British victims of Kabul terror attack: Foreign Secretary's statement

Press release

Two British nationals and the child of another British national were killed in the Kabul terror attack on 26 August, the Foreign Secretary has said.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

> I was deeply saddened to learn that two British nationals and the child of another British national were killed by yesterday's terror attack, with two more injured.

> These were innocent people and it is a tragedy that as they sought to bring their loved ones to safety in the UK they were murdered by cowardly terrorists.

> Yesterday's despicable attack underlines the dangers facing those in Afghanistan and reinforces why we are doing all we can to get people out. We are offering consular support to their families.

> We will not turn our backs on those who look to us in their hour of need, and we will never be cowed by terrorists.

Published 27 August 2021

[How Hackney Council built an API Platform](#)

Hackney Council built an API platform for developers to use to create APIs. The platform includes a set of API service standards and template code.

Summary

- Timeframe: October 2017 to present
- Team members: For HMRC, the Head of Products (EU Exit, Integration Framework, SDES) at Enterprise Integration Services. For Hackney Council, the Corporate Information and Communications Technology (ICT) team and Development Manager
- Tools: CircleCI, Amazon Web Services (AWS), .NET Core
- [API playbook](#)

Project objective

Hackney Council wanted to build a public API platform using modern software development processes. This platform would be for developers and contain all the Hackney Council APIs, supported by a robust set of API standards. Widespread use of this platform would result in reduced development costs, better return on investment, and would enable services to develop a loosely coupled microservices architecture. That is, changes to one service would not affect other services.

The department

Hackney Council provides services such as council tax and rent payment, repair reporting and bulk waste collection to residents of the London Borough of Hackney. The Corporate Information and Communications Technology (ICT) team works with the service users and residents to identify their user needs and build effective solutions to those needs.

Researching the API platform

Although Hackney Council's Corporate ICT team had full management support for this project, they recognised that they did not yet have the skills and knowledge to start building the platform. To start with, they spoke to HMRC about how to successfully implement a large-scale API platform in government. HMRC shared their knowledge on:

- how HMRC implemented and maintained their API platform and their overall technical architecture
- how HMRC developed their API service standards
- the API-first approach to designing endpoints with user needs in mind
- what skills and capabilities Hackney Council needed to do the same

The council team also collaborated with various digital agency partners to research those partners' API-first strategies and standards. From this, the council team realised that they needed to understand how to build APIs from both a user needs and data needs perspective. The team also researched the [technology code of practice](#) to learn about applicable best practice. Once this research was complete, the team was ready to start choosing technology before building the platform.

Choosing technology to build the API platform

From the start, Hackney Council's Corporate ICT team took an iterative approach to choosing the technology to build the API platform depending on the user and data needs. They looked at each solution's benefits and drawbacks and changed their approach as necessary.

For example, after evaluating both Google Cloud and AWS cloud platforms, the team chose AWS. Hackney Council felt AWS suited their needs more, as it is very developer-friendly due to the variety of services provided. Additionally, the pre-existing relationship with HMRC helped, as the HMRC delivery manager was able to set up meetings between the council team and AWS to answer questions. For example, the council team spoke with the AWS Solution Architecture team to make sure the council team were following the [5 pillars of the AWS Well-Architected Framework](#).

The team also made technology choices based upon their existing skills. The team of developers already had knowledge of .NET Core programming language skills, so they decided to build the platform using that language.

At the same time, the team learned from their digital agency partners about:

- AWS practices around API development
- how different types of API (platform and service) would be appropriate for different use cases, depending on data and reusability needs

The team was then ready to start building the platform.

Building the API platform

Hackney Council's corporate ICT team started building the API platform. This work included the public API platform and an API implementation guide with a set of API service standards. There were several challenges. The platform had to support:

- both modern APIs and the council's legacy applications, which were not built on database or data quality principles
- highly available, scalable and secure APIs in a loosely coupled microservices architecture, meaning that changes to one service would not affect other services

Additionally, the Corporate ICT team needed to:

- understand the different user and data needs and make sure the platform

served both of those types of needs
  - agree on the [API standards for both reusable and service-specific APIs](#) and the standards' criteria
  - upskill themselves quickly to build the platform to the required standard by working closely with their digital agency partner
  - educate their users on the difference between reusable platform APIs and non-reusable service APIs and how reusable APIs would work, because historically, most API development happened in silos and there was no API reuse

Solving challenges when building the API platform

The team used an [AWS PostgreSQL database architecture](#) to make the APIs highly available, scalable, secure, and loosely coupled. To increase security, the team used token authentication through Google Groups instead of API keys. Additionally, the team built a developer hub to collect all the APIs together to make onboarding of external developers easier.

The [API playbook](#) that the team delivered was central to overcoming the challenge of educating users. This playbook:

  - defines platform and service APIs and states the advantages of platform APIs
  - defines API service standards for APIs to meet so those APIs can go live
  - provides a template for developers to use when creating APIs, including pre-existing base code to get an API up and running quickly

This playbook was a valuable resource for getting developer buy-in to the API-first strategy as a platform. Developers could see the playbook was a single source of all the information needed to develop and maintain platform APIs. This buy-in was important to embedding the API-first strategy in the service development process.

Throughout the build process, the team led architecture and data meetups, where they asked external digital agencies and internal developers for feedback. This open and collaborative process made sure the:

  - platform and API playbook met both user and data needs
  - API standards were fit for purpose

The team also used these meetups to emphasise to stakeholders that reusing APIs would save on development costs and provide a return of investment on the API platform.

Result of Hackney Council's API platform

Hackney Council's API platform went live in January 2019. The council team won an iNetwork award for API services, and the team were finalists at the AWS awards for City on Cloud. This platform brought both tangible and intangible benefits.

By working in the open and collaborating with multiple digital agencies, the

team embedded an API-first strategy within service development, which saved time and money in the development process.

Since the platform went live, developers have been able to create APIs much more quickly and consistently by:

- using the API playbook
- reusing existing APIs such as the Person or Contact Details APIs

Additionally, the wider developer community (including both Hackney Council and external developers) now recognises the value of working in the open, of collaboration, and of having defined API standards.

The developer community also has regular data and architecture meetups to build the community of practice for robust and secure platforms. Hackney Council iterates their API playbook once a year, and they released a new version in May 2021. In future, the API playbook will have a distribution list to alert users when the team publishes a new playbook.

Joint Expeditionary Force Chiefs hold biannual meeting

News story

The biannual Joint Expeditionary Force Chiefs of Defence meeting was hosted by the UK in London.

Joint Expeditionary Force Chiefs of Defence. Crown Copyright.

Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter, met with his nine counterparts from the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) in London 25-26 August 2021.

The JEF Chiefs of Defence discussed current international security

challenges, including Afghanistan and violent extremism, and the future development of the JEF.

A joint statement was released following the meeting: [We] look forward to Exercise JOINT PROTECTOR which will take place in Sweden in September. The exercise will test the JEF HQ's ability to provide command and control to counter malign influence and destabilisation activity short of crisis and competition in the High North, Baltic and the North Atlantic area.

Published 27 August 2021

Harrow man fined for dumping waste illegally in Edmonton

A Harrow man has been fined almost £500 and ordered to pay costs of £2,350 at Willesden Magistrates' Court for dumping waste illegally on an Edmonton industrial estate.

Christopher Stokes, 48, of Grant Road, Harrow, London, pleaded guilty on 19 August 2021 to depositing the waste at land off Pegamoid Road and Barnes Road on the Montagu Industrial Estate in Edmonton, Enfield on 13 January 2018, without a permit.

He was fined £480, made subject to a victim surcharge of £48, and ordered to pay costs of £2,350 at a rate of £10 per week.

The incident happened after travellers moved onto land owned by Enfield Borough Council on the Montagu Industrial Estate in December 2017. They then occupied vacant buildings on land off Dane Road and Barnes Road. The buildings and surrounding land were subsequently subject to the large-scale dumping of waste. Mr Stokes claimed he was moving the waste that he dumped to make space for his sister's caravan, and received no financial reward.

The court heard how CCTV footage showed waste, including a table, being dumped onto land close to the junction of Barnes Road and Pegamoid Road, Edmonton, from a white panel van registered to Stokes. He had previously been convicted of a similar offence of depositing controlled waste without a licence.

Dan Kettridge, Environment Crime Team Leader for the Environment Agency, said:

> We hope that today's ruling sends out a strong message that we will search out and prosecute anyone found to be dumping waste illegally.

> The operation of a waste site without regard for the environment and the law has the potential to harm our natural resources, blight communities and undermine the legitimate businesses that do follow the rules.
>
> Our role is to protect the environment for people and wildlife, so we won't hesitate to take action against those who put it risk. And to anyone flouting the rules, our message is clear: you won't get away with it.

Stokes was prosecuted by the Environment Agency in a joint operation with Enfield Borough Council under Operation Angola. This targets criminal gangs that dump significant amounts of waste across the South East.

Christopher Stokes pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawfully depositing waste on 13 January 2018, contrary to s.33 (1) (a) and (6) of the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) 1990. He was originally charged with an alternative of knowingly causing waste to be deposited on 13 January 2018, contrary to s.33 (1) (a), (5) and (6) of the EPA 1990). He was sentenced on a basis of plea that his culpability was reckless and the harm caused category 3.

[Landmark Environment Bill strengthened to halt biodiversity loss by 2030](#)

The Government has strengthened its commitment to protect the environment for future generations and build back greener with new amendments to the landmark Environment Bill that will see the UK build on its reputation as a global leader in conservation.

Following work with parliamentarians and wider stakeholders, new amendments tabled yesterday (26/08) include strengthening the duty to set a legally-binding target to halt species decline by 2030.

This will solidify the Government's commitment to leave a richer, more biodiverse environment for future generations with a clear need for action: between 1932 and 1984, we lost 97% of our species-rich grassland, five species of butterfly have disappeared from England in the last 150 years, and indicators showing the state of birds dependent on farmland stand at less than half their value compared to 1970.

This new amendment reflects the Prime Minister's pledges on the international stage during the UK's leadership of this year's G7 summit — with the G7 committing to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity by 2030 as well as signing up to the global '30×30' initiative to conserve or protect at least 30 per cent of the world's land and at least 30 per cent of the world's ocean

by 2030 – and will enable us to meet our ambition to make this world-leading target the net zero equivalent for nature.

New measures will also tackle storm overflows through a new requirement for water companies to monitor the water quality impacts of their sewage discharges and publish this information. This monitoring will drive action by water companies to reduce sewage discharges that do the most harm, to better protect the environment and public health. Water companies will also be required to publish near real-time information on when their storm overflows operate.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

> The Environment Bill is at the vanguard of our work to implement the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth.
>
> We have been clear about the need, and our intention, to halt the decline of our natural environment, and so we are strengthening our world-leading target to put this beyond doubt. It will be a challenging task, but halting this decline is a crucial part of our commitment to be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state.
>
> Our new package of measures on storm overflows will help crack down on the pollution in our rivers, waterways and coastlines, to better tackle the harm that they cause.

The Environment Bill will bring forward action to address environmental challenges including biodiversity loss, climate change, waste and pollution of the air, water and land.

The amendments will:

- Strengthen the legal language of our new world-leading target to 'halt the decline in species abundance by 2030', reconfirming our existing commitment to nature.
- Place duties on water companies to monitor the water quality impact of their sewage discharges and to publish this data, as well as a duty to provide near real-time information on when storm overflows operate
- Introduce a duty to require the Government to publish a report considering the costs and benefits of eliminating overflows entirely which will inform Government decision-making in this area.
- Separately, the Government will undertake a review of legislation which would require Sustainable Drainage Systems to be constructed to ministerial standards on new developments, which would reduce the pressure on the sewage system. This type of "blue-green" infrastructure can deliver a number of benefits – it can prevent water entering foul sewers; reduce surface flooding; improve biodiversity, and improve associated carbon emissions.
- Bring in a further safeguard for the independence of the new Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) by requiring greater parliamentary

scrutiny of any guidance issued to the OEP.
- Introduce Statutory guidance for local planning authorities to explain how they should take into account new Local Nature Recovery Strategies, to embed strategies for the environment and nature's recovery into their planning systems.
- Create a duty and power to allow the Secretary of State to review, and increase if appropriate, the minimum duration for which new biodiversity gain sites must be secured. This will allow this important aspect of the policy to be reviewed after Government has evaluated the early years of mandatory biodiversity net gain practice, to understand how developers can make a positive impact on nature from their work
- Bring in additional technical amendments to support swifter and more effective implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility measures which will allow for future schemes to appoint scheme administrators through regulations – saving time and money. Extended Producer Responsibility schemes mean companies will be expected to cover the full cost of recycling and disposing of their packaging, and through the fees they pay they will be incentivised to use packaging that can be recycled and meet higher recycling targets.
- Accept all the recommendations of the House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee (DPRRC), which will ensure appropriate scrutiny of those provisions by parliament

- The full amendments are [published here](#)
- Read more about the [Environment Bill here.](#)
- Today's announcement will support the delivery of the 25 Year Environment Plan and is part of the Government's commitment to tackle the twin threat of biodiversity loss and climate change.