

Press release: First UK Minister visit to Russia in two years

Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan visited Russia to discuss international security issues ahead of the Foreign Secretary's visit later this month.

Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan used the opportunity, the first Ministerial visit to Russia for two years, to discuss international security issues ahead of the Foreign Secretary's visit later this month.

Meeting the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov, the two Ministers agreed that the strong cooperation shown around security and policing ahead of next summer's World Cup in Russia is hugely important and proves the value of working together on issues of mutual interest.

Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan said:

The UK's approach of robust engagement with Russia is the right one. We will continue to engage with Russia, agreeing where we can but challenging when we do not.

In my wide-ranging meeting with First Deputy Foreign Minister Titov, I thanked him for the efforts Russia have shown in preparing for the World Cup next summer. We agreed that where our interests align, there is huge value in cooperation.

As permanent members of the UN Security Council, my visit, and indeed the forthcoming visit by the Foreign Secretary, are vital opportunities to discuss matters of international security such as Ukraine, Syria, Iran and North Korea.

The Minister also visited the venue for the 2018 World Cup Final, the Luzhniki Stadium, and saw the preparations underway which have included visits by UK Police.

Press release: Ten minute passport renewal service extends to 16 to 25 year olds

The online passport renewal service, which takes an average of 10 minutes to

complete, has previously only been available to people over the age of 26.

An HMP0 survey found that 63 percent of people would prefer to renew their passport online. Over 300,000 16 to 25 year olds renew their passport each year, the expansion means that they will all be able to benefit from the service which provides an easy, convenient and secure service to British nationals across the globe.

Immigration Minister Brandon Lewis said:

This service makes it easier than ever before to renew your passport and I am delighted that we are now able to offer it to 16 to 25 year olds.

We are harnessing technology to transform our services. As part of this service, customers are able to digitally upload pictures taken on their tablet or smartphone, and even those taken at photo shops or booths, to their passport application.

We want to ensure we have a modern and easy-to-use service for our millions of passport holders and applicants.

The survey also found that 84 percent of women and 74 percent of men were embarrassed to some extent by their current passport photograph.

In addition over 30 percent of applicants report that it can take them multiple attempts to take a compliant passport photo themselves. This is one of the reasons HMP0 have significantly increased the digital offering. This includes the option to get the photo taken in a photo booth or shop where a compliant photo is uploaded and a special code is generated that is then used to start your online application. This will make applying for a passport easier and help applicants to get their passport photo right the first time.

HMP0 issue 6 million passports every year, and these new services make the process of applying for a passport even more simple and convenient.

Notes to editors

To renew your passport online visit www.gov.uk/apply-renew-passport

[Press release: Support Northern Powerhouse culture this Christmas,](#)

minister says during Coronation Street trip

Northern Powerhouse Minister Jake Berry today (Friday 8 December) called on communities to support local cultural institutions over the festive break as he visited the Rovers Return set of Britain's best-loved soap.

Jake Berry walked the famous cobbled street and met the cast and crew of Coronation Street in Manchester to mark Northern Powerhouse Culture Week, and celebrate over 57 years of the household show being broadcast to the nation.

During the trip he threw the spotlight on how government investment is supporting cultural institutions across the North of England, and urged people to get out and celebrate their local highlights.

Northern Powerhouse Minister Jake Berry said:

I can't think of a more perfect way of marking Culture Week than visiting the set of one of the world's most iconic TV shows – made right here in the Northern Powerhouse.

As well as being an economic powerhouse, the North of England is also a cultural powerhouse, with hundreds of the country's best museums, art galleries and other cultural organisations on people's doorsteps.

Over the festive period, I'd encourage people to try something they haven't before. From Liverpool's Albert Docks to Newcastle's Discovery Museum, let's enjoy some of the most iconic, well-known and well-loved places the Northern Powerhouse has to offer.

Cultural funding

As part of its commitment to ensuring that the Northern Powerhouse continues to blaze trails in arts and culture industries in the UK, the government has invested:

- £13 million to the Hull City of Culture 2017
- £20 million for the Great Exhibition of the North and for a Northern Cultural Regeneration fund to pave way for future cultural investment in the Northern Powerhouse
- £78 million for the Factory Manchester – Manchester's new theatre and exhibition space
- and from April 2018, an additional £170 million, or 75% of the Arts Council's lottery funding, will be invested outside of London, which means an additional 31 cultural institutions and organisations in the North will receive regular government investment

During the visit, the minister also visited the Manchester Museum, which has benefitted from £5 million of government funding, to hear about exciting plans for a new South Asia gallery. This will draw on some of the best of the national collections from the British Museum to engage with the city-region's diverse communities and tourists.

Culture Week (4-8 December) showcased the amazing talent and industry throughout the North from sports and the arts, to the media and music and film industries. The themes for week included:

- sporting culture – Monday
- arts culture – Tuesday
- exhibiting culture – Wednesday
- media culture (TV, film, gaming) – Thursday
- music culture – Friday

Visit [@NPHinfo](#) on Twitter for more information or search [#CulturedNorth](#).

The week coincided with the [announcement of 11 bidders](#) for the Northern Cultural Regeneration Fund – a £15 million government investment to help build a lasting regional legacy from the Great Exhibition of the North.

Press release: £1.7m back pay identified for a record 16,000 workers as 260 employers are named for underpaying minimum wage rates

- Government has identified £1.7 million in back pay for 16,000 workers – more workers than in any previous naming round.
- 260 employers named and fined a total of £1.3 million for underpaying the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates. *Retail, hospitality and hairdressing were the most prolific sectors named in this round.
- In Wales, nine employers were named , amounting to £11,000 in arrears, £9000 in penalties, affecting 14 workers.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) today (8 December) named 260 employers for failing to pay 16,000 workers at least minimum wage rates.

Government investigators identified £1.7 million in back pay for some of the UK's lowest paid workers and fined employers £1.3 million for underpayment.

Retail, hairdressing and hospitality businesses were among the most prolific

offenders in this round. Common reasons for errors made include: failing to pay workers travelling between jobs, deducting money from pay for uniforms and not paying for overtime.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

It is unacceptable for employers not to pay their staff the wages they should receive.

Today's announcement shows how the UK Government is clamping down on the nine employers in Wales who have failed to pay their staff the National Minimum Wage.

I encourage employees who think they are being underpaid to seek Government advice to ensure they receive what they're entitled to.

The UK Government is working hard to create the right conditions for economic growth and job creation in Wales, but without compromising employee rights.

Business Minister Margot James said:

There is no excuse for not paying staff the wages they're entitled to and the government will come down hard on businesses that break the rules.

That's why today we are naming hundreds of employers who have been short changing their workers; and to ensure there are consequences for their wallets as well as their reputation, we've levied millions in back pay and fines.

Bryan Sanderson, Chairman of the Low Pay Commission, said:

The Low Pay Commission's conversations with employers suggest that the risk of being named is encouraging businesses to focus on compliance.

Further, it is good to see that HMRC continues to target large employers who have underpaid a large number of workers, as well as cases involving only a few workers, where workers are at risk of the most serious exploitation. It is imperative that the government keeps up the pressure on all employers who commit breaches of minimum wage law.

If workers are concerned they are not being paid the correct rates then they can seek advice from workplace experts Acas.

Since 2013, the scheme has identified £8 million in back pay for 58,000 workers, with 1,500 employers fined a total of £5 million. This year the government will spend a record £25.3 million on minimum wage enforcement.

Rates will rise again in April 2018, giving young workers in particular the biggest pay boost in a decade.

For more information about your pay, or if you think you might be being underpaid, [visit the dedicated National Minimum and Living Wage website](#)

The Welsh firms identified were:

- Mr Martin Brindley Station Cars, Wrexham LL11, failed to pay £5,303.74 to 1 worker.
- Total Site Maintenance Limited, Neath Port Talbot SA12, failed to pay £3,176.62 to 127 workers.
- Brynamman One Stop Limited, Neath Port Talbot SA18, failed to pay £1,252.76 to 1 worker.
- Ron Skinner & Sons Ltd, Blaenau Gwent NP22, failed to pay £863.5 to 2 workers.
- Rothwell & Robertson Limited trading as Ye Olde Bull's Head Inn, Isle of Anglesey LL58, failed to pay £627.53 to 1 worker.
- Men At Work (Wales) Limited, Conwy LL31, failed to pay £310.8 to 1 worker.
- Mr Stephen Gomes trading as Moksh, Cardiff CF10, failed to pay £263.22 to 2 workers.
- Vale Holiday Parks Limited, Ceredigion SY23, failed to pay £213.38 to 2 workers.
- Schoolhouse Daycare Limited trading as Swansea DVLA Schoolhouse Daycare, Swansea SA6, failed to pay £125.37 to 1 worker

[Press release: First glimpse of updated road design manual in 2018](#)

Renowned experts at the company responsible for the country's motorways and major A roads are updating the "Design Manual for Roads and Bridges" (DMRB) to make it easier for designers to understand and use.

The DMRB is a cornerstone of the delivery and management of motorway and all-purpose trunk roads across the UK and is a respected document used across the globe.

The modified standards are being published in phases, with the first set being released in 2018 and the full update complete by the end of March 2020.

The re-drafting will be completed using a revolutionary online authoring

tool, signalling an important move to digital technology and therefore give the potential for future updates to be more straightforward.

Highways England Chief Highway Engineer, Mike Wilson said:

Highways England is the recognised authority for road design, building and maintenance, and our standards are used across the globe.

This is an exciting time for the highways sector and as we deliver both the government's £15 billion road investment programme and look ahead to 2020 and beyond, we are delighted to be able to start releasing the first updates to this crucially important document.

We are grateful to our partners in the industry who have supported this significant review which will ensure our roads are designed, built and maintained to the very highest, safest standards.

In April 2015 Highways England began working on a project to review and update the complete suite of over 350 documents and associated Interim Advice Notes (IANs) that make up the manual. This is a specific requirement of the Protocol attached to the Highways England Licence as part of the Government's Road Investment Strategy.

These changes include making it easier to produce and maintain the manual. Requirements and advice will be easier to distinguish, which will result in fewer departures from the standards required for new schemes and the time/cost associated with these.

Over the years, the existing manual has become difficult to use due to the many revisions and variations in language and style. Following a consultation with key stakeholders and users of the manual, a number of changes have been implemented including a new set of drafting rules that follow best practice from national and international standardisation organisations.

The governance processes are also being updated to streamline the development process of the standards and make it more efficient.

To support this extremely ambitious and demanding programme, Highways England is supported by several leading UK consultants, providing world class expertise, to ensure that the manual is fit for the future. Collaboration among suppliers and leaner ways of working are key to successfully delivering the updates.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.