Flooding risk continues into the weekend

The public in large parts of England should be on alert for potential flooding, both today, into the weekend and early next week, the Environment Agency has warned.

As of midday on 29 October there are 12 flood warnings, meaning that flooding is expected, and 39 flood alerts, meaning that flooding remains likely. These are spread across parts of the north, southwest and southern England.

For the latest information, the public should sign up to flood warnings and check the latest safety advice.

In the past few days 40 properties have been flooded in Cumbria, however, 1,450 properties have been protected across the county, in part down to some of the new flood defences installed in areas such as Cockermouth.

Environment Agency officers are taking action in areas where very poor weather conditions are expected – shutting flood gates and clearing debris from grilles to ensure watercourses are free of blockages. Teams of frontline staff remain ready to operate flood storage areas and other defences, deploy temporary barriers and pumps where needed to help protect communities.

Ben Lukey, Flood Duty Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

> Flooding is devastating so whilst we are pleased 1,450 properties have been protected, our thoughts are with the 40 households who have suffered.
>
> The public need to stay on alert this weekend and into early next week as surface water and river flooding could still bring disruption in the southwest as well as part of northern England.
>
> Environment Agency teams have been out on the ground clearing grilles and screens where flood debris can build up and impede river flows, and stand ready to operate flood defences if needed. Working with our partners in local resilience forums, we are supporting emergency response to keep people safe where flooding does occur.
>
> We are urging residents and visitors, especially holidaymakers in the Lake District and elsewhere, to stay alert and check their flood risk by signing up for free flood warnings on the Gov.uk website and via @EnvAgency on Twitter, which offer the latest updates.

The Environment Agency is prepared to take action this winter wherever it is needed, with 250 high volume pumps available and 6,000 trained staff across the country. We use our flood warning system to directly alert over 1.4 million properties when flooding is expected.

Evacuating people from their homes is a multi-agency decision where all risks are considered and at present there are no plans to evacuate any communities.

Find out if you're at risk of flooding in England

Sign up for flood warnings

Get help during a flood

What to do after a flood

A stronger economy for the British people

Delivering the Budget and Spending Review, Rishi Sunak set out a plan to invest in stronger public services, with total departmental spending growing by £150 billion a year in cash terms by 2024-25, a £90 billion real-terms increase, which is the largest real-terms increase in overall departmental spending for any Parliament this century.

He also outlined how the government would create jobs, improve skills, tackle NHS backlogs, put more police on the streets, and build new homes, hospitals, and schools.

On top of this, Mr Sunak announced new fiscal rules to ensure the public finances remain on a sustainable path and lay the foundations for a strong economy for generations to come.

Delivering the Budget and Spending Review in Parliament, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

> Today's Budget delivers a stronger economy for the British people: stronger growth, with the UK economy recovering faster than our major competitors. Stronger public finances, with our national debt finally under control. Stronger employment, with fewer people out of work and more people in work.
>
> Growth up, jobs up, and debt down: let there be no doubt – our plan is working.

It comes as latest figures show that the economy is on track to reach prepandemic levels by early next year, with unemployment peaking at less than half what was initially predicted.

Strong and innovative public services:

The Budget and Spending Review sets out how delivering real-world improvements to the UK’s day-to-day public services is at the heart of building a strong future economy.

In addition to the historic set of spending commitments already announced for the NHS, which mean NHS England’s day-to-day budget is set to grow by 3.8% on average in real terms each year over the SR21 period, Mr Sunak announced £5.9 billion to tackle the NHS backlog of non-emergency tests and procedures, modernise digital technology and ensure there are at least 100 community diagnostic centres to help people across England get health checks, scans and tests closer to their homes.

To support pupils and teachers, an additional £4.7 billion will be invested in the core schools budget in England, over and above the SR19 settlement for schools in 2022-23 – in addition to £1.8 billion of new money for education recovery and catch-up over the next three years.

An investment of £11.5 billion will help build up to 180,000 affordable homes – with 65% of the funding for homes outside London.

Supporting people and businesses:

Building on the success of the Plan for Jobs, the Budget and Spending Review will continue supporting people into work with over £6 billion of funding for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) over the next three years to help people earn more and gain the right skills.

To boost wages and prospects for all, skills funding will increase by a total over the parliament of £3.8 billion compared to 2019-20. This will quadruple the number of places on Skills Bootcamps, expand the offer on free Level 3 qualifications and launch the new Multiply scheme to improve numeracy skills across the UK for up to 500,000 adults.

To ensure that work pays, the government is increasing the National Living Wage to £9.50 from April 2022, cutting the Universal Credit taper rate from 63p to 55p and increasing Universal Credit work allowances by £500 per year.

Freezing fuel duty and duty rates on alcohol will help hard-working people to keep more of what they earn, while the alcohol duty system will be overhauled to make it fairer and more straightforward.

To support parents, £302 million will fund new early years programmes including bespoke breastfeeding services and parent-infant mental support, and funding to rollout Family Hubs across England.

And to help up to 300,000 more families facing multiple needs, there will be an extra £200 million invested in the Supporting Families programme.

To help high streets to adapt and recover, there will be a new temporary business rates relief for eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties in England and the government is freezing the business rates multiplier for a further year, a tax cut worth £4.6 billion over five years.

Levelling Up the UK:

To deliver on the commitment to level up the whole UK and help ensure people's opportunities in life are not determined by where they live, today's announcement includes £5.7 billion for London-style transport settlements in English city regions over five years including Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region and the West Midlands.

The Spending Review confirms £2.6 billion between 2020-2025 for a long-term pipeline of over 50 local roads upgrades, over £5 billion for local roads maintenance; and funding for buses, cycling and walking totalling more than £5 billion in England over the Parliament.

The allocation of the first round of the UK-wide Levelling Up Fund sees £1.7 billion of local investment in local areas, while the launch of the over £2.6 billion UK Shared Prosperity Fund focussed on funding programmes to help people into jobs and get on in life.

On top of this the first 21 projects will receive funding from the £150 million Community Ownership Fund, helping communities across the UK protect and take ownership of their most treasured local community assets.

Investing in growth:

To spread opportunity across all of the UK, the government is putting its Plan for Growth into action with significant investment in innovation and skills.

To create the high-wage, high-skilled jobs of the future, public R&D investment will increase to record levels of £20 billion by 2024-25. Combined with R&D tax reliefs – which are going to be modernised and refocused – total UK Government R&D support as a proportion of GDP is forecasted to increase from 0.7% in 2018 to 1.1% in 2024-25 – well above the 2018 OECD average of 0.7%.

A new UK Global Talent Network will work with businesses and research institutes to identify and attract the best global talent in key science and tech sectors.

Building back greener:

Building on the £26 billion of capital investment announced for the Net Zero Strategy just last week, this Budget and Spending Review brings the total committed by the government since March 2021 for a green industrial revolution in the UK up to £30 billion.

It includes £380 million for our world-leading offshore wind sector and £6.1 billion to deliver the Transport Decarbonisation Plan by boosting the number of zero emission vehicles, helping to develop greener planes and ships, and encouraging more trips by bus, bicycle and foot.

£3.9 billion will decarbonise buildings, including £1.8 billion to support tens of thousands of low-income households to make the transition to net zero while reducing their energy bills.

Seizing the opportunities of Brexit & advancing Global Britain:

This Budget and Spending Review enables us to do things differently now we have left the EU.

A new £1.4 billion Global Britain Investment Fund will provide grants to encourage internationally mobile companies to invest in the UK's critical and most innovative industries, including life sciences and automotive.

The cost of Air Passenger Duty on domestic flights will support greater air connectivity within the Union and reforms will modernise the UK's tonnage tax regime to ensure that the British shipping industry remains highly competitive.

Today's commitments ensure that the UK will remain a development superpower and one of the largest ODA donors in the G7. Due to the government's careful stewardship of the public finances and the strength of our economic recovery, today's forecasts show that we are scheduled to return to 0.7% in 2024-25 – before the end of the Parliament.

Delivering for all parts of the UK:

The government will make levelling up a reality across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland by providing UK-wide support in critical areas, while also targeting action to meet local needs.

Many of today's announcements will directly benefit people across the UK. This Spending Review also provides an additional £8.7 billion per year to the devolved administrations through the Barnett formula – leading to the highest annual funding settlements since devolution in 1998:

- the Scottish Government will benefit from a £4.6 billion per year funding boost
- the Welsh Government a £2.5 billion per year funding boost
- the Northern Ireland Executive a £1.6 billion per year funding boost

Further information

Further measures announced by the Chancellor can be found in this factsheet.

WTO Trade Policy Review of the Russian Federation: UK Statement

Thank you Chair. Let me first of all join others in welcoming Director Ekaterina Mayorova and her numerous team from the Russian Federation here today. Allow me to thank her Government and the Secretariat for their respective reports and work towards this Review. I would also like to extend our thanks to our distinguished discussant Ambassador Chambovey for facilitating the process and for his, as ever, insightful comments at the opening of this meeting.

Chair, we appreciate the opportunity to engage with the Russian Federation on its trade policy regime.

Bilateral trade between the UK and Russia grew to over £14.5 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q2 2021. Exports from the United Kingdom to Russia totalled over £4bn during that period. Russian exports to the United Kingdom between 2016 and 2020 increased threefold giving a total of over £10 billion.

I would like to join other Members in welcoming the active participation of the Russian Federation right across the different negotiations we have in this house, not least across the invaluable plurilateral initiatives. We welcome Russia's contributions in these important discussions to modernise the WTO Rulebook and make it fit for the 2020s. I would also like to recognise the positive changes made and steps taken by the Russian Federation since its last Trade Policy Review in 2016, such as implementing key provisions of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, reductions to the simple average applied MFN tariff rate, and developments in the area of electronic commerce.

Chair, having spoken about these several encouraging developments, I note, like others, that there remain a number of areas in which we would like to see further efforts by the Russian Federation to promote free and fair trade.

Firstly, despite the commitment expressed by the Russian Federation in its report to improving the business climate, as other Members have also noted this morning, Russia continues to implement local content and import substitution policies. Indeed, this is clear from the comments of the Russian Government in its own report. These policies, as others have said, have an impact upon foreign direct investment, and upon government and commercial procurement practices. We cannot ignore their detrimental effect on free and fair trade, international trade and investment. We call on our Russian colleagues to ensure Russia's policies are consistent with its WTO obligations, and are administered in the spirit of those obligations.

Related to this, we note that the significant stake of state owned enterprises in key sectors of the Russian economy continues to hinder open and fair competition. The United Kingdom would like to advocate a reduced role for state owned enterprises in the Russian economy, in line with the liberalising spirit of the commitments our countries have undertaken as WTO Members.

Secondly, like other Members which have spoken this morning, we would like to highlight the further challenge for competitive conditions which is posed by the prevalence of domestic subsidies and tax relief policies within the Russian Federation. These market distorting policies disrupt the level playing field and provide unfair advantages to domestic Russian entities over their international competitors. In our view such policies are present in a wide range of sectors, such as IT, energy, agriculture and agri-tech, as well as being embedded in Russia’s export credit system. Again, Chair, we would encourage the Russian Federation to review its policies in this area to ensure compliance with WTO commitments.

Thirdly, Chair, I would like to comment on another matter of concern for British business operating in the Russian Federation. Our questions to the Russian Federation contain several requests for clarification as to the interaction between the regulatory regimes of the Russian State and the Eurasian Economic Union. The lack of clarity and coherence between these regimes in areas such as SPS, intellectual property and labelling leads to burdensome complexity for British business and other international businesses and in some cases serves as a substantial barrier to trade. We look forward to reviewing Russia’s responses to our questions on this matter.

We would like to highlight challenges with the enforcement of legislation on intellectual property rights developed at Union and State level, in a context where online piracy continues to pose an ongoing threat to the interests of UK business in Russia. We urge the Russian Federation to align its standards to those of international best practice, refrain from introducing measures that are more trade restrictive than necessary and strengthen its enforcement practices in these important areas.

Lastly, whilst we welcome the confirmation in the Secretariat’s report that Russia’s notification record is generally positive, we must highlight that some notifications remained outstanding towards the end of 2020 and no notifications were provided in relation to State Trading Enterprises under Article XVII of the GATT. Again Chair we would encourage the Russian Federation to make all relevant notifications to the WTO in a consistent and timely manner, in line with its own transparency obligations.

This Trade Policy Review presents an opportunity for our colleagues in the Russian Federation to build on developments Russia has made since the last TPR, to take decisive steps to strengthen its trade policy regime in the areas highlighted through this process by the UK and other Members, and to show that Russia is living by values of free and fair trade – not just in word but also in deed

To conclude, I would like to thank the Russian Federation for their engagement with this trade policy review, and for their attention to our comments. We look forward to receiving Russia's responses to our questions, and to working together in line with the words of the Director General in the Economist today: we have to work together to reform the WTO, we have to make it work better for people everywhere. Thank you Chair.

UK and Italy support a dialogue on renewable energy in Uzbekistan

World news story

The British Embassy in Tashkent supported the organisation of a conference on renewable energy at the Turin Polytechnic University in Tashkent.

The conference "Energy transition as a viable boost for the sustainable economic development" was organised jointly with the Italian Embassy in Tashkent with engagement of Politecnico di Torino, Italy on 15 October, 2021.

This joint initiative of the two embassies is timely and symbolic of Italy and the UK's joint lead of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) which is planned in Glasgow in November, 2021.

The conference opened with a recorded address by David Moran, COP26 Regional Ambassador for Europe, Central Asia, Turkey and Iran. There were online and offline presentations made by leading UK experts in the field, including Professor Stuart Galloway, Deputy Head of Department and Professor of Compact Power Systems, the University of Strathclyde and Botir Gafurov, Managing Director of Juru Energy on "Developing a Bankable Solar PV Project in Uzbekistan: Technical Perspective".

The event is expected to bring to the attention of the audience a combination of policy analyses and concrete case studies, giving the opportunity to share experiences and views towards the common goals.

In his opening remarks David Moran, COP26 Regional Ambassador for Europe, Central Asia, Turkey and Iran noted:

> The UK is considered a world leader in low-carbon energy, underpinned by a firm commitment to delivering a low-carbon economy, having the right policies and drivers in place to encourage deployment and cost reduction, as well as being a global centre for project financing.
>
> We will be happy to help the Uzbek government to meet top managers of the British companies offering a range of services in renewables and professional services.

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UK MOD host international AI Defence partnership forum

The UK Ministry of Defence hosted the fourth AI Partnership for Defence (AI PfD) dialogue, becoming the first nation outside the US to host the forum which brings together like-minded defence partners to discuss respective policies, approaches, challenges and solutions in adopting AI-enabled capabilities.

The partnership, which expanded from 13 to 16 nations in May, was launched by the US Department of Defense (DoD) Joint AI Centre (JAIC) in 2020 to collaborate and share global best practice. The importance of the reoccurring forum was underlined by the recent US national security commission on AI that reported to Congress earlier this year. Equally AI was highlighted in the UK’s Integrated Review where the Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced at least £6.6bn for research and development (R&D) enabling more research into AI and related areas.

General Sir Patrick Sanders, the head of UK Strategic Command, said:

> By bringing together 16 like-minded nations to discuss AI, this partnership opens an essential international dialogue that benefits our collective Defence and promotes a common vision for the responsible use of AI.

The UK delegation includes representatives from the Defence Science and

Technology Laboratory (Dstl), the new Defence AI Centre and the Defence AI and Autonomy Unit with UK participation coordinated by the British Defence Staff in Washington DC. The 2-day event focused on AI governance, and considered the role of organisational strategies, policies, standards, regulation and risk management frameworks in both providing assurance, and enabling innovation.

Steve Meers, head of Dstl’s AI Centre, said:

> The AI partnership is a vitally important initiative that builds on a growing set of international nations coming together to ensure we are all clear and agree on the responsible application of AI, and to support one another as we deal with global defence and security challenges.

The event follows Dstl’s virtual AI Fest 4, which ran a ‘trustworthy AI’ theme including more than 110 talks over 2 days and 50 spotlight talks on demand.