

News story: Work to improve disabled access to toilets on trains and at stations is underway

Work to improve disabled access to toilets on trains and at stations is underway following talks between Rail Minister Paul Maynard and senior rail industry representatives.

The Rail Minister met with senior executives after Paralympian Anne Wafula Strike highlighted the issue. Clearer information will be made available about the availability of accessible toilets in advance of journeys and the Department for Transport will work with train companies to see how staff training can be improved. Where facilities are out of order, we have challenged industry to make sure disabled passengers are informed before the train departs. Maintenance teams will also ensure accessible toilets are more reliable and fix them more quickly when problems arise, ensuring fewer toilets are out of service in the first place.

Rail Minister Paul Maynard said:

I take the issue of accessibility on our railways extremely seriously and these commitments from industry are just one step forward to improve things.

It is vital that all people, including disabled passengers, are able use public transport and I will continue to push train companies on this matter.

Paul Plummer, chief executive of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents train operators and Network Rail, said:

The rail industry wants to modernise what is often Victorian infrastructure to make it more accessible and to provide far better information to enable people with disabilities to travel with confidence.

When things go wrong, rail companies want to put them right, and we are keen to hear directly from people with disabilities to understand their experiences which is why the industry is already engaging more with disability groups to understand how we can improve.

It has been a requirement since 1999 that all new trains with toilets are built with accessible toilets as standard – all trains built before then must comply by 2020.

The meeting sought to identify and address the reasons behind the lack of provision of accessible toilets, as part of the government's ongoing commitment to reduce barriers to disabled people accessing transport services. The steps were agreed as part of the rail industry's continued strong engagement with disabled advocacy groups.

More than 150 stations have been upgraded under the [Access for All programme](#) to remove barriers to independent travel – this includes installing signs, ramps and lifts. A further 68 are in construction or development.

The Department for Transport will be publish its 'Accessibility action plan' later this year, which will address accessibility across all modes of public transport. In addition, Aviation Minister Lord Ahmad will be holding talks on access to air travel for disabled passengers.

[Press release: Natural England backs hedges and boundaries for wildlife and people](#)

The [hedgerows and boundaries grant](#), individually worth up to £5,000, is designed to help farmers and other land managers improve important farmland boundaries.

The application window for the £5 million scheme closes on 28 April. Farmers can apply for a one-off grant towards the restoration of a range of traditional boundaries including hedgerows, dry stone walls, stone-faced banks and earth banks. Nearly 800 applicants were successful last year.

Guy Thompson, Chief Operating Officer of Natural England, said:

Hedgerows, dry stone walls and earth banks are a quintessential part of the English countryside. Not only do they perform a vital agricultural role in protecting crops and livestock from the elements, they help support a variety of wildlife. Increasingly farmland boundaries also play a major role in preventing soil loss as well as reducing pollution and flooding. I'm pleased that this grant will help to support these traditional boundaries and the wider benefits that they bring.

Payment rates are fixed for each item. These include hedge-laying or coppicing, hedgerow restoration through gapping-up, stone-faced bank repair and stone wall restoration, which can include a top wiring supplement.

Like the rest of the Countryside Stewardship scheme, the application process is competitive. Applications score more highly if the business has been in a previous Environmental Stewardship agreement or England Woodland Grant Scheme. Priority is given to smaller holdings and restoring hedges or walls is preferred to stone-faced or earth banks. More points are awarded if the application is for more than £1,000, and if the holding is part of a group receiving Facilitation Fund payments.

Grants are not available on land parcels already within Mid or Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship, a live 2016 Hedgerow and Boundary Grant, Higher Level Stewardship or Uplands Entry Level Stewardship on 31 July 2017. Land parcels in Entry Level Stewardship can be included in applications, as long as other eligibility criteria are met.

Grant offers will be made to successful applicants from July 2017. The deadline for submitting claims to Natural England is 31 December 2018.

Customers can apply by downloading an [application form](#) or by using the new online application process which is expected to be available on the [Rural Payments service](#) from early March 2017.

For enquiries (media only) contact: Mary Tomlinson, Senior Press Officer, Natural England. Email: mary.tomlinson@naturalengland.org.uk Telephone: 07771 834 975.

[Press release: Lack of controls over cash collections](#)

The Charity Commission ('the Commission') investigated [Al-Hassan Education Centre \(1078159\)](#), a mosque and education centre based in Leeds after it repeatedly failed to file its accounts – see [endnote 1](#). The Commission concluded that the trustees mismanaged the charity.

The Commission uncovered inadequate financial governance at the charity and that the trustees were not able to fully account for the charity's funds in relation to cash collections and charitable expenditure. The charity also failed to submit accounting information for the financial years ending 31 March 2012 and 31 March 2013.

The [inquiry](#) also found that there were wider governance failures within the charity whereby the trustees were not adhering to some of the provisions within their governing document including: failure to hold Annual General Meetings since July 2013 or the required 2 trustee meetings a year and that they had no policies for loans and money laundering. The regulator also concluded there had been mismanagement by the trustees due to a lack of financial controls in relation to cash collected and spent following Friday

prayers, and a lack of up to date policies and procedures.

The inquiry considered that the trustees had not acted in the best interests of the charity, put the charity's funds at risk and concluded there was mismanagement and misconduct by the trustees.

On 16 November 2016 the Commission issued an order under the Charities Act to direct the trustees to take certain actions to regularise the charity's governance, submit its outstanding accounting information and review its policies. The trustees have already taken steps to complete the actions, and the Commission will continue to monitor the charity to ensure that its order is complied with.

Carl Mehta, Head of Investigations, Enforcement at the Charity Commission, said:

The trustees in this case failed to take basic steps to ensure that the charity's funds were able to be accounted for. This is simply not acceptable and I expect the trustees to take measures to speedily correct this.

For many faith groups, collecting funds in cash is likely to be a regular occurrence as part of worship or devotion. Charities must ensure that they have in place effective and proper financial controls to ensure those funds are safeguarded.

Trustees can use the Commission's guidance to implement robust internal financial controls that are appropriate to their charity. [Internal financial controls for charities \(CC8\)](#) is available on GOV.UK. There is also a [self-check-list for trustees](#) available.

The full report is available on [GOV.UK](#).

Ends

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1. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
 2. Search for charities on our [online register](#)
 3. Details of how the Commission reports on its regulatory work can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

Endnotes

1. The inquiry was opened on the 25 February 2015. The charity was previously part of the [class inquiry](#) in April 2014 for failing to submitting accounting information for the financial years ending 31 March 2012 and 31 March 2013.

[News story: Toby Wallace report published](#)

From:

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Fatal man overboard from ocean rowing boat in the North Atlantic Ocean.

MAIB's report on the investigation of the man overboard from the ocean rowing boat Toby Wallace in the North Atlantic Ocean with loss of 1 life on 14 February 2016 is now published.

The report contains details of what happened and the subsequent actions taken:

PDF, 1.95MB, 31 pages

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[Ukraine: UN 'gravely concerned' by deteriorating situation amid flare-up of violence in Donetsk](#)

31 January 2017 – Amid outburst of violence in Ukraine, the United Nations

Security Council and the top humanitarian official there expressed grave concern today about the “dangerous deterioration” of the situation in the country’s eastern region and its severe impact on the local civilian population.

In a press statement, Council members condemned the use of weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements along the contact line in Donetsk region that lead to deaths and injuries, including among civilians.

The members of the Security Council expressed their full support of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and underlined the need for strict compliance with resolution 2202 (2015), which endorsed the “Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements,” aimed at ending the violence in eastern regions of Ukraine.

“The members of the Security Council called for an immediate return to a ceasefire regime,” the statement concluded.

Earlier in the day, the humanitarian community and the Humanitarian Coordinator in the country also expressed grave concern by the “drastic deterioration” of the security situation in eastern Ukraine and its humanitarian consequences.

In a statement issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the UN and its aid partners in the county expressed particular concern about the impact on the civilian population on both sides of the ‘contact line.’”

Casualties continue to be recorded. Sustained targeting of and damages to civilian infrastructure adds to the already difficult conditions. This situation, they said, is exacerbated by the harsh winter, and may have irrevocable consequences. “The Government of Ukraine is doing its utmost to provide support and to coordinate humanitarian efforts.”

The humanitarian community stressed that due to the shelling, the Donetsk Filter Station (DFS) stopped working on yesterday, leaving some 15,000 to 17,000 people in Avdiivka without water, and potentially affecting up to 400,000 people served by the facility.

Moreover, on 30 January the fourth power line to the Avdiivka coke plant was damaged by shelling, leaving it without power, and further impacting on the supply of hot water. Urgent repairs are needed to restart the heating system. With temperatures falling well below -10 degrees Celsius, should the heating system stop working it will freeze and will require weeks to restart.

In Donetsk, city water is being redistributed from Verkhniokalmiuska Filter station, and other cities are surviving by using local water reservoirs designed to provide 24 hours of storage. In villages such as Vasylivka, Spartak, Verkhnotoretske and Kruta Balka water delivery has stopped altogether, and in part of Yasynuvata water is now cut.

“An immediate cessation of hostilities is urgently needed to prevent further loss of lives and to enable repair teams to urgently restore critical basic

services to hundreds of thousands of affected civilians living in -10 below zero temperature," said Humanitarian Coordinator Neal Walker.