

Scottish Secretary visits Belfast to discuss Union connectivity

News story

On his recent visit to the city Alister Jack met businesses to talk about improving transport links between Northern Ireland and the rest of United Kingdom.



On board the Stena Line Belfast – Cairnryan ferry

On a two-day trip [30 March and 1 April 2022], Mr Jack met Stena Line, logistics companies, transport firms, and businesses who transport goods between Belfast and Scotland.

The poor state of the roads on the Scottish side of the ferry link – in particular the A77 and A75 – is an issue highlighted by Sir Peter Hendy in his recent [Union Connectivity Review](#)

Sir Peter was clear that strengthened transport connections between all parts of the UK are vital to maximise economic growth and jobs. He advocated the creation of 'UKNET' – a strategic transport network spanning the entire United Kingdom. Upgraded roads in South West Scotland would be a key part of that network. Sir Peter recommended offering the Scottish Government new funding to upgrade the A75, and encouraged the Scottish Government to improve the A77.

Secretary of State for Scotland Alister Jack said:

Sir Peter Hendy's Union Connectivity Review highlighted the need for urgent investment in the poor roads in South West Scotland. These are not just local roads serving people in the South West of Scotland. They are crucial arteries linking Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK. They are vital for the transportation of goods in both directions, but are currently not fit for purpose.

My meetings in Belfast will help inform the UK Government response to Sir Peter's review. We have been clear that we want to work with the Scottish Government to make urgent improvements to the A77 and A75.

Meeting the Ulster Scots Agency

The Scottish Secretary also met the [Ulster Scots Agency](#) on his visit, to hear about their community and culture. The Ulster-Scots' identity links Scotland and Northern Ireland, with centuries of shared history. Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis joined him for this part of the visit.

Mr Jack added:

It was a great pleasure to meet the Ulster Scots Agency and members of their community. They have a fascinating history and culture, and I was grateful to them for sharing it with me. It was also real a pleasure to hear the very talented young musicians from Campbell College.

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[UK Minister for Asia visits Laos to boost collaboration on global health, climate change and trade](#)

Press release

UK Minister for Asia, Amanda Milling visited Laos this week (30 March – 2 April).



During her trip, the Minister met Foreign Minister, H.E. Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith and co-chaired the UK-Laos Political Dialogue alongside Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Bounleua Phandanouvong.

The Dialogue covered cooperation on education and health, tackling climate change and COVID-19, as well as addressing regional and global security, including human rights and Russian's invasion of Ukraine.

The Minister also had the opportunity to travel to Xieng Khouang in northern Laos to see first-hand how UK funds are supporting unexploded bomb clearance. She met with the brave teams who carry out the work in the field and risk their lives each day to save others.

Minister for Asia, Amanda Milling, said:

The UK-Laos Political Dialogue has been a great opportunity to discuss how we can strengthen our cooperation and work together to address shared challenges.

I also saw the positive impact the UK has in the region, seeing how our funding is helping clear unexploded bombs in Xieng Khouang province.

This support has meant that land that was once dangerous and unusable can now be used for schools, homes and farming.

While in Vientiane, Minister Milling's meeting with the Minister for Environment covered Laos's target for zero emissions by 2050, and their attendance at COP26.

In her meeting with the Minister for Energy they discussed Laos's plans to transition to more renewable energy, while her talks with the Minister for Health covered Covid-19 and the UK's support in providing vaccines.

Minister Milling met Chevening Alumni to hear about their achievements since returning to Laos and also with British business figures helping to expand commercial ties in the country.

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Health and Social Care Secretary extends cancer call for evidence to April 8

Press release

Call for evidence to inform an ambitious 10-Year Cancer Plan extended to Friday 8 April to ensure everyone has their say



- Cancer is the biggest cause of death from disease in the UK and the government wants to make the country's cancer care system the best in Europe
- Government wants to hear from everyone – especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds who are disproportionately impacted by cancer

More people can share their experiences and views on how the country can lead the world on cancer care, as the Health and Social Care Secretary announces an extension on the cancer call for evidence to inform an ambitious 10-Year Cancer Plan.

Cancer is the biggest cause of death from disease in the UK but it does not affect everyone equally. Black men for example have the highest mortality from prostate cancer and people from Caribbean or Pakistani backgrounds are more likely than white British people to be diagnosed with lung cancer at a later stage, when it is harder to treat.

The government wants to hear from everyone – whether a patient or a friend or family member affected by this disease. Cancer affects some groups in different ways so the government is particularly keen to hear from people from ethnic minority backgrounds to help us improve how we diagnose and treat this disease.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

My father died from cancer and wished he had taken the early signs much more seriously. But unfortunately for him, like so many people from ethnic minority communities, it was detected too late.

No one should feel ashamed in coming forward to their doctor or going to a cancer screening – this is all about making sure you get the care you need and living a longer and healthier life.

We are extending the cancer call for evidence to inform our 10 year Cancer Plan to better understand why people aren't coming forward, how we can improve early diagnosis to save more lives and we need to hear from you. We know disparities exist and I would encourage everyone to share their views on gov.uk by Friday 8 April.

The Health and Social Care Secretary set out his vision to make England a world-leader in cancer care as we learn to live with Covid – with renewed attention paid to innovative treatment and early diagnosis to radically improve outcomes for cancer patients.

Cancer care has improved – in the last 15 years, one-year survival has increased by around 10%. But the pandemic has impacted cancer care with 50,000 fewer cancer diagnoses across the UK during the pandemic.

The government's cancer priorities include:

- increasing the number of people diagnosed at an early stage, where treatment can prove much more effective;
- boosting the cancer workforce;
- tackling disparities and inequalities, including in cancer diagnosis times and ensuring recovery from the pandemic is delivered in a fair way. For instance, the 'Help Us Help You' cancer awareness campaign will be directed towards people from more deprived groups and ethnic minorities;
- intensifying research on mRNA vaccines and therapeutics for cancer – this will be achieved through the UK's global leadership and supporting industry to develop new cancer treatments by combining expertise in cancer immunotherapy treatment and the vaccine capabilities developed throughout the pandemic;
- intensifying research on new early diagnostic tools to catch cancer at an earlier stage; and
- improving prevention of cancer through tackling the big known risk factors such as smoking.

The call for evidence can be found [here](#)

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Published 2 April 2022

Infants, children and families to benefit from boost in support

Thousands of babies, children and families will benefit from a multi-million-pound package which will improve access to support, advice and services from birth through to adulthood.

Ensuring every child is properly supported throughout their life is vital for helping them thrive in future. The government is today (Saturday 2 April) announcing wide-ranging support across its flagship family programmes for those who need extra help to fulfil their potential, levelling up opportunities for children across the country.

To support parents, 75 local authorities have been announced as eligible for a share of £302 million to create new Family Hubs in their areas. These hubs give parents advice on how to take care of their child and make sure they are safe and healthy – providing services including parenting and breastfeeding support.

To further support children in their early years, £100 million of this funding will be shared among eligible areas to roll out bespoke parent-infant relationship and perinatal mental health support. Early intervention helps to improve children's mental health and life outcomes, which is why this investment is an important step to better support the first few years of a child's life.

A safe and stable home life is also vital for children's future life chances, so the government is increasing its support for families who face multiple disadvantages and may need extra help to overcome the challenges they face.

Through its [Supporting Families](#) programme, 300,000 of the most vulnerable families will receive help from a dedicated keyworker who will offer practical assistance, such as hands-on parenting support – backed by £700 million. Among those who have been supported by the programme, young people are 38% less likely to end up in prison and 32% less likely to end up in care.

For those children who do grow up in care, and often face multiple challenges without the family support network that others take for granted, the government will provide extra help as they leave the care system and transition to independence. Backed by £172 million, care leavers will be able to access practical advice on housing, finance and employment.

These announcements come just ahead of the Easter holidays, when hundreds of thousands of children from low-income families will also benefit from the government's [Holiday Activities and Food programme](#) which provides them with a healthy meal and an enriching activity to help them thrive.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

If we are to level up outcomes for children facing the biggest challenges, this needs to start at home. Being part of a stable, loving family gives a child an early advantage, which is why we are investing so significantly in helping every family to access the vital services that help them and their children thrive.

Evidence shows that some of the most disadvantaged families don't access vital services. Family Hubs offer localised early help and intervention, from early years support to parenting classes, all of which can make a transformative difference in the lives of parents and carers who may not have a support network.

We also have a responsibility to protect young people leaving care, to play our role fully as their corporate parent when their birth parents are unable. This funding will provide them with personal support and guidance as they embark on adult life and contribute fully to their own communities.

New research published this week shows that last summer (2021) alone, almost three-quarters of a million children benefitted from fun activities and healthy food through the HAF programme. Of these, 616,000 children took up a free, government-funded place, for those who are either eligible for free school meals or considered by the local authority to be in need of this provision. Clubs around the country targeted disadvantaged young people to benefit their health and wellbeing, and 70 per cent of those surveyed had never before been to this kind of free summer holiday provision.

An additional £3.2 million in 2022-23 will help councils to prevent care leavers from sleeping rough as part of the Government's manifesto commitment to eradicate rough sleeping by the end of parliament. The funding will allow councils to appoint specialist homelessness prevention advisers to provide intensive support to care leavers at highest risk of rough sleeping, as well as homeless prevention coordinators to improve the range and quality of accommodation options available to care leavers.

Minister for Levelling Up Communities, Kemi Badenoch said:

Stable and secure families are the bedrock of society. We want vulnerable families to get the right support at the right time to stop problems from escalating.

We've seen the significant impact the Supporting Families programme has had on families right across the country over the past decade and with the additional funding we're providing, even more vulnerable families will be able to get the help they need.

This is in line with the work set out in our Inclusive Britain strategy, which will help create a country where a person's race, social or ethnic background is no barrier to achieving their ambitions.

Today's announcement follows a package of major reforms to education, health and care announced earlier this week, through the Schools White Paper and the Green Paper on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision. Taken together, these aim to transform the future of education so that every child, no matter their background, gets an excellent education.

Minister for Health, Maria Caulfield said:

The 1,001 critical days from pregnancy to the age of two are crucial for development and impact a child's health for the rest of their life.

I'm committed to ensuring every child has the best start in life to enable them to reach their full potential – that's why we're Building Back Fairer and ensuring 75 local authorities with disproportionately poor health and educational outcomes will be eligible for additional funding to support families earlier and offer specialised help locally.

Everyone should have a solid foundation on which to build their health and we are determined to tackle health disparities by levelling up the opportunities for children, no matter their background or where they grow up.

Government Advisor and Chair of the Early Years Review, Dame Andrea Leadsom said:

It is during the 1001 critical days from conception to age two that the building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health are laid down. Providing joined up support for every parent and carer will be truly transformational in helping every baby get the best start for life.

Andrea King, Director of Clinical Division, Anna Freud Centre said:

We warmly welcome the additional investment from the Government into the continuing implementation of family hubs across England. It will provide much needed funds to support local children's services leaders to collaborate and co-design support for some of our most vulnerable children and families, through the delivery of family hubs.

By working within communities and alongside children's services, family hubs are able to deliver early intervention and support services when the need arises. This funding will provide thousands of children and young people with more opportunity to fulfil their potential.

The measures set out today demonstrate work across government to make sure families get the best start in life, ahead of the recommendations due this spring from the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#).

Funding for young people leaving social care will see several targeted support programmes continue for the next three years. These include:

- **£99.8 million for Staying Put** Funding for local authorities will help care leavers stay with their foster families after they turn 18, potentially through to their 21st birthday. It means care leavers can continue to benefit from a stable and secure family setting, and prepare for independence at a more gradual pace, allowing them to lean on the supportive, nurturing family network.
- **£36 million for the Staying Close programme** More care leavers will be supported to live near their former children's home with support from a trusted adult – providing stability and a safety net into adulthood.
- **£36.4 million for Personal Advisors** These advisors support care leavers up to age 25, helping them navigate services such as housing, health or benefits and providing practical or emotional support to help them prepare for the challenges of living independently.

The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme is jointly overseen by the Department for Health and Social Care and the Department of Education. Announcing the eligible 75 LAs is only the first step in delivering the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. We will work with the eligible LAs on the detailed programme requirements and will provide further detail to the sector in due course.

The £302 million for the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme includes:

- £100 million for bespoke parent-infant relationship and perinatal mental health support,
- £82 million to create a network of Family Hubs, improving access to a wide range of integrated support services for families with children aged 0-19,
- £50 million to establish breastfeeding support services,
- £50 million to fund evidence-based parenting programmes,
- £10 million to support local authorities to publish a clear 'Start for Life offer,' and

- A further £10 million to trial innovative start for life workforce models.

The package also includes £10 million to enable five local authorities to trial and evaluate innovative workforce models, investing in developing the modern, skilled workforce that we need to support babies and families.

The 75 local authorities (LAs) eligible for Family Hubs will be contacted and provided with further details on next steps.

They include: Barking and Dagenham, Barnsley, Bedford Borough, Birmingham, Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Bolton, Bradford, Brent, Bristol, Calderdale, Camden, Cornwall, Coventry, Croydon, Derby, Doncaster, Dudley, Durham, East Sussex, Enfield, Gateshead, Greenwich, Hackney, Halton, Haringey, Hartlepool, Hounslow, Isle of Wight, Islington, Kent, Kingston Upon Hull, Knowsley, Lambeth, Leicester, Lewisham, Lincolnshire, Liverpool, Luton, Manchester, Medway, Middlesbrough, Newcastle upon Tyne, Newham, Norfolk, North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, North Northamptonshire, Northumberland, Nottingham, Oldham, Peterborough, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Redcar and Cleveland, Rochdale, Rotherham, Salford, Sandwell, Sheffield, South Tyneside, Southampton, Southwark, St. Helens, Stoke-on-Trent, Sunderland, Tameside, Telford and Wrekin, Thurrock, Torbay, Tower Hamlets, Wakefield, Walsall, Waltham Forest, and Wolverhampton.

The [Family Hubs – Growing Up Well project](#) is part of the government's commitment to champion family hubs. The Department is seeking to recruit up to six LAs to partner with them to support Beta testing and implementation of the information-sharing digital solutions.

An annual report of the [Supporting Families programme 2021-2022](#) includes an update on the programme's performance and a summary of the latest research findings.

There is also a suite of updated programme guidance for local authorities and their partners. These set out our refreshed expectations on what we want to achieve for families and provide the tools to deliver an early help system that is seamless, responsive, and offers co-ordinated preventative support.

Between 2012-2015, the Troubled Families Programme supported almost 120,000 families to improve their lives. The eligibility criteria and delivery model was updated in 2015 and since then the programme has supported over 470,000 families to build brighter futures. However, due to these changes, these outcome figures are not directly comparable.