

Press release: UK Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin visits Zimbabwe

UK Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin arrived in Harare on 1 February. This is the second UK Ministerial visit to Zimbabwe since President Mnangagwa was sworn in in November 2017 and Minister Baldwin's first visit since her appointment.

Minister Baldwin wants to learn more about Zimbabwe and better understand the context and the challenges and opportunities it is facing as it emerges from 37 years of rule by former president Robert Mugabe. The Minister will hold meetings with business representatives, politicians, human rights groups, NGOs and other members of civil society.

She will also see some of the important development work supported by the UK, including visiting a school for children with disabilities. She will see how the UK is increasing its work on reaching the most marginalised children with education, including those with disabilities, in the run up to the UK-hosted Disability Summit.

Minister Baldwin said:

The past few months have seen momentous change in Zimbabwe and it is a privilege to visit at such a pivotal time.

I am looking forward to meeting a wide range of Zimbabweans and hearing from them about the huge potential their country holds and the challenges that must be faced ahead of elections later this year.

The UK has a longstanding relationship with Zimbabwe and we are committed to working with the government of Zimbabwe for a bright, prosperous and hopeful future for all Zimbabweans.

Notes for editors

Minister Harriett Baldwin is the UK's Minister for Africa for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development.

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News story: Diving into innovation at Sizewell

Specialist scuba divers will set to work removing radioactive waste from Sizewell A's nuclear fuel storage pond

The team of American underwater experts tackled their first UK 'nuclear dive' at Dungeness A in 2016 where, wearing full protective suits and shielded from radiation by the water, they were able to cut up empty fuel storage skips and retrieve other pieces of submerged equipment.

The ponds were used to store thousands of used nuclear fuel rods, held in metal skips, after they were discharged from the reactors. After the last of the fuel was transported to Sellafield for reprocessing, the skips and a range of redundant items, including sludge, were left behind in the water.

Pond clean-out conventionally takes place using remotely operated equipment to lift the whole radioactive skips clear of the water, exposing them to the air, where they are carefully cut up before decontamination, storage and eventual disposal. This process is slow with potential radiation dose risks for workers.

By doing the work under water, the divers can cut up the skips more safely, access awkward areas more easily, making the whole process safer, faster and more productive.

Now the lessons learned at Dungeness are being put into practice at Sizewell A pond as part of a decommissioning project that will take around 10 months to complete.

Steve Franks, Sizewell A Site Ponds Programme Manager, said:

The scale of work to be delivered by the divers is huge. Although we only have one pond to decommission, the inventory of the ponds is larger than at Dungeness A but we will still be looking to speed up the work wherever it is safe to do so.

In addition to a reduction in the overall radiation dose for workers, compared to traditional methods, the diving technique has a lower environmental impact, ultimately providing value for the UK taxpayer.

The first dive took place recently and focused on surveying the pond floor, transferring sludge into a purpose-built tank, setting up cutting equipment and size -reducing the first of 35 skips, which are classified as Intermediate Level radioactive waste.

The site is owned by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA). Geoff

Suitor, Head of the Magnox Programme for the NDA, said:

Magnox's implementation of innovative approaches, such as the use of divers to handle radioactive waste in ponds, contributes to real progress in reducing risks and hazards at the Magnox sites. Together, we are successfully cleaning up and making safe the UK's earliest nuclear sites on behalf of our communities and the environment.

During more than 250 dives at Dungeness A, a number of new ideas emerged including the use of lightweight plastic platforms for divers to stand on when exploring uncharted areas of the pond floor.

The team of 12 nuclear divers is supplied by US contractor Underwater Construction Corporation (UCC), which also carried out the Dungeness A project.

[News story: International Development Secretary praises rapid plague response](#)

The plague, which causes fever, chills, head and body aches, vomiting and nausea within a few days, came close to affecting nine countries last year, including Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, Ethiopia and South Africa, and becoming a larger scale epidemic that could threaten health security and damage economies.

The disease – which can rapidly spread between humans through airborne droplets – affected more than 2,000 people and led to around 200 deaths.

Rapid response by the UK and international partners prevented the plague from claiming more lives and reduced the risk of it spreading internationally, including to the UK.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

Deadly diseases like the plague have no respect for borders. Preventing outbreaks like this, as well as Ebola and Zika, saves lives around the world and stops them reaching the UK, which is firmly in all our interests.

UK aid helped stop the potential spread of plague across Africa. Our support helped the World Health Organization send vital doses

of antibiotics to Madagascar to deal with the crisis, making us all safer.

Cruel diseases like the plague have no place in the modern world and our rapid response with international partners stopped this from becoming a global health threat, which would have endangered more lives and destroyed economies.

With our support, the World Health Organization (WHO) sent out more than 100 international experts to deal with the crisis, along with 1.2 million doses of antibiotics, and also set up nine specialist treatment centres in Madagascar to care for those affected. The UK is a major funding partner for the WHO's new Health Emergencies Programme, which has been successful in helping to contain this outbreak and others such as Ebola in Democratic Republic of the Congo and of Marburg virus on the Ugandan/Kenyan border.

UK aid, through DFID and the Department of Health and Social Care, funded a team of three public health experts who flew to Madagascar and provided advice in monitoring the disease, preventing further infection including through introducing border surveillance and safe burial practices.

DFID has also been supporting WHO's regional office in Africa to help them prepare, prevent and respond to disease outbreaks rapidly in 21 countries at risk. For example, strengthening the surveillance systems for yellow fever in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo to enhance the detection of Zika.

Investing in health systems early helps the poorest countries stand on their own two feet and is great value for money, because it enhances the world's ability to prevent epidemics, rather than reacting to the next crisis. Evidence suggests that for every £1 invested in preparation a £2 return can be achieved in terms of savings on future spend/investments.

Public Health Minister Steve Brine said:

Disease transcends lines drawn on a map—and we have a duty to share our expertise to fight outbreaks of deadly disease across the world. Our expert Rapid Support Team played a key role in containing this plague, as well as building the skills of local healthcare workers in responding to future outbreaks.

DFID will be investing more so African countries such as Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo have the capability to respond quickly to disease outbreaks. The UK's support will build African countries' health systems to make sure they have well trained staff, and strong data and surveillance systems to prevent and address disease outbreaks quickly.

This will help prevent devastating epidemics that destroy lives and economies. During the West Africa Ebola epidemic \$2.2 billion in GDP was lost in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, threatening not only the macroeconomic stability of the region but also food security, human capital development,

trade and private sector growth.

While the plague epidemic has ended, plague is endemic in some areas of Madagascar and individual cases of the disease may occur until the end of April.

The WHO is demonstrating the results of reform efforts. It is working hard to mobilise quickly and engage with stakeholders to ensure a rapid and effective response through enhanced leadership, preparedness, monitoring, coordination and communication.

Press release: 45,000 households move off benefit cap and into work

Since its introduction in April 2013, 170,000 households have had their Housing Benefit capped. Of these, 107,000 are no longer capped, with 45,000 households having moved into work.

The latest [Office for National Statistics employment statistics](#) also show that the employment rate is at a joint record high of 75.3%, with a record 32.2 million people in work.

There are now a record 810,000 job vacancies at any one time, a rise of 17,000 since last quarter and 60,000 a year ago. There are 340,000 more job vacancies than in 2010.

Work and Pensions Secretary of State Esther McVey said:

Our priority is to have a fair welfare system that promotes work, while caring for those who cannot – and that is why we brought in the benefit cap.

I've seen for myself how long-term unemployment can blight families for generations. Behind these figures are real people who have moved into jobs and are improving their lives for themselves and their children.

The benefit cap incentivises work, including part-time work, as anyone eligible for Working Tax Credit (or the equivalent under Universal Credit) is exempt.

Households where someone receives Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, or the support component of Employment and Support Allowance and those claiming Carer's Allowance or Guardian's Allowance are also exempt from the cap.

The figures above relate to the number of households who have had their Housing Benefit capped.

The [benefit cap statistics released on 1 February 2018](#) also include – for the first time – a limited set of experimental statistics on the number of households who have had their Universal Credit capped.

Follow DWP on:

[News story: Government spend on digital services passes £3bn mark](#)

Thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are now signed up to provide their digital, data and technology services to government, and public bodies are utilising their expertise to drive the UK's digital transformation.

And this quarter's [newly published sales data](#) shows that we're having an impact, with sales reaching £3.2 billion, with 48% of this being spent on SMEs. This means that £1.43 out of every £3 is going to SMEs.

The latest figures arrive not long after the 3rd birthday of the Digital Marketplace – created in 2014 by Crown Commercial Service (CCS) and Government Digital Service (GDS) to make government procurement easier and more transparent.

The platform hosts CCS frameworks including G-Cloud, Digital Outcomes and Specialists and Crown Hosting Data Centres.

Niall Quinn, Director, Technology Strategic Category for CCS says:

In the three years since Digital Marketplace was launched, we have overhauled the public sector procurement landscape, harnessing the expertise of innovative companies and giving thousands of SMEs the opportunity to supply to government for the first time. We're now planning the next steps of our journey, making the platform and processes more commercial, more flexible and better tailored to the needs of users – both buyers and suppliers.

Warren Smith, Director, Digital Marketplace says:

We've started to bring the tools, techniques, technologies and culture of the internet to public procurement and contracting. What we've achieved so far is testament to an amazing team and the

importance of user-centred, design-led, data-driven and open approaches, but we've only scratched the surface. The next 3 years, to 2020, will see a step-change where these approaches are mainstreamed across government.

In 2016/17 frameworks available through the Digital Marketplace contributed towards CCS delivering £725 million in savings including commercial benefits for taxpayers.

The Digital Marketplace website recorded over 1 million visits in 2017, compared to the same number in the whole of the preceding two years.