

Shadow Cabinet appointments

Ian Lavery and Andrew Gwynne are appointed joint National Elections and Campaign Coordinators for the Labour Party.

Jon Trickett is appointed Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office and will remain Shadow Lord President of the Council.

Ends

News story: Britain and Cyprus Step Up Defence Co-Operation

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon and Cypriot Defence Minister Christoforos Fokaides signed a Defence Co-operation Programme in the capital Nicosia today, agreeing to closer working.

Building on the agreement signed last year, the Ministers agreed that the key regional partners would now work closely across Special Forces, counter terrorism, Crisis Response, intelligence, Air Defence, hybrid warfare and cyber.

Improved Maritime Search and Rescue co-operation will be a particular focus, and during his visit Sir Michael offered Cyprus the chance to display alongside the international community at Royal International Air Tattoo 2017 and reviewed opportunities for naval personnel exchanges.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Britain is stepping up its global role and Cyprus is a key partner in promoting European security and stability.

We have now committed to strengthen our defence partnership with greater co-operation in areas such as counter terrorism, maritime security, and crisis response.

The Defence Secretary also announced the continuing commitment to train senior Cypriot Officers at the Royal College of Defence Studies together with other training being opened up on the Advanced Command and Staff Course.

While in Cyprus, Sir Michael visited the Zenon Joint Rescue Coordination Centre, on the island's south coast. Extending the Republic of Cyprus' crisis response capability, the centre incorporates modern maritime surveillance and warning systems and is central to Cyprus's efforts to tackle illegal human trafficking.

Sir Michael's visit comes at an important time for Cyprus, following the UN-facilitated talks held in Geneva in January, and as negotiations continue towards a solution to the long-standing Cyprus issue. The Defence Secretary confirmed that as a Guarantor Power, the UK will do whatever necessary to secure a settlement and our priority is for both sides to find an agreement allowing each community to feel secure.



Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon met UK Armed Forces personnel at RAF Akrotiri during the visit. Crown Copyright.

The Defence Secretary also took the opportunity to thank the Cypriot Minister for their support to Op Shader, with British aircraft operating from RAF Akrotiri, and Cyprus' own contribution including to the foreign fighters part of the campaign. Sir Michael visited RAF Akrotiri, meeting with 903 Expeditionary Airwing later in the day.

Since Sir Michael's last visit in September last year, the RAF has attacked 330 further terrorist targets in and around Mosul, working in the closest possible cooperation with the brave Iraqi troops.

[Green Party condemns Boris Johnson's push to keep selling arms to Saudi Arabia after bombing](#)



Green Party

10 February 2017

The Green Party is horrified by the revelation Boris Johnson urged the UK to continue selling weapons to Saudi Arabia after a funeral bombing in Yemen last October [1].

The airstrike, on October 8 last year, claimed the lives of 140 people. A UN report concluded the attack had breached international humanitarian law [2].

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said:

“These letters reveal Boris Johnson’s stunning disregard for human rights. He went out of his way to ensure arms were sold to a brutal, oppressive regime knowing full well such weapons had previously been used to kill innocent Yemenis and could be again. Johnson has shown utter contempt not just for the 140 people who lost their lives in the Sana’a bombing but also for the people whose lives he put at risk with this terrible decision.

“Britain should stop selling arms to Saudi Arabia immediately. UK weapons must not be used to violate international law and human rights.”

Notes:

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/10/boris-johnson-urged-uk-to-continue-saudi-arms-sales-after-funeral-bombing>
2. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-saudi-un-idUSKCN12K2F1>

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An arbitrary cap on the number of children the Government will support is not only cruel, but is bad policy – Abrahams

Debbie

Abrahams MP, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, commenting on a letter from the Social Security Advisory Committee addressing the Government's policy to limit child tax credits to two children, said:

"The Social Security Advisory Committee is right to raise very serious concerns over Tory plans to limit child tax credits to two children.

"An arbitrary cap on the number of children the Government will support is not only cruel, but is bad policy.

"Requiring survivors of rape to justify themselves in this way constitutes an unacceptable extension by the Government into deeply sensitive areas of women's lives.

"That's why Labour is calling on the Tories to scrap this pernicious policy before it takes effect in April."

ENDS

Greens, Disabled People Against Cuts and bereaved mother call for inquiry into deaths of benefit claimants



Green Party

10 February 2017

The Green Party, Disabled People Against Cuts and a mother whose son died after his benefits were cut have called on the Government to launch an independent inquiry into the deaths of benefit claimants.

An letter [1] to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Damian Green MP, calls on the Department for Work and Pensions to launch an independent inquiry into the methods used to assess benefit claimants and their entitlements, to determine “whether these procedures are fair and proper or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of claimants”.

The Green Party has also compiled a dossier listing 50 people who died while claiming benefits. The dossier includes the death of Mark Wood, whose mother Jill Gant co-signed the letter to Damian Green.

Wood starved to death in 2013, aged 44. A doctor had said Wood, who had Asperger’s syndrome, obsessive compulsive disorder and mental health problems, was completely unfit to work. Yet despite this Wood was found fit for work and his benefits were cut, forcing him to survive on about £40 per week. Four months later he was found dead, weighing just 35kg. [2]

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party, said:

“It is unacceptable that in the fifth richest country in the world people are starving to death, like Mark Wood, or taking their own lives, as Michael O’Sullivan did, because their benefits have been cut. The social security system should be an ally, not an enemy of those who need help.

“Britain is a caring nation. We should be proud to look after each other and take every measure possible to ensure people receive the support they need – starting with an independent inquiry into the deaths of benefit claimants.”

Mags Lewis, disabled spokesperson for the Green Party, said:

“We urgently need an independent inquiry into the deaths of people receiving benefits to find out if the methods used by the Department of Work and Pensions to assess claimants are fair or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of some of claimants.

“Until this has taken place it is impossible to feel confident that lessons have been learned from the tragic loss of those who have already died while claiming benefits – or that others will be kept safe in the future.”

Linda Burnip, co-founder of Disabled People Against Cuts, said:

" As the UK Government has been found guilty by the UN of committing grave and systematic violations of disabled people's human rights we feel a public inquiry into deaths which have been linked to the discredited Work Capability Assessment regime must urgently be initiated by the government and Department for Work and Pensions."

Jill Gant, mother of Mark Wood, who starved to death four months after his benefits were cut off in 2013, said:

"I believe an enquiry is absolutely essential because the Work Capability Assessment is not fit for purpose for the most vulnerable, particularly those with mental health problems, like my son Mark who died of starvation aged 44 because his benefits were stopped."

Notes:

1.

The Green Party
The Biscuit Factory
Room 202, A Block
100 Clements Road
London
SE16 4DG

The Rt Honourable Damian Green MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to ask you to launch an independent inquiry into the deaths of people receiving benefits. Such an inquiry should be tasked with examining the methods used to assess claimants and their entitlements. It should determine whether these procedures are fair and proper or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of some of claimants – who have the highest support needs which should be met by society.

As the evidence continues to mount that this is the case, The Green Party has compiled a dossier highlighting the stories of fifty individuals who died since 2008, and where there is good reason to believe their treatment at the hands of your department has been a factor in their deaths.

Treatment such as the suspension of benefits to David Clapson who went on to die just three weeks later from diabetic ketoacidosis, after the fridge used to store his insulin stopped working when he couldn't afford to top up his electricity card. Many of these fifty examples cases coroners, in their verdicts, have expressed grave concern about the methods employed by your

department.

We want to ensure that all pertinent questions have been asked, and that any relevant lessons have been learned. At present it is impossible to feel confident this is the case.

The more time passes without an inquiry, the longer concerns will remain and questions will hang over the procedures used by your department to handle benefits. We urge you to use your power to end that uncertainty.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party

Mags Lewis, disability spokesperson for the Green Party

Linda Burnip, co-founder of Disabled People Against Cuts

Jill Gant, mother of Mark Wood, who starved to death four months after his benefits were cut off in 2013.

2.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/mark-wood-sweet-and-gentle-44-year-old-man-with-mental-health-problems-starved-to-death-after-9161749.html>

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