

Speech: 'To govern is to serve': Chris Skidmore on countering fraud in government

First of all I would like to thank Lesley for her kind words and for the invitation to speak here today. This is, I believe, an important opportunity for experts from right across the UK public sector and beyond to share best practice and the latest thinking on strategies to address fraud.

To govern is to serve. Government at its basic principle is at the service of the public. I am committed to making government work better for the public we serve. We are public servants. But there are also public servants – namely civil servants – who quietly serve the public through service to the government. You provide a service to the public. In particular, the service you provide is one which protects their, or more befittingly our, resources from threats.

'To govern is to serve' is a principle which my colleague Ben Gummer, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, [spoke about during his recent speech to Reform](#). In his remarks he talked about efficiencies. Efficiencies in the way that we work and the way resources that we use. And above all how taxpayers' money is spent.

We must ensure that we do everything in our power that we protect every penny of taxpayers' hard-earned money. And ensure that it delivers the services that we all rely on.

We will do this with a spirit of openness and transparency. We will be open about the challenges: where they lie and how government can help.

It is unjust that public money is lost to fraud. It is unjust that many people who work day in, day out to meet commitments to their families, their employers and their communities – the honest majority – are unfairly affected by a dishonest minority who seek to abuse the money set aside for critical public services.

That is why we have a duty to do all we can to protect this government against anyone looking to abuse public services.

As you will already be aware, fraud is constantly evolving in new and sophisticated ways.

And it has the potential to touch millions of lives. Fraud is now the most prevalent crime across the UK and reaches far beyond those email scams that we've all come across. It is evolving in different ways and now encompasses systematic, digital, and automated fraud affecting businesses and industries right up and down the country.

In today's digital age, the perpetrators may never even know the personal and

financial loss they inflict on their victims.

And it is for this reason that we, like other governments and industries across the world, need to redouble our efforts to stay ahead of those looking to abuse our services and resources. This involves ensuring we have the right standards, the right skills and the right culture to detect, report and prevent fraud.

We have made great strides over the last couple years. We have built up our evidence base and increased our understanding of the problem. We now know more than we ever have done about the fraud landscape in the UK.

We have increased fraud awareness across the public sector and found more fraud through centrally coordinated activities like the Random Sampling Programme and deep-dive analytics projects with organisations such as the Student Loans Company.

We have brought people working in a diverse range of roles across government together into the Counter Fraud Champions network. This has allowed individuals in counter fraud across more than 40 public sector bodies to come together to share best practice and solve common challenges for the first time.

Our increased focus on combating fraud across the public sector, most notably in welfare, last year led to realised benefits alone worth £805 million last year. Outside of welfare and tax, in the last few years we have introduced new processes and controls that have led to fraud prevention savings rising from £9 million in 2013 to 14 to £27.5 million in 2014 to 2015.

Departments, and many of you, have led the way on introducing these changes through embracing the fraud agenda and striving to make a difference. The Cabinet Office, through Lesley, has been here to support you, providing ground breaking new programmes such as the Debt Market Integrator and maintaining long running services, such as the [National Fraud Initiative](#).

Finally, we have tested and trialled new technologies and forms of data sharing and analytics, to find and prevent fraud and have taken legislation through Parliament to make data sharing easier across the public sector to find and fight and prevent fraud.

Let me be clear, we are better informed and better equipped to meet the challenges in front of us than we have ever been. But fraud in its various forms does not stand still, and nor can we.

You have already shown that you are capable of responding to the challenge and I commend you for your work to develop innovations which are leading to increased prevention and detection of fraud.

We now need to build on our successes and increase capability and skills so we can go even further still. This means ensuring that people on the ground are properly equipped to tackle the problems that we face.

The Chief Executive of the Civil Service, John Manzoni, has prepared the

ground on this important agenda. Through his backing and commitment, the Cabinet Office will launch the Counter Fraud Profession later this year.

Building on the work by John, his team, and the many experts across central government and in other sectors who are working on it, the Counter Fraud Profession will ensure that we continue to have talented and highly skilled professionals working to protect public funds. People who are properly recognised, properly trained and properly accredited. People who are dedicated to protecting taxpayers' money; and who can support colleagues who are not specialists to fulfil their roles.

Establishing the Counter Fraud Profession will demonstrate our commitment to countering fraud across and within government and I know that many of you here today will be right at the heart of making this happen.

In addition to investing in skilled people I am today launching a new set of Counter Fraud Functional Standards. These standards will outline the minimum measures that organisations should have in place for dealing with fraud.

These standards will empower managers across the Civil Service and the wider public sector to call out fraudsters, cut down on waste and make sure that every penny is accounted for. These standards will help boost our effectiveness at tackling fraud.

Alongside organisation-wide standards we are also launching new professional competencies for those working in counter fraud within government.

These professional competencies, created and endorsed by experts in the public sector and academia, will set out a common set of skills and experience that those working in counter fraud should have, and cover the whole of central government. Public servants working in counter fraud across government will be able to use these competencies to develop their skills and have their capability in counter fraud work recognised. Please do speak to the Fraud team here from the Cabinet Office today to learn more about the standards and competencies that have been launched today.

Thanks to the work completed in creating these, we have now brought together a great wealth of information, for the first time, to understand how counter fraud work should be done. This work is not glamorous and is not likely to grab headlines. But it is crucial.

These standards and professional competencies are the new foundation on which the government will build a robust counter fraud response. They demonstrate our commitment to building, step by step, a government that is increasingly able to find and fight fraud, protect the public services we need and to make government work better for everyone.

As I've just outlined, there is a great deal that we are doing to combat fraud on all fronts. However I also want to emphasise that the fight against fraud needs all public servants to play their part in its detection and its prevention. To stand up for public services. We need to work together, across government, and with agencies, to ensure that we succeed.

Importantly we also need to initiate a culture shift which recognises that finding fraud is not an organisational failing or a weakness. It is part of a strong public service duty. Finding, reporting and preventing more fraud is a good thing: it means that more money is being invested where it matters. And by calling it out, we are sending a strong message to fraudsters that we will not tolerate abuse.

We need to build the structures that will allow your excellent work protecting the public purse to be seen, understood and adopted. We have to foster and nurture an appetite for change and a spirit of openness and collaboration to new approaches that will allow the best ideas to spread.

That is why today's conference, which brings you all together to share ideas and approaches, is so important and a real opportunity for all of us.

Fighting the injustice of those who abuse public finances is everyone's business. We are on a mission to build a country that works for everyone and your work is invaluable to achieving this.

Already the government has been recognised as the most transparent in the world by the UN. We want to continue our drive to ensure that transparency is at the heart of everything we do and it is only through creating that culture of openness and honesty that we will be able to effectively recognise the fraud of the future.

I am committed to ensuring that we, as a government, take a zero tolerance approach to fraud – to defraud the government is to defraud the public; we must root out fraud wherever it lies, if we are to protect taxpayers' money.

I want us to be the best in the world at detecting and preventing fraud and I think with better collaboration, skills and capability that I've talked about, we can be. We have built the foundation for a potential revolution around how the public sector protects public services through dealing with fraud, and I encourage you to seize the opportunity and be part of this.

Sarah Champion commenting on the Government's failure to act on cross-party recommendations to reduce the gender pay gap

**Sarah
Champion MP,
Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities**, commenting on the Government's failure to act on cross-party recommendations to reduce

the
gender pay gap, said:

“The cross party Women and Equalities Committee’s recommendations aim to improve working conditions for women of all ages and sectors right across the country.

“But, sadly, it seems that their recommendations are again falling on deaf ears.

“The Government has systematically ignored the evidence the Committee, charities, experts and individuals have worked so hard to produce.

“This Government continues to ignore the voices and lived experiences of thousands of women in chronically low paid, under-valued sectors of the economy such as care, hospitality and retail. Industries where zero hour contracts and bad practice have been allowed to run rife.

“The structural causes of the gender pay gap must be addressed, otherwise women will simply continue to be left behind.

“The lack of meaningful response to the Women and Equalities Committee shows that when it comes to tackling the serious, underlying causes of gender inequality in our country, this Tory Government isn’t willing to take the bold action needed.”

Misuse of sanctions is further evidence of the Tory Government letting vulnerable groups down – Debbie Abrahams

Debbie Abrahams MP, Labour’s Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, commenting on the findings of the Public Accounts Committee report on sanctions, said:

“Two years after the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry the Government has failed to implement even their limited actions to address sanctions failings.

“This report makes it clear that

sanctions have been used inconsistently to punish those struggling to get by with seven wasted years of austerity.

“This deplorable misuse of sanctions is further evidence of the Tory Government letting vulnerable groups down.

“Labour has committed to scrapping the Tories’ punitive sanctions regime, under our plans to transform the social security system to ensure that, like the NHS, it is there for us all in our time of need.”

SNP must “mind the gap” on tax

21 Feb 2017



The Scottish Conservatives are warning the SNP that they must “mind the gap” with the rest of the UK ahead of today’s key vote on tax rates.

The warning comes as the Scottish Parliament prepares to vote for the first time to set new rates of income tax, following the successful implementation of the new Scotland Act.

The SNP Government – under pressure from the Greens – has decided to reject a plan to lift middle earners out of the higher rate of tax, as proposed elsewhere in the UK.

It will instead freeze the rate – dragging police officers, senior teachers and nurses into paying it.

The Scottish Conservatives will today step up their call for the SNP Government to prioritise economic growth by setting competitive tax rates no higher than the rest of the UK.

Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:

“Over the last 18 months, Scotland’s growth rate has been around a third of that for the UK – with the result that employment is now falling in Scotland.

□ “The SNP’s plans to set tax rates higher than the rest of the UK will only worsen this growing divide we are seeing, deterring investment and reducing new jobs.

“Our message to the SNP today is clear: it needs to mind the gap. Higher taxes in Scotland means lower growth, which will deliver less cash for government to spend on our vital public services.”

“Derek Mackay’s handling of the business rates crisis has shown that this Scottish Government simply does not understand business and the economy.

“It is must start to listen to job creators who need a Government which goes for growth, not one which punishes aspiration.”

News story: £4 million awarded for tech which gives motorists advance notice of congestion and free parking spaces

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Government awards £4 million for tech projects that will cut congestion, speed up journeys and clean up the environment.

Apps that notify motorists of congestion and free parking spaces, and real time journey information for visually impaired passengers, are just some of the projects that will receive a share of £4 million government technology funding today (21 February 2017).

Nineteen councils across England will receive between £50,000 and £300,000 each for their ideas to improve journeys through digital innovation.

The government money will be spent on developing cutting edge technology such as apps and sensors which can be used to cut congestion, improve parking in city centres and alert drivers when electric car charging points become available.

Successful bidders include:

- £234,000 for Blackpool to use Bluetooth technologies to cut traffic congestion
- £182,000 for Dorset to provide advance congestion warnings for drivers on the A31 using an app
- £300,000 for Warrington to provide real-time information to businesses and public through on-street information displays, social media and phone apps
- £150,000 for Coventry for a real-time bay availability system across 450

pay and display parking spots

- £204,000 for Westminster, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham to roll out a new generation of electric vehicle charge points which will provide real-time data to motorists when they are available
- £50,000 for Peterborough to use digital technology to provide real time journey information directly to visually impaired people

Roads Minister Andrew Jones, said:

I congratulate today's winners for coming up with cutting-edge, innovative ideas that will transform journeys for passengers and motorists across the country. Technology is rapidly evolving and this important work shows that if we get it right, it can cut congestion, speed up journeys, clean up the environment, and improve accessibility.

Andrew Jones is visiting one of the competition winners, Westminster Council, today where he will see smart technology in practice including a hands-free parking app which reduces the time motorists circulate by showing available space.

Local authority	Project	Funding awarded
Blackpool	Traffic congestion and parking Bluetooth management technology	£234,000
City of York	Connected vehicle data for traffic signalling to improve congestion	£295,200
Derbyshire	Early warning system for congestion enabling drivers to communicate with one another and avoid traffic	£237,500
Dorset	Advanced congestion warnings app	£182,100
Southampton	Enabling council to deliver real time travel information to better manage road network	£90,000
Swindon	Alert system for local authority traffic managers to better disseminate congestion information	£235,000
Warrington	Using Bluetooth and Smart technology to manage traffic flow and provide real-time information to businesses and the general public	£300,000
Worcestershire	Information sharing system so traffic incidents can be dealt with quickly by highway staff and vehicles	£300,000
Newcastle	Connected bus scheme for Arriva Fleet to equip more buses with vehicle infrastructure technology.	£98,200
Portsmouth	Developing platform for Portsmouth's Traffic Management Centre, enabling communication exchange between vehicles infrastructure and other vehicles	£285,000

Local authority	Project	Funding awarded
Reading	Improve roadworks warning, parking and traffic information	£250,000
Coventry	Real time information on parking bay availability to improve parking services	£150,000
Somerset	Provide advanced traffic signal phase and timing information for traffic on the M5 – Junction 24, through Bridgwater, to Hinkley Point	£290,000
West Midlands	Real time information for HVG drivers to avoid unnecessary stops at traffic signals via hands free smartphone app	£285,000
Hounslow, Hammersmith, Fulham and Westminster	Sharing information about electric charge points by deploying parking sensors in electric vehicle bays	£204,000
Luton	To collect live car park availability data and give straight to drivers to reduce congestion by reducing time looking for spaces	£73,500
Milton Keynes	Provision of real time information with cameras/sensors and 7 laser sensors at key junctions in Central Milton Keynes enabling monitoring of all available parking	£175,000
Oxfordshire	Real-time parking information for Blue Badge, Pay and Display and electric vehicle charge points with a particular focus on vulnerable road users	£239,000
Peterborough	Real time journey information for the visually impaired with a focus on visitors being able to access the new Royal National Institute for the Blind head offices in Peterborough	£50,000