

President of India presents Gallantry Awards

The President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee presented Gallantry Awards and Distinguished Service Decorations today (March 20, 2017) at a Defence Investiture Ceremony held at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Press release: Prisons and Courts Bill to improve access to justice and better protect the vulnerable

Plans to revolutionise the courts to make them more straightforward and efficient, and deliver swifter justice for victims, will be outlined by the Justice Minister Sir Oliver Heald QC today.

The Prisons and Courts Bill, which also contains a range of measures to help boost the reform of our prisons, will be debated by MPs in the House of Commons this week (week commencing 20 March 2017).

Measures in the ground-breaking Prisons and Courts Bill will mean that more cases can be progressed securely online and through video and telephone conferencing, eradicating the need for many administrative hearings to take place in the traditional courtroom setting and reducing the need for travel.

To ensure justice is also open and seen to be done, video booths will be installed in courts across England and Wales to allow members of the media and public to observe virtual hearings from court buildings anywhere in the country. Lists and results of cases that have taken place online, as well as those concluded in a physical courtroom, will also be available digitally.

Justice Minister Sir Oliver Heald QC said:

Britain has the best justice system in the world, but it should also be the most modern. Victims and the most vulnerable are at the centre of our changes, which will help deliver swifter and more certain justice for all.

We want courts that are efficient and fit-for-purpose, with facilities across the entire estate that are modern, user-friendly, and work in favour of our hard-working and dedicated judges and magistrates.

The Prisons and Courts Bill underpins this vision – building on the good progress we have already made in improving the experience of all users and cementing our reputation for global legal excellence so victims get the justice they deserve as quickly as possible.

The Prisons and Courts Bill proposes an extension to the use of video links and virtual hearings which allow victims to take part in cases without having to meet their alleged attacker face-to-face.

Under our virtual hearings measures a further 60,000 pre-trial hearings in the magistrates' court and 17,000 contested bail hearings can also take place by video, along with 30,000 pre-trial hearings in the crown court. This will save around 34,000 hours of courtroom time. Proposals to introduce online convictions for some limited offences will also benefit the courts. Potentially around 8,000 offences – including 7,000 cases of people travelling without a train and tram ticket, and a further 1,300 cases of people fishing without a licence – could be handled online, taking away the need to be in a courtroom.

Bill measures will also mean around 420,000 summary and triable either way offences can be progressed without the need for administrative hearings to take place in a court. For example, offenders will be able to enter a plea online reducing the need to go to court until they need to attend trial or a hearing where they can be sentenced.

Discussions between the court and legal representatives about issues such as trial location will be able to take place via email or telephone or video conferencing, instead of being in a courtroom.

The government is also removing the requirement for indictable only offences to have a 'first appearance' in the magistrates' court, instead sending those cases straight to the crown court.

The Prisons and Courts Bill underpins our investment of over £1 billion for a modern justice system. The government is investing over £850 million to modernise and digitise the courts, and preserve the full majesty of the physical courtroom for cases that require it, in addition to around £250 million to deliver a fully connected criminal courtroom. This will result in savings of £252 million a year for the taxpayer.

We will move from too many underused and badly maintained buildings to fewer, better buildings with modern facilities. More modern and robust technology will be put in place in courts, such as Wi-Fi, modern telephony and screens for sharing evidence, to make the lives of our excellent judiciary and legal professional users easier.

The Prisons and Courts Bill also provides courts with the power to put an end to domestic violence victims being cross-examined by their alleged attackers in the family courts, calling time on what the Justice Secretary has described as a "humiliating and appalling" practice.

Car insurance premiums will also be cut by around £40 a year, with new fixed

tariffs capping whiplash compensation pay-outs and a ban on claims without medical evidence, helping to crack down on the compensation culture epidemic.

In addition, the legislation sets in law for the first time that a key purpose is to reform offenders as they are punished for the crimes they have committed.

Notes to editors

1. [The Bill](#) was introduced on 23 February 2017. Follow its progress on the Parliament website.
 2. Recent announcements:
 3. [Impact assessments](#)
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[Green lies on referendum re-run exposed](#)

20 Mar 2017



The Greens' election manifesto will be deemed a "lie" if the party sides with the SNP in backing a second independence referendum, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

A series of remarks from the party and its "co-convener" Patrick Harvie have revealed a massive u-turn in recent months.

The information was compiled by the Scottish Conservatives ahead of a two-day Holyrood debate on whether or not there should be a second independence referendum.

Following the No vote of 2014, Mr Harvie said Scotland should "live with" the result and "find ways to work together".

A month later, he added the country should "move beyond" the independence debate, and failing to do so would be "damaging".

The Greens also set out in their Holyrood manifesto that one million people should have to sign a petition, and that public demand should be "irresistible", before another vote was called.

In May last year, Mr Harvie said there would be "little point" in revisiting the poll unless opinion had shifted "markedly".

Most tellingly, the manifesto stated: "If a new referendum is to happen, it should come about by the will of the people, and not be driven by calculation

of party political advantage.”

However, since the turn of the year, the Greens’ position has completely changed.

The party’s own campaign, under the banner of Yes 2, has already begun, while just two months ago Mr Harvie said the independence option “has to remain on the table”.

The Greens’ vote is expected to be crucial, with their MSPs compensating for the lack of an SNP majority.

Scottish Conservative MSP Annie Wells said:

“The Greens like to think they’re a bit different, and above the idea of manifesto pledges and hypocrisy.

“But they aren’t, and these wild contradictions expose that.

“They were elected on a promise they would only back another referendum if the people wanted it.

“But that now looks like a lie, and it will be confirmed as such if they back the SNP on holding another unwanted and divisive referendum.”

After the referendum, Patrick Harvie said that Scots would have to ‘live with’ and ‘move beyond’ the result

- **Harvie said that Scotland would have to ‘live with’ the referendum result.** ‘I knew whatever the result Scotland would have to live with it, and find ways to work together. That’s not always easy for people with passionately held opposing views, and it’s only possible when we see and acknowledge each other’s humanity. Now the result is in, there are many bitterly disappointed Yes campaigners around the country. There’s also more than a little glee on the No side. Well OK, fair enough; they feel the need to celebrate and I’ve no doubt I would too if the position was reversed’ (*Daily Record*, 20 September 2014, [link](#)).
- **He said that we have to ‘move beyond’ the referendum result and that it would ‘damaging’ to ‘obsessively focus’ on people being Yes and No voters.** ‘There are many people who are still very proud of being part of the 45 per cent who voted Yes. And there are some who are finding it difficult to accept it wasn’t a win. But I think it’s important to say that this dividing line between the 45 per cent and the 55 per cent is one that we are going to have to move beyond. Focusing too much on that is going to become increasingly meaningless. That dividing line is one that isn’t relevant for us as individuals anymore and it isn’t helpful for the party and I think it would be damaging for Scotland as well to obsessively focus on that dividing line for the future.’ (*Daily Record*, 12 October 2014, p11).

The Greens said that a future referendum should be reliant on 1 million people signing a petition rather than political parties doing a deal behind 'closed doors'

- **Patrick Harvie said that a second independence referendum should wait until public demand for another one is 'irresistible'.** 'Any government that wants to put another referendum forward to win it, would be well advised to wait until the public demand from outside of the pro-independence movement is irresistible. I don't want to scrape by with 51 per cent. I want a clear and decisive choice to be made. If we went into another referendum right now that wouldn't happen.' (*Common Space*, 28 May 2015, [link](#)).
- **In a statement on a second referendum, the Greens asserted that the timing of a referendum should be based on 'public appetite' and they cited 1 million people signing a petition as a way of showing this.** 'The timing of the referendum should be determined by public appetite: Scotland should decide, when Scotland wants to decide.... In assessing public appetite for a second referendum we will respect new kinds of citizen-led initiatives – for example, a call for a referendum signed by up to 1 million people on the electoral register.' (*Scottish Greens*, 18 September 2015, [link](#)).
- **Patrick Harvie demanded that the public be responsible for calling another independence referendum, not political parties 'carving up a deal behind closed doors'.** 'The question of independence may well be put again, but let's say that the people of Scotland are in charge of that. We propose a citizens' initiative so that it is the public who say when they are ready for that question to be put, not political parties carving up a deal behind closed doors.' (*STV*, 10 October 2015, [link](#)).
- **He said there would be 'little point' in a second referendum unless opinion shifted 'markedly'.** *The Scotsman* reported that 'Harvie said there would be 'little point' in having another referendum unless opinion had shifted 'markedly' towards independence. 'Will that happen? I hope so, I don't know'. (*The Scotsman*, 14 May 2016, [link](#)).
- **The manifesto on which Scottish Green MSPs were elected said that another referendum should be called on the 'will of the people' rather than the 'calculations of party political advantage'.** It had no other triggers for Green support for a second referendum. 'Citizens should be able to play a direct role in the legislative process: on presenting a petition signed by an appropriate number of voters, citizens should be able to trigger a vote on important issues of devolved responsibility. As we proposed on the one year anniversary of the Independence Referendum, this is the Scottish Greens' preferred way of deciding to hold a second referendum on Independence. If a new referendum is to happen, it should come about by the will of the people, and not be driven by calculations of party political advantage' (*Scottish Green Manifesto 2016*, p36, [link](#)).
- **Patrick Harvie said that Brexit would not be the 'strongest context' to convince Scots to vote for independence.** 'Greens support independence. I

don't think we're ever going to argue against that position. What I have argued is that those on the pro-independence side who have almost seemed to be relishing the prospect of that Brexit scenario would be well advised to think carefully. I don't think it's the strongest context within which to continue to build the case that convinces those who weren't convinced of independence. I've no doubt at all that if that scenario takes place, there will be many who will demand another referendum. But I suspect they will already be the people who were convinced in 2014. They won't be the kind of people who felt uncertain in 2014 and those are the people that independence advocates need to engage with.' (*Herald Scotland*, 10 May 2016, [link](#)).

Now the Greens have broken their own promises by doing background deals with the SNP on a second referendum with little public appetite.

- **Last summer, Patrick Harvie and Sturgeon had a backroom meeting on a second referendum.** An SNP spokesperson said 'The plans for the SNP's new initiative on independence have had to take account of the EU referendum outcome. However, our campaign will be launched before the end of the summer recess and we look forward to working with others across the Yes movement to build majority support for independence.' (*The National*, 17 August 2016, [link](#)).
 - **The Greens have already begun to campaign under the banner of 'Yes 2' and would do so 'regardless of what the SNP is doing'.** A party spokesperson said 'Ahead of our conference in October we will be announcing to our members proposals for relaunching the Green Yes campaign.' (*Express Online*, 10 August 2016, [link](#)).
 - **Harvie is pushing for a second referendum to be held in March 2018.** 'What's been very clear is that the option needs to remain on the table, and we support that. That means the legislation to allow Holyrood to make that decision has to be progressed this year... I think a reasonable guess at the moment might be that if Scotland chooses to have this question put again, if the UK chooses to dig its heels in and refuses to respect the way that Scotland voted to remain in the EU, then maybe at some point round about the halfway mark of the two-year Brexit negotiation period, or not long after that halfway mark, we might need to be in a position to put that question to the public. (*Herald Scotland*, 13 January 2017, [link](#)).
 - **Recent polling has shown that over two thirds of Scots are against a second referendum.** A BMG poll for Mev Brown of 1,009 adults carried out between 23 and 27 February found that, when don't knows are removed only, 33 per cent of Scots support a second referendum (*Daily Express*, 6 March 2017, [link](#)).
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Britain is about to embark on the most complex and important negotiations since World War II. This a hugely significant moment for the whole country – Keir Starmer

Keir

Starmer MP, Labour's Shadow Brexit Secretary, commenting on reports that Theresa May will trigger Article 50 on March 29, said:

“Britain

is about to embark on the most complex and important negotiations since World War II, so this a hugely significant moment for the whole country.

“Theresa

May has repeatedly said that she wants to build a national consensus on Brexit,

but it is increasingly clear she has failed to do so. Britain is now more divided at home and isolated abroad.

“It

is also extraordinary that the Prime Minister has failed to provide any certainty about her plans for Brexit or to prepare for the clear dangers of not reaching a deal with the EU.

“Labour

will hold the Prime Minister to account all the way, and argue for a Brexit deal that puts jobs, the economy and living standards first.”

Press release: Foreign Secretary appoints new GCHQ Director

Today Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson announced that Jeremy Fleming has been appointed to succeed Robert Hannigan as Director GCHQ, with the agreement of the Prime Minister.

Jeremy Fleming has been Deputy Director General of MI5 since 2013. He will succeed Robert Hannigan, who announced in January his decision to step down once a successor was in place. He will take up his post around Easter. The

appointment was made following a recruitment process chaired by National Security Adviser Sir Mark Lyall Grant.

Announcing the appointment, the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said

Jeremy Fleming is a dedicated public servant whose work over two decades in the intelligence services has helped to keep our country safe. I congratulate Jeremy on his appointment as Director of GCHQ at an important time for the service. I know that he will continue the excellent work of Robert Hannigan in leading this outstanding organisation, when the skill and ingenuity of the UK intelligence community are critical to defending Britain from cyber attacks, terror plots and other activities that threaten us and our allies.

National Security Adviser Sir Mark Lyall Grant said:

Jeremy Fleming emerged from a strong and competitive field as the outstanding candidate to become the next Director, GCHQ. He is a national security professional of the highest standard, who is widely respected across the national security community, in the UK and overseas. I would also like to thank Robert Hannigan for his excellent leadership of GCHQ over the last 3 years, including for the important role he played in preparations for the 2017 Investigatory Powers Act and in the setting up of the National Cyber Security Centre.

New GCHQ Director, Jeremy Fleming said:

It is a great privilege to be asked to lead GCHQ as it approaches its centenary in 2019. The organisation has a distinguished past and an increasingly important role to play in keeping Britain safe in the digital age. From managing cyber risks posed by nation states to preventing terror attacks, keeping our children safe online and supporting our Armed Forces, the exceptional men and women of GCHQ operate on the new frontline of global challenges.

I'd like to pay tribute to Robert Hannigan, who over the last few years has led GCHQ through the transformation of some of our most important national security capabilities. I look forward to building on his legacy and in particular, the role he has played in increasing the transparency of GCHQ's crucial work and in expanding its cyber mission through the work of the National Cyber Security Centre.

Outgoing GCHQ Director, Robert Hannigan said:

I'm delighted that the Foreign Secretary has appointed Jeremy Fleming to be the new Director. I've known Jeremy for many years and he is a great friend and colleague. He comes with deep intelligence experience and expertise.

Notes to editors

- **Jeremy Fleming biography:** Jeremy Fleming joined government from the private sector in 1993. He is a career MI5 officer with significant professional experience of national security and intelligence work, including international and Northern Ireland counter-terrorism, counter-espionage, cyber, and protective security. Jeremy joined the Board of MI5 in 2005 with responsibility for Technology. He was seconded to the Home Office in 2007 to be the Director of Strategy for the newly formed Office for Counter Terrorism and led on the revision of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST. On return to MI5, he became the Director for intelligence Collection, overseeing a significant uplift in digital capabilities. He was promoted to Assistant Director General in 2011 and led MI5's preparations for the London 2012 Olympics. Jeremy was appointed Deputy Director General of MI5 in April 2013, with responsibility for the agency's core operational work. He has played a lead role in shaping the organisation to disrupt the changing face of the threat from terrorist groups and hostile state actors.
- All questions should be directed to GCHQ press office: 01242 221461 ext 33847; pressoffice@gchq.gsi.gov.uk

Further information