

Update on tackling intimidation in public life

In July 2017, the then Prime Minister commissioned the independent and respected Committee on Standards in Public Life to undertake a review into abuse and intimidation in elections. This followed concerning evidence from many Parliamentary candidates – across the political spectrum – on their experiences during the 2017 general election.

For those in public life, it has become harder and harder to conduct any political discussion, on any issue, without it descending into tribalism and rancour. Social media and digital communication – which in themselves can and should be forces for good in our democracy – are being exploited and abused, often anonymously.

It is important to distinguish between strongly felt political debate on one hand, and unacceptable acts of abuse, hatred, intimidation and violence. British democracy has always been robust and oppositional. But a line is crossed when disagreement mutates into intimidation.

Left unchecked, abuse and intimidation will change our democracy and mean that the way Members interact with constituents will need to change. Increasing levels of threats directed at those in public life is a worrying trend that will require a coordinated and thorough response from government, the relevant authorities, businesses and the public themselves to address.

As the general election campaign commences, I want to update the House on the actions that the Government has taken to tackle intimidation, and the steps that the Government is taking in this specific election.

Prosecution guidance

We have worked with the Law Officers to publish new guidance from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for the legal authorities on the laws on intimidation, and the wide range of areas in which intimidation can be prosecuted under existing laws. This has been complemented by guidance to the police from the National Police Chiefs Council.

The CPS guidance can be found at: [Responding to intimidating behaviour: Information for Parliamentarians](#). The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), CPS, College of Policing and Electoral Commission have also issued [Joint Guidance for Candidates in Elections](#), which is distributed by the Electoral Commission.

Supporting local councils

We have passed legislation to remove the requirements for candidates running for local government, parish council, and local mayoral elections, to have

their addresses on their ballot papers.

We have written to Local Authority Chief Executives, to raise awareness about the sensitive interest provisions in the Localism Act 2011 which protect the personal addresses of councillors in England, ensuring that monitoring officers are aware of the guidance published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

New legislation to tackle intimidation

We have consulted on our Internet Safety Strategy Green paper, and we published the world-leading DCMS-Home Office Online Harms White Paper in April 2019. This set out a range of legislative and non-legislative measures detailing how we will tackle online harms and set clear responsibilities for tech companies to keep UK citizens safe. It established a government-wide approach to online safety, delivering the Digital Charter's ambitions of making the UK the safest place in the world to be online, whilst also leading the world in innovation-friendly regulation that supports the growth of the tech sector.

The White Paper set out the Government's intention to introduce a new mandatory 'duty of care', which will require relevant companies to take reasonable steps to keep their users safe and tackle illegal and harmful activity on their services. It stated that the new regulatory framework will make clear companies' responsibility to address the harm of "online abuse of public figures". The White Paper also included ambitious measures to support education and awareness for all users and to promote the development and adoption of new safety technologies.

The Cabinet Office has undertaken a public consultation entitled 'Protecting the Debate: Intimidation, Influence and Information'. From that we committed to legislate to introduce a new electoral offence, clarify the electoral offence of undue influence of a voter, and introduce a digital imprints regime.

Digital imprints

We recognise the important arguments in favour of having a digital imprints regime in place as soon as possible, but it was not possible to legislate for and implement a regime in advance of a December election. Technical considerations would need to be addressed, for example to avoid the need for individual candidates and campaigners to publish their home addresses as part of an imprint. Moreover, for a digital imprints regime to work properly, political parties, campaigners and others would need to understand on what material they are required to include an imprint. Rushing into a new regime – that could have proved unworkable – could have led to significant issues, including confusion, unintentionally stifling democratic debate or to people unknowingly committing an offence.

The Government is committed to implementing a digital imprints regime as soon as it can – but it must be a workable regime.

Defending Democracy Programme

On 22 July 2019, the Government announced the Defending Democracy programme that will help maintain the integrity of our democracy and electoral processes. This cross-government programme, led by the Cabinet Office, has been set up to: * protect and secure UK democratic processes, systems and institutions from interference, including from cyber, personnel and physical threats; * strengthen the integrity of UK elections; * encourage respect for open, fair and safe democratic participation; and * promote fact-based and open discourse, including online.

Earlier this year, this Government committed to publishing a consultation on electoral integrity, which will look at measures to improve voters' confidence in our democracy.

Protection of candidates

The Parliamentary Liaison and Investigations Team (PLAIT) and the Members Security Support Team (MSSS) will continue to support Members once they become candidates after dissolution. Personal security advice and guidance has been provided to all Members, and there is a package of security measures available for homes and constituency offices.

- Local police forces are chiefly responsible for the security of candidates. As such, they have been briefed on their responsibilities regarding the delivery of protective security measures. The Home Secretary wrote to Chief Constables on 21st October 2019, and the Security Minister wrote to PCCs, to ensure that they prioritised tackling the intimidation and abuse of Members and candidates.
- Local police forces also have a dedicated point of contact for candidates who can be contacted for security advice. All urgent concerns, or contact outside of office hours, should be directed to police control rooms, who have been briefed to provide suitable guidance and support.
- Recognising that intimidation can take a number of forms, the Cabinet Office will coordinate with the Police, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and others to issue a package of security guidance, including how to report it. Following the dissolution of Parliament, this guidance will be sent to all Returning Officers, to be issued to all candidates in every constituency.

The Cabinet Office, in its cross government coordination role, has set up an Election Cell which will meet regularly during the election campaign period and whose attendees include organisations responsible for the safety of candidates.

Advice to candidates regarding abuse online

Social media helps Members and candidates connect with the public and can and should be a force for good in our democracy. However, there have been worrying trends of abuse and threats directed towards Members of all parties, and particularly female and BAME Members. The Government believes this is completely unacceptable.

Illegal activity online should be treated in the same way as illegal activity offline, and reported to the police. Social media companies, such as Facebook and Twitter, have also developed guidance and dedicated mailboxes for reporting abuse and intimidation against candidates during an election. Today, the Home Secretary, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and I have written to social media companies asking them to work together during this election to provide clear advice to candidates in one place so candidates know what content breaches their terms and conditions, where to report suspected breaches and what they can expect once a report has been made. We have also asked that they work together to identify where abusive users towards candidates are migrating between platforms and to encourage more proactivity on this. A copy of this letter has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Conclusion

Democracy is a fundamental British value and one underpinned by respectful, vibrant and robust debate. But this freedom cannot be an excuse to cause harm, spread hatred or impose views upon others – a line is crossed when disagreement mutates into intimidation, violence or abuse.

Our politics will be the poorer if talented potential candidates – people who just want to stand to represent their peers and stand up for their areas – decide not to get involved out of fear for their or their loved ones safety. If fewer candidates put themselves forward, then voters will have less choice at the ballot box.

The Government will take all necessary steps to protect the debate, have put in place measures to support candidates with their safety for this election and have ambitious plans to tackle online and offline abuse of those in public life beyond.

[Sara Khan's speech at Leeds Council](#)

Thank you Shaid for inviting me and to Leeds Council for hosting this event.

I've had wonderful feedback about the last 2 days, and I hope we can continue to see more events like this.

As a born and raised Yorkshire lass it's always wonderful to be back up north.

Someone remarked to me the other day that the tea is much stronger up north.

I replied: "Ah yes, that's because Britain's finest tea is from the north. Of course, I'm referring to the one and only Yorkshire Tea. Where no other tea compares!"

It's not just the tea that is stronger either.

Some of the most resilient and no-nonsense counter-extremists are from up north too. So, I mean it when I say: "More power to us Northerners!"

As much as I would like to spend the next 20 minutes talking about the many virtues of the north of England, I must focus on the challenge of hateful extremism.

The role of councils and civil society in challenging extremism is vital. They are not necessarily the same role, but they are certainly complementary.

Local councils are on the front line of countering extremism. Civil society groups are often the first to spot emerging tensions within their area and communities. Local councils are often the first to respond when incidents break out. Both civil society and councils are often the first to see the devastating impact extremism is having in their areas too.

The work that you all do together is crucial to countering extremism. And your work is vital because the challenge of extremism continues to endure in our country.

We are seeing Channel referrals for far right extremism now account for nearly half of all referrals for the first time ever.

Last year saw the biggest far right marches in a generation, many of which will have been in the cities and towns that you represent.

Prosecutions for inciting racial hatred are at their highest since recording began.

This year alone we've seen a 10% rise in hate crime and a further rise in antisemitic and anti-Muslim incidents.

Tech companies find themselves in a never-ending battle of removing and taking down hundreds of thousands of pieces of extremist content online.

Islamist extremists continue to persist; often targeting other Muslims.

Other forms of extremism are also beginning to garner significant concern such as far left hateful extremism directed at Jews.

I've also heard about hateful extremist activity within other minority communities – often directed at other minorities or towards members of that

same community.

I've also heard frightening evidence from farmers targeted by animal rights extremists.

And as the Commission's work shows, extremists, whether far right, Islamist or other, are seizing on and exploiting local tensions in our towns and cities to cause division, to spread their disinformation and extremist propaganda in an attempt to recruit, normalise and mainstream their views. These activists are organised, active and often effective.

Victims are often targeted because of who they are or what they believe. Individuals from ethnic, racial or religious minorities are targeted as well as women, LGBT people and those who hold differing political views. The active attempts to diminish pluralism, normalise hateful narratives, which often include making the moral case for violence, demand an urgent response.

Inaction therefore is quite simply not an option especially when we recognise the wider harm extremist activity is causing.

Our research, the first of its kind, has shown that the harms of extremism are wider than terrorism and include:

- social division and intolerance
- crime, violence and harassment
- censorship and restriction of freedom
- the undermining of democracy
- economic harms
- mental health and wellbeing

Why would we therefore not counter extremism?

Yet unfortunately, some do make this very case despite the devastating impact of extremism. Counter-extremism is itself often viewed in a negative light, is perceived to be controversial and those working in this field, whether council officials or indeed local civil society groups often find themselves in the face of abuse. Some who oppose counter-extremism work even go as far as suggesting erroneously that counter-extremism work is a racist endeavour.

Prior to my role as Commissioner I spent over a decade running a counter-extremism NGO and I was always struck by these 2 parallel challenges.

The need to counter the harmful activity of extremists – and challenging those who call for an end to counter-extremism work – while ensuring that counter-extremism work is rooted with a clear objective in line with civil liberties so that distrust and opposition do not arise which could hamper vital counter-extremism efforts.

But quite frankly something needs to change. We need a new way of thinking about extremism that helps us make sense of it all and that's what I'm here today to talk to you about – how the Commission's work provides such clarity.

About 18 months ago I was appointed to head up the independent Commission to

review extremism and current counter-extremism efforts in England and Wales.

My Commission is committed to engagement, evidence and impartiality.

I have visited 20 towns and cities; held a series of workshops, roundtables and interviews with experts, activists and critics; and ran a call for evidence receiving nearly 3,000 responses.

I gathered evidence from inside and outside government – including publishing work from 17 academics.

Our findings were published last month in the report “Challenging Hateful Extremism.”

I wanted this report to address head on some of the key challenges that exist in counter-extremism work.

Firstly, the conceptual challenge of extremism.

When I started my role, the phrase I often received from well-wishers was: “Good luck with that!”

And it’s not difficult to understand why.

As many of you know, when you discuss extremism, you hear a lot of different interpretations.

The E-word is also often misused, especially in these politically febrile times, to label opponents or to even shut down debate. It’s not surprising therefore that some are sceptical about the E-word.

But I don’t think that this is enough of a sound argument to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Who can deny, for example, the presence of Islamist and far right extremist groups – and the harm they are having, not only in our country but globally?

On the contrary I see it as the Commission’s job to get rid of some of that ambiguity and to ensure that counter-extremism work is proportionate.

And that’s what we have done in this report.

Firstly, we have shown that extremism is not confined to a single race, religion or ideology. Concerns were raised about the growing threat of the far right, far left, Islamist and other forms of religious extremism and even animal rights extremism.

Nor is extremism solely limited to violence; it also includes what has traditionally often been understood as non-violent extremism. This is a confusing term I’ve never liked because I think it hides the true harm of what we actually mean. Outside of terrorism and violent extremism, we have identified what we call hateful extremism:

Behaviours that can incite and amplify hate, or engage in persistent hatred,

or equivocate about or make the moral case for violence

That draw on hateful, hostile or supremacist beliefs directed at an out-group, and that cause or are likely to cause harm.

It is my view that countering hateful extremism requires the greatest attention and focus if we are to be successful in reducing the extremist threat.

Yet having reviewed the current counter-extremism approach including the government's counter-extremism strategy, it is clear to me that a complete overhaul is required in our counter-extremism approach.

And this brings me onto addressing the second challenge that I sought to address in my report – what does a counter-extremism approach look like?

Well, it requires a vision for a start: one where together we uphold our democratic way of life in a peaceful, plural and inclusive society that opposes intolerance;

Where people exercise individual liberty but also take personal responsibility in promoting equal citizenship;

And where communities and institutions robustly challenge and resist extremism, supporting those affected by it.

A counter-extremism approach should be victim-centred and human rights-based ensuring a proportionate response.

Freedom of expression must be defended and protected; but it is a qualified right and can be limited. To date there has been little discussion of the victims of extremism; how extremists target them and the resulting abuse, harassment and curtailment of their rights; or the wider consequences to a democratic society.

A counter-extremism approach should also be much more effective in challenging extremist propaganda, narratives and disinformation – and crucially counter-extremism requires taking a stand and being proactive.

As Albert Einstein famously said: “The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.”

I think this describes counter-extremism.

Inaction is quite simply not an option.

I want to talk about the important role of councils in challenging hateful extremism. I've seen some excellent initiatives and work by local authorities.

The LGA submission to our call for evidence highlighted the damage that it's doing to our communities and local businesses, which have to deal with the

impact of increasingly hate-filled public demonstrations on their doorstep

In the north this threat manifests itself in a number of ways.

Whether it be increased far right marches in our towns and cities or hateful extremists exploiting tensions in our communities around the introduction of relationships education as we have seen with activists from the Islamist extremist group Hizb-Ut Tahrir.

Hateful extremism isn't just a lofty concept, it helps us make sense of behaviours we are seeing in our local area and communities. One such case that demonstrates this is Sunderland.

We show how local, national and international far right activists seized on local tensions, organising and attending 13 marches in 13 months.

They spread anti-minority disinformation and conspiracy theories online and offline, amassing hundreds of thousands of views to normalise hate and recruit others to their cause. Stephen Yaxley Lennon in conjunction with Rebel Media for example promoted one campaign which amassed 100,000 views.

Social division, attacks on Asians and mistrust of the state were some of the harms.

What happened next showed a real step-change in developing innovative solutions to complex problems.

The local council and police worked tirelessly to counter these insidious narratives and demonstrate commitment to local residents by setting up public meetings where residents could voice their concerns to decision makers. The local print media played an important role in not sensationalising the issue and reporting on the facts.

Sunderland has a long road ahead of it to repair the damage done by these far right activists but I'm confident that they will continue to demonstrate real leadership in challenging these hateful extremists.

Whilst Sunderland have done a great job over the last 6 months, we cannot be complacent. Something like Sunderland can happen anywhere.

Hateful extremists look for and seize on local tensions...

And unfortunately, there's plenty of tension around.

No town or city is immune; and often these incidents can develop quickly over a relatively short period of time.

But my tour of the country has also shown me that not every council knows how best to respond to these often-difficult challenges when they arise.

Some councils felt able to talk about some forms of extremism in their area, for example the far right, but found it uncomfortable to discuss others, for example, Islamist extremism, in fear of causing offence or a lack of

understanding.

For the sake of victims and social cohesion we must move beyond this.

I have made clear in my report that having a consistent approach to tackling all forms of extremism is needed; we need to call out extremism wherever and from whichever section of our society it manifests.

Our report also gives an example of one council who did not take a more robust response to an extremist in their area, even after the High Court declared this individual, an imam of a mosque, to be an extremist who had spouted religious violence, antisemitism and other extremist behaviour.

Our case study showed, that despite the High Court's ruling, it appeared to be business as usual for this imam and a poor response from the council and civil society (including other faith leaders), contributed to a lack of an effective response in challenging his extremist behaviour and beliefs – and not challenging this is how normalisation happens.

We can and must do better than this if we are committed to countering hateful extremism.

Another key challenge increasingly faced by local councils is activist groups who unfortunately are misplaced in undermining counter-extremism.

We are around the corner from Bradford my home town, and, as many of you will be aware, earlier this year we saw the controversy with the Bradford Literature Festival – where speakers decided to pull out because some of the festival's funding included central government BSBT funding.

Some of the accusations levelled at the counter-extremism strategy included the claim that “taking counter-extremism money in any circumstances legitimises the strategy of the state which approaches Muslims as criminals” and that the “counter-extremism strategy relies on premise that Muslims are predisposed to violence and therefore require monitoring and surveillance”.

Islamist organisations like Cage and others have regularly promoted such views creating fear and distrust – and it is unfortunate to see an anti-counter-extremism lobby regularly peddle these false claims.

As one of the few people who has reviewed the government's 2015 counter-extremism strategy and criticised the current approach as unfocused, unnecessarily broad and at times confusing, I have yet to see any evidence of these unfounded claims.

These claims are, at best, a misrepresentation of the counter-extremism strategy and of BSBT, at worst they are dangerous.

Such false claims not only damage counter-extremism work but can help create a climate of hostility towards counter-extremists including the view that they are Islamophobic.

And I must address the abuse towards those who deliver counter-extremism

work.

My report shows that counter-extremists often receive more abuse, often personal, racist and sexist I might add, than support – and this includes not only civil society groups that may operate in your local area but is often experienced by council officials, community and Prevent co-ordinators and even councillors.

Some have faced unacceptable vilification in an attempt to smear and silence counter-extremists – labelled as sell-outs, Uncle Toms, Islamophobic, a native informant, not a real Jew or Sikh, that they are part of a state-led conspiracy, are spies and so on.

I have been genuinely shocked at the scale of this abuse; our report shows that 78% of counter-extremists had experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment because of the work they do or for receiving government funding for counter-extremism work.

Not only does such abuse dissuade others from getting involved in counter-extremism work, it is contributing to a climate of censorship and is undermining this important work. Counter-extremists should not have to put up with such abuse as part of their day job. It's difficult enough countering the hatred of extremists – to then find yourself being targeted by the anti-counter-extremism activists.

The role of local councils is vital in this regard; to directly challenge such behaviour and these harmful narratives, while providing support to those who are countering extremism on the ground.

I know from my own personal experience that counter-extremism is often lonely and even dispiriting work.

I cannot emphasise how vital it is to show support to those whether within the council or in civil society who are experiencing such abuse.

And as someone who did come from a civil society background, I will say this: councils need to make sure they don't just go to the usual gatekeepers or those who shout the loudest or to those who claim to represent 'a community'. There is no monolithic community. You have a duty to hear from the diversity of views that exist and especially from victims.

So, what next for the Commission?

Well we have put forward a number of recommendations for government, public bodies, tech companies and civil society.

I am of the strong view that there needs to be clear distinctions between counter-terrorism, counter-extremism and integration/community cohesion work; all 3 are vital but all 3 are different and require different responses.

I am concerned that too often we talk about these issues as if they are one and the same; they are not, and our language and response need to demonstrate this.

We're due to get a response from the government in 3 months; but I suspect this will be longer with the upcoming general election and a new government.

But as extremism continues to persist, I'm not content to sit and wait for a response, that's why in the coming months the Commission will focus on our key priorities

Having provided the first step of a language, description and understanding of hateful extremism, the Commission is now working towards developing a working definition of hateful extremism.

We want to show that our definition works operationally, for the public and as a basis for improving the law. Thanks to those of you who attended our workshop yesterday, we want to hear your thoughts on how our definition works on the ground.

As we continue this work, I'd encourage those interested to reach out to the Commission, join our workshops and help us shape government policy from the ground up.

Secondly, we want to make sure that existing powers are applied consistently and appropriately. Although we haven't heard a good case for more powers, we have heard that existing ones aren't being applied to their fullest extent.

In the coming months I hope to undertake a review of existing legislation through the lens of hateful extremism, victims' experiences, and the abuse counter-extremists suffer, including online. We must make sure that we are using all of the powers we have at our disposal to counter hateful extremists.

Thirdly, in our report we recommended that the government set up a new taskforce to help everyone to become quicker to respond to incidents.

In the meantime, we're going to focus on connecting the local to the national.

In the coming months we will work with people in this room to identify emerging incidents, we'll facilitate discussions between people on the ground and experts who can offer unique insights. We'll support those affected on the ground to develop better responses.

I support the vital work of the Special Interest Group on Challenging Extremism and I will be keen to work with them closely, as they are with the Commission, in together developing effective, robust and faster responses to extremist incidents as they develop.

We will continue to produce research – in particular to understand better what we know to be effective in countering hateful extremism.

Next year we will provide an update of our work and share all of our learning.

We have a lot of work to do in the next few months to deliver these

priorities and of course, you will all have a role too.

Local councils are at the forefront of challenging hateful extremism and, as many of you know, it's about upholding our plural and democratic way of life, about defending our diverse country which is made up of different races, political opinions, sexualities, religions and beliefs.

It is about having confidence in knowing what we stand for as a country: individual liberty, equal citizenship, fundamental freedoms; and standing up for them with conviction and pride.

This ultimately, and I cannot emphasise this enough, requires brave, bold and consistent leadership both from government and across civil society. Without leadership and a commitment in standing up for these values that defines our liberal democracy, we will not be able to counter hateful extremism that is so desperately needed.

Which is why yesterday – as we head towards a general election, I wrote to the leaders of the 3 main political parties calling on them to make a clear commitment to challenging hateful extremism.

I will be looking to see if our political parties, who seek to form the next government, understand the responsibility that falls on them to champion the work needed to counter hateful extremism. I would like to see a commitment within each political party's manifesto.

In my letter I wrote that “our country's current response to hateful extremism is weak, insufficient and often ineffective. In the interests of our country we need to do better”.

And how can we do better?

By recognising hateful extremist incidents far more quickly. By doing more to protect and support victims. By being more effective in challenging hateful extremists by using the right tools whether legal or otherwise. By everyone playing their part which includes recognising that inaction works in favour of hateful extremists.

We cannot turn a blind eye; to do so results in consequences advantageous to extremists.

I believe with our new approach – with greater clarity in our language – and by working together we can protect and promote a plural, peaceful and inclusive Britain.

Thank you very much

West Bank settlements: Foreign Office statement



A Foreign Office spokesperson said:

The UK condemns the Israeli authorities' recent advancement of plans for over 2,300 housing units across the West Bank.

Settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the physical viability of the two-state solution. The UK calls on Israel to halt such counterproductive action.

Further information

Published 5 November 2019

Sunderland man charged over £12,000 for running illegal waste operation

On Wednesday 30 October, a Sunderland man was ordered to pay over £12,000 after a hearing at Sunderland Magistrates Court.

Mr Clifford Shee, aged 55, of Bright Street in Sunderland, was successfully prosecuted by the Environment Agency and subsequently fined £1,999 [comprising of £1,230 for charge 1 and £769 for charge 2], and ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £120 and costs of £10,800.

The overall amount totalled £12,919.

Mr Shee was prosecuted for operating outside the requirements of three exempt waste activities, which included illegally storing mixed waste onsite

containing general waste and food stuffs, storing hazardous waste inappropriately, and failing to keep accurate and correct details of waste transfer documentation between September 2017 and February 2018.

Mr Shee ran the operation from a site on Durham Road, Birtley.

Mr Shee was also prosecuted for failing to safely store ninety-nine 45 gallon drums, which contained polluting, hazardous and combustible wastes. This was made additionally careless as the drums were located near to a ditch that runs into Rowletch Burn, and sits only a short distance from the main North South Railway line.

Even though the drums were initially fly-tipped on to his property, Mr Shee failed to take appropriate steps to remove the hazardous items. He stored them for several years outside in the open air without any regard to the risks to the environment and neighbouring premises, through spillage or fire.

Mr Shee ignored all of the advice and guidance provided to him by the Environment Agency and deliberately continued to operate his waste company in breach of the rules.

Mr Shee entered guilty pleas to the charges under regulation 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016, operating a regulated facility, namely a waste operation except under and to the extent authorised by an environmental permit.

Also section 33 (1) (c) of the Environmental Protection 1990, keeping waste in a manner that is likely to cause pollution or harm to human health and section 34(5) and (6) of the Environmental protection Act 1990 for failing to include certain specified information on waste transfer documentation.

Jonathan Stirland, acting on behalf of the defendant, told magistrates that Mr Shee had gaps in his knowledge about operating the site and was keen to undertake training. He also intended to remove some of the offending waste from the site but had been prevented from doing so by a faulty clutch on one of his vehicles. In respect of the 99 drums of waste, Mr Stirland told the court they had been fly-tipped on Mr Shee's land and he didn't know what to do with them.

When sentencing, the magistrates found Mr Shee's operation of the facility without a permit as deliberate, telling him "...you knew what you did was wrong and you did it for a long period of time", and "...disregarded advice given".

In regards to the storage drums, the magistrates described Mr Shee's behaviour in failing to take any steps to deal with them as "unbelievable", calling his actions "reckless at the very least".

Area environment manager for the Environment Agency, Jamie Fletcher, said:

Our role as regulator aims to help protect the public, residents and the environment from situations that may potentially cause serious harm. In the case of Mr Shee, he continuously ignored the

advice from the Agency, and ran a waste company that was in breach of environmental rules that are in place for a reason to help protect people.

The Birtley site contained almost a hundred hazardous storage drums, and if they were to leak or be set alight could've caused serious damage or health implications to local residents or the environment.

The successful prosecution and level of fine shows how the Environment Agency is always looking to clamp down on unlawful activities, and will seek to bring to justice those individuals and businesses who aim to bend the rules.

If you see or are aware of waste crime, you can report it by calling the Environment Agency's incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60 or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Letter to Returning Officers

[unable to retrieve full-text content] Minister for the Cabinet Office, Oliver Dowden, provides assurance to Returning Officers that reasonable costs for the 2019 General Election will be reimbursed.