

**INNER CITY CHALLENGE
PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE DRAFT
NOT FOR RELEASE**

STEPHEN HAMMOND MP TO JOIN BIRMINGHAM YOUTH ON A 5-DAY BOOTCAMP

Wimbledon MP Stephen Hammond will swap Westminster politics for a 5-day placement with leading youth charity Fairbridge.

The MP for Wimbledon and previous investment banker will be swapping his suit and schedule for a pair of jeans and a t-shirt as he joins youth outreach workers working with Birmingham's most at risk young people.

Fairbridge works with 13 – 25 year olds who are not in education, employment or training and at risk of becoming homeless or seeing crime as their only career alternative. The Conservative MP will join Fairbridge on an outreach access weekend that takes young people to the Welsh countryside as an emergency intervention.

Through high impact activities such as a climbing wall, cave, gorge and hill climbing, the Access course helps young people face up to their life challenges. Stephen Hammond will be joining in on all the activities, including taking a video diary and assessing his emotional responses to difficult tasks.

Claire Rigby, Centre Manager at Fairbridge Birmingham says, "There is a real gap between the social literacy of NEETS and the services offered them. The work we do at Fairbridge plugs that gap, helping young people learn about themselves and basic interaction with others – basic skills they never acquired when growing up."

"The Inner City Challenge is something of a bootcamp for MPs," says former Conservative Party Leader Iain Duncan Smith MP, initiator behind the placement programme, "It takes MPs out of the comfortable Westminster village and places them up front with the most broken parts of Britain. They can see the extent of damage first hand but also that renewal is possible and that people in the voluntary sector turns lives around."

Editor's Notes

The CSJ published a report on poverty in Birmingham in December 2007. The following statistics highlight the extent of difficulties with worklessness and economic dependency, and educational failure.

- There the CSJ discovered that Birmingham has nearly 180,000 people of working age who are economically inactive and for the last five years the number of working-age residents claiming a key benefit has been static at around 130,000.
- Birmingham's unemployment rate is 5.7 per cent – more than double the national average. It is worse than Liverpool (5.4 per cent), Nottingham (4.3 per cent), Manchester (3.9 per cent), Newcastle-on-Tyne (3.4 per cent), Leeds (2.9 per cent), Sheffield (2.8 per cent) and Bristol (2.4 per cent).
- Among Birmingham's non-selective state schools, 73 per cent (49 out of 67) perform below the national average at GCSE.
- In the Washwood Heath ward in the Hodge Hill parliamentary constituency, 40 per cent of young men have never worked or are long-term unemployed.

Stephen Hammond is MP for Wimbledon and Shadow Minister for Transport. He was elected in May 2005.

The placement is from Monday 9am 28 July 2008 – Friday 2.30pm 1 August 2008, at Fairbridge, 79 Warwick Street, Digbeth, Birmingham, B12 0NH.

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