

Foreign Secretary statement in Estonia: 11 March 2021

It is an enormous pleasure to be here to mark a century of diplomatic relations with Estonia.

I want to thank President Kaljulaid and Foreign Minister Liimets for their hospitality, and for the very valuable discussions we have had today.

I was also pleased to join the meeting of Baltic Foreign Ministers yesterday evening.

As I'm here, I'm reminded of the history that we have together.

In 1921, the UK was among the very first countries to recognise Estonia's independence, establish diplomatic relations, and cement a friendship born from our Navy's support in the 1918-20 War of Independence.

The British servicemen who gave their lives in that struggle are still commemorated in the Church of the Holy Ghost here in Tallinn.

It's very important that we remember our history, but of course our relationship is not just about a rich history.

It is also about our values, our commitment to work together multilaterally, and ultimately a brighter future not just a proud past.

While the UK has now left the EU, our commitment to our European friends and our neighbours is undiminished.

In fact I would go further, I would say that we have an opportunity to be even better allies, friends and partners and with no country is that commitment stronger than with our friends in Estonia.

Perhaps the best evidence of this is our enduring commitment to European defence and security.

We feel very much that Estonian security is our security, we are committed to that.

The 850 British troops stationed here in Estonia are testament to that commitment and they are not going anywhere.

We will continue to stand with you and all of our partners to tackle Russia's malign activity in the region.

You can count on British solidarity with that.

As we look ahead, there are many ways in which we want to deepen and broaden our co-operation. We had excellent discussions about that, as I did with your

president as well.

Estonia and the UK are at the forefront of the international effort to tackle the biggest challenges in Europe and globally, such as climate change and the global recovery from COVID-19. And frankly the assault on open societies, that we're not just seeing in Belarus and Russia but around the world.

With our Estonian friends we are united and in lockstep in beating the drum for liberal free trade, human rights, democracy and open societies.

Using our common membership of the UN Security Council we are working together to champion gender equality and in particular girls' education.

We can see from the C19 pandemic that the challenge globally of making sure young girls don't find themselves falling out of school and not getting back into school is even stronger and the case for supporting girls' in education and the global recovery is stronger still. Another excellent area for us to cooperate on.

And we are collaborating closely on defending media freedom in Belarus and elsewhere.

We look forward to the Global Conference on Media Freedom in Tallinn later this year. It's a really important event and I can't think of a better place to host the event than Estonia.

The Statement of Intent that Minister Liimets and I have signed today signals mutual desire to continue to build this close collaboration across all of these areas, to strengthen our friendship even further in the future. We shouldn't be backward looking but forward looking and really ambitious on that front.

We truly value the relationship we have developed over the last hundred years.

And we look forward to nurturing it further over the next 100 years.

Thank you very much for your warm welcome.

MHRA response to Danish authorities' action to temporarily suspend the AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine

News story

This is a precautionary measure by the Danish authorities. It has not been confirmed that the report of a blood clot was caused by the AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine. People should still go and get their COVID-19 vaccine when asked to do so.



Dr Phil Bryan, MHRA Vaccines Safety Lead said,

Vaccine safety is of paramount importance and we continually monitor the safety of vaccines to ensure that the benefits outweigh any potential risks.

It has not been confirmed that the report of a blood clot, in Denmark, was caused by the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca.

The Danish authorities' action to temporarily suspend use of the vaccine is precautionary whilst they investigate.

Blood clots can occur naturally and are not uncommon. More than 11 million doses of the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca vaccine have now been administered across the UK.

Reports of blood clots received so far are not greater than the number that would have occurred naturally in the vaccinated population.

The safety of the public will always come first. We are keeping this issue under close review but available evidence does not confirm that the vaccine is the cause.

People should still go and get their COVID-19 vaccine when asked to do so.

Background

- The MHRA encourages anyone to report any suspicion or concern they have beyond the known, mild side effects on the [Coronavirus Yellow Card site](#). Reporters do not need to be sure of a link between a vaccine and a suspected side effect but are still encouraged to report.

Major milestone achieved in Teesside flood scheme

A major step in a £4.8million Teesside flood scheme has been taken as a new debris screen is lifted into place.

Construction started on the joint Environment Agency and Middlesbrough Council scheme at Marton West Beck last year.

It will reduce the risk of flooding from the beck, sea and surface water to nearly 500 homes in central Middlesbrough.

During flooding the new scheme will hold flood water back in Marton West Beck and Albert Park, slowing the flow and reducing the impact downstream. The extended debris screen in the park will collect debris and rubbish that can cause flooding and plays a key role in reducing flood risk.

As well as the new screen, which extends the already existing screen on the beck, the scheme includes new stone-clad flood walls, a new drainage system, the instalment of protective fencing, and several flood storage bunds.

Schemes such as this are 'essential'

Leila Huntington, the Environment Agency's Flood Manager in the North East, said:

This project protects nearly 500 homes and businesses in the centre of Middlesbrough and will provide an economic boost for the town, as well as bringing benefits for wildlife in the wider area.

Schemes such as this are essential as we see climate change bringing with it more extreme weather conditions and an increased flood risk.

The scheme is just one of many across the North East that better protect properties and businesses as part of a £132million six year investment programme to create or improve flood and coastal defences in the region.

A further £5.2billion government investment package has been secured to deliver 2,000 schemes across the country, better protecting 336,000 properties between 2021 and 2027.

Councillor Dennis McCabe, Middlesbrough Council's Executive Member for Environment and Commercial Services, added:

The recent extreme weather has been a timely reminder of the devastation that flooding can bring to whole communities. It's more important than ever that we ensure that those areas at the greatest risk have the best possible protection.

I'm delighted that Middlesbrough Council has been able to work in partnership with the Environment Agency to deliver this important scheme which will offer a great degree of reassurance to a large number of homes.

Delighted to see scheme moving forward

The contractor working on the project is BMMJV, a joint venture between BAM Nuttall and Mott MacDonald.

Katie Fraser, Project Manager for BMMJV, said:

Work on Marton West Beck Flood Alleviation Scheme started at the height of lockdown and the team had to adapt rapidly to the COVID-19 situation.

As well as implementing safe practices on site we have been able to ensure the project continued as planned by working collaboratively with the Environment Agency by holding online meetings and virtual site tours and utilising technology to drive smart solutions and minimise risks on site.

We are delighted to see the scheme moving towards completion knowing we have contributed to the protection of homes in Middlesbrough.

The Marton West Beck Flood Alleviation Scheme project information has been translated into eight languages including Arabic; Bengali; Czech; Polish; Punjabi; Romanian; Tamil; and Urdu.

[It can be downloaded online](#)

To find out if you are living in a flood risk area and for more information visit the ['what to do in a flood' page](#)

People can also contact the project team by sending an email to martonwestbeck@environment-agency.gov.uk

It's expected the scheme will be complete by the end of this spring.

Government targets false vaccine information on social media

- New campaign will help tackle vaccine misinformation online through a series of shareable videos
- Trusted community figures will call for people to check before they share
- Aim is to counter the spread of misleading and false information through private messaging channels on social media

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has now developed a [toolkit](#) with content designed to be shared via Whatsapp and Facebook community groups, as well as Twitter, Youtube and Instagram, to tackle false information spread through private channels.

It follows concerns from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) of low vaccine uptake amongst ethnic minority communities, and a recent Ofcom study which showed that people from a minority ethnic background were twice as likely as white respondents to rely more on people they know, people in their local area or people on social media for information about coronavirus.

The campaign is fronted by trusted local community figures such as imams, pastors and clinicians in short, shareable videos which include simple tips on how to spot misinformation and what to do to stop its spread, signposting to the NHS for the best source of information.

It is the first government campaign designed for private instant messaging services where there are concerns that false information about coronavirus is spreading – and that not enough has been done to tackle it, particularly where it could impact the take up of the vaccine.

Minister for Digital and Culture Caroline Dinenage said:

We want to harness the power of social media to tackle false information and encourage take up of life-saving vaccines among ethnic minorities.

Our new toolkit and campaign will help people access reliable and factual information on vaccines and builds on the good work platforms are already doing to promote trusted quality information.

Ministers have worked with platforms throughout the pandemic to ensure accurate and reliable information about coronavirus and life-saving vaccines is easily accessible, and to stop the spread of dangerous content. Facebook has introduced measures to better identify false news and social media platforms have committed to respond swiftly to anti-vaccine content, as well

as the principle that no company should profit from it.

This new toolkit is based on the core principles of the government's [SHARE](#) checklist, which encourages people to check where information has come from before they share it, to think critically about the facts and whether or not they are coming from an expert to make sure what they're sharing is accurate.

Reverend Alton Bell, Senior Pastor at the Wembley Family Church, said:

As a faith leader and scientist in the black community, I'm lending my voice to this campaign because it is absolutely vital people get the facts about the vaccine, not rumours which could do them harm if they believe them. My message is simple: be aware of false information online and check before you share.

Imam Qari Asim, Senior Imam at Makkah Mosque in Leeds and Chair of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, said:

It's natural that people might have questions about vaccines, but we're seeing instances where they've relied on unfounded theories or fake news to make a decision to delay taking the vaccine.

We want people to be aware of the false information that is being circulated on these platforms and make informed choices based on the information from the health authorities and faith leaders.

Dr Onyinye Okonkwo, GP at the Wand Medical Centre in Birmingham, said:

I know that many members of the black community have concerns about the information being sent on social media about the vaccine. As a doctor, I understand that this information can be worrying.

I advise everyone to check with a reliable source, such as the NHS website and spread the right information, not the virus.

The move comes as Facebook launches the second wave of an on-platform ad campaign, in partnership with Full Fact, to educate people about how to spot false news online.

Rebecca Stimson, Head of Public Policy UK, Facebook, said:

Over the last year we've been connecting people with authoritative information about COVID-19 – directing over ten million visits to NHS and Government websites from Facebook and Instagram. As part of this new campaign we'll be providing free advertising to leaders in communities where there are concerns about the vaccines, to help them widely share accurate information.

During the pandemic we've removed twelve million pieces of harmful misinformation from Facebook and Instagram, and introduced limits on WhatsApp which have led to a 70% reduction in highly forwarded private messages.

Katy Minshall, Head of UK Public Policy, Twitter, said:

At Twitter, we recognise the role the service plays in disseminating credible public health information. We continue to work with health authorities around the world – including the NHS – to ensure high visibility access to trusted and accurate public health information on our service, including about COVID-19 vaccines.

We have continued to update our approach over the past year, and our most recent update means we will now apply labels to Tweets that may contain misleading information about COVID-19 vaccines, in addition to our continued efforts to remove the most harmful COVID-19 misleading information from the service. This continued investment builds on our existing work to guard against the artificial amplification of non-credible content about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The full toolkit can be found [here](#).
- The campaign centres around a main message – 'Check before you share' – and recommends three simple tips for people to follow:
- Check – is it coming from an expert?
- Look closely – does the information seem trustworthy?
- Still unsure? Don't share it
- The government, NHS and local authorities are working hard to encourage people in all communities to come forward and accept the offer of a jab when it comes.
- We recently set out details of how we are partnering with directors of public health, charities and faith leaders to bolster vaccine uptake.
- The NHS and faith and community leaders are central to these efforts and through them we are reaching more people who are eligible for a vaccine, providing them with clear advice and public health information in over thirteen languages.
- Through the Community Champions scheme councils and voluntary organisations are delivering accurate health information and ensuring communities have trusted local voices who can help answer questions about the vaccine. £23 million funding has been allocated to 60 councils and voluntary groups across England to support those most at risk from COVID-19 and boost vaccine take up.
- Champions are helping dispel myths around the vaccination process, using

Facebook and Whatsapp groups to hold Q&As to help drive take up of the vaccine.

Standards Matter 2: Further online evidence sessions announced

As part of its current [landscape review of standards](#), the Committee is continuing to gather evidence and views about the structures in place to support high standards in public life.

The Committee is holding online evidence sessions, via Zoom, on Wednesday 17 and Wednesday 24 March to hear from individuals and organisations on these issues.

The online open sessions will be livestreamed via [the Committee's YouTube page](#)

The Committee has no remit to investigate individual cases; these sessions will focus on the structures in place to regulate standards and encourage high standards of conduct in public life.

You can [view the evidence sessions from the 10 March here](#).

Wednesday 17 March – The Importance of High Ethical Standards

11:00 – 12:00: Lord Mark Sedwill KCMG, former Cabinet Secretary

13:00 – 14:00: Lord Gus O'Donnell GCB, former Cabinet Secretary

14:00 – 15:00: Dame Carolyn Fairbairn DBE, former Director General, Confederation of British Industry, and Sir Jonathan Symonds CBE, Non-Executive Chairman, GlaxoSmithKlein

15:30 – 16:30: Professor Elizabeth David-Barrett, Director, Centre for the Study of Corruption, University of Sussex, and Daniel Bruce, Chief Executive, Transparency International UK

16:30 – 17:30: Jacqui McKinlay, Chief Executive, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, and Jonathan Goolden, Regulatory and Public Sector Partner, Wilkin Chapman LLP Solicitors

Wednesday 24 March – Standards Bodies and Regulators

9:00 – 10:00: Rt Hon Peter Riddell CBE, Public Appointments Commissioner and former Director of the Institute for Government

10:00 – 11:00: Rt Hon Lord Eric Pickles, former Anti-Corruption Czar and

Chair, independent Advisory Committee on Business Appointments

11:00 – 12:00: Sir David Normington GCB, former First Civil Service Commissioner and former Public Appointments Commissioner

13:30 – 14:30: Dr Hannah White OBE, Deputy Director, Institute for Government*, and Professor Matthew Flinders, Professor of Politics and Director of the Sir Bernard Crick Centre for Public Understanding of Politics, University of Sheffield

14:40 – 15:30: Caroline Anderson, Ethical Standards Commissioner for Scotland, Ian Bruce, Public Appointments Manager for Scotland, Douglas Bain, Welsh Assembly Commissioner for Standards, and Dr Melissa McCullough, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Standards

16:00 – 17:00: Commissioner Mario Dion, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, Canada

*Dr Hannah White was Secretary to the Committee 2011-2013

The public consultation for this review has now closed. The Committee would like to thank all those who submitted evidence and views.

Meetings, roundtables and research for this review are ongoing. Notes and transcripts will be published on the Committee's website in due course.

The Committee will report in the autumn.

The online open sessions will be livestreamed [via the Committee's YouTube page](#)

Notes to Editors

1. Interview requests and media enquiries should go to Maggie O'Boyle on 07880 740627.
2. The independent Committee on Standards in Public Life advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in the UK. It monitors and reports on issues and arrangements relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders. [Find out more about the Committee's work here.](#)
3. The current members of the Committee are: Lord (Jonathan) Evans of Weardale KCB DL, Chairman, Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP (Labour), Dr Jane Martin CBE, Dame Shirley Pearce DBE, Monisha Shah , Rt Hon Lord (Andrew) Stunell OBE (Liberal Democrat) and Rt Hon Jeremy Wright QC MP (Conservative)
4. The Committee is also currently conducting [a review of electoral regulation](#), on the way donations and campaign expenditure by candidates, political parties and non-party campaigners in election and referendum campaigns are regulated and enforced by the Electoral Commission, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Police. It is due to report on electoral regulation by June 2021.
5. You can follow the Committee on Twitter [@PublicStandards](#)

[Watch the Committee's short videos about the Nolan principles](#)