

Press release: Justice Minister visits Staffordshire and West Midlands CRC

- Part of an ongoing tour of prisons and probation areas to get to the heart of the daily challenges staff face
- Minister Gyimah thanks staff at Staffordshire and West Midlands Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) for their vital work in delivering major reforms to improve safety and reduce reoffending
- The CRC provides employment and education training, housing and welfare services, and drug rehabilitation – turning offenders away from crime

Justice Minister Sam Gyimah today visited Staffordshire and West Midlands CRC to see the work probation staff are doing to reform offenders and turn their lives around.

The CRC is run by the Reducing Reoffending Partnership – a joint enterprise bringing together the best of the private and voluntary sector. They support and closely monitor offenders, working one-to-one with them to assess and address their needs including accommodation, education, training and employment, drugs and alcohol, and health.

The minister saw staff delivering employment and education training, housing and welfare services, and drug rehabilitation – teaching offenders the tools they need to turn away from crime.

He also met with the CRC CEO, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service's senior contract manager, and the head of performance for the local National Probation Service. They discussed how probation services are being delivered in the Midlands, and the CRC's new operating model, which has seen them go from strength to strength this year.

Speaking after the visit to the CRC, Justice Minister Sam Gyimah said:

Probation officers do a vital job in helping offenders turn their lives around and reduce reoffending.

It was great to meet the team at Staffordshire and West Midlands CRC, and the offenders they support, to see how the work they do helps them lead crime free lives. I was especially pleased to meet their impressive CEO, Chris Blackwell, who is driving forward positive changes which support our reform agenda.

We are committed to improving our probation service and are carrying out a comprehensive review to improve outcomes for offenders and communities.

The CRC provide a Through the Gate service to support prisoners in the run up to, and after, their release from custody. The CRC works closely with the St

Giles Trust to train prisoners to act as role models and encourage fellow offenders to engage with all the services available to them.

Press release: Priti Patel urges end to conflict and man-made famine in South Sudan

This follows an official declaration of famine in some parts of South Sudan in February, in areas which have seen some of the most intense fighting between Government and opposition forces and restrictions on access for humanitarian organisations. With 100,000 people in Unity state at risk of starvation and a million more on the brink, this is the first declaration of famine anywhere in the world for six years.

The Development Secretary told President Kiir of South Sudan that the fighting that was causing the famine – and which has killed tens of thousands of civilians – had to stop and that “conflict could not build the country”. Ms Patel, the first Cabinet Minister to visit the country since South Sudan’s independence ceremony in 2011, also made clear that it was abhorrent that those that the people of South Sudan should be able to look to for protection were also perpetrating human rights abuses that included murder and rape.

During a visit to Leer in northern South Sudan, Ms Patel saw first-hand the impact of the famine. She met families that had lost loved ones and were now relying on life-saving support of UK aid, which is providing food, water and medical supplies to millions in need in the country. She also met church leaders in the country who she argued would be key to securing a lasting peace in the country.

Ms Patel met South Sudanese refugees at Imvepi reception centre and Bidibidi refugee settlement in Yumbe, close to Uganda’s border with South Sudan, which is welcoming in thousands of people a day fleeing violence and famine. There she saw the thousands of people who were arriving from across the border with nothing more than what they could carry and the support UK aid was providing.

International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

“The situation in South Sudan is catastrophic and unbearable. We cannot let food be used as a weapon of war nor can we tolerate attacks on aid workers, who are selflessly trying to deliver lifesaving food, water and medicine.

“The Government of South Sudan and all parties to the conflict must stop the barbaric violence and let aid get through to those in desperate need – this is the only way we can end the suffering of millions of innocent people and stop children dying.

“UK aid is saving lives in South Sudan by delivering urgently needed food, water and medicine. The international community now needs to step up alongside Global Britain to stop famine spreading in South Sudan and help support stability in the region.

“Hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese now call Uganda home and many have faced unimaginable horrors in getting here. We cannot undo the harm that has been done to them, but thanks to UK aid, refugees reaching Uganda are receiving shelter, food, medical care, a measure of safety and the hope for a future.

“This support is helping people who have lost everything stay in the region close to home, so they are not forced to make perilous journeys in search for a better life. This is in everyone’s interest.”

During her three day visit to South Sudan and Uganda, the International Development Secretary saw how UK leadership and support is delivering urgently needed food for people in Leer where over a third of the population have insufficient food and have been surviving by desperate measures, including eating grass and seeds. She also visited a UK aid supported hospital in Juba, South Sudan’s capital, treating malnourished children and met with British troops who are supporting the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

In the whole of South Sudan, almost 5 million face the daily threat of going without enough food and water and 3 million people have been forced from their homes because of ruthless violence and widespread rape.

This is the biggest refugee movement in Central Africa since the 1994 Rwandan genocide and Uganda is now the largest refugee hosting nation in Africa with more than 1,200,000 refugees, of which 834,000 are South Sudanese. Uganda’s Bidibidi refugee settlement recently became the largest refugee hosting centre in the world, with 270,000 refugees despite having opened only less than a year ago.

Uganda has one of the most progressive refugee policies in the world, where refugees are given land, jobs and integrated into communities, giving people fleeing conflict hope for the future.

UK aid has been instrumental in supporting this by rapidly upgrading infrastructure, hospitals and schools on the Ugandan border with South Sudan as well as delivering emergency food, water, shelter and medicine to respond to the influx in refugees.

[International Development Secretary Priti Patel visited Uganda this week, where violence & conflict has led to over a million people fleeing to neighbouring countries like Uganda](#)

Notes to Editors

- The UK was one of the first major donors to respond to the UN’s appeal to South Sudan – pledging in less than 24 hours – and we are leading the

way by making sure millions of people in South Sudan get urgently needed food, water and medicine, as well as longer term support to provide much-needed education.

- We are providing £100 million of humanitarian assistance to South Sudan this year. This will provide food for over 500,000 people, safe drinking water for over 300,000 people, emergency health services for over 100,000 people and support for 650,000 people to build their livelihoods.
- The UK has also matched £10 million of the public donations to the DEC's East Africa appeal which together has raised £50 million in three weeks.
- In the last year, UK aid in Uganda has fed 650,000 people, vaccinated 235,000 children, provided healthcare for 65,000, sheltered 181,000, and provided clean water for 40,000 and essential relief items for 64,000.
- Over half a million new refugees arrived in Uganda in 2016, 88% of them from South Sudan – more than crossed the Mediterranean into Europe. Around 2,200 arrive each day. There have been more than 194,000 arrivals since the start of this year.

Press release: John Millen jailed for 8 months for illegal waste operation

The operator of a waste site in Sittingbourne, Kent has been imprisoned for 8 months for the illegal disposal, sorting and treatment of construction demolition waste.

John Millen, 50, trading as K.M. Millen Grab Hire, received the custodial sentence today (Wednesday 12 April) at Maidstone Crown Court after pleading guilty to using the Gas Road site for illegal waste transfer activities.

The Environment Agency brought charges against Mr Millen following an investigation in December 2014 which established over 40,000 tonnes of waste had been illegally deposited on the site.

Mr Millen was subsequently provided with clear guidance on the action he was required to take and an Enforcement Notice to clear the waste from the site by the end of March 2015 was issued. However, after the three months had expired it was clear that none of the waste had been removed and he continued to crush, treat and deposit waste.

The activities being undertaken by Mr Millen were in clear breach of environmental legislation and would have required an Environmental Permit. Mr Millen did not apply for an appropriate Environmental Permit and continued to operate, avoiding significant costs to his business.

Alan Cansdale, Environment Manager at the Environment Agency said:

Mr Millen was fully aware that he was not allowed to store that amount of waste on the site, but continued to accept more construction and demolition waste whilst ignoring the advice and guidance issued to him by Environment Agency Officers. His actions put the environment at risk.

Waste crime can undermine legitimate businesses, so we work closely with businesses to help them comply with the law. In cases like this, where illegal operations are connected to licensed businesses, we have no hesitation in prosecuting those involved. We want to make sure that waste crime doesn't pay.

Whilst passing sentence, Judge St. John-Stevens said that Mr Millen was the "controlling mind of the business" and he ignored all advice offered from the Environment Agency regarding his business operations

Speech: 54th Special Session of the Executive Council

Thank you, Madam Chair,

The United Kingdom supports the statement made by the Ambassador of Malta on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make a few additional remarks.

It is a matter of huge regret that the Executive Council has to meet in extraordinary session today. This is the latest in a series of meetings the Council has held over the past four years to address the regular use of chemical weapons in Syria. At each meeting the United Kingdom, and many others, has expressed deep concern about continued chemical weapons use in Syria, and about the Syrian Government's failure to account fully for its chemical weapons programme.

What happened in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April was the worst of human acts. As we have heard, at least 72 civilians, including many children, were killed by an attack so awful that many died where they fell. Those facts are not in dispute. This was a war crime. The need to find out who was responsible, and to seek justice for the victims, is the reason we meet here today.

United Kingdom scientists have now analysed samples obtained from Khan Shaykhun. These samples have tested positive for the nerve agent sarin, or a sarin-like substance. The United Kingdom's assessment is that it is highly likely that the Syrian Government was responsible for a sarin attack on Khan Shaykhun on 4 April.

Let me explain why.

There is no evidence to suggest that any party to the conflict in Syria, other than the Syrian Government, has access to a nerve agent such as sarin. Only the Syrian Air Force has the capability to launch a chemical weapons attack from aircraft, and it has already been condemned by this Council for having used chemical weapons deployed from aircraft on at least three occasions in 2014 and 2015.

Other countries have also made assessments. The United Kingdom fully supports the United States action on 6 April, which we believe was an appropriate response to the chemical weapons attack launched by the Syrian Government, and was intended to deter further attacks.

Meanwhile the Syrian Government, and their Russian allies, have told us a simply extraordinary story of an airstrike on a jihadist chemical weapons storage facility on April 4th. We all watched the terrible news footage reporting the early morning attacks in real time, but the Syrians have told us tales of conventional air attacks at midday. Are the Syrians telling us that the people we saw dying last Tuesday morning did so before the attack took place? This is a story which is simply not credible.

Since Syria joined the Convention, in the aftermath of the Ghouta atrocity, the Syrian Government has denied scientific reality and obstructed the truth about the full extent of its chemical weapons programme. Syria and its backers claim that it has destroyed its chemical weapon stockpiles. Yet the Director General has continued to report that the OPCW cannot declare Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons programme as "accurate and complete", and that serious "gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies remain". While the Director General and the Technical Secretariat have worked tirelessly to establish the truth, Syria has failed to reciprocate. The Syrian government has provided limited information, only under pressure and when challenged with evidence that made its position untenable. Syrian engagement with the OPCW has been neither meaningful nor honest. Their supposed cooperation is a facade. The fact that the JIM has found regular Regime use of chemical weapons underscores the fact that Syria has unquestionably failed to account for, and to destroy, its whole chemical weapons programme.

Madam Chair,

It is bad enough that the Syrian government continues to deceive the international community. However, it is shocking that one country, a founding member of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the joint architect of the 2013 agreement to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons programme, is joining them in this deception. We saw last night Russia's 8th veto in the Security Council to protect the Syrian government. The draft resolution

vetoed by Russia condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and called for a full investigation. How any responsible country could object to that, is truly impossible for us to comprehend.

So what is the way forward? It is clear.

We welcome the Director General's statement this morning about the work of the Fact Finding Mission to date. He rightly tasked the FFM to begin its work on the Khan Shaykhun incident within hours of the reports coming in on 4 April. As we all know, the FFM is professional, independent and impartial, and has unparalleled technical expertise. Calls from Syria's allies, and parties to the conflict, to set up alternative investigations and new bodies are absurd. This is a blatant attempt to delay and distract from the essential task at hand. It also seeks to undermine the integrity and impartiality of the OPCW, and is frankly disrespectful to the ideals we share. The priority now is to support the Director General, and the FFM, in their investigation. When the FFM reports in the weeks ahead, the Executive Council should convene again, as we have agreed this morning, and take the necessary action on its findings. That's our responsibility under the Chemical Weapons Convention. And that's our duty to the suffering people of Syria.

[News story: Winners of Pensions Dashboard Techsprint revealed as FinTech Week 2017 draws to a close](#)

The event, hosted at Aviva's Digital Garage in Hoxton, brought together over 20 leading technology firms with consumer groups and industry experts to develop the best ideas for how pension dashboards can revolutionise retirement planning for ordinary pension savers.

Using the Pensions Dashboard prototype unveiled by the Pensions Dashboard Project Group on Wednesday morning as a starting point, the participants worked overnight to develop their ideas.

The winners were:

- Wobi, Sigma, Pension Portal and Pension Hub – the 'Consumer Champion' award for their personal pension timeline combined with life event nudges
- Bravura, MyFuture Now and True Potential – the 'Eureka' and 'People's Choice' awards for their 'Act Your Age' financial age comparison tool
- Digital Space, GBST, NEST, Sprint Enterprise and SSP Advisor – 'Speed-build' award for their 'Lifeline' holistic savings tool incorporating pensions alongside other finances

The TechSprint was part of [FinTech Week 2017](#) which saw thousands of firms, investors, regulators and authorities from around the globe meet in London to celebrate the UK's world leading FinTech industry.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Simon Kirby, said:

I am delighted at the success of FinTech Week 2017. It has been fantastic to see how Britain is leading the way in this crucial sector. I am clear that the government will do everything it can to help firms seize the opportunities FinTech presents as we forge a bold new role for ourselves in the world and build the highly skilled, highly productive economy we all want.

I want to congratulate the TechSprint winners on their fantastic ideas and thank everyone for taking part. It is great to see the potential FinTech has to help consumers now and in the future.

Team 'Act Your Age', the winners of two TechSprint awards, said:

A fantastic event which showed what a group of strangers can achieve in one day if they are collaborative and open. Our approach to give people more information about their pension was to keep it simple – and keep it effective.

FinTech Week 2017 ran from Monday to Thursday with events organised by government, regulators, trade bodies and industry. It underlined the UK's status as the best place in the world to build a FinTech firm and showcased the country's most cutting-edge FinTech firms – and the impact they have on real people.

On Wednesday over 800 people attended the government's first ever International FinTech Conference. Over 100 UK FinTech firms mixed with hundreds of investors from every continent, in a bid to increase investment in the sector.

[Video highlights of the International FinTech Conference 2017](#)

Speakers travelled from far and wide to attend the event, including Adrienne Harris, special assistant to President Obama for economic policy, flying from the United States of America.

The conference featured a series of workshops covering topics like payments, open-banking, how to co-invest with the BBB, roboadvice, cyber security and financial inclusion. It closed with 14 UK firms, including Plum, Disperse and Onfido, pitching directly to hundreds of investors on the main stage.

Opening the International FinTech Conference, Chancellor Philip Hammond highlighted the importance of exciting new sectors like FinTech and artificial intelligence in driving a modern, productive economy.

The Chancellor said:

We can't remain the number one place for FinTech and other technologies of the fourth industrial revolution by simply relying on our ingenuity, talent and openness, we have to go out and get the business.

Responsible for innovations like contactless payments, banking apps and online crowd funding, the sector is worth nearly £7 billion to the UK economy and employs over 60,000 people in the UK.

It is changing the way we bank and, thanks to Britain's entrepreneurial spirit and our world leading financial sector and regulatory environment, independent experts rank the UK as the best place to start and grow a FinTech firm anywhere in the world.

Further information on Pension Dashboard:

- pension dashboards have the potential to revolutionise retirement planning by allowing people to see all of their pension savings in one place
- at the moment there is no easy way for people to see the value of all of their pensions, with people having to track down their data themselves, locate missing records and wait for up to date estimates
- research has shown that over a third of people approaching retirement find it difficult to keep track of their pension pots and there is currently around £400 million worth of pension pots laying unclaimed
- pension dashboards should change this by helping people access their pensions information more easily