

Press release: Homes England backing Samaritans as its new staff charity of the year

[Samaritans](#) provides round-the-clock confidential support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope or at risk of suicide. It offers a safe place to talk about problems without fear of judgement, and meets with Homes England's aim to create a greater awareness of mental health amongst its 750-strong staff.

Sam Gale, Corporate Account Manager at Samaritans, said:

"We are delighted to have been chosen as Homes England's charity for 2019. When someone is feeling overwhelmed, it's vital that they are listened to and supported to work through difficult thoughts and feelings. With our confidential 24-hour service, available 365 days a year, we are often the only place people can turn to, especially when other services are unavailable.

"We look forward to working with Homes England in the communities where its employees are based to raise funding for our service and promote the power of listening. Together, we will save lives."

This will be the second year the government's housing agency has chosen to support a charity in this way, and follows a successful 12 months which saw an impressive £18,400 raised for [Alzheimer's Society](#). Far surpassing their original £10,000 target, staff across Homes England's ten offices took part in a variety of fundraising initiatives; including raffles, bake sales and a host of sporting challenges such as sponsored walks, runs and bicycle rides – with some members of staff taking part in the London Marathon, Three Peaks Challenge and even a sky dive. Alzheimer's awareness sessions also took place throughout the year, alongside Dementia Friends training and creating a network for staff with caring responsibilities.

Hayley Woodyatt, Senior Regional Corporate Partnerships Executive at Alzheimer's Society, said:

"Homes England's achievements over the last 12 months are a testament to their staff and colleagues. They have been innovative with their ideas and have kept people affected by dementia at the heart of everything they do. Not only has this resulted in a phenomenal £18,400 being raised for Alzheimer's Society but they have also taken great efforts to raise awareness of dementia and our work which is just as valuable.

"The money they have raised will help so many people across the UK affected by dementia. By 2021 there will be 1 million people in the UK living with the condition and it is only through the support of individuals and businesses like Homes England that we can unite and take on dementia, together."

Tom Walker, Deputy Chief Executive of Homes England and the agency's staff charity project team lead, added:

"I'm incredibly proud of what has been achieved over the last year for Alzheimer's Society and the remarkable amount of money we've raised, which will make a real difference to the lives of people living with dementia and their families.

"By embracing Dementia Friends training we've also strengthened our understanding of this terrible condition and I'm excited to see what can now be accomplished over the next 12 months for Samaritans."

ENDS

For more information contact Sarah Tucker, PR and Media Officer at Homes England on 020 7393 2261/07970 973134 or email sarah.tucker@homesengland.gov.uk

[News story: War disablement pension rates 2019](#)



The new rates of war pensions and allowances proposed from April 2019 are set out in the [War disablement pension 2018 rates document](#).

The annual uprating of war pensions and allowances for 2019 will take place from the week beginning 8 April 2019.

Published 15 February 2019

Press release: Change of British High Commissioner to Singapore: July 2019



Ms Kara Owen CV0 has been appointed British High Commissioner to the Republic of Singapore.

Ms Kara Owen CV0 has been appointed British High Commissioner to the Republic of Singapore in succession to Mr Scott Wightman CMG who will be transferring to another Civil Service appointment. Ms Owen will take up her appointment in July 2019.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Full name: Kara Owen

Married to: Commandant (Rtd) William Tierney

Children: Two daughters

2016 to present FC0, Director for the Americas
2012 to 2016 Paris, Deputy Head of Mission
2011 FC0, Head of Strategy, Communication and Training Department, Consular Directorate
2009 to 2011 FC0, Assistant Director, Head of Diversity and Equality
2005 to 2009 Hanoi, Deputy Head of Mission
2005 Secondment to the EU as Private Secretary to Head of the Aceh Monitoring Mission, Indonesia
2003 to 2005 FC0, Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary
2001 to 2003 FC0, Assistant Private Secretary to Junior Ministers
2000 FC0, Desk Officer, EU Social Policy, Europe Directorate
1996 to 2000 Hong Kong, Vice Consul (Consular) and then Vice Consul (Political), British Consulate General
1993 to 1995 FC0, Desk Officer, Russia

Further information

[News story: Banks scored on quality of service: latest results published](#)



The measure was introduced by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) after it conducted a market investigation into the banking sector in 2016. The league table style results allow customers to clearly see how their bank compares on quality of service and helps to drive competition between banks to improve the quality of their offering to customers.

Since August 2018, banks have been required to publish information on how likely people would be to recommend their bank – as well its online and mobile banking, branch and overdraft services – to friends, relatives or other businesses, with results being updated every 6 months.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the Competition and Markets Authority, said:

We introduced this survey last August so that people can see exactly how well banks are treating their customers.

If people are unhappy with the customer service they are currently getting, I would encourage them to look at the results and think about switching to a better performing bank.

The results of the survey must be prominently displayed in banks' branches, as well as on their websites and apps.

The latest survey results are available on the following links:

- [personal](#)
- [small business](#)

Press release: “Significant progress” made at 10 of most challenging prisons

- Minister applauds progress of the ‘10 prisons project’ – six months after vowing to resign if violence did not start to fall within a year
- In latest innovation, teams of experienced officers will help build confidence of new recruits and ensure all staff get the basics right
- £10m project aims to reduce violence and drug use while improving decency at 10 of the most challenging prisons

Today (Friday, 15 February), the Prisons Minister announced the latest initiative to drive improvement – Standards Coaching Teams who will support new recruits and ensure good practice is delivered consistently across the jails.

Working on rotation around the 10 prisons, and comprising some of the brightest and best officers from across the estate, the team will provide advice and encouragement to inexperienced officers to build their confidence, particularly in their relationships with prisoners.

The team is also supporting all staff to get the basics right and meet consistently high standards in routine tasks such as cell checks.

Around 60 experienced officers were selected to take up the coaching roles, and recently completed their two-week training course at the Prison Service (HMPPS) training college at Newbold Revel.

It is the latest measure in a £10m initiative to reduce violence and raise standards, which has already seen:

- X-ray body scanners installed – allowing staff to search for drugs and other contraband concealed in people’s bodies
- Scanners installed which can detect invisible traces of drugs, including psychoactive substances, soaked into clothing and paper
- The introduction of Incentivised Substance Free Living units – where offenders willing to lead drug-free lives can access enhanced conditions
- Specialist staff and teams put in place at all 10 prisons, including additional entry searching staff and dog handlers
- Drugs strategy managers established to lead counter-drugs efforts and improve recovery for users
- Refurbished cells and shared areas, and enhanced sanitation, to raise standards of decency
- A ‘drug diagnostic’ visit for each prison to help them understand their

drug issues and how to tackle them

Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said:

In six months these prisons have made significant progress, from tougher security to improved standards of decency, thanks to the tireless work of governors and staff. I am hugely grateful for their efforts.

I have no doubt the Standards Coaching Teams – who I had the privilege to recently see graduate – will make a significant contribution. Their knowledge and experience will be invaluable in driving further improvement.

I promised that I would resign if violence did not start to fall within a year. There is still much to do, and I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge, but the first six months have given us a solid platform from which we can set a more positive direction for all our prisons.

The 10 prisons project was announced in August 2018 to tackle the serious problems facing some of the most challenging prisons in the country.

It has seen the introduction of significant additional security measures to tackle the influx of drugs which fuels violence, as well as investment in leadership and building refurbishment.

The ten prisons will serve as models of excellence for the rest, with good practice to be spread across the prison estate.

Notes to editors:

- Geographical clusters of prisons in Yorkshire, the north Midlands and London were selected for the project, to ensure a targeted approach to tackling the supply of drugs from organised crime in those areas.
- The ten prisons making up the project are: HMP Hull, Humber, Leeds, Lindholme, Moorland, Wealstun, Nottingham, Ranby, Isis and Wormwood Scrubs.