

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 21 December 2020

Good afternoon,

I want to update everyone on one thing and that's what's happening at our borders and especially at Dover.

Last night at 11pm the French Government imposed restrictions on UK freight crossing to France when accompanied by a driver.

And so today I chaired a meeting of the Government's emergency, COBR committee

in order to co-ordinate a UK-wide response.

And it is vital first to stress that these delays

– which are only occurring at Dover –

only affect human-handled freight,

and that is only 20 per cent of the total arriving from or departing to the European continent,

which means the vast majority of food, medicines and other supplies are coming and going as normal.

You may also be aware – in fact I'd be amazed if you weren't –

that the government has been preparing for a long time for this exactly kind of event.

So working with the Kent Resilience Forum, Kent County Council and Highways England,

we've activated our long-prepared plans,

with the result that we have already been able to reduce the number of lorries waiting on the M20 from 500 to 170.

The site at Manston Airfield is ready to cope with any overflow.

And, of course, we are working with our friends across the Channel to unblock the flow of trade as fast as possible.

The Government at all levels is communicating with our friends in Paris

I have just spoken to President Macron – we had a very good call – we both

understand each other's positions and want to resolve these problems as fast as possible.

I know that Grant is also speaking to his counterpart and we are working to a solution, as I say, as fast as we can

to allow freight traffic to resume between the UK and France,

and ensure that lorries can travel in both directions in a Covid-secure way.

I want to stress that we in the UK fully understand the anxieties of our friends about Covid, their anxieties about the new variant,

but it is also true that we believe the risks of transmission by a solitary driver sitting alone in the cab are really very low.

And so we hope to make progress as fast as we possibly can.

I want to repeat that these delays only apply to a very small percentage of food entering the UK,

and as British supermarkets have said, their supply chains are strong and robust,

so everyone can continue to shop normally.

And to our international friends and partners I want to say very frankly:

We understand your concerns,

And I hope that everybody can see that as soon as we were briefed as a government of the fast transmissibility of this new strain at about 3.15pm on Friday afternoon,

We lodged all the necessary information with the World Health Organisation

And we took prompt and decisive action the very next day to curb the spread of the variant within the UK.

And we want to work with our colleagues, with our friends around the world, as we have from the beginning to develop new treatments and new vaccines.

And today I can announce that half a million people in the UK have now received their first dose.

As we've seen throughout this pandemic, this virus alas can move all too swiftly from one nation to another,

But it is steadily being defeated by an international response

An international response that is bringing the hope of vaccines to the entire world,

And in that the UK will continue to play our full part.

I'll now handover to our Secretary of State, Grant.

[New trade barriers service launched to help British businesses export internationally](#)

News story

The Department for International Trade (DIT) has today (Monday 21st December) launched a new service to help British businesses identify new trade opportunities overseas.



The 'Check for barriers to trading and investing abroad' digital service will allow users to search for information on trade barriers imposed by other countries, which could restrict businesses in trading and investing there.

Whilst not all barriers are necessarily resolvable, businesses will be able to see where barriers have been removed and the new service will highlight potential areas of growth and opportunity for their products or services.

This service is the latest tool made available by DIT in supporting British businesses with market access issues. It sits alongside the existing 'Report a trade barrier' and 'Check how to export goods' as a suite of services. It has been specifically created to help make it easier for British businesses to seize new opportunities.

Tackling trade barriers is one of the Department's key priorities. It is integral to Britain's independent trade policy and could add billions into the British economy through increased trade flows.

"I have spent much of the past year speaking to British businesses of all sizes – hearing of their determination to bounce back bigger, better and bolder out of COVID-19.

“This new service will help businesses across Britain to identify potential new markets and seize the new opportunities that come with becoming an independent trading nation, boosting jobs and growth in every corner of the country.

“I am committed to doubling down on tackling trade barriers, so that we can add to the 175 barriers across 61 countries we have already removed and make it easier for our great British businesses to trade globally.”

The new database will be regularly updated to reflect the latest information on trade barriers.

Published 21 December 2020

[Wales to play part in delivering new British Army vehicle](#)

Press release

A Cardiff-based business has been awarded a £20m contract to provide components for a new armoured fighting vehicle.



A company in South Wales will play an integral part in delivering the British Army’s next-generation armoured fighting vehicle, the UK Government has announced.

MilDef, which is based in Cardiff, will provide electronics such as Crewstation PCs, servers and ethernet switches for the Boxer armoured fighting vehicles under a £20m subcontract awarded to them by RBSL and Rheinmetall.

The contract is expected to sustain and create around a dozen Welsh jobs and will secure further development of MilDef’s manufacturing facilities in the city over the next 10 years.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

Thousands of jobs in Wales are supported by UK defence expenditure and this latest £20m investment shows our continued commitment to invest in Welsh suppliers – cementing Wales’ place as a defence industry hub.

I welcome this investment which comes at a time when the UK’s armed forces are providing crucial support to the NHS, Ambulance Service and Covid-19 testing effort across Wales.

Director Land Equipment for Defence Equipment and Support, Major General Darren Crook, said:

The British Boxer programme has continued at pace this year despite the significant challenges that 2020 has set us. I am delighted that we are now beginning to see real term benefits to the UK from the investment in the programme and proud that we will be delivering a state-of-the art future capability to our British Armed Forces.

Duncan Skinner, Chief Sales Officer at MilDef Group, said:

We are delighted to supply high-performance products together with RBSL into one of the UK MoD’s strategic vehicle programmes. MilDef Ltd continues its expansion in the UK defence industry and this contract is an example of the exciting times ahead for the company.

The UK decided to re-join the Boxer programme in 2018 and since then has committed £2.8bn to deliver over 500 vehicles to the British Army. They will be made up of four variants: an Infantry Carrier; a Specialist Carrier; a Command Vehicle; and an Ambulance.

Much of the fleet is planned to be built in Telford and Stockport by main contractors RBSL and WFEL, supported by a nationwide supply chain that will secure around 1000 jobs nationwide and create an ambitious UK apprenticeship scheme. The aim is to have the first vehicles in service in 2023.

ENDS

Published 21 December 2020

[New appointment to the Boundary](#)

Commission for Scotland

News story

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack announces appointment to the Boundary Commission for Scotland



The Scottish Secretary, Alister Jack, today announced the appointment of Dr Susan Walker OBE as a member of the Boundary Commission for Scotland. The appointment will commence in January 2021 for a period of four years.

Dr Walker, who has been a member of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland since 2013, will replace Paula Sharp, who has served her maximum term.

Since 2015, Dr Walker has been a board member of Food Standards Scotland, and a member of the Water Industry Customer Forum since 2011.

Dr Walker studied Geography at the University of Durham, then a PhD in Water Resources Management at the University of Manchester.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

It's great news Dr Susan Walker OBE has accepted the post as a member of the Boundary Commission for Scotland.

Dr Walker brings vast experience and invaluable specialist knowledge, particularly from her background as a member of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland, which is responsible for reviewing constituencies and regions for the Scottish Parliament. She will be an important part of the team and no doubt will make a positive impact and add significant strength to the work of the Commission.

I thank Paula Sharp who will leave her post at the end of the year after serving for ten years.

The Boundary Commission for Scotland is an advisory non-departmental public body wholly funded by the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland. It is independent and non-political, constituted by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, and in Schedule 1 to the Scotland Act 1998.

The Commission is responsible for reviews of constituencies in Scotland for the Westminster Parliament. It is required by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended) to review UK Parliament constituencies every five years. The reviews ensure that each constituency has roughly the same number of electors. The next review will be in 2023.

Published 21 December 2020

[The Social Security, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit \(Amendment\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2020](#)

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