

Press release: New Charity Inquiry: Hindu Community Society

The Charity Commission has opened a statutory inquiry into Hindu Community Society ([1136595](#)), a charity which exists to promote charitable purpose for the benefit of the Tamil community in Coventry, particularly by advancing the Hindu religion.

The Commission has serious regulatory concerns regarding the management and governance of the charity. Despite being previously included in a class inquiry in 2017 for failing to file its financial accounts, the charity's trustees have failed for the sixth consecutive year to submit the charity's annual financial information on time. Despite repeated reminders from the Commission in relation to its accounts for the financial year end 2016, 2017 and 2018, the trustees remain in continued breach of their legal duties.

Additional concerns arose around the potential loss of £500,000 of charity funds spent on a leased property, from which the trustees were subsequently evicted. The Commission also has concerns about potential private benefit arising from payments made to trustees for employment within the charity.

The Commission therefore opened a new statutory inquiry on 14 June 2017 to examine serious concerns of potential misconduct and mismanagement at the charity. The Commission has been unable to announce or progress its investigation before now so as to avoid prejudicing a separate HMRC investigation into the Charity. HMRC's investigation has now closed.

The Commission's inquiry will now examine:

- the extent to which the trustees are complying with their legal duties to administer, govern and manage the charity, in particular;
 - their compliance with legal obligations to prepare and file the charity's annual financial information
 - the extent to which the trustees have complied with previously issued regulatory guidance
- the extent to which a properly appointed board of trustees is exercising proper and adequate oversight of the charity's affairs, in particular;
 - whether the trustees have avoided or adequately managed potential conflicts of interest and;
 - whether there has been any direct or indirect benefit
- the trustees' decision making with regards to expenditure on property leased by the charity

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. Reports of previous inquiries by the Commission are available on [GOV.UK](#).

Ends

Notes to Editors

- The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales; our role is to regulate charity trustees' compliance with the charity law framework.
 - The Commission has not made any conclusions and the opening of the inquiry is not a finding of wrongdoing.
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Press release: International Trade Secretary visits Iceland to promote trade continued investment in UK

The International Trade Secretary is visiting Iceland today (Friday 10 May) to promote trade with the UK.

Dr Liam Fox will meet Minister for Foreign Affairs Gudlaugur Thórdarson to discuss how to increase trade between the two countries and ensure continued investment into each other's economies.

He will meet a number of Icelandic business that invest in the UK. This includes bionic limb-manufacturer Ossur, who employ 50 people in research, development and manufacturing at their sites in Manchester and Livingston.

He will also visit Arctic Trucks who engineer and design 4x4 vehicles for extreme conditions at their site in Warwick.

The UK and Iceland have a long history of investment in each other's economies. Trade between the UK and Iceland was worth £1.5 billion in 2018, with major exports of British machinery and vehicles worth £487 million.

There are significant commercial opportunities for UK companies and British experts are expected to work alongside their Icelandic counterparts, playing a vital role in the project management, design and construction of major infrastructure projects.

Dr Fox will meet the Icelandic Airport Authority to discuss the planned expansion and development of Keflavik international airport over the next seven years. This is expected to provide opportunities for British experts with vast experience in major airport expansions including in Beijing, Dubai, Singapore and New York to work with Icelandic firms.

International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox, said:

The UK and Iceland have a long history of friendship and trade.

We are mutual champions of free trade and, as we leave the European Union, we are committed to an even stronger trading relationship.

Trade between us is worth £1.5 billion a year and Icelandic firms continue to make important investments in the UK. This is testament to the UK's skilled and expert workforce and this continued investment will help to create jobs and prosperity throughout Britain.

Iceland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Gudlaugur Thórdarson said:

Protecting the mutual interests of our businesses and consumers has been a key priority for both countries. Therefore, we are pleased to have secured continued preferential market access for trade in goods between the two countries, no matter how the UK chooses to leave the EU.

Iceland has always underlined the importance of close ties with the UK after Brexit and when the time comes, we look forward to negotiating a deep and comprehensive trade agreement.

Last month, the UK signed a trade continuity agreement with European Economic Area countries, Iceland and Norway, which provides certainty for UK, Icelandic and Norwegian businesses.

The UK and Iceland have also agreed that our citizens in each other's countries can continue their lives as before, and that direct flights can continue without interruption.

[Press release: Highways England heads out on the road](#)

For the third successive year, Highways England is out on the road with information about more than 140 road maintenance and improvement projects, using a mobile exhibition unit to visit communities across the region to help people understand the work that will be taking place in their area over the coming year.

Kicking off last week, Highways England staff spoke to more than 2500 people across four days in Bury St Edmunds, Stowmarket and at the Truckfest event in

Peterborough.

The facility, which opens out into larger exhibition, features displays, and presentations of upcoming essential maintenance and minor improvement works across the region in 2019/20. The mobile centre also gives drivers and local residents the chance to speak to Highways England staff about their own concerns and ask any questions they may have.

Michael Freeman, Highways England Service Delivery Manager, said:

This mobile exhibition offers us an excellent opportunity to better get into communities we will be working alongside as we complete crucial road upgrades in the east of England. It's important we speak with people to explain the work we are doing and the benefits it will bring for them, their town and this region.

We know that the work we do has an impact on our road users, and we are eager to better engage with drivers and local residents, so we can hear their comments, allay their concerns and answer any questions they may come to us with. Last year we had a good response with people coming along to learn about roadworks and share their views, so we hope that interest will continue and grow further in 2019.

After speaking to Highways England staff at Truckfest, Ted, a truck driver from Godmanchester, said:

Given the nature of the job it's inevitable that I get caught up in traffic because of congestion or accidents, or have to go through a diversion because of roadworks. This can be frustrating, however, after speaking to Highways England it's clear they're working hard to improve the roads in the East, leading to short journey times, which is only a good thing for me.

Drivers will once again be able to speak to Highways England staff about a range of road works that are happening soon and further in the future, with £61 million committed to essential maintenance and minor improvement works across the east of England.

During this financial year (2019/20), Highways England will deliver more than 140 schemes in the east, including essential road maintenance work, safety improvements, traffic signal renewals, road resurfacing, landscaping and the creation of cycleways.

Over the coming months, people will also get a chance to see the exhibition and speak to Highways England staff as it heads to Chelmsford, Colchester, Mildenhall, Ipswich, Peterborough, Longwater and Hopton. Times and locations will be announced soon.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Press release: Way forward for courts and tribunals estate published](#)

- Principles set out for future court changes
- Travel times and ease of transport to be prioritised
- New Court and Tribunal Design Guide published

The [Fit for the Future: Transforming the court and tribunal estate consultation response](#), published by HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS), details how decisions regarding the future of the estate should be made. It makes clear that people will continue to be able to access court and tribunals while providing value for money for the taxpayer and ensuring long-term efficiency.

This has been developed to complement HMCTS' £1bn Reform Programme, which is bringing new technology and modern ways of working to the justice system, making it more accessible for everyone.

[Today's response](#) will make sure the court and tribunal estate remains fit for the 21st century.

It states that:

- When visits to courts are necessary, travel times and ease of transport will continue to be prioritised – with added support for vulnerable users
- Court and tribunal buildings will be fit for purpose and can be maintained at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer
- Specialist front-of-house staff will be at courts to support the public and legal professionals, and will be trained in new technologies
- The estate is aligned with the Reform Programme

Justice Secretary, David Gauke, said:

Our Reform Programme allows people to start to settle disputes away

from the courtroom, while offering opportunities to improve our courts and tribunals.

With new technology and modern ways of working, we expect the number of people accessing our courts remotely to increase. We are reviewing the current estate to ensure it is fit for purpose.

This report makes sure that access to justice, value for money and efficiency are maintained in the long term and these principles will mean our justice system remains fit for the 21st century.

HMCTS has committed to ensuring that views from the public, legal professionals and stakeholders are sought before any relocation of services, using the criteria set out in the Fit for the Future principles.

Reform may increase the number of people accessing courts remotely through online services, potentially reducing the need for court and tribunal buildings. Fit for the Future commits to not acting on that assumption by proposing to close courts without sound evidence that the reforms are reducing the use of those buildings.

Today's report follows a public consultation launched in January 2018. All 249 responses were carefully considered and used to strengthen the principles.

Alongside Fit for the Future, HMCTS has also published a [new Court and Tribunal Design Guide](#). This has been developed after engaging with user groups, to make sure the guide improves the experience for court and tribunal users, while providing value for the taxpayer.

Notes to Editors

1. Access to justice is a core principle of the Reform Programme and courts will only close when there is evidence that the estates principle can be met and, where appropriate, that reform is reducing the use of those buildings and people have access to a nearby alternative.
2. As set out in the consultation, the government is committed to ensuring the vast majority of people will be able to travel to and from court using public transport between the hours of 7.30am and 7.30pm.
3. Our analysis shows that, to date, there has been limited change to the proportion of people who have reasonable journeys to court as a result of court closures. In fact, since December 2010, our data shows there is less than 2% difference in the proportion of people who could attend their nearest court by 9.30am.
4. The government's [Fit for the Future: transforming the court consultation response](#).
5. [The Court and Tribunal Design Guide](#).
6. As lessons are learned and HMCTS Reform initiatives develop, the Design Guide will be updated, and further iterations published.
7. For more information contact the MoJ press office on 0203 334 0173

[News story: Future support for nature in UK Overseas Territories](#)

A ten week [Call for Evidence](#) has been launched by the UK Government today (Friday, 10 May) to gather knowledge on safeguarding nature in the UK Overseas Territories.

Many of the Overseas Territories are globally significant in their ecological richness, containing over 90 per cent of the UK's marine and terrestrial nature. They are hotspots for biodiversity with an estimated 3,300 endemic species, but they are also highly vulnerable to environmental change.

To support on-going work in the UK Overseas Territories to tackle climate change and protect the natural environment, the Call for Evidence will help to develop and refine existing and potentially new funding streams from the UK Government to replace EU finance sources.

Today's announcement builds on the 25 Year Environment Plan which contains a number of ambitions to improve biodiversity in the Overseas Territories, including the continued implementation of the Blue Belt programme.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

The recent IPBES report drives home the message that we must increase our efforts to protect our environment as the effects of biodiversity decline and climate change are felt around the world.

This is why it's crucial to ensure that precious species and landscapes in our Overseas Territories continue to be supported. This Call for Evidence will provide us with the evidence to help determine the best way to do so.

2020 is the year we must all agree on further action for climate, nature and ocean conservation, with appropriate funding to protect and enhance the planet's most pristine ecosystems for flora and fauna.

Announced by the Chancellor in his Spring Statement, the Call for Evidence will also look to further understand how environmental outcomes are delivered through existing spending on biodiversity and conservation, and consider whether spending is effective. This includes looking at options for future funding streams to replace existing EU schemes, such as the Voluntary Scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Overseas Territories of the European Union (BEST).

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, said:

Britain's Overseas Territories contain some of the world's most important and fragile ecosystems. As I said in the recent Spring Statement, there is a clear link between biodiversity and economic growth, so acting now to protect and nurture the biodiversity of the Overseas Territories is not only a down payment on our pledge to leave the environment in a better condition than we found it, but also supports sustainable economic growth in these island territories.

In January 2019, Ministers announced the seventh round of funding under Darwin Plus, worth around £3.75m, was shared amongst 17 projects around the globe including world-leading scientific investigation projects such as the British Antarctic Survey's 'bird-borne' radar tracking system for albatrosses. Scientists will be able to track the movement of this giant bird of the South Atlantic Ocean and to build-up a data picture of how albatrosses can be better protected from fishing tackle on boats. The Darwin Plus initiative has already successfully supported 30 biodiversity projects in the Overseas Territories since the start of 2018.

UK Minister of State for the Overseas Territories, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, said:

Governments around the world must act now to preserve animal and plant species and halt irreversible damage to our planet before it is too late.

The UK Government is working to do just this, from our Blue Belt programme which will protect over 4 million square kilometres of ocean around the British Overseas Territories by 2020, to our leadership on fighting the illegal wildlife trade, to this new call for evidence which will help safeguard the rich biodiversity of our Overseas Territories. The long-term protection of these fragile and unique ecosystems is absolutely vital.

The UK supports the Overseas Territories in implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These include taking 'urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts'; to 'conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources' and protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems', including halting biodiversity loss.

The Call for Evidence is open for ten weeks from 10 May 2019 and closes on 19 July 2019.