

Charity regulator urges donors to support registered charities to help those affected by the crisis in Afghanistan

This follows the launch of the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Afghanistan Crisis Appeal. The DEC brings together 15 leading UK aid charities to raise funds quickly and efficiently at times of crisis. They are all registered charities.

[The Appeal](#), launched by the DEC on 14 December 2021, aims to relieve what the United Nations World Food Programme describes as “the worst humanitarian crisis on earth”, and it is vital that any donations reach those in need.

By supporting registered charities, including through the DEC, the public can be assured that their donations will be regulated in line with the charity law framework.

Helen Stephenson CBE, Chief Executive of the Charity Commission said:

The British public are generous at times of crisis and particularly at this time of year, and we want to see all charitable contributions count. This appeal from the Disasters Emergency Committee will help address the substantial humanitarian challenges facing Afghanistan right now.

While most fundraising is genuine, the regulator warns that fraudsters and criminals may sometimes take advantage of public generosity at times of increased giving, using various methods such as fake appeal websites, email appeals that falsely use the name of genuine charities, or appeals from fake charities.

It therefore encourages people to ensure they support genuine relief efforts by following a few simple steps before giving:

- check the charity’s name and registration number on the Charity Register at gov.uk/checkcharity. Most charities with an annual income of £5,000 or more must be registered
- make sure the charity is genuine before giving any financial information
- be careful when responding to emails or clicking on links within them

There are currently 474 charities on the charity register that list Afghanistan as an area they work in overseas.

If you think that a collection or appeal is not legitimate, report it to the police. If you think the collection is fraudulent report it to Action Fraud over the phone at 0300 123 2040 or online.

ENDS

Devon and Cornwall fisheries to get a Christmas and New Year boost

For the third year running, the Environment Agency has restocked the River Culm in Devon, following a pollution incident in 2019. More than 6,000 fish have been released into the river this week, including dace, roach and chub, to boost numbers and give the river a helping hand to recover. The river will be monitored to see how these stockings have contributed to the river's recovery.

In the New Year, Fisheries Officers will also be stocking thousands more fish into fisheries across the area. More than 9,000 fish, including tench, bream, crucian carp, roach and rudd, will be introduced into a number of fisheries across Cornwall to enhance angling opportunities and to help fisheries to have sustainable and healthy fish stocks. Some Devon angling clubs will also be receiving fish in the New Year.

Every year, the Environment Agency's Calverton Fish Farm near Nottingham breeds coarse fish for release into rivers and still waters across England to help boost fish populations.

Callum Underhill, Environment Agency Fisheries Officer, said:

Devon and Cornwall has a variety of excellent fishing opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy, from rivers and canals to still water venues. Sometimes they can benefit from a helping hand by adding excellent quality fish from our National Fish Farm.

The work of our National Fish Farm is funded by income from rod licence fees, so it shows how vital it is that anglers get the necessary rod licence when thinking of fishing, as all of these funds are reinvested back into angling and improving fisheries and the environment.

Restocking occurs in winter because water temperatures are lower and this minimises any stress on the fish during the stocking process, giving them the best possible survival rates.

Restocking is done where numbers are low, have been depleted following a pollution incident or to create new fisheries and opportunities for anglers.

Winter is a good time to introduce the fish, as it enables them to acclimatise to their new surroundings, ahead of their spawning season which usually begins in the spring and goes through to the summer for some species. Fish also play a critical role in sustaining a river's finely-balanced ecosystem, so the wider natural environment will also get a festive boost.

You need a rod fishing licence to fish for salmon, trout, freshwater fish, smelt or eel with a rod and line in England. Get yours from <https://www.gov.uk/fishing-licences>.

[Spades in ground as government delivers on rail investment promise for North and Midlands](#)

- work begins on rail projects to slash journey times between towns and cities like Sheffield, Leicester, Chesterfield, Nottingham and London and between Leeds and Manchester
- under the Integrated Rail Plan, rail journeys will be transformed across the North and Midlands, creating a commuter culture to rival that of London and the South East
- plan backed by biggest ever government investment in rail – £96 billion to create high-speed lines, upgrade existing ones and rolling out Oyster-style pay-as-you-go tickets

Just a month after announcing £96 billion of rail investment for the North and Midlands, work is already starting on the [Integrated Rail Plan](#) with the launch of the next stage of Midland Main Line electrification.

Main works to electrify the Midland Mainline between Kettering and Market Harborough will start on 24 December 2021, laying the foundation for the planned upgrade of the line all the way to Sheffield and Nottingham and setting the starting gun for quieter trains, greater decarbonisation, better connectivity and more local services across the region.

Today (21 December 2021), on a visit to the Leicester hub of Network Rail contractors SPL, the Transport Secretary saw wiring gantries being built for the Midland Mainline and met with staff to mark the launch of the biggest ever government investment package for the North and Midlands, which will boost opportunity and support job creation across the regions.

The Integrated Rail Plan is the blueprint for the government's commitment to

building better transport links, generating prosperity and opportunity across the North and Midlands up to 15 years sooner than previously planned, all while delivering on levelling up the country.

Works over Christmas and the New Year between Manchester Victoria and Stalybridge will speed up the electrification and resignalling of the railway and renew the track, which is a critical stage in the [Transpennine Route Upgrade](#) (TRU). This will pave the way for delivering passengers in Greater Manchester faster, more frequent and more reliable trains.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Last month, I promised we would get on with delivering the Integrated Rail Plan by Christmas and that's exactly what we're doing.

Today marks the beginning of a transformation of rail journeys for the Midlands and the North, where we will slash journey times and build better connections between towns, cities and everywhere in between.

Under our plans, people won't have to wait 2 decades for better services. This unprecedented investment will deliver better railways sooner.

As the first part of Northern Powerhouse Rail, TRU will transform the railway between York and Manchester, delivering more reliable and comfortable services while cutting journey times between 2 of the economic powerhouses in the North – Manchester and Leeds – first to 41 minutes then eventually to 33 minutes. Full electrification of TRU will also increase capacity on the network by more than 90%.

The Integrated Rail Plan will cut journey times from Chesterfield to London to 76 minutes, Derby to London to 58 minutes and Nottingham to London to 57 minutes. Passengers will also see services and capacity nearly doubled, making travelling by train more convenient and comfortable.

It will also deliver more seats, more frequent services and shorter journey times, and ensure benefits are not just for those travelling between the centres of the biggest cities, but also between smaller towns and communities across the North and Midlands.

It sets out a commitment to 3 new high-speed lines including the completion of HS2 from Crewe to Manchester, a new high-speed line between Birmingham and East Midlands Parkway, and a new high-speed line between Warrington, Manchester and Yorkshire.

It also provides £360 million to roll out a programme of fares, ticketing and retail reform including the rollout of contactless pay-as-you-go ticketing to 700 stations in urban areas, including around 400 in the North.

The government will also drive towards rolling out digital ticketing across the whole network.

Silviya Barrett, Head of Policy and Research at Campaign for Better Transport, said:

This is good news for passengers who will benefit from quicker journeys and better connections, and also good news for the planet. Electrifying more of the railway is key to helping make one of our greenest forms of transport even greener.

Maria Machancoses, Chief Executive Officer of Midlands Connect, said:

It is great to see the government putting the Integrated Rail Plan into action so quickly after the report was released. Extending the Midland Main Line electrification is an early Christmas present to the region and is the first step towards giving the East Midlands the transport infrastructure it deserves.

Our job now is to build the infrastructure around it with HS2 trains coming to Derby and Nottingham through East Midlands Parkway and our flagship project the Midlands Rail Hub progressing well, too.

Today's news is testament to local councils, businesses and MPs who have successfully made the case for upgrades on the Midland Main Line for years and the Department for Transport for working with us. Today is a good day for the Midlands as spades start to go into the ground.

Paul McKeown, Investment Director for Network Rail's Eastern Region, added:

It's our pleasure to welcome the Secretary of State to Leicester. This next phase of electrification will bring real benefits to passengers and the communities we serve in the East Midlands. Teams will be working throughout Christmas to install the equipment which will carry the electric wires as far north as Market Harborough.

[£316 million government funding boost](#)

to tackle homelessness

- Homelessness Prevention Grant will support the homeless and those at risk of losing their home
- Councils will use the funding to help people find a new home, get help with evictions, or move into temporary accommodation
- Funding includes £5.8 million for those forced into homelessness by domestic abuse

Tens of thousands of people will be protected from homelessness as a result of a £316 million funding boost, announced by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities today (21 December 2021).

The government's Homelessness Prevention Grant will support households in England who are homeless or at risk of losing their home. Councils will use the funding to help them find a new home, access support for unexpected evictions and secure temporary accommodation where needed.

The funding includes an additional £5.8 million to support people forced into homelessness by domestic abuse. This follows the landmark Domestic Abuse Act, which ensures councils give people who find themselves in this situation a "priority need" for assistance.

Funding will be allocated to all councils responsible for housing in England based on local homelessness need in individual areas.

This underlines the government's commitment to ensure people at risk of becoming homeless, across the country, get help more quickly. Since the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in 2018, over 400,000 households have been successfully prevented from losing their homes or supported into settled accommodation, with rough sleeping levels falling 37% between 2019 and 2020.

Minister for Rough Sleeping, Eddie Hughes MP, said:

I have seen first-hand the devastation of those who come face to face with homelessness, and my heart goes out to anyone in this situation.

The support we are announcing today is going directly to communities that need it most.

It will help thousands of people across England, with councils able to prevent homelessness before it occurs and put a roof over the heads of those who have lost their homes.

The Homelessness Prevention Grant, available for 2022/23, is on top of the recently-announced £66 million to provide rough sleepers with safe and warm accommodation and drug and alcohol treatment services this winter, and £65

million support package for vulnerable renters struggling due to the impact of the pandemic. Overall, the government is investing £2 billion over the next three years to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

Government has also announced a £28 million funding boost to help rough sleepers get their COVID-19 vaccines and move into safe accommodation. The Protect and Vaccinate scheme will help to increase vaccine uptake among people who are homeless and sleeping rough, by supporting outreach work in shelters to educate people about the dangers of the virus, giving money to councils to provide safe and secure accommodation while their level of vaccination is increased and delivering mobile vaccinations.

Recent funding has enabled local councils across the country to deliver practical, on the ground support for homeless people.

Calderdale Council, in West Yorkshire for example, has used government funding to provide 25 units of self-contained flats and long term accommodation to help prevent homelessness and drive down the number of rough sleepers in the local area. These units offer a range of on-site support for residents including support on how best to 'Move on' and an NHS run Wound Clinic to treat emergency injuries and provide access to sexual health, drug and alcohol services.

Cllr Scott Patient, Calderdale Council's Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Resilience, said:

We understand the impact that rough sleeping and homelessness can have on individuals, families and communities. Everyone affected has their own story, and the circumstances can be very complex and distressing. We do all we can, working with local partner organisations, to offer people hope and a stronger future through support, advice and accommodation.

We have made significant progress, and every step we've taken has brought hope to those living street-based lifestyles, helping them to rebuild their lives. We know there is still more to do, and the financial support from the government helps us to make this happen.

One Calderdale service user is John, 49, who now has a long-term tenancy after a member of the public found him rough sleeping in a tent in the undergrowth in Sowerby Bridge, Calderdale.

John was assessed for a Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme-funded, long-term tenancy, but was nervous to take this on as he had never had his own home. He was offered reassurance around the support he would have to help him to sustain the tenancy. He wanted to remain close to his mum and a suitable property was identified to facilitate this. John was supported to open his first bank account, change the location of his prescription, contact utility suppliers and register with a new doctor.

Whilst having a tenancy was a huge leap for John, this was made easier with

assistance from his support worker. Having his own property has given him a new lease of life and stability, and the platform where he can address his substance misuse. He has a blossoming relationship and he is able to live an independent life in the comfort of knowing that he has staff and support services around him should he need it.

John said:

From getting out of the tent in Sowerby Bridge and meeting the support services, I don't think I'd be here today. I feel alive, better, stronger in myself, more confident, no drugs. Without support I wouldn't be here.

[Nothing can replace the scale or scope of the UN mandated Syrian cross-border mechanism](#)

Thank UN Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. We very much welcome your efforts over the past month to facilitate a political solution, including a recent visit to Damascus to seek to unblock progress on the Constitutional Committee.

For years, the Security Council, on behalf of the wider membership of the UN, has demanded implementation of the steps in resolution 2254. Yet not only has the regime failed to engage genuinely in the process, but the issues that gave rise to and sustained the conflict continue – atrocities, human rights abuses, disregard for the rule of law and widespread corruption and economic mismanagement.

Until there is genuine willingness to engage in the Syrian-led and owned process endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2254, there is no prospect of a sustainable solution which should remain the priority for us all. I'd like to thank too Martin Griffiths for his briefing and the ongoing work of the UN and its partners to address the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. I thank too Dr. Amani Ballour for returning to the Security Council and for her powerful testimony and for her appeal of what a normal childhood should look like for Syrian children.

It is evident from the Secretary-General's reports submitted pursuant to resolutions 2139 and 2585, the humanitarian needs in Syria remain vast. These needs are exacerbated by the approach of winter and the lack of testing and treatment capabilities amidst the continued spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is vital that the Council continue to support provision of assistance to Syrians in need by the most effective and efficient means. At present, it remains clear that nothing can replace the scale or scope of the UN mandated cross-border mechanism for achieving this. We welcome evidence in the reports of the significant progress made by the UN to scale up cross-line assistance into north-west and north-east Syria, and to increase humanitarian early recovery interventions. We should continue to be guided by the UN's objective and thorough reporting on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Finally, this year marked the 30th anniversary of the Global 16 Days Campaign, focussed on the issue of the gender-related killing of women. Women and girls continue to be acutely affected by the conflict in Syria, with gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and assault widespread, particularly in camps. Poverty, displacement and Covid-19 have exacerbated the problem. We should continue to ensure the availability of humanitarian funding to counter gender-based violence in Syria. The UK has contributed over \$34 million to UNFPA to counter gender-based violence in Syria since 2019. We encourage others to consider the same. Thank you Mr President.