

# UK Armed Forces continue to strengthen interoperability with Finland and Sweden

Press release

British troops have taken part in Exercise Vigilant Knife alongside Swedish and Finnish Armed Forces.



British troops have taken part in Exercise Vigilant Knife alongside Swedish and Finnish Armed Forces, further strengthening our interoperability in anticipation of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO.

The short notice command-post exercise took place in Rovaniemi and Rovajärvi, northern Finland from 29 August to 2 September 2022 and built on the success of [Exercise Vigilant Fox](#) which took place in July.

## **Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace said:**

Whilst there is war in Europe, it is more important than ever to strengthen our international partnerships. We welcome Finland and Sweden's application to join NATO and will continue to exercise together so we are ready to face shared security challenges.

Exercise Vigilant Knife is an invaluable opportunity for UK personnel to develop their skills and experience of warfighting in cold weather conditions, enabling them to be effective on the battlefield alongside their Finnish and Swedish counterparts.

Around 80 British Army personnel from C Company, 2 Rifles Battlegroup took part in the exercise, travelling from the island of Santahamina in the south of Finland where they are undertaking a 3 month training deployment as part of a [security agreement between the UK and Finland](#).

Formed of over 2,000 troops, the international force practiced delivering and receiving international assistance as well as enhancing tactical and technical interoperability.

As a light infantry company, British personnel provided anti-tank, sniper and reconnaissance capabilities to the exercise and were primarily involved in both offensive and defensive actions to test the readiness of the Finnish forces alongside the Swedish unit.

This added to the invaluable experience that UK troops have already enjoyed whilst on deployment in Finland. Operating in northern Finland presented new challenges enabling troops to train in heavily wooded terrain.

Enhancing our forces through international exercises is crucial preparation should we need to deploy alongside our European partners in the future, enabling us to be effective on the battlefield.

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## [JCVI advises use of additional bivalent vaccine for autumn booster campaign](#)

Press release

Published advice updated to include an additional bivalent vaccine now approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).



Following on from the previous advice on which vaccines should be used in this year's autumn booster programme, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has [updated its published advice](#) to include an additional bivalent vaccine now approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products

Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

Studies indicate the Pfizer-BioNTech bivalent vaccine produces a marginally higher immune response against some variants than the Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA Original 'wild-type' vaccine. The clinical relevance of these small differences is uncertain

'Bivalent' vaccines have been developed by global manufacturers since the emergence and dominance of the Omicron variant. These vaccines are targeted against antigens (substances that induce an immune response) from 2 different COVID-19 strains, or variants.

All of the available booster vaccines offer very good protection against severe illness from COVID-19. As more vaccines continue to be developed, the committee will consider their use in the autumn programme.

Professor Wei Shen Lim, Chair of COVID-19 immunisation on the JCVI, said:

It is very encouraging that more vaccines continue to become available and we now have another option to add to the vaccines already advised for the autumn booster campaign.

Winter is typically the time of greatest threat from respiratory infections. We strongly encourage everyone who is eligible to have their booster vaccine this autumn when it is offered. This is our best defence against becoming severely ill from COVID-19.

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## [\*\*Pfizer/BioNTech bivalent COVID-19 booster approved by UK medicines regulator\*\*](#)

Press release

The adapted COVID-19 vaccine targets both the original virus and the Omicron variant

## COVID-19 vaccines



A second, “bivalent” vaccine has today been approved as a booster by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) after it was found to meet the UK regulator’s standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

The updated booster vaccine made by Pfizer/BioNTech, targeting two coronavirus variants, has been approved for use in individuals aged 12 years and above. This decision has been endorsed by the Commission on Human Medicines, after a careful review of the evidence.

In each dose of the booster vaccine, ‘Comirnaty bivalent Original/Omicron’, half of the vaccine (15 micrograms) targets the original virus strain and the other half (15 micrograms) targets Omicron (BA.1).

The MHRA’s decision is based on data from a clinical trial which showed that a booster dose with the bivalent Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine triggers a strong immune response against both Omicron and the original strain. Safety monitoring showed that the side effects observed were the same as those seen for the original Pfizer/BioNTech booster dose and were typically mild and self-resolving, and no new serious safety concerns were identified.

### **Dr June Raine, MHRA Chief Executive said:**

I am pleased to announce that we now have a second approved vaccine for the UK Autumn booster programme. The clinical trial of the Pfizer/BioNTech bivalent vaccine showed a strong immune response against the Omicron BA.1 variant as well as the original strain.

Bivalent vaccines are helping us to meet the challenge of an ever-evolving virus, to help protect people against COVID-19 variants.

We have in place a comprehensive safety surveillance strategy for all UK-approved COVID-19 vaccines, and this will include the updated booster we approved today.

### **Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed, Chair of the Commission on Human Medicines said:**

Following an independent review of the safety, quality and effectiveness of the vaccine, the Commission on Human Medicines and

its COVID-19 Vaccines Expert Working Group supports the MHRA's decision.

As with any medicinal product, including vaccines, it is important to continually monitor effectiveness and safety when it is deployed, and we have the relevant processes and expertise in this country to do that.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) will advise on how this vaccine should be offered as part of the deployment programme.

## Notes to Editors

- The [Commission on Human Medicines \(CHM\)](#) advises ministers on the safety, efficacy and quality of medicinal products. The CHM is an advisory non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care.
- This new authorisation to the Conditional Marketing Authorisation (CMA) granted by the MHRA is valid in Great Britain only and was approved via the [European Commission \(EC\) Decision Reliance Route](#). This is when the marketing authorisation application made by the company references the decision made by the EMA's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP). In such cases, the MHRA considers the application together with due consideration of the EC decision, before making an independent decision on the quality, safety, and effectiveness of the vaccine.
- More information can be found in [product information for the Pfizer/BioNTech bivalent vaccine](#).
- A recent paper in a Lancet journal suggested that COVID-19 vaccines have prevented up to 20 million deaths in the first year of use.

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## [£110m fund to level up rural communities unveiled](#)

Rural businesses such as farms, wedding venues and pubs will benefit from up to £110 million of funding being allocated today to support countryside communities across England.

The funding will be invested in projects which will boost productivity and create rural job opportunities. These could include farm businesses looking to diversify by opening a farm shop, wedding venue or tourism facilities or improvements to village halls, pubs and other rural hubs for community uses.

Investment will be based on local priorities and support investment in projects such as grants for:

- converting farm buildings to other business uses
- rural tourism, such as investments in visitor accommodation
- capital grants for provision of gigabit-capable digital infrastructure at hubs such as village halls, pubs and post offices for community use
- capital grants to develop, restore or refurbish local natural, cultural and heritage assets and sites
- creation of new footpaths and cycle paths, particularly in areas of health need, or capital grants to enable people to develop volunteering and social action projects locally

The Rural England Prosperity Fund worth up to £110 million will be delivered by eligible local authorities and give local leaders a greater say in investment than they previously had under EU schemes. It will be in addition to the £2.6 billion allocated via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to support levelling up across the UK. The fund will be part of the UKSPF and is a rural top-up for eligible local authorities.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Greg Clark MP said:

This major investment in rural businesses will help us boost the countryside economy and close the rural productivity gap.

It's our mission to spread opportunity across the whole of the UK and this funding will help us do just that.

Lord Benyon, Minister for Rural Affairs, said:

We are addressing the rural productivity gap, levelling-up opportunities and outcomes, and looking after the rural areas and countryside that so many of us are proud to call home.

The Rural England Prosperity Fund worth up to £110 million recognises the unique strengths and challenges of rural communities, and will support them to invest and grow their economies in line with local priorities.

Rural areas contribute hugely to the life of our nation economically, socially and culturally. 85% of England's land mass is rural, rural areas are home to 9.6 million people (17% of England's population) and the rural economy is worth £260 billion to the economy (15% of England's output).

Published today, the 'Delivering for Rural England' report describes how rural interests will be at the heart of the government's approach to levelling up to ensure the 12 levelling-up missions deliver for these communities.

The report summarises the considerable progress that has been made in supporting rural areas, for example in improving connectivity with 30% of rural premises now having access to gigabit-capable connections compared with 19% in January 2021.

As well as the ongoing work to recruit 20,000 more police officers across the whole country and make our streets safer, the government has also taken steps through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act to tackle crimes prevalent in rural communities such as illegal hare coursing. The new measures came into force on 1 August and strengthen penalties for those caught hare coursing who will now face an unlimited fine and up to six months in prison.

The report sets out how the government is working to close the productivity gap for rural areas, which has fallen from 90% of the England average in 2001 to 83% in 2019. Funding announced today through the Rural England Prosperity Fund, together with the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Food Strategy and the Agricultural Transition Plan, is set to unlock billions of investment in rural communities over the coming years.

Rural proofing – the process by which government ensures the needs of rural communities are met in government policy-making – has also been supported with the development of new guidance and training for civil servants. Work will also continue in developing the role that the Levelling Up Advisory Council can play in offering specific insights into the design and delivery of levelling up in rural areas.

- The second rural proofing report 'Delivering for Rural England' can be found on GOV.UK.
  - Further details on the Rural England Prosperity Fund can be found in the England Prosperity Fund: prospectus on GOV.UK.
  - The Rural England Prosperity Fund is integrated into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which supports productivity and prosperity in places that need it most. Rural England Prosperity Fund funding is available from April 2023 to March 2025.
  - For eligible local authorities, the Rural England Prosperity Fund is a rural top-up to UKSPF allocations. It supports activities that specifically address the challenges rural communities face. It is complementary to funding used to support rural areas under the UKSPF.
  - The REPF succeeds EU funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme which were part of the Rural Development Programme for England.
  - Funding has already been provided to devolved governments to support rural communities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as part of the agreed replacement to the Common Agricultural Policy. UK Government is incorporating England's share of funding to support rural economies into the UKSPF to better streamline and simplify the spending landscape.
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# Rough sleepers helped to rebuild their lives with new strategy backed by £2bn government support

- Government publishes landmark Rough Sleeping Strategy to drive forward manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping for good
- 14,000 beds and 3,000 support staff this year will help individuals find work and access mental health services
- Extra 2,400 long-term supported homes will be created for those with most complex needs
- To break the cycle of addiction and rough sleeping, drug and alcohol treatment services will be expanded

Thousands of people living on the streets will be given a roof over their heads and tailored support to rebuild their lives under landmark government plans set out today (3 September 2022) to end rough sleeping.

The cross-government [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#) is backed by £2 billion and builds on the significant action already taken by the government, which has driven a 43% drop in rough sleeping since 2019 and rough sleeping has fallen to an 8-year low. As a result, England now one of the lowest rough sleeping rates in the world.

In this year's Spending Review we announced we are spending £2 billion over the course of this parliament to end rough sleeping and tackle homelessness – today's strategy sets the key funding allocations, totalling £764 million.

This includes up to £500 million over 3 years for the Rough Sleeping Initiative, which this year will help provide 14,000 beds for rough sleepers and 3,000 staff to provide tailored support across England. This includes helping individuals find work, manage their finances and access mental and physical health services.

An extra 2,400 long-term supported homes for those with the most complex needs, including young people, will also be provided, through our new £200 million Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme. This is on top of 3,200 homes that have already been delivered.

To break the cycle of addiction and rough sleeping, the government is also expanding its Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant programme to an additional 20 areas in England, bringing the total to 83. The scheme provides funding for substance misuse treatment services for people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough.

The government has a manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping in this parliament. This means rough sleeping is prevented wherever possible and, where it cannot be prevented, it is a rare, brief and non-recurring experience.



**Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Greg Clark said:**

Ending rough sleeping in this parliament is an important manifesto commitment.

We've made great strides towards that goal in the last few years, and today's strategy backed by £2 billion of support will give some of the most vulnerable people in our society a roof over their heads and targeted support so they can rebuild their lives.

The full weight of government is behind this very necessary pledge and this landmark strategy will give us the right tools to identify people at risk of rough sleeping earlier and provide the help they need.

**Minister for Rough Sleeping Eddie Hughes said:**

No one should have to sleep on our streets and our strategy will help make that a reality.

We will pull every lever at our disposal so councils, working hand in hand with the voluntary, faith and community sectors, can intervene swiftly when someone is sleeping rough.

When I worked at YMCA Birmingham, I saw first-hand how the right support can help people turn their life around. We're making great progress and this strategy is hugely important step towards ending rough sleeping for good.

The government is also extending the Housing First Pilots in the West Midlands, Manchester and Liverpool, which give homeless people with multiple and complex needs access to independent long-term housing as a secure and stable platform from which other issues can be addressed.

Thousands of prison leavers at risk of homelessness will also be helped into rental accommodation as part of an expanded government scheme designed to reduce reoffending and tackle rough sleeping.

The second phase of the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders programme – to be launched later this year as part of this strategy – will help councils provide rental deposits, landlord incentives and dedicated support staff.

It builds on the 2021/22 scheme, which helped 145 councils across England and Wales provide the much-needed support. With prison leavers without a stable home around 50% more likely to reoffend, the scheme will help cut crime by reducing the number of prison leavers ending up homeless so that they have the foundation to get a job and access treatment for addictions.

And the government is helping to put night shelters on a more secure and

stable footing by increasing the variety and quality of services so they can be relied on for the long term.

To improve transparency and accountability for the mission to end rough sleeping, the government will publish quarterly data showing progress.

Finally, as part of our support we are repealing the outdated Vagrancy Act as no-one should be criminalised simply for having nowhere to live. However, to ensure we don't weaken the ability of police to protect the public and communities from crime and anti-social behaviour we are considering bringing forward new legislation, while also embedding rehabilitation and support at the heart of our approach.

**Interim CEO at St Mungo's homeless charity Rebecca Sycamore said:**

As a leading homelessness charity we know first-hand how important it is to focus on the root causes of rough sleeping in order to help break that cycle. We deliver a huge range of services to support people out of homelessness and into rebuilding their lives and so welcome this new strategy.

Currently there is a significant gap in supported accommodation for people with complex needs and the announcement of an extra 2,400 homes in particular, is a step forward to helping people sustain a life away from the streets.

Actions introduced today include:

## **Rough Sleeping Initiative**

The [Rough Sleeping Initiative](#) is the government's flagship programme to drive the manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping. Up to £500 million will help provide emergency beds, off-the-street accommodation and wrap-around support.

## **Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme**

The [Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme](#), announced in 2020, is backed by up to £433 million over the lifetime of this parliament. This funding will provide up to 6,000 homes for rough sleepers. Once in their new home, rough sleepers will be supported by specialist staff to access the help they need, such as support for mental health and substance abuse problems, moving towards training and work.

From the total budget of the programme, £39.4 million will continue the work of providing a roof over people's heads and the support they need to sustain it.

## **Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme**

Many areas need more accommodation with suitable support for adults experiencing multiple disadvantage, both long-term and good quality hostel accommodation, as well as specialist accommodation for young people (under 25) who are already experiencing rough sleeping or are at risk.

This is why the government is introducing the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP), a new £200 million fund, which will deliver up to 2,400 homes by March 2025, including supported housing and Housing First accommodation, and accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness, including rough sleeping.

## **Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant**

Since 2020/21 the [Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant](#) has provided £50 million for substance misuse treatment services for people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough. This includes evidence-based drug and alcohol treatment and wraparound support to improve access to treatment, including for people with additional mental health needs.

The government will provide extra investment of up to £186.5 million over the spending review period, expanding these vital services to 20 more areas, bringing the total to 83 areas and 5 pan-London projects. This includes an investment of £15 million announced as part of the cross-government Drug Strategy.

## **Housing First Pilots**

Housing First supports homeless people with multiple and complex needs to access and maintain independent housing. Unlike traditional 'staircase' or 'treatment first' approaches, it places people directly in independent long-term settled housing, with personalised, flexible and non-time-limited support. This gives people choice and control over both their housing and the support they receive – secure housing offers a stable platform from which other issues can be addressed, rather than setting preconditions such as being 'housing ready' or participating in treatment.

We are extending our [Housing First Pilots](#) in the West Midlands, Manchester, and Liverpool, providing a further £13.9 million over 2 years on top of the £28 million already invested.

## **Voluntary, Community and Frontline Sector programme**

Up to £7.3 million will ensure [local rough sleeping services have the tools they need to end rough sleeping](#) and develop prevention services to stop people arriving on the streets in the first place.

## **Streetlink**

We will revitalise this initiative, which enables people to connect local services with somebody they see sleeping rough, with new investment to improve the website and make it more user friendly.

## **Transparency and data-led Framework**

We are committed to ending rough sleeping – this means rough sleeping will be prevented wherever possible or, where it cannot be prevented, be a rare, brief and non-recurring experience. In practice this approach, developed in consultation with experts at the Centre for Homelessness Impact, means more effective support to prevent rough sleeping from happening in the first place, and a tailored offer of support where it does, so people can build an independent life off the streets.

To hold the government and local leaders to account and measure progress, we will [publish quarterly data](#) to set out how the government and its partners are delivering on this mission.

## **Night Shelter Transformation Fund**

Help for faith and community groups to develop night shelter services, to expand high-quality single-room accommodation and move-on support for rough sleepers. DLUHC will work with Homeless Link and Housing Justice to help organisations, with up to £10 million of funding across 2022-2025.

This fund aims to transform the sector for the long term, with a wider range of services, partner organisations on a firmer footing and less reliance on government funding to meet core costs.