

Operation Yellowhammer and Older People Briefing Paper October 2019



Introduction

Operation Yellowhammer is the government's contingency planning for its response to the most severe anticipated short-term disruption under a no-deal Brexit. Originally intended to be undisclosed documents, the government was forced by Parliament to release the plans, although they have yet to publish emails and messages, instead citing releasing details of private messages risked breaking laws relating to human rights and data protection.

If the UK ceased to be a member of the EU without a deal and all rights and reciprocal arrangements with the EU ended with the UK reverting to "third country" status in relation to the EU, known as the 'reasonable worst case' scenarios. Operation Yellowhammer covers key areas of risk, including food and water supplies, healthcare services, trade in goods and transport systems. Government departments are setting up 24-hour operational centres to co-ordinate responses to issues as they arise.

As part of the scenario, the government assumes that there will be no deals in place with the EU or member states to manage the impact, that business will remain very unprepared, and that the Brexit extension from March to October will mean that businesses are in some cases less prepared – due to 'Brexit fatigue' and the seasonal impacts.

Key areas of Operation Yellowhammer

1. Traffic management
2. Negative impacts of no deal Brexit for EU
3. France imposing EU mandatory controls on UK goods
4. Increased immigration checks at EU border posts
5. Likely electricity price increases
6. Impact on the supply of medicines and medical supplies
7. Fresh food supplies decreases
8. Cross-border UK financial services impacts
9. No firm decision about personal data
10. Law enforcement data disruptions
11. Loss of citizenship for EU nationals
12. Gibraltar
13. Protests and disorder across the UK in reaction to leaving
14. Traffic disruption because of border delays affecting fuel supplies
15. REDACTED
16. Insurance payment delays
17. Impacts of rising costs for low income households
18. "No new checks with limited exceptions" document
19. Fishing impacts
20. Adult social care fragility

How could this affect older people?

There is little doubt that exiting the EU under a no-deal Brexit will cause disruption to a wide array of sectors in the early stages of the UK's withdrawal. The most significant impediments to the lives of older people would be in the following areas:

Point 5. Likely electricity price increases

. "There will likely be significant electricity price increases for consumers (business and domestic)"

Point 6. Impact on the supply of medicines and medical supplies

. "The reliance of medicines and medical products' supply chains on the short straits crossing (the Channel crossing ports of Dover and Folkstone) make them particularly vulnerable to severe extended delays; three-quarters of medicines come via the short straits. . . . Whilst some products can be stockpiled, others cannot due to short shelf lives — it will also not be practical to stockpile products to cover expected delays of up to six months."

Point 7. Fresh food supplies decreases

. "Certain types of fresh food supply will decrease. Critical dependencies for the food supply chain (such as key input ingredients, chemicals and packaging) may be in shorter supply. In combination, these two

factors will not cause an overall shortage of food in the UK but will reduce availability and choice of products and will increase price, which could impact on vulnerable groups.”

Point 11 iii Loss of citizenship for EU nationals

... “The Commission and individual Member States do not agree to extend the current healthcare arrangements for UK state pensioners and tourists beyond 31 October 2019 and refuse offers by the UK to fund treatments. Member States take no further action to guarantee healthcare for UK nationals and treat them in the same way as other third country nationals. Member States should treat people with urgent needs, but may require them to pay after the fact. There is a risk of disruption for patients and a minority could face substantial costs.”

Point 17 Impacts of rising costs for low income households

... “Low income groups will be disproportionately affected by any price rises in food and fuel.”

Point 20 Adult social care fragility

... “There is an assumption that there will be no major change in adult social care on the day after EU exit. The adult social care market is already fragile due to declining financial viability of providers. An increase in inflation following EU exit would significantly impact on adult social care providers due to increasing staff and supply costs, and may lead to provider failure with smaller providers impacted within 2-3 months and larger providers 4-6 months after exit. There are also possible concurrent localised risks: transport or staff disruption, severe winter weather or flu could exacerbate the existing market fragility, and that cumulatively could stretch resources of providers.”

Conclusion

The report shows there's still significant detail to be clarified if Britain is to keep trading efficiently. The NPC understand there is a lack of any certainty at the moment and a sense of powerlessness for many people. What is certain however, is that the government has outlined in Operation Yellowhammer the effects of a no-deal Brexit will be especially hard on low income groups, including the 1.9 million pensioners (16%) who are living in relative poverty, rising to 31% among those in social housing and 36% among private renters. Millions more will be affected day to day with uncertainty over energy price rises, medicine and food supplies, as well as the possible negative impacts on an overstretched NHS and an already faltering social care system.

Further information

1. HM Government - Operation Yellowhammer
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/83119/9/20190802_Latest_Yellowhammer_Planning_assumptions_CD_L.pdf
2. Institute for Government – What is Operation Yellowhammer?
<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/operation-yellowhammer>
3. HM Government - Government Response to the Humble Address Motion
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-humble-address-motion>

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