

£30m Waking Watch Relief Fund now open for applications

- £30m fire alarm fund will relieve residents of waking watch costs
- Funding targeted at cities with most high-rise buildings with unsafe cladding
- Builds on £1.6 billion funding to speed up removal of unsafe cladding on eligible buildings

Tens of thousands of residents in high-rise buildings can now access financial support to make their buildings safer while they wait for remediation work to complete, the Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick has announced as the Waking Watch Relief Fund opens today (31 January).

The £30 million fund will protect leaseholders from the high costs of Waking Watches, where a building is continually patrolled in case of a fire, by providing financial support for fire alarms, which will also make buildings safer in the long term.

The fund will be distributed through councils, regional authorities and directly through the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, depending on the location of the building. The funding is available for buildings across England, with £22m targeted to the cities with most high-rise buildings with unsafe cladding, including Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds.

Buildings over 18m with unsafe cladding systems and where Waking Watch costs have been passed on to leaseholders will be eligible.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick said:

We know many people are anxious about the costs of waking watches, which was always only intended as an interim measure while historic safety issues were fixed.

This fund will relieve the financial pressure on residents in these buildings and ensure they will be kept safe. I encourage those who are eligible not to delay and start their applications swiftly so we can distribute the funds as quickly as possible.

The Responsible Person (RP) – the person or business responsible for ensuring the safety of residents in their building – can apply for the fund and provide the evidence needed. The Responsible Persons are encouraged to speak to their local Fire and Rescue Service about the installation of the fire alarms in their building and to keep leaseholders informed.

The [criteria](#) for the fund have today been published, setting out which buildings are eligible for funding, the evidence needed to apply and how

applications will be assessed, as well as the way the funding is provided.

MHCLG will work closely with councils and Fire and Rescue Services on the delivery of the fund.

The fund is not a substitute for swift remediation of unsafe cladding – for which the Government has provided £1.6 billion in financial support.

This builds on steps the Government has already taken to support leaseholders, including securing an agreement that owners of flats in buildings without cladding do not need an EWS1 form to sell or re-mortgage their property – benefitting nearly 450,000 homeowners.

These measures are part of the government's commitment to improve the safety of buildings across the country which will be enshrined in law through the Building Safety Bill in 2021.

Around 95% of the highest risk buildings with unsafe cladding similar to that found on Grenfell Tower have been made safe or have work underway compared to a year ago; with 159 buildings starting work last year compared to 90 in 2019 – representing more buildings on site with remediation work in 2020 than at any point previously.

Notes to Editors:

The Waking Watch Relief Fund will be available to all eligible buildings in England. £22 million of the £30 million funding available has been allocated to the eight metropolitan areas estimated to have the largest number of eligible buildings across England. These areas are:

- Greater London
- Greater Manchester
- Birmingham
- Leeds
- Liverpool
- Bristol
- Newcastle
- Sheffield

The remaining £8m of the fund will be centrally administered and is available to buildings across all other areas of England.

The document outlining the average cost of waking watch per building is available [here](#).

The 'Responsible Person', is the person, group, company or other entity that is responsible for ensuring the safety of occupants in their building from fire.

New-style driving licences and number plates mark one-year anniversary of Brexit as EU flag is removed

News story

To mark the first anniversary of Brexit, the government unveils new designs for driving licences and number plates without the EU flag.



- driving licences and number plates get a makeover to mark one year since the UK's departure from the EU
- EU flag removed with new design issued at the start of this year
- comes as the UK cuts red tape with several member states, making it easier for Britons to drive in the EU

UK [driving licences](#) and [number plates](#) have been given a makeover to signify the beginning of a new chapter for the UK.

To mark the UK's exit from the EU, the EU flag has been removed from all UK driving licences and number plate designs, with the first batches issued from 1 January 2021.

While existing licences and number plates will still be valid, the new versions will be issued to everyone renewing a licence or getting one for the first time.

The new designs coincide with the beginning of a number of agreements recently made between the UK and member states for British drivers, making it easier for Britons to drive in the EU when existing restrictions end.

Thanks to these agreements, UK drivers who hold photocard licences will not need an [international driving permit](#) to drive in any of the 27 EU member states, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland or Liechtenstein. UK drivers won't need to display a GB sticker in most EU countries if their number plate has GB or GB with a Union Flag on it.

Although [national restrictions](#) are still in place, and people should not be travelling internationally unless for work or other [legally permitted reasons](#), these new arrangements mean that Britons can easily drive in the EU for years to come

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Changing the designs of our driving licences and number plates is a historic moment for British motorists, and a reassertion of our independence from the EU one year on from our departure.

Looking to the future, whether it's for work or for holidays abroad, these changes mean that those who want to drive in the EU can continue to do so with ease.

[Driving licences](#) and [number plates](#) can be renewed online.

New driving licence design

New number plate design

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[UK applies to join huge Pacific free trade area CPTPP](#)

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss will speak to ministers in Japan and New Zealand on Monday morning (1 February 2021) to request to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), with formal negotiations set to start this year.

The announcement comes as the UK today celebrates one year since leaving the EU and becoming an independent trading nation.

Joining the CPTPP would deepen the UK's access to fast-growing markets and major economies, including Mexico, Malaysia and Vietnam, for the benefit of UK business.

Joining the £9 trillion partnership will cut tariffs for UK industries including food and drink, and cars, while also creating new opportunities for modern industries like tech and services, ultimately supporting and creating high-value jobs across the UK. Unlike EU membership, joining does not require the UK to cede control over our laws, borders, or money.

UK trade with the group was worth £111 billion last year, growing by 8% a year since 2016. Benefits that CPTPP membership will bring for businesses include:

- Modern digital trade rules that allow data to flow freely between members, remove unnecessary barriers for businesses, and protect commercial source code and encryption.
- Eliminating tariffs quicker on UK exports including whisky (down from 165% to 0% in Malaysia) and cars (reducing to 0% in Canada by 2022, two years earlier than through the UK-Canada trade deal).
- Rules of Origin that allow content from any country within CPTPP to count as 'originating'. For example, this would mean that cars made in the UK could use more Japanese-originating car parts, such as batteries.
- Easier travel for businesspeople between CPTPP countries, such as the potential for faster and cheaper visas.

The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said

"One year after our departure from the EU we are forging new partnerships that will bring enormous economic benefits for the people of Britain.

"Applying to be the first new country to join the CPTPP demonstrates our ambition to do business on the best terms with our friends and partners all over the world and be an enthusiastic champion of global free trade."

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said

"Joining CPTPP will create enormous opportunities for UK businesses that simply weren't there as part of the EU and deepen our ties with some of the fastest-growing markets in the world.

"It will mean lower tariffs for car manufacturers and whisky producers, and better access for our brilliant services providers, delivering quality jobs and greater prosperity for people here at home.

"We're at the front of the queue and look forward to starting formal negotiations in the coming months."

The UK will publish its negotiation objectives, scoping analysis, and consultation response in advance of negotiations expected to start this Spring.

CPTPP membership is a key part of the Government's plan to position the UK at the centre of a network of modern free trade deals that support jobs and drive economic growth at home.

Julian David, CEO of techUK, said

"Today marks an important step in the UK's path to developing a modern trade policy that creates new opportunities for the UK tech sector. Building on our recent agreements with Japan and the European Union, the accession to the CPTPP will allow us to join a group of ambitious countries breaking the

newest ground in digital trade.

“The UK has been a major beneficiary of the rise of digital trade with over 67% of service exports worth £190.3 billion being digitally delivered. CPTPP will open up new markets for innovative tech SMEs looking to grow and expand beyond our borders. We are looking forward to working with the government throughout the process.”

Mike Cherry, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Chair, said

“Membership of the CPTPP would be a hugely welcome development to all small businesses looking to either expand or begin their trading journeys.

“Crucially, at the very heart of this agreement is an SME chapter, something that we have lobbied for the inclusion of in every FTA, ensuring that no business is left behind.

“This is truly a world-leading agreement and one that will genuinely help small firms to thrive and succeed more than ever.”

CBI President, Lord Karan Bilimoria, said

“This ambition marks a new chapter for our independent trade policy. As one of the largest free trade agreements in the world, these 11 countries contribute over £100 billion to our economy.

“Membership of the bloc has the potential to deliver new opportunities for UK business across different sectors. The CBI will continue to work with the Government to ensure that firms get the most out of an agreement that will create jobs and deliver wide-ranging benefits to communities across the country.”

[Vaccine Deployment Minister and Mayor of London collaborate to share benefits of vaccine uptake](#)

This week, we reached the sombre milestone of 100,000 (coronavirus) COVID-19 deaths in the UK. Every death is a tragedy and leaves behind a bereft family, but it is evident some communities have been hit harder than others.

People of black African ethnicity in England are over twice as likely to die from this virus than white people, according to the ONS. The same is also true of South Asian people.

Now, as 2 politicians from Asian immigrant families, we know the reasons for

this go beyond ethnicity. It is to do with socio-economics – where and how people live – as well as historic issues of racism and inequality in this country. Those from minority ethnic groups are more likely to work in some of the lowest-paid, public-facing jobs in the country which has put them at increased risk of catching this virus.

It is also to do with history – in the past minorities have not been properly included in some medical research, including trials of vaccines. All this can damage levels of trust. However, this is not the case in the trials of today's COVID-19 vaccines which have been safely and widely tested across a range of different ages and ethnic groups. It is however incredibly important to acknowledge these lower levels of trust that some from black Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds have in the institutions set up to represent them, and we will continue to do all we can to address this.

We're incredibly pleased the UK has already started rolling out two COVID-19 vaccines which will save thousands of lives in our communities. The vaccines will eventually get us back to our normal lives, but right now it is how we will protect our communities, our friends and family, our colleagues, our elders.

Today we are calling on people from ethnic minority backgrounds to get their COVID-19 vaccine – it is safe, it is effective and it could save your life or the life of someone you love. This is an issue of vital importance and one that transcends party lines.

This week, black MPs from both the Conservative and Labour parties united against the spread of false rumours about vaccines in a video where they shared heart-breaking stories of losing loved ones to COVID-19. British Asians have put out a similar video to help dispel vaccine myths.

The NHS has been doing an incredible job, rolling out vaccinations across the country – in GP clinics, pharmacies and vaccination centres, from racecourses and leisure centres to mosques and gurdwaras. Over 7.8 million people have now received the first dose, and we have reached the incredible rate of 250 jabs a minute. But it is vital COVID-19 vaccines are available to everyone, regardless of ethnicity, faith or socio-economic background. We want everyone to get the advice and information they need to make decisions about their personal health. But make no mistake, the decision to take this vaccine could save your life and stop you ending up in hospital.

We are investing a huge amount of time and effort to strengthen the partnership between central and local government and to bring communities closer together in this effort. The government is expanding the community champions scheme so that communities have trusted local leaders who can help answer questions about the vaccine and work with the NHS and public health teams to support local communities. We are both working with faith leaders, grassroots organisations representing our diverse communities and charities and have listened to their ideas about how we can protect our communities from coronavirus and get vaccines to as many people as possible.

Some have shared concerns over what goes into the vaccines, and whether their

faith permitted it. The medicines regulator, the MHRA, has confirmed there are no animal products in the vaccines and Imams have declared them to be Halal. In recent weeks we have seen the Archbishop of Canterbury receive the vaccine and Pope Francis encouraging everyone to take it.

Some have worried about how quickly the vaccine was developed. Others want to know how soon they or their loved ones would get the vaccine. We can reassure people that government is on target to offer the first dose of the vaccination to the first 4 priority groups by 15 February and all over-50s by the spring. And that it is safe. Its quick development is all down to the global effort of scientists and countries around the world.

We know people often put their trust in their friends, religious leaders, or family over the government. It is through events like these, across the country, that we are helping community and faith leaders answer whatever questions people have about the vaccines and how and when they will be invited to get a jab.

During the biggest vaccination programme in our country's history, we want to make this an opportunity to unite, and champion the work of our brilliant scientists, researchers, health and social care staff and front-line workers that have cared for our loved ones and played a pivotal part in the scientific breakthroughs that developed the vaccines.

We've asked everyone to play their part to protect the NHS, save lives, and get society up and running again, and we know the sacrifices communities have made to follow the rules.

Now the vaccines have finally given us hope, we urge everyone but especially people from black, Asian and ethnic minorities, to find trusted advice, call your GP, visit the NHS website, and encourage your family and friends to protect themselves when the call comes, it could save their life.

UK Emergency Medical Team deployed to Eswatini to support coronavirus response

A team of medics from the UK's Emergency Medical Team (EMT) is deploying to Eswatini in southern Africa to provide support and specialist expertise in hospitals that are battling the coronavirus pandemic.

The team of 11, which includes 4 British medics, will fly from London Heathrow today (30 January 2021). They will provide urgent training and use their specialist expertise to provide clinical supervision to those treating patients critically ill with COVID-19.

A biomedical engineer will also train emaSwati staff on how to install, use and maintain critical care equipment, and support the distribution of key supplies including oxygen.

As of 27 January 2021, Eswatini has a total of 15,051 COVID-19 cases and 522 people have died from the illness. The country has seen a surge of new cases and fatalities since December 2020, with limited access to testing and treatment for much of the population.

Minister for Africa, James Duddridge, said:

Our UK Emergency Medical Team will save lives by using their world-leading specialist expertise and skills to make sure medics in Eswatini are best equipped to treat those seriously sick with coronavirus.

We stand by the people of Eswatini in the battle to bring this outbreak under control. This dreadful disease does not respect borders, and none of us are safe until we are all safe.

UK EMT Team Leader Andy Kent said:

UK-Med as part of the UK EMT is proud to be able to support the people of Eswatini in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our team will be working alongside health care teams to support them with the treatment of increasing numbers of serious and critically-ill COVID-19 patients. They will also supervise and train Eswatini health staff, and help make sure that critical care equipment is functioning and used efficiently.

UK EMT Eswatini Medical Coordinator, David Anderson, said:

It is really important that the UK through the UK EMT continues to support other countries with their COVID-19 response. It is a fantastic opportunity to take our hard-won knowledge and work with the staff in Eswatini to support and improve their COVID-19 response.

The UK EMT is the UK's front-line response to a humanitarian crisis overseas and is able to rapidly deploy resources that include a fully equipped surgical field hospital when needed.

Last year, the UK EMT supported the World Health Organization and health ministries in the fight against coronavirus in deployments to Ghana, South Africa, Cambodia, Burkina Faso, Bangladesh, Chad, Zambia, Armenia and Lebanon.

In addition to supporting the immediate humanitarian response, the UK is at the forefront of efforts to drive unprecedented global collaboration and resourcing for the development and delivery of new vaccines, treatments and tests at the speed and scale required.

Notes to editors

- The EMT is a partnership of the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, emergency health NGO UK-Med, NGO Humanity & Inclusion, the UK Fire and Rescue Service and Palladium.
- The EMT's travel to support the Eswatini Minister of Health is considered essential business on behalf of the UK Government.