation can have on their financial well-being. However, children may also experience hardship if and when they are with their other parent and emerging evidence suggests that paying child maintenance can push parents into poverty.

Research found that separated parents without main responsibility of childcare have a poverty rate of 30% compared to 21% amongst working age adults.

The report concludes that a lack of clear, consistent and helpful publicly available advice makes it hard for separated parents to navigate what is a complex social security system and so adds to their stress during separation. Sometimes parents feel they have been very poorly treated by the Child Maintenance Service, with poor communication resulting in confusion and unnecessarily long delays to child maintenance arrangements being set up.

Liz Sayce, the Committee’s interim chair, said:

> Social security needs to enable children, and families, to thrive whether or not parents have separated. We urge the government to develop a clear strategy for supporting separated parents in the social security system. While there is a general policy focus on children’s welfare, the government does not appear to be considering separated parents and their children’s welfare as a joined-up issue.
>
> We recognise that there are no easy policy solutions. Nevertheless, we believe that improvements are needed to ensure separated parents, both those with main and without main responsibility of care, are not unduly suffering. This is vital to ensure no negative impact on the welfare of their children.

The committee recommends that:

1. The government clearly and publicly articulates a strategy for separated

parents (including parents without main caring responsibility) and their children with respect to the social security system. We recommend that a cross-departmental working group is set up to lead urgent action on the strategy and issues highlighted in this report.

2. The quality and availability of data on parents without the main responsibility of care should be improved to get a better understanding of the scale and nature of the problems created by the social security system and its interaction with the child maintenance system. These data should also help define evidence-based policy solutions to deliver the government's strategy and allow progress against the strategy to be assessed and monitored objectively.

3. We are not making general recommendations to change benefit rules because we believe that better data and a clear overarching strategy are needed first. However, there are obvious challenges for separated parents to share care under current policy for housing support in the social security system. Therefore, we recommend that:

   a) The housing element of Universal Credit should enable young parents, under 35 years, who are sharing care and paying child maintenance, to have their children to stay overnight.

   b) Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should consider options for the system to support all parents without the main responsibility of care and with more than one child to stay with them overnight.

We would also encourage DWP to consider ways to improve the child maintenance formula. For example, review the earnings thresholds, which have not been updated since 1998, to ensure they factor in the well-being and living standards of both parents and their children.

The Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) is an independent advisory body of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The committee's role is to give advice on social security issues; scrutinise and report on social security regulations (including tax credits) and to consider and advise on any matters referred to it by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions or the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland.

The Committee membership comprises:

- Liz Sayce (Interim Chair)
- Bruce Calderwood
- David Chrimes
- Carl Emmerson
- Chris Goulden
- Philip Jones
- Jim McCormick
- Grainne McKeever
- Dominic Morris

- Seyi Obakin
- Charlotte Pickles
- Victoria Todd

Further enquiries should be directed to Denise Whitehead, Committee Secretary, on 020 7829 3354.