

Press release: FC0 reaches major milestone in plastic elimination campaign

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The Foreign Office Minister of State Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon has today (Tuesday 27 November) announced a huge drop in single-use plastics being used by Foreign Office staff in the UK.

This announcement coincides with Lord Ahmad's attendance at the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference in Kenya, and the first ministerial meeting of the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance, which has made eliminating plastic pollution from oceans its top priority.

Since February, the Foreign Office has successfully eliminated 97% of single-use plastics (SUPs). This means that around 1.56 million pieces of plastic have been removed from the UK estate annually. Per person, this means a drop in avoidable single use plastics from 310 to 10 in just 10 months.

Foreign Office Minister Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

Plastic waste is a global problem that threatens ocean life and endangers whole ecosystems.

Every one of us has the power to make choices which can reduce our own plastic use. As we take our message around the world and call on other countries to take action, it is only right we strive to eliminate all avoidable single-use plastic here in the UK and it is fantastic to see the Foreign Office leading the way.

Eliminating plastic pollution was top of the agenda at the Sustainable Blue Economy conference in Nairobi today, where Ministers and High Commissioners

from Commonwealth countries, including Canada and Kenya, have shared the ambitions and expertise they have in marine protection.

The Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance (CCOA), announced by the Prime Minister during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London (16-18 April), aims to unite countries around the Commonwealth so they can work together to turn the tide on plastic entering the marine environment.

Each country has pledged to take action, such as banning microbeads, committing to cutting down on single use plastic bags, and other steps to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

Background

- Over half a million disposable plastic coffee cups have been completely removed from the FCO's UK Estate since the introduction of a 50p levy in April. Biodegradable coffee cups are now provided as an alternative, but staff are encouraged to use their own mugs. This is a significant change from last year, when hot beverage cups accounted for 48% of plastic waste in FCO catering.
- To cut other catering-related waste at the UK Estate, the FCO has removed plastic cups, take-away cutlery, food containers, and drinks bottles. These have been entirely replaced with vegware biodegradable alternatives
- The remaining 3% of plastic waste still produced is currently unavoidable, since it is within the supply chain. The FCO is committed to working with its partners and implementing the necessary changes as they become possible within the industry.
- The FCO is the leading government department in plastic waste reduction and is sharing its experience across Whitehall and internationally. Looking to the future, it will continue to champion the elimination of avoidable SUPs from all its overseas estates by the end of 2020. It will also launch the #FuturePerfect programme which aims to save £20 million from the FCO's energy bills by 2025.
- Through CCOA, there is assistance available from the UK through the £66.4million Commonwealth Oceans Plastic Package, supporting Commonwealth countries to improve waste management systems, implement other initiatives to reduce plastics waste and help them to deliver their ambitions under the Alliance.
- Included in the package is a £25million Marine Plastics Research and Innovation Framework, to help researchers approach the scourge of marine plastic waste from a scientific, technical, economic and social

perspective.

- The UK has also launched the Commonwealth Litter Programme, with the UK working with partners across the Commonwealth to share expertise and find solutions to the environmental and socio-economic problems caused by litter in the marine environment.

Further information

Press release: CMA secures court order against viagogo

This development results from legal proceedings launched by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in August over concerns that viagogo was breaking consumer protection law.

The court has agreed to make a legally binding order instructing viagogo to comply with the law by:

- telling purchasers of tickets if there is a risk that they will be turned away at the door
- informing customers which seat in the venue they will get
- providing information about who is selling the ticket, so people can benefit from enhanced legal rights when buying from a business
- not giving misleading information about the availability and popularity of tickets – which had the potential to lead to customers being rushed into making a buying decision or making the wrong choice
- making it easy for people to get their money back under viagogo's guarantee when things go wrong
- preventing the sale of tickets a seller does not own and may not be able to supply

It will also ensure that viagogo does not repeat historic failures to make its customers aware of the face value of tickets on sale through its site.

Andrea Coscelli, CMA Chief Executive Officer, said:

This court order is a victory for anyone who decides to buy a ticket through viagogo. We have been clear throughout our investigation that people who use these resale websites must know key facts before parting with their hard-earned money, including what seat they will get and whether there is a risk they might not actually get into the event at all.

viagogo has agreed to a comprehensive overhaul of its site to ensure it respects the law, just like the other resale sites who have already signed commitments to improve the information they offer and give people a fair deal.

Today's court order, which is a significant outcome for consumers, must be complied with by mid-January – the same deadline set for other resale sites that have already agreed to change their practices. It has been secured after viagogo agreed to address all of the CMA's concerns, without the need for a trial. The order is legally binding and enforceable by the court.

The order the court has agreed to make today will now ensure consumers' rights are protected quickly, without the need for further legal action.

The CMA continues to work closely with partner agencies and enforcers to drive up standards in the sector.

Notes to editors

1. Further information on the CMA's work so far in this sector is [available on GOV.UK](#).
 2. If viagogo fail to comply with the court order, the company could face a fine and/or certain individuals involved could face imprisonment. The courts, rather than the CMA, have the legal powers to issue a fine or send people to prison.
 3. The key pieces of consumer protection legislation relevant to the CMA's investigation are the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA), the Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013 (CCRs), the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs) and the Electronic Commerce (EC Directive) Regulations 2002 (ECRs).
 4. As an enforcer under Part 8 of the Enterprise Act 2002, the CMA cannot levy administrative fines but it can enforce the above legislation through the courts, and where appropriate, obtain additional measures to improve consumer choice, drive better compliance with the law, or obtain redress for consumers.
 5. Media enquiries to the CMA should be directed to press@cma.gov.uk or 020 3738 6460.
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Press release: CMA secures court order against viagogo

Ticket resale site viagogo must overhaul the way it does business to comply with a court order, secured after CMA enforcement action.

Press release: Government uses innovative tech companies to tackle rural isolation and loneliness

- Five small tech-companies awarded contracts to tackle loneliness in Monmouthshire
- Minister says this will “improve people’s lives and enable them to feel a part of their local community”
- Sixty-five percent of the applications were from Welsh and UK-wide small businesses

Five tech companies have been awarded contracts to use cutting-edge technology to tackle the problem of rural isolation and loneliness.

These businesses will create new technology platforms to match the supply and demand for transport in rural areas, as well as minimise the risk of digital exclusion among older people and those in more isolated, rural areas with limited connectivity.

Speaking at the [Digital Leaders Innovation Conference](#) in London, Cabinet Office Minister, Oliver Dowden, said:

I am delighted that our funding for innovative tech companies is helping to tackle loneliness and rural isolation – to improve people’s lives and enable them to feel a part of their local community.

The GovTech fund encourages firms to find innovative ways to address the big social problems we all face, including loneliness, plastic pollution and national security. Through emerging technologies, this fund will help to elevate British companies onto a global market while transforming the delivery of public services for people across the UK.

Councillor Sara Jones, Cabinet Member for Social Justice and Community Development at Monmouthshire County Council, said:

In Monmouthshire, we are blessed with beautiful, rural surroundings and thriving towns. Yet the diversity of our landscape has its challenges, where journey times on public transport to local services can exceed two hours. That is why we are determined to address this issue to ensure people feel connected and part of the community.

We are delighted to be working with innovative businesses who have developed a range of digital solutions for transport and rural isolation. Given the importance of the small business sector to the fabric of our country, it was great to see that sixty-five percent of the applications were from Welsh and UK-wide micro businesses with less than 10 employees.

In November 2017, the £20m Govtech Catalyst Programme was launched to help fund innovative tech firms, to solve public-sector challenges through innovation and emerging technologies.

As part of a wider commitment to use technology to improve lives and transform the delivery of public services, the government will publish an innovation strategy in spring 2019.

The five small tech-firms to win contracts are:

- Box Clever Digital Limited
- Enable International Ltd
- GPC Systems Ltd
- The Behavioural Insights Team
- Zipabout

These 5 companies are funded up to £50,000 each over 12 weeks, in phase 1, to prove the feasibility of their ideas. They are given contracts to conduct research and development.

In phase 2, up to two companies are then funded to develop their ideas and will be awarded up to £500,000 over 12 months.

The successful companies will retain all intellectual property and equity for what they develop.