

Newcastle rapist jailed for longer

Press release

Connor Barrass has had his jail sentence increased following an intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.



A Newcastle man has had his jail sentence increased following an intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

Connor Barrass, 23, was found guilty of rape, attempted rape, sexual assault and causing grievous bodily harm to his 40-year old victim. Prior to this case the offender had 21 previous convictions, a number of which involved violent offending against women.

On 10 August 2020, Barrass was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment at Newcastle Crown Court. The court also imposed a restraining order and he was made subject to the sex offenders notification requirements.

Following the court's decision, the Solicitor General referred the sentence to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme. On 9 December the Court found Barrass to be a Dangerous Offender and ruled that the sentence was unduly lenient. The Court increased the original sentence to 15 years' imprisonment followed by 5 years on licence.

After the hearing at the Court of Appeal the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP, said:

Barrass' actions were shocking and despicable. The Court of Appeal's decision to increase his sentence recognises his victim's distressing and harmful ordeal.

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Community groups tackling loneliness to benefit from £4m fund

Book clubs, walking groups and other community projects will be able to apply for a £4 million fund designed to help reduce loneliness in the coming months.

The Local Connections Fund – made up of £2 million from the Government and £2 million from The National Lottery Community Fund – will be used for hundreds of small grants worth between £300 and £2,500.

These investments are designed to help local organisations bring people and communities together as the country recovers from the coronavirus pandemic.

Minister for Civil Society, Baroness Barran, said:

A great way to reduce loneliness is to do something you already enjoy with like-minded people, whether that's walking, volunteering or joining a book club. During the pandemic I've been so impressed with the way community groups have adapted their work to bring people together in new and innovative ways.

By investing directly in local charities and organisations, the £4 million Local Connections Fund will get support to where it's needed quickly and help bring people together through shared interests, so that no one needs to feel isolated in the months ahead.

Elly De Decker, Director of England Funding at The National Lottery Community Fund, said:

Throughout the pandemic, we've seen charities and community groups be a powerful force for good, tackling loneliness.

Small organisations are making a big difference, often on only small sums of money – supporting individuals to connect, reducing feelings of isolation, and helping communities thrive.

Su Moore, Stronger Communities Director at the Jo Cox Foundation, said:

The power of connection is a thread that runs through the work of the Jo Cox Foundation. Throughout 2020, we've seen our Great Get Together and More in Common community organisers mobilise to

support their neighbours, to tackle loneliness.

Local people understand the issues in their communities, and by supporting them, we can make a real difference.

This announcement builds on previous work by the Government to reduce loneliness during the pandemic. Over £24 million of the [£750 million charity funding package](#) has gone directly towards reducing loneliness, and a further £45 million to organisations supporting people with their mental health.

And in June we relaunched our long-running campaign, Let's Talk Loneliness, to remind people that there's no shame in asking for help. The [website](#) has lots of useful advice on how to help yourself and others safely.

Throughout December, the [Let's Talk Loneliness advent calendar](#) is sharing practical advice, inspiring stories, and support routes to encourage people to take the first steps to alleviate loneliness in themselves and others.

The Local Connections Fund will be split into two rounds of funding – each with its own application window, one in January 2021 and one in the summer 2021.

Funding will be available to small charities and community groups in England with an annual income of £50,000 or less, which are working to reduce loneliness by helping people feel more connected.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will provide the first round of funding, totalling £2 million, and this will open for applications on 5 January 2021.

Organisations should apply via [The National Lottery Community Fund](#), the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Grants from this round will be distributed and spent by the end of the financial year.

Notes to Editors:

Three tangible actions for anyone feeling lonely and three actions for people wanting to help

If you are lonely you can:

- Keep in touch with friends, family and neighbours
- Ask for help if you are feeling lonely by getting in touch with organisations that offer support – there's a list on the Let's Talk Loneliness website.
- Set a routine with online activities, regular tasks or by volunteering

If you are worried about someone who is lonely:

- Phone a friend or send a letter to a family member you think may be lonely

- Smile, wave or chat from a safe distance with a neighbour
- Help out through volunteering with local groups or by offering regular conversation to someone living alone

Over the last two years, the UK Government has been leading the way on tackling loneliness:

- It created the world's first Minister for Loneliness and published the world's first Government loneliness strategy in October 2018, containing 60 commitments from nine Government departments. Implementation of the strategy is ongoing and the Government published a first annual report in January 2020 setting out our progress;
- It launched the first Government fund dedicated to reducing loneliness worth £11.5 million, which is supporting 126 projects to transform the lives of thousands of lonely people across England;
- It launched the inaugural #LetsTalkLoneliness campaign in June 2019 to help raise awareness and tackle stigma.

We are the largest community funder in the UK – we're proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since June 2004, we have made over 200,000 grants and awarded over £9 billion to projects that have benefited millions of people.

We are passionate about funding great ideas that matter to communities and make a difference to people's lives. At the heart of everything we do is the belief that when people are in the lead, communities thrive. Thanks to the support of National Lottery players, our funding is open to everyone. We're privileged to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.

[Withdrawal Agreement Update](#)

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House, and the people of Northern Ireland, on the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol as part of the Withdrawal Agreement with the European Union.

Throughout 2020 we have worked intensively to ensure that the Withdrawal Agreement, in particular the Northern Ireland Protocol, will be fully operational on 1 January 2021.

Our aims, and the proportionate and pragmatic way we intended to pursue them, were set out in the Command Paper we published in May, 'The UK's approach to the Northern Ireland Protocol' .

This set three key commitments that we believe needed to be respected in all

scenarios:

We had to ensure that Northern Ireland businesses retained unfettered access to the rest of the UK market.

Northern Ireland's place in the UK's customs territory had to be protected – and that meant that goods that stayed in the UK were not subject to tariffs.

And we had to ensure that the important GB-NI trade flows, on which lives and livelihoods depend, were not disrupted; and we need to ensure a smooth flow of trade, with no need for new physical customs infrastructure.

And Mr Speaker, I am pleased to say that on Monday the European Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič and I – as co-chairs of the Joint Committee set up to negotiate the implementation of the protocol – came to an agreement in principle on a deal which meets all of those commitments, and puts the people of Northern Ireland first.

I would like to begin by paying tribute to Maroš and his team for their pragmatism, their collaborative spirit – and their determination to get a deal done that would work for both sides. And I'd also like to thank the first minister, the deputy first minister and all the members of the Northern Ireland executive for their crucial intervention at significant moments in order to ensure that the rights of the people of Northern Ireland were protected.

Turning now to that first Government commitment, the deal protects unfettered access for Northern Ireland businesses to their most important market.

As the Prime Minister underlined, this had to be protected in full – and that meant removing any prospect of export declarations for Northern Ireland goods moving from Northern Ireland to Great Britain.

And that's what our agreement will do. There will be no additional requirements will be placed on Northern Ireland businesses for these movements, with the very limited and specific exception of trade in endangered species and conflict diamonds.

On the second commitment, Mr Speaker, the deal safeguards Northern Ireland's place in the UK's customs territory.

As recently as July, the Commission had envisaged a default tariffs scenario in which, and I quote:

all goods brought into Northern Ireland [would be] considered to be at risk ...and are as such subject to the Common Customs Tariff."

If that had been implemented that would have raised the prospect of a 58% tariff on a pint of milk going from Scotland to a supermarket in Strabane or 96% on a bag of sugar going from Liverpool to the shops of Belfast.

As we've repeatedly made clear, this could never have been an acceptable outcome.

So instead, I am pleased to say that under the agreement that we've reached, Northern Ireland businesses selling to consumers or using goods in Northern Ireland will be free of all tariffs.

Whether that is Nissan's cars from Sunderland; or lamb from Montgomeryshire.

Internal UK trade will be protected as we promised – whether we have a Free Trade Agreement with the EU or not.

And third, Mr Speaker, this deal would keep goods flowing between Great Britain and Northern Ireland in January, and indeed provide some necessary additional flexibilities.

It protects Northern Ireland supermarket supplies. We heard throughout the year that traders needed time to adapt their systems.

That is why we have a grace period for supermarkets to update their procedures.

And our agreement also prevents any disruption at the end of the transition period on the movements of chilled meats. British sausages will continue to make their way to Belfast and Ballymena in the new year. And we have also got time for reciprocal agreements between the UK and EU on agri food to be discussed in the months ahead.

This deal also protects the flow of medicines and vet medicines into Northern Ireland. This means we'll grant industry a period of up to 12 months to adapt to the rules under the protocol – so this will avoid any disruption to critical medical supplies.

So three commitments entered into, three commitments that we have upheld.

But this agreement in principle also goes further still, providing additional flexibility that will enable us to make the most of the opportunities that face us as the transition period ends.

As you know, Mr Speaker, this House has been concerned about the risk of so-called 'reach back' from the state aid provisions that the Protocol applies.

The concern that many colleagues had was that a company in Great Britain, with only a peripheral link to commercial operations in Northern Ireland, could be caught inadvertently by the tests within the Protocol's text.

That would not have been acceptable; nor was it what the Protocol had envisaged.

That is why I am pleased that the agreement we have addresses that risk.

It means firms in GB stay outside state aid rules where there is no 'genuine and direct' link to Northern Ireland, and no 'real foreseeable' impact on NI-EU trade. It's an important step forward, dealing with an issue raised by a number of honourable and right honourable members across this House.

Also, this deal ensures that Northern Ireland will be out of the Common Agricultural Policy, which means that the Northern Ireland Executive have full freedom to set their own agricultural subsidies for Northern Ireland's farmers.

It also means appropriate and flexible arrangements which mean that more than £400m of spending each year is totally exempt from state aid rules. As well as this, the deal ensures that support for fishermen in Northern Ireland will also be exempt from EU state aid rules – and that means more than £15m of flexibilities for Northern Ireland's fishermen over the next five years. And of course Northern Ireland's services industries are totally outside the scope of the Protocol and its state aid measures.

The agreement also respects the Protocol provisions, which were endorsed by Parliament, that allow some EU officials to be present at Northern Ireland ports as UK authorities carry out our own procedures.

And let me be clear, there will be no Belfast 'mini-embassy' or mission, as the EU originally sought. And the EU officials will not have any powers to carry out checks themselves.

There will instead be sensible practical arrangements, cooperation, reciprocal data-sharing, so that both sides can have confidence in these unique arrangements.

We also want to leave no doubt about our ongoing commitments to peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland.

My Right Honourable Friend the Northern Ireland Secretary will set out, in the coming days, further measures of financial support, to help businesses and communities to prosper and thrive from the end of the year and beyond.

And Mr Speaker, we've been able to deliver a package which now means that the Protocol can be implemented in a pragmatic and a proportionate way. It takes account of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all of its dimensions, and it protects the interests both of the EU single-market but more importantly, the territorial and constitutional integrity of the whole United Kingdom.

Now, this agreement will be approved officially at a Joint Committee meeting in the coming days.

And, of course this agreement that we have reached also enables the Government to withdraw clauses 44, 45 and 47 of the UK Internal Market Bill, and avoids the need for any additional provisions in the Taxation Bill.

Having put beyond doubt the primacy of the sovereignty of this place, as we leave the EU, we rest safe in the knowledge that such provisions are no longer required.

We know that we now need to get on and give further clarity to business as to the specifics of what this deal means for them, and how it will all work in detail in practice. And we will do this through the publication of further guidance.

And that will sit along the ongoing, intensive work we will take forward to implement the Protocol

But above all, Mr Speaker, we will always work with the interests of the people and businesses of Northern Ireland in mind – as this agreement, and the important flexibilities it will provide, reflects.

Because we must all remember if the Protocol is to work, it must work for the whole community in Northern Ireland. And whether it is to be maintained in the future, as the Protocol itself sets out, is for the people of Northern Ireland to decide through the democratic consent mechanism that my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister negotiated.

And on that critical, important note of the primacy of democracy, I recommend this statement to the House.

[UK Minister reiterates UK commitment to Somalia and the region's response to the threat of Al-Shabaab](#)

Press release

Minister for Africa, James Duddridge MP visited Mogadishu where he announced new UK contributions to support Somalia's long-term security and stability.



UK Minister for Africa, James Duddridge and Somali Prime Minister, Mohamed Hussein Roble

UK Minister for Africa, James Duddridge MP, visited Mogadishu this week where he underlined the UK's continuing commitment to Somalia's long-term security and stability, and the world's poorest, with new UK support worth £21.8 million (\$29.2 million).

In the first visit to Somalia by a UK government Minister since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic – and the first visit since the UK created a single Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office to bring together diplomacy and development – Mr Duddridge met President Mohamed Farmajo and Prime Minister Mohammed Roble. They discussed the upcoming federal elections, including the importance of timely and inclusive elections, as well as progress on economic and security sector reform.

In discussions on UK support for Somalia's operations against Al-Shabaab, the Minister announced new UK contributions to support the Somali Security Forces worth £1.6 million (\$2.15 million) to counter the threat from roadside bombs.

The Minister met British troops training the Somali army, and reiterated UK support for the African Union in securing and protecting regional stability. He said that the UK would contribute a further £3.37 million (\$4.5 million) for the Somali Security Forces engaged in joint operations with the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM).

The Minister also met development and humanitarian partners working to protect the resilience, health and stability of Somalia's communities – and announced a comprehensive package of UK support.

This includes:

- £3.8 million (\$4.9 million) to help the thousands of Somalis recently displaced by catastrophic flooding. This is in addition to long-term UK aid-funded food assistance, emergency healthcare and shelter for the country's most vulnerable
- £5m (\$6.7 million) to support cash-based food assistance for approximately 123,000 vulnerable, food insecure people. This funding will be channelled through WFP Somalia
- A further £8 million (\$10.3 million) to support Somalia's health services, with a focus on antenatal care and vaccinations. So far this year, UK aid has helped over 120,000 Somali women receive antenatal care, ensured a skilled birth attendant was present for the delivery of 90,000 babies, and vaccinated 100,000 children against the most common childhood killers

UK Minister for Africa, James Duddridge, said:

The UK is a proud partner on Somalia's journey towards stability and security – from British troops training alongside the Somali Army, to the life-saving UK aid programmes that are safely delivering babies and vaccinating against disease, as well as providing those in desperate need with food assistance.

We remain committed to African efforts to secure and protect regional stability, and today I can announce new UK support to those working alongside the African Union's peacekeeping mission here in Somalia. Working together, we can tackle the forces who

threaten stability across East Africa and around the world.

Notes to Editors:

- The UK Minister for Africa visited Somalia on 8 and 9 December
- A biography of the Minister for Africa, James Duddridge MP, can be found [here](#)
- The further £3.8m humanitarian funding for Somalis displaced by catastrophic flooding will support the provision of cash-based assistance to the most vulnerable and much needed relief supplies for the many thousands of Somalis recently displaced by catastrophic flooding. This is part of the UK's £324m four year humanitarian programme from 2018 to 2022 which also provides food assistance, emergency healthcare, nutrition, shelter, and protection for the most vulnerable
- The further £8m for the provision of health services, such as antenatal care and vaccination, in Somalia brings the UK's total health spending from 2016 to 2021 to £96.9m
- The further £5m (\$6.7 million) to support cash-based food assistance comes from the UK's Crisis Reserve, a £61m funding package recently approved by the Foreign Secretary, targeting 12 countries with rising levels of food insecurity

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[New partnership programme to help financial institutions digitise](#)

The Department for International Trade (DIT) has today launched new a global partnerships programme, Leading Edge, to help International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in priority markets access the best British fintech solutions – beginning with Singapore, Australia and the US.

Leading Edge is designed to help create the right conditions for new partnerships and trade and investment opportunities, supporting important global financial and professional services relationships and promoting the adoption of fintech, particularly of UK-grown solutions in areas such as RegTech, robotic process automation and Artificial Intelligence.

Large financial institutions will be able to make the most of the leading fintech scene in the UK, which is home to approximately 1600 fintech firms and this is expected to more than double by 2030. The UK fintech sector is estimated to be worth £11bn in revenue in 2019, up from £6.6bn in 2015, and now accounts for around 8% of total financial services output.

Minister for Investment, Gerry Grimstone, said:

At this year's Singapore FinTech Festival, the UK is showcasing why collaboration and innovation are key pillars of our fintech philosophy and why digitisation is a core part of the future of financial services.

The digital adoption and transformation support offered by the UK's leading firms will enable International Financial Institutions to remain not only competitive but also a viable part of the financial services sector of tomorrow.

I welcome the launch of Leading Edge, which will give these global firms in our partner countries, including Singapore, the opportunity to collaborate with and benefit from the UK's world leading fintech expertise.

DBS CEO, Piyush Gupta, said:

DBS is excited to work with Leading Edge, which offers us the opportunity to tap into the extensive range of capabilities of UK fintechs.

This will further enhance our existing in-house programmes that not only engage, nurture and grow the startup community but through value exchange, create incremental value for our customers.

UOB Head of Group Technology and Operations, Susan Hwee, said:

At UOB, we focus on building on our customers' trust by making banking simpler, smarter and safer.

In our pursuit to create greater value for them, we continually innovate and work with like-minded partners across the globe.

As the ecosystems we forged have enabled us to break new ground in developing customer-centric banking solutions, we look forward to collaborating with the best of UK FinTech firms in the Leading Edge programme.

In Singapore, DIT has agreed partnerships with the three major banks, DBS, OCBC and UOB. This announcement comes as part of the UK's involvement in Singapore FinTech festival. DIT has a full programme of events, with speakers including Minister for Investment, Gerry Grimstone, HM Trade Commissioner for Asia Pacific Natalie Black CBE, and CEO of DBS, Piyush Gupta.

The UK and Singapore are both leaders in the global digital economy, with 65% of all UK services exports to the world delivered remotely in 2019. We are

working closely with Singapore to ensure business continuity, and working towards the UK joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership; a key priority for government as we focus on strengthening our relationships with dynamic economies in the Indo-Pacific region.