

Press release: Secretary of State urges Business Advisory Group to keep making their voices heard

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland James Brokenshire MP held the latest meeting of his Business Advisory Group at Stormont House today – and urged the business leaders to continue adding their voices to the growing demand for a return of the devolved power sharing government.

The session was the latest in a series of meetings to help businesses engage with UK Government and provide input on a range of strategic economic and business critical issues facing Northern Ireland, including developing skills, upgrading infrastructure, improving procurement and delivering affordable energy and clean growth.

Speaking after the meeting, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

“I urged members to keep using their influence to encourage political parties to deliver a functioning and effective Executive so we can continue to build an economy that works for everyone.

“Political stability is a fundamental basis for industrial success. Securing stable devolved institutions in Northern Ireland that will provide leadership, support innovation and boost skills will be integral to delivering on Northern Ireland’s potential as a place to invest and do business.

“I will continue to engage with political and business leaders and community groups to ensure that Northern Ireland’s interests are fully represented in EU exit negotiations. I genuinely believe the talent, resilience and global outlook of the business community in Northern Ireland presents positive opportunities for Northern Ireland’s future.”

News story: Foreign Office minister visits Algeria, Tunisia and Iran

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa Alistair Burt arrives in Algeria today (Monday 31 July) for the first stage of a three country trip that will also include Tunisia and Iran.

In Algeria he will meet with the Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune and other senior ministers. Libya and regional security issues will be a major

focus, but the visit will also be an opportunity to discuss a range of bilateral issues – including trade. UK exports to Algeria increased by 24 per cent in 2016.

The Minister arrives in Tunisia on Wednesday 2 August for a two day visit that will include a meeting with Foreign Minister Khemaies Jhinaoui.

This will be the first ministerial visit to Tunisia since the UK changed its travel advice last week. Having carefully reviewed conditions in Tunisia, including the threat from terrorism and improvements by the Tunisian security forces, the Government no longer advises against travel to most of the country, including Tunis and the major tourist destinations. Talks will cover counterterrorism cooperation, UK support to improve the Tunisian security situation and drive economic reforms, tourism and boosting trade.

The Minister arrives in Iran on Friday 4 August and will attend the official swearing in ceremony of the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Saturday 5 August. The Minister will have talks with senior politicians on a range of bilateral and regional issues, including our dual national detainees.

On Algeria Minister Burt said:

The UK is committed to a close relationship with Algeria and I'm excited to be visiting the country again. The partnership between our two countries in areas such as security and trade is getting stronger by the day. British businesses are thriving in many sectors – helping to build the new airport, invest in Algeria's agricultural sector and improve English language teaching.

On Tunisia Minister Burt said:

The UK is a strong partner and friend of Tunisia and I look forward to continuing our close work on security, counterterrorism, reforming the economy and trade. After a careful and thorough review we decided to no longer advise against travel to Tunisia. This is partly due to the security improvements that the Tunisian authorities have made. It is vital that our good cooperation on security matters continues and that we work together to consolidate the progress that has been made.

On Iran Minister Burt said:

I look forward to representing the UK at President Rouhani's swearing-in ceremony, on my first visit to Iran. We hope to build further on improving UK-Iran relations during President Rouhani's second term.

The President's personal commitment to the nuclear deal is welcome

and it is vital both our countries work closely together to ensure the deal continues to be successfully implemented. We are also keen to maintain dialogue on Iran's regional policies, human rights and particularly our dual national detainees. Progress in all of these areas is important to the UK.

Further information

News story: Launch of consultation on Criminal Finances Act Codes of Practice

Law enforcement agencies will soon be able to seize works of art and precious stones and metals that are being used to launder criminal funds.

Measures in the Criminal Finances Act mean officers will also be able to seize betting receipts, casino tokens and gaming vouchers in the same way that they currently confiscate cash.

The act, which received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017, gives law enforcement agencies, and partners, enhanced capabilities and greater powers to recover the proceeds of crime, tackle money laundering, tax evasion and corruption, and combat the financing of terrorism.

The act will help make the UK an even more hostile place for the corrupt and the criminal through measures including unexplained wealth orders, which require someone who is expected of being involved in serious criminality to explain the origins of their wealth if it appears disproportionate to their income.

Security Minister Ben Wallace said:

Criminals don't just deal in cash, they move or hide their money in the form of expensive pieces of art, buying and selling valuable precious metal and stones or even purchasing rare stamps to mask their amassed wealth.

It is vital that law enforcement agencies can take these high value, easily transportable assets from them so that they cannot use them to fund their criminal lifestyles.

This sends a clear message to criminals that we will not stand by and watch them use the UK to launder their dirty money or fund

terrorism.

The changes will be supported by new Codes of Practice for law enforcement officers, which have been published today (Monday 31 July) for consultation. Following the 4-week consultation the Codes will be subject to further Parliamentary scrutiny.

The Codes being consulted on also include:

- updated guidance on exercising powers to search and seize and detain property
- updated guidance on the exercise of investigation powers in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) to include new and extended powers relating to unexplained wealth orders and disclosure orders
- updated guidance for prosecutors on investigation powers, including who can apply for orders, time limits in conducting searches and the seizure of materials
- updated guidance on the exercise of powers in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (ATCSA) to include new and extended powers relating to administratively forfeit terrorist cash, and new civil recovery powers to seize, detain and forfeit terrorist assets and terrorist money held in bank and building society accounts

Interested organisations and members of the public are now invited to take part in the 4-week consultation in respect of the Codes of Practice providing guidance on the exercise of the powers. The consultation will close on Friday 25 August.

You can read the consultation documents on the [Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001: codes of practice](#) page.

Other measures included in the Criminal Finances Act and which are expected to be phased in from Autumn 2017 include:

- the creation of Unexplained Wealth Orders requiring those suspected of corruption or other serious crime to explain the sources of their wealth, helping to facilitate the recovery of illicit wealth and stopping criminals using the UK as a safe haven for the proceeds of international corruption
- new criminal offences for corporations who fail to stop their staff facilitating tax evasion, this will hold corporations to account for their employees' actions, ensuring robust global compliance regimes
- extending the existing civil recovery regime in POCA to allow for the recovery of the proceeds of gross human rights abuses or violations overseas

The powers brought in by the Criminal Finances Act would only be used by law enforcement agencies where necessary and proportionate to do so. The act ensures they are targeted at those who pose the greatest threat, subject to a set of stringent safeguards.

The Home Office is working with key stakeholders, including other government

departments, law enforcement agencies and the regulated sector, to support their efforts to prepare for the commencement of the act's measures.

News story: 100 years on, Defence Secretary and members of the Armed Forces attend Passchendaele commemorations

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon joined The Prince of Wales, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, The King and Queen of Belgians, Prime Minister Theresa May, and other dignitaries at a commemoration at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Tyne Cot Cemetery.

The Tyne Cot cemetery is situated on the former battlefields of the Ypres Salient, within sight of the town of Ypres and holds 12,000 graves with 35,000 names on the memorial wall. The service reflected the story and experiences of those who fought in the Third Battle of Ypres and was watched by descendants and members of the public.

The battle began 100 years ago today on 31 July 1917 and was a major engagement in the First World War, claiming the lives of around 275,000 British and Commonwealth military personnel and around 200,000 German lives.

The Chief of the Defence Staff, Joint Force Commander and heads of the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force also attended the ceremony. A Guard of Honour was provided by the 1st Battalion Irish Guards. Musical support was provided by the Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines Plymouth, the Band of the Welsh Guards and the Central Band of the RAF.

The Band of the Welsh Guards and the Central Band of the RAF at the Tyne Cot Cemetery

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

These services provide us with the time to reflect on the sacrifice not just of the thousands of British and Commonwealth troops who gave their lives, but of the men on all sides who did not return home. This was a battle which touched communities across Europe and it is a privilege to be here in Belgium to stand as friends with the representatives of all the countries who took part in the Battle – friends who continue to be strong allies.

Earlier in the day Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon also met with Belgian Defence Minister Vandeput to discuss security and defence cooperation between the two countries. Their meeting highlighted the enduring ties between the UK and Belgium, particularly the UK's commitment to NATO.

The Defence Secretary later toured the Esterline factory in Kortrijk, which specialises in display screens for use in military aircraft.

In the afternoon, a National Service of Remembrance took place at the Welsh Memorial in Flanders organised by the Welsh Government's First World War Programming Committee. This Service of Remembrance commemorated 100-years since the 38th (Welsh) Division attacked the German held frontline on the Pilckem Ridge at the beginning of the Third Battle of Ypres.

News story: VMD's Accredited Internet Retailer Scheme (AIRS) 5th Anniversary

The VMD's Accredited Internet Retailer Scheme (AIRS) has now been running for 5 years since its launch on 25 May 2012.

AIRS was developed in response to the general public's concerns about buying veterinary medicines over the internet. The aim of the scheme is to provide assurance to the public and professional keepers of animals, that by purchasing their veterinary medicines from an accredited internet retailer they are:

- buying the medicines from a reputable, UK-based retailer
- at less risk of buying unauthorised, inappropriate or ineffective medicines for their animals
- confident that the retailer meets the requirements of the Scheme and the law

There are now 41 accredited websites operated by 32 businesses and further applications are in the pipeline. Companies whose websites have been accredited are diverse and include some well-known organisations.

An [up to date list of accredited retailers](#) is available.

We have worked closely with retailers to explain the assessment criteria and what changes they need to make to their websites for compliance with both AIRS and the Veterinary Medicines Regulations. Whilst doing this, the VMD has built some very good working relationships with retailers and has gained a better understanding about how internet businesses operate. We have used this information to develop our guidance and to help applicants understand how to meet the accreditation standards.

With the aims of the scheme in mind, we reviewed its requirements in 2016 and made a number of changes, in particular:

- Accreditation is now focussed on the retail supply of authorised veterinary medicines (classes POM-V, POM-VPS and NFA-VPS) only
- Non-medicinal products are no longer included in the assessment. Instead, applicants have to declare that they do not make medicinal claims for non-medicinal products on their websites
- Applicants have to acknowledge that continued accreditation is contingent on a commitment to promptly correct all non-compliances brought to their attention

We believe that these changes have simplified the accreditation process whilst maintaining the appropriate controls on the sale of medicines by internet retailers.

AIRS is open to all UK-based registered veterinary practice premises, registered pharmacies and approved SQP retailers that supply POM-V, POM-VPS and NFA-VPS veterinary medicines online. Membership is voluntary and its free.

Retailers who meet the accreditation criteria display the special 'VMD Accredited Retailer' logo with their unique accreditation number [image of logo]

If you wish to apply to become an AIRS member, [application forms and other guidance is available](#)