

Press release: £1.6 billion Stronger Towns Fund launched

The government will today (4 March 2019) launch a £1.6 billion fund to boost growth and give communities a greater say in their future after Brexit.

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The Stronger Towns Fund will be targeted at places that have not shared in the proceeds of growth in the same way as more prosperous parts of the country.

It will be used to create new jobs, help train local people and boost economic activity – with communities having a say on how the money is spent.

To be launched this year, the fund is part of the government's commitment to build a more prosperous economy that works for everyone.

A total of £1 billion will be allocated using a needs-based formula. More than half this share (£583 million) will go to towns across the North with a further £322 million allocated to communities in the Midlands. Communities will be able to draw up job-boosting plans for their town, with the support and advice of their Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Another £600 million will be available through a bidding process to communities in any part of the country.

Local communities will be encouraged to come together to draw up proposals to restore pride and create new jobs in their area.

The government will also seek to ensure towns across Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will benefit from the new funding.

This will build on the success of the government's City and Growth Deals initiatives.

Announcing the Stronger Towns Fund, Prime Minister Theresa May said:

For too long in our country prosperity has been unfairly spread. Our economy has worked well for some places but we want it to work for all communities.

Communities across the country voted for Brexit as an expression of their desire to see change – that must be a change for the better, with more opportunity and greater control.

These towns have a glorious heritage, huge potential and, with the right help, a bright future ahead of them.

Communities Secretary James Brokenshire said:

We have listened to people who are concerned by momentous changes to their communities and I am determined to provide the support they need to create a more prosperous future beyond Brexit.

This major new fund builds on more than £9 billion in City and Growth Deals we have delivered since 2010 to help hard working people reach their full potential and to build an economy that works for everyone.

I look forward to working closely with local leaders to take forward their encouraging proposals and to hear what more they propose to bring benefits to their communities.

A full list of allocations of the £1 billion can be found below:

Region	Allocation (£m)
North West	281
North East	105
Yorkshire and The Humber	197
West Midlands	212
East Midlands	110
South West	33
South East	37
East of England	25

[Press release: Minister for Asia Mark Field visits New Delhi and Mumbai](#)

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field, visited India from 1 to 3 March to further strengthen UK-India relations.

Press release: New legal measures to protect workers from misuse of non-disclosure agreements

- New proposals include legislating that workplace confidentiality agreements cannot be used to prevent people reporting harassment or discrimination to police
- Measures also include extending the law to ensure the worker agreeing to confidentiality agreements receives independent legal advice on the limitations
- The plans are part of the government's ambition to create a fairer workplace as part of the modern Industrial Strategy

The rules around non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and confidentiality clauses are set to be tightened under new legal proposals announced by Business Minister Kelly Tolhurst today (Monday 4 March 2019). This includes enshrining in law for the first-time that individuals cannot be prevented from reporting crimes, harassment or discrimination to the police.

Many businesses legitimately use NDAs and confidentiality clauses in agreements to prevent disclosure of confidential information. However, in recent months there has been increasing evidence to suggest that NDAs and confidentiality clauses are being abused by a very small minority of employers to intimidate whistleblowers, conceal harassment and discrimination incidents – including sexual assault, physical threats and racism.

Today's proposals will help put an end to the unethical use of these agreements and encourage good practice from employers and lawyers. They include:

- clarifying in law that confidentiality clauses cannot prevent people from speaking to the police and reporting a crime (or prevent the disclosure of information in any criminal proceedings)
- requiring a clear, written description of rights before anything is signed in confidentiality clauses in employment contracts or within a settlement agreement
- extending the law that means a worker agreeing to a settlement agreement receives independent advice; the advice must cover the limits of any confidentiality clauses in the settlement agreement so a person is in full possession of all the relevant facts; this will help to prevent employees from being duped into signing gagging clauses which they were unaware of

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Sexual harassment is against the law and discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated – in the home, the workplace or in public.

Over the past couple of years, we have seen brave individuals breaking silence on such behaviour, but too many are still facing the unethical misuse of non-disclosure agreements by their employers.

We're sending a clear message that a change in the law is needed to ensure workers are able to come forward, be aware of their rights and receive the advice they need before signing up to them.

Business Minister Kelly Tolhurst said:

Many businesses use non-disclosure agreements and other confidentiality agreements for legitimate business reasons, such as to protect confidential information. What is completely unacceptable is the misuse of these agreements to silence victims, and there is increasing evidence that this is becoming more widespread. Our new proposals will help to tackle this problem by making it clear in law that victims cannot be prevented from speaking to the police or reporting a crime and clarifying their rights.

They will also help boost understanding of work place rights and legal responsibilities, all part plans to create a fairer workplace through our modern Industrial Strategy.

Evidence of the misuse includes examples where victims of harassment or discrimination have been silenced using the legal agreements, for example, suggesting that a worker cannot blow the whistle despite the fact that no provision can remove a worker's whistleblowing rights. In addition, through an NDA or settlement agreement, employers could insist that a worker is unable to discuss an issue with other people or organisations, such as the police, a doctor or a therapist. This can leave victims afraid to report an incident or speak out about their experiences, leaving others exposed to similar situations, and putting customers and other businesses at risk.

The proposals set out today to extend the requirement to receive legal advice to cover limits on confidentiality clauses and that signatories must be provided with a clear overview of their rights that will help end this unethical practice.

Chief Executive at the Equality & Human Rights Commission Rebecca Hilsenrath said:

The landscape of women's employment has been littered with the misuse of NDAs in order to hide harassment, protect perpetrators and silence victims. We really welcome the measures set out today

by the government which will help to empower victims and ensure no one is forced to sign a gagging clause against their will. But regulating NDAs alone will not prevent workplace sexual harassment.

To fundamentally change workplace cultures and ensure everyone enjoys a working environment that allows them to reach their full potential, employers must take steps to prevent sexual harassment from happening in the first place. We believe that such a duty should be made mandatory for all employers.

Acas Chief Executive Susan Clews said:

The misuse of NDAs has quite rightly been in the media spotlight and I'm sure many employers and workers would welcome greater clarity around their use.

We're keen to work with the government to help develop clearer guidance on NDAs that reflects new changes in the law.

The [consultation](#) will run until 29 April.

The government's modern [Industrial Strategy](#) published in 2017, sets out how the whole of the UK can build on its strengths, extend them into the future, and capitalise on new opportunities.

The government's [Good work plan](#) responds to Matthew Taylor's review, [Good work: the Taylor review of modern working practices](#) in which he outlines the '7 principles for good quality work for all'.

[Press release: Penny Mordaunt launches new funds to tackle period poverty globally](#)

- Penny Mordaunt leads new government campaign to end period poverty globally by 2030
- New UK aid support for projects tackling period poverty and stigma globally
- New expert joint taskforce of government, business and charities, supported by £250,000 to develop new ideas to tackle period poverty in the UK

Ahead of International Women's Day, Minister for Women and Equalities and Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Mordaunt, will today

(4 March) announce a new UK government campaign to break the silence and end period poverty globally by 2030.

In many developing countries, it is estimated that half of all women and girls are forced to use rags, grass and paper to manage their periods. A lack of access to products, and the stigma and taboo that still surrounds periods, can force them to miss school or work, or even to live in isolated huts during their periods each month. In the UK, Girl Guiding UK found that 26% of girls aged 11-21 feel embarrassed talking to people about their period, and 21% had been made to feel ashamed or embarrassed about their period.

In a speech at Church House today, Ms Mordaunt will announce a new campaign to end period poverty globally by 2030 which includes:

- £2 million in UK aid support, through the Department of International Development (DFID), to help organisations which are already working to stamp out period poverty around the world;
- A new advisory taskforce of government departments (including the Department of Health, Department for Education and Department for Work and Pensions), manufacturers, retailers, social enterprises and charities. A pot of £250,000 funding will kickstart this work, which will also lever funding and expertise from the private sector to develop a sustainable solution to period poverty in the UK; and
- AmplifyChange has committed £1.5 million to support 54 projects working across 27 countries to help girls to manage their periods with dignity. This is part of UK aid's ongoing support to the multi-donor fund AmplifyChange

Minister for Women and Equalities Penny Mordaunt said:

"Empowerment starts when you are young. Girls should be able to focus on their education and their future without being worried about or embarrassed by their periods.

"There are British entrepreneurs and businesses already doing fantastic work to tackle period poverty and I want us to partner and support them to really make a change to the lives of those who need it most.

"This is a global issue. Without education, women and girls around the world won't be able to take the steps to reach their true potential."

This focus on vulnerable women and girls, at home and around the world, is part of Ms Mordaunt's new mission. A new strategy, to be published in spring, will set out how government will strive to economically empower all women – particularly those who are financially vulnerable, in low paid jobs or who currently don't work.

In her speech Ms Mordaunt will set out some of the life moments that prevent women from being able to achieve their goals:

- By the time their first child is aged 20, women have, on average, been in paid work for four years less than men
- 20% of women aged 55-64 are informal carers

- Lower earning women taking short breaks to care for children and returning to work part-time accumulate less than a third of the private pensions income of a man working full-time

As part of the GEO's work to support all women, in February Ms Mordaunt also announced £500,000 to support vulnerable women – including victims of domestic abuse, homelessness or substance abuse – to return to work.

To ensure the GEO is at the heart of the government's work on equalities, it will join Cabinet Office from 1 April. GEO will work across government and with business and civil society to tackle persistent inequalities that limit economic empowerment at every stage of life.

Notes to editors:

Hey Girls – <https://www.heygirls.co.uk/>

Hey Girls founder Celia Hodson said: ‘‘ I very much welcome the statement from Secretary of State Penny Mordaunt MP regarding her commitment to set up a Task Force to focus on finding a sustainable model to eradicate Period Poverty in the UK.

“I’m confident that given recent reports highlighting Period Poverty has significantly increased and the high percentage of women and girls currently struggling to access menstrual products this initiative will receive cross-sector support and should be widely supported by cross-party members.”

WUKA – a company which creates eco-friendly period wear.

Ruby Raut, CEO and Co-Founder of WUKA said: ‘We are very pleased to hear and show our support to GEO who are raising voice to tackling financial fragility that affects some girls and women, period poverty. Period poverty is a huge issue for those girls and women from low-income families or who are homeless. Girls and women are left with very little choices and end up using dirty items of clothing, inserting plastic or overusing a pad or tampon which is unhygienic and a huge health problem for women.

“Period poverty is real and is happening all around the world including here in the UK and it needs to be addressed.

“We believe that one way to tackle it is via open and honest conversations instigated by government and subsequently backed up by manufacturers, retailers, social enterprises, charities, organisations, business, health care professionals and the third sector. However there is only one way to resolve this issue, being smart and investing in sustainable solution to end the period poverty permanently.”

Government membership of the taskforce will be decided We’re pursuing global goal 5 – gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls In her Bright Blue speech last year, Minister for Women and Equalities, Penny Mordaunt, acknowledged that more needed to be done to help those women beyond the boardroom, beyond London and beyond big business to fulfil their ambitions. Following on from the speech, the government is now developing a

new strategy which will seek to economically empower women of all backgrounds. This will be released in spring. DFID's £2million comes from UK Aid Direct – DFID's main centrally managed programme for small and medium charities. Every single project the Department for International Development is supporting through the Girls Education Challenge fund already includes menstruation.

International statistics on period poverty:

- In India, a quarter of girls miss school because of menstruation, and only 12% of girls and women have access to sanitary pads
- In South Sudan a survey of school girls found that 83% of them use old cloths, goat skin or nothing at all to manage their periods
- In Senegal, a study found that 30% of girls who had undergone FGM had an infection and additional menstrual problems related to their excision
- In some parts of the world, 2/3 of girls had no idea what was happening to them when they got their first period.
- Up to 82% of girls in Malawi don't know about menstruation when they get their first period; in rural Gambia, 1/3 of girls thought menstruation was a disease
- In many parts of the world a girl's first period still marks her readiness for marriage and childbearing, driving child marriage, teenage pregnancy and educational drop-out