

# A new Queen's Speech to build back better from the pandemic

New laws to ensure the UK builds back better and stronger from the pandemic will be unveiled in next week's Queen's Speech.

Following the unprecedented, global impact of coronavirus the Government's new legislative programme will be focussed on supporting the nation's recovery, backing the NHS, levelling up and spreading opportunity.

It will support jobs, businesses and our economy, while delivering the Government's commitments to create safer streets and neighbourhoods and achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, for a cleaner, greener UK.

The new measures will build on the progress so far, in spite of the pandemic, following a period which also saw the UK become an independent nation outside the EU.

The Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The impact of the pandemic on people's lives has been unique in our history.

My Government is still focussed on beating this disease, saving lives and livelihoods and rolling out vaccines, but I am also determined that we look forward and get on with fulfilling the promises we have made to the British people.

Not only will we address the legacies of the pandemic, we will go further to unite and level up the country, fight crime and create opportunities up and down the country for businesses and families to build brighter futures.

The State Opening of Parliament on Tuesday follows the delivery of 44 bills in the last Parliamentary session, including the legal framework to help us strike new trade deals around the world and powers to regain control over our borders.

A number of bills will be carried over to complete their passage in the next session. This includes the Environment Bill, which will set legally binding environmental targets, and cement the UK's leadership on climate change, as we host the international COP26 Summit in Glasgow later this year.

Laws to protect the public, support our police and deliver Manifesto commitments to cut crime will also return, with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill set to overhaul sentencing to keep serious sexual and violent offenders behind bars for longer.

The bill will also double the maximum sentence for assaulting people in the emergency services, who have worked night and day to keep us safe during the pandemic, and build confidence in the criminal justice system by speeding up justice, modernising courts and reforming bail to better protect vulnerable victims and witnesses.

To tackle knife crime and youth violence, the bill will give the police new powers to stop and search those convicted of knife and offensive weapons offences. Police, local authorities and other agencies will also have a new, legal duty to work together to address the root causes of serious violence and intervene earlier to prevent these crimes from happening in the first place.

These changes follow the delivery of the new Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act, which ends the prospect of early release for anyone convicted of a serious terror offence, and the Domestic Abuse Act, which will transform our response and provide greater protections from all forms of abuse.

Together these serve as examples of the Government's commitment to deliver on the promises made to the British people before the pandemic.

The Government's agenda, to be set out in next week's Queen's Speech, will continue to reflect that ambition to not only fight COVID-19 and recover from its impacts, but to build back better.

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## [Letters from the Prime Minister to the First Minister of Scotland and the First Minister of Wales: 8 May 2021](#)

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## [Surge testing to be deployed in](#)

# Ruislip

Press release

Additional surge testing and genomic sequencing deployed in Ruislip where a confirmed case of a variant of concern has been identified.



Working in partnership with Hillingdon Council, NHS Test and Trace is providing additional testing and genomic sequencing in targeted areas within the HA4 postcode in Ruislip, Hillingdon. This follows the identification of a single case of the variant first discovered in South Africa (B.1.351) in Ruislip. The confirmed case has completed self-isolation and their contacts have been identified.

Everybody aged 16 years and over who resides or works in these postcodes is strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 PCR test, whether they are showing symptoms or not.

Enhanced contact tracing will be used for individuals testing positive with a variant of concern. In these instances, contact tracers will look back over an extended period in order to determine the route of transmission.

By using PCR testing, positive results can be sent for genomic sequencing at specialist laboratories, helping us to identify variant of concern cases and their spread.

Between Monday 10 and Sunday 23 May, Hillingdon Council will be offering additional PCR testing for people without symptoms living or working in the targeted area. This testing will be available at South Ruislip Young People's Centre, Victoria Road, HA4 0JE or Haste Hill Golf Course, The Drive, Northwood, HA6 1HN daily between 8am and 8pm. Attendees are required to book an appointment in advance on [the local authority website](#).

People in this area should also continue using twice-weekly rapid testing alongside the PCR test as part of surge testing.

People with symptoms should continue to [book a free test online](#) or by phone so they can get tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent to them at home.

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1. 8 May 2021

Added information about additional PCR testing between Monday 10 and Sunday 23 May, available at South Ruislip Young People's Centre, Victoria Road, HA4 0JE or Haste Hill Golf Course, The Drive, Northwood, HA6 1HN daily between 8am and 8pm.

2. 7 May 2021

First published.

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## [Taskforce launched to investigate reported rise in pet thefts](#)

A Pet Theft Taskforce has been launched today to investigate the recent reported rise in pet theft since the start of lockdown, Environment Secretary George Eustice has announced.

Sales platforms have reported a considerable rise in puppy and kitten prices over the course of the past year following more people deciding to buy or adopt a pet. Recent reports have suggested that this may be leading to a rise in pet thefts.

According to DogsTrust, the price for five of the UK's most sought after breeds grew significantly during the first lockdown with the price of some breeds rising by as much as 89%. Google searches for 'buy a puppy' increased by 166% in the months between March and August following the start of lockdown last year. Recent police investigations into dog theft have also resulted in numerous raids and arrests on suspicion of theft and animal cruelty.

The new taskforce has been set up to gather evidence to understand the factors that may be contributing to any perceived rise in thefts and to recommend any necessary measures to tackle the problem. The Taskforce will learn lessons from successes in tackling other types of theft, such as mobile phone or metal theft, and how to clamp down most effectively on this illegal market and those engaged in it.

Stealing a pet is already a criminal offence under the Theft Act 1968, with offenders facing a maximum penalty of seven years in prison. If someone causes an animal to suffer in the cause of stealing it from its owner, then they are also liable to prosecution for offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

The taskforce will be made up of government officials from Defra, Home Office and Ministry of Justice as well as operational partners such as the police. It will also seek input from animal welfare groups and experts in relevant fields.

The Pet Theft Taskforce will:

- work with police, law enforcement, and experts to understand and tackle pet theft
- consider the issue from end to end, including causes, prevention, reporting, enforcement and prosecution.
- make clear and timely recommendations on ways to reduce pet theft.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

Pets are much loved members of the family, and these reports will be distressing for all pet owners.

Pet owners shouldn't live in fear so we've set up this Taskforce to thoroughly investigate the issue and ensure that we have the measures in place to stop these criminals in their tracks.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Having callous thieves steal a much-loved pet is heart-breaking for families and it is deplorable that criminals seek to profit from this cruel crime.

We are already taking action to combat such lawlessness by bolstering the police with 20,000 extra officers but this new taskforce will ensure we know how best to combat the driving forces behind this distressing crime and clamp down on the perpetrators.

The Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

We are a nation of animal lovers and many of us have sought the companionship of pets during the pandemic, which makes the reported spike in thefts especially cruel and shocking to many people.

This taskforce will examine every option available to protect families from this appalling crime and make sure perpetrators feel the full force of the law.

Taskforce partner, Deputy Chief Constable Amanda Blakeman said:

Dog theft is a very emotive issue which has a huge impact on families or individuals and we are aware of a growing concern

around this issue. The taskforce will support us in understanding this risk and also identifying trends involving serious and organised crime.

The taskforce will enable us to gather intelligence across the country and tackle groups who work across geographical boundaries. We hope that this is a step forward in providing reassurance that we are committed to understanding any risks fully, and challenging related criminal behaviour.

The police have advised that dog owners should avoid leaving their pet unattended while out in public, vary their routines when walking their dogs and should take basic security steps at home such as checking locks on doors and garden gates.

The Blue Cross has also published detailed [guidance](#) for pet owners on how they can protect their animals from theft.

The taskforce will include representatives from operational partners to provide knowledge, experience and guidance on the practical aspects of reducing pet theft. It will also seek the input from stakeholders and experts in relevant fields, such as campaign groups and animal welfare organisations to gather any evidence they may hold and seek their views on the issue.

The taskforce will aim to report on the findings and publish its recommendations in the autumn this year. The full Terms of Reference for the Taskforce can be accessed [here](#).

The plans are part of the Government's commitment to further strengthening the UK's position as a global leader in animal welfare standards and come alongside other measures including taking steps to end live animal exports and crack down on the illegal smuggling of dogs and puppies, with further proposals to improve standards and eradicate cruel practices to be set out later this month.

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## **Over 800 organisations receive new funding to tackle loneliness**

- Over 840 charities, community groups and small grassroots organisations across England to benefit
- Announcement comes one year on from Government relaunching 'Let's Talk Loneliness' campaign
- Minister for Loneliness visits Cultivating Community in Somerset to see how

grant funding will help them tackle loneliness

- WhatsApp among more than 70 organisations that pledges new measures

Over 840 charities, community groups and grassroots organisations tackling social isolation have received a share of £4m to tackle loneliness, as the country continues to build back better from the pandemic.

Projects across England, including songwriting workshops in Devon, dance classes in Bedfordshire, and online chat services in Durham, have been awarded grants ranging from £300 to £2,500.

The funding is designed to help local organisations with an annual income of less than £50,000 bring people and communities together.

The grants will be used to tackle loneliness and isolation in different ways – from covering the costs of technology and equipment to bring people together in a safe and secure way, to strengthening their services through training and development to provide long-term impact.

The Minister for Loneliness marked the announcement with a visit to [Cultivating Community](#) in Somerset, who have benefited from The Local Connections Fund.

Thanks to a grant worth £1502, the organisation is running a programme called 'Planting Seeds of Connection'. The programme enables the elderly and isolated to grow plants and flowers, and whilst doing so connecting with others, to help tackle loneliness.

Baroness Barran, Minister for Loneliness, said:

As we emerge from lockdown, it's critical to remember that some people will remain isolated, and loneliness will not simply go away. This is why the Government is committed to continuing to tackle loneliness as a national priority.

The local organisations benefiting from these grants are a powerful way of connecting small groups of people across communities in England. I'm delighted that the Local Connections Fund is giving people an opportunity to do things they enjoy, whilst helping tackle loneliness.

It is a privilege to have worked alongside the organisations in the Tackling Loneliness Network to produce our action plan, and I am confident that the commitments we've made will be a positive step towards ending the loneliness that has blighted so many lives in the past year.

The Local Connections Fund is made up of £2 million from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and £2 million from The National Lottery

Community Fund. The second round of funding for the Local Connections Fund will be provided by The National Lottery Community Fund and applications for this will launch in the summer of 2021.

The funding coincides with one year since DCMS relaunched its long-running campaign, [Let's Talk Loneliness](#), to remind people that there is no shame in asking for help. To mark this milestone, the Loneliness Minister has released [Emerging Together: the Tackling Loneliness Network Action Plan](#), to recognise that tackling loneliness will remain a national priority for the Government.

The action plan has set out key themes and actions decided by the [Tackling Loneliness Network](#), which includes over 70 organisations. Members of the network have committed to self-funded actions which will help local communities tackle loneliness, including:

- WhatsApp will develop a chatbot messaging service that will offer anyone impacted by loneliness a simple and secure way to find information and support services.
- JCDecaux has committed to look at how relevant content to help signpost young people to loneliness support and services could be included on their network of free, fast wifi spots on high streets across the UK.
- The Association of Convenience Stores will produce a guide for its members on wellbeing and tackling loneliness

Since the beginning of the pandemic, over £34 million of the [£750 million charity funding package](#) has gone directly towards reducing loneliness, and a further £50 million to organisations supporting people with their mental health. In total, over 14,000 charities have benefited.

Elly De Decker, England Director at The National Lottery Community Fund, said:

Throughout the pandemic we've continually seen the impact that grassroots groups and charities are having on their local communities. The grants made through the Local Connections Fund have empowered small organisations across England to make a huge difference – supporting individuals to build connections, reducing feelings of isolation and helping communities to thrive.

We are proud to have distributed this funding on behalf of DCMS, and now look ahead to the summer when a further £2 million of National Lottery funding will be made available – through the Local Connections Fund – to help charities and community groups address loneliness and create social connections in their local areas.

Sophie England, Public Policy Programmes Manager UK at Facebook, said:

It has been a real privilege to represent Facebook on the Tackling Loneliness Network over the past year and to work with such an inspiring network of companies, organisations and individuals.



While there are many fantastic resources and services open to those impacted by loneliness, it can be really difficult to know where to go to find them. The WhatsApp chatbot messaging service will provide a free and simple way to access this information, ensuring that anyone impacted by loneliness can find the support they need.

## Notes to editors

Organisations that have been awarded grants from the Local Connections Fund include:

- Imagination Dance in Bedfordshire which has been awarded £980 for their Actively Connecting project, which supports older people and those who are living with dementia to maintain an active lifestyle. The grant is being used to provide online classes which have been impacted due to the pandemic.
- Cheesy Waffle Project in County Durham who are using their grant of £1,928 for their Check In & Chat service. This service provides one-to-one support to children, young people and adults with mental health and individual needs to help them feel more supported, less isolated and part of their local community.
- Jamming Station in Devon is using its £2,500 grant to deliver its More Than Words songwriting and spoken word workshops to three groups of people: 16-18 year old songwriters; 18-30 year old songwriters; and poets, rappers and lyricists. The project addresses loneliness and isolation in young people through mentoring and creating a safe space for them to explore and develop.
- Places for Nature in Devon which has been awarded a grant of £1,324 for its Our Places for Nature: Virtually Together project. The virtual nature-themed interactive workshops motivates communities to get outdoors and make changes to their gardens and, once out of lockdown, to their communal outdoor spaces. The project brings together neighbours virtually and enables new friendships to be established.
- Basilon Pride in Essex is using its £300 grant for Basildon Pride Digital 2021 to improve its digital presence and hold an online celebration of LGBT+ History Month. The project provides easier access to users from a smartphone, to help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation and build new relationships across the local LGBT+ community.
- Karibu Community Action in Kent has been awarded £2,489 for its Digital Inclusion project. The funding is being used to provide 12 BAME families with tablets to enable them to keep up with virtual education and work. It helps to connect families and also signposts them to tools to help with online learning at home.
- EPIC Dad in Suffolk is using its £2,500 grant for the EPIC Dad Fun Bag Project. The funding will support fathers and father figures by providing and safely delivering fun bags to family homes in the local communities. The project aims to encourage families to spend quality time together by providing some practical support in the way of games, toys, crafts, puzzles and other fun activities.

Over the last three years, the UK Government has been leading the way on

tackling loneliness:

- It created the world's first Minister for Loneliness and published the world's first Government loneliness strategy in October 2018, containing 60 commitments from nine Government departments. Implementation of the strategy is ongoing and the Government published a first annual report in January 2020 setting out our progress;
- It launched the first Government fund dedicated to reducing loneliness worth £11.5 million, which is supporting 126 projects to transform the lives of thousands of lonely people across England;
- It launched the inaugural #LetsTalkLoneliness campaign in June 2019 to help raise awareness and tackle stigma.

The National Lottery Community Fund is the largest community funder in the UK, awarding money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since June 2004, it has made over 200,000 grants and awarded over £9 billion to projects that have benefited millions of people.