

Press release: Quicker way to resolve claim disputes launched online

The new service, introduced by HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS), can be used to start a claim against anyone in England and Wales, and provides a quicker, more user-friendly way to start an action in the County Court for amounts up to £10,000.

Rather than having to fill in and post a paper form, or use an outdated online system from 2002, the new pilot allows people to issue their County Court claim more easily, settle the dispute online and recommends mediation services – which can save time, stress, and money.

More than 1,400 people have already used an earlier pilot of the system launched in August last year. Over 80% of those early users, including individuals and small businesses, found the service very good and easy to use. Early evidence suggests that the online system has improved access to justice as engagement from defendants has improved.

Launching the new service, Justice Minister Lucy Fraser said:

We know that using the civil courts has been a daunting prospect for some. This innovative, quick and easy online system will enable people and small businesses to get back the money that is rightly owed to them.

This is an excellent example of the work we are doing under our £1billion plan to transform the courts system, allowing people to access justice online and around their busy lives.

Justice Birss, who chairs the sub-committee of the Civil Procedure Rules Committee dealing with this Civil Money Claims pilot scheme, said:

This is an important step in the modernisation of our courts and tribunals system.

For too long the perceived delays and complexity of the system have put off too many people from using the civil courts to make a small claim. When it is complete this new online route will give members of the public and small businesses a more user-friendly way to access justice. The system now being made available to the public is the first stage in that new route.

Laura Iron, head of service at the Personal Support Unit, a charity supporting people who choose to represent themselves in the civil and family justice system, said:

“The PSU welcomes the new online system: It avoids most of the formal legal language of traditional court processes, and is much more intuitive for users. While traditional processes are still the norm, this is a clear step forward for people who are comfortable with online processes. It reflects the commitment of HMCTS to designing an improved range of services tailored to the different needs of all court-users.”

The initiative is an important first step in the modernisation of the civil justice system and begins to deliver the vision set out by Lord Briggs in his 2016 report on the structure of civil courts, where he called for claims worth up to £25,000 to be solved in an online court. It is launched after a year of development with members of the judiciary, representatives from the advice and legal community and users, and will continue to be piloted while other aspects of an end-to-end online system are developed.

The move is part of the Government’s £1 billion investment to modernise the court service, making it swifter, simpler, and easier to access for everyone. HMCTS is exploring how justice can best be served in the digital age.

Other examples of the Government’s court reforms which are making access to justice easier for everyone include:

- A new service which allows people to submit their tax appeals online – drastically cutting the number of applications being returned as incomplete or inaccurate
- Launching the first divorce application services online – making the process easier to understand for divorce applicants and helping to progress applications
- A new paperless system, in operation at Lavender Hill Magistrates’ Court, which means thousands of cases involving fare evasion are processed more swiftly and effectively.

[Press release: New boost to rogue landlord crackdown](#)

Rogue landlords who rent out substandard properties face being forced out of the sector as new banning orders are brought in and a national database of offenders goes live today (6 April 2018).

Landlords convicted of a range of housing, immigration and other criminal offences such as leasing overcrowded properties, fire and gas safety offences and unlawful eviction, will be put on the new database, so councils can share information between themselves and keep a closer eye on those with a poor track record.

The private rented sector houses 4.7 million households in England and the

government is delivering these reforms under the [Housing and Planning Act 2016](#) so everyone has a safe and decent place to live.

Minister for Housing and Homelessness Heather Wheeler said:

I am committed to making sure people who are renting are living in safe and good quality properties. That's why we're cracking down on the small minority of landlords that are renting out unsafe and substandard accommodation.

Landlords should be in no doubt that they must provide decent homes or face the consequences.

The database will be available to use by councils to crackdown on poor and unfair practice in the private rented sector such as overcrowded, squalid or dangerous accommodation, and to help target their enforcement action.

Landlords convicted of offences under the government's new law may also be given banning orders preventing them from leasing accommodation for a period of time, ranging from 12 months to life. Councils must record details of any landlord or property agent who has received a banning order on the database. Landlords that ignore a banning order will face criminal sanctions including up to 6 months imprisonment and an unlimited fine.

The department will be able to use the database to publish regular updates on the number of landlords and agents who have been banned, convicted of a banning order offence or received two or more civil penalties, broken down by local authority area.

These measures follow the announcement that councils are also being given tough new powers to tackle the small minority of rogue landlords who rent out overcrowded properties and impose fines of up to £30,000 for those landlords who do not comply. Overcrowded and poor quality housing can result in excess noise, increased demand on local services such as waste collection and anti-social behaviour generally, which is why the government is determined to crack down on it.

Public safety is paramount which is why this government will support further measures proposed by Karen Buck MP in a Private Member's Bill to protect tenants in both the social and private rented sectors. This forms part of the government's plan to ensure a safer and stronger housing market that works for everyone.

The [Housing and Planning Act 2016](#) introduced a range of measures to tackle rogue landlords:

- civil penalties of up to £30,000 as an alternative to prosecution – came into force April 2017
- extension of Rent Repayment Orders to cover illegal eviction and/ or failure to comply with a statutory notice – came into force in April 2017. Rent Repayment Orders will also cover breach of a banning order

from 6 April 2018.

Government has worked with Karen Buck MP to draft and publish the Private Member's Bill on [Homes \(Fitness for Human Habitation and Liability of Housing Standards\)](#).

The following guidance for local housing authorities has been published:

News story: Every 10 minutes a child in England has a rotten tooth removed

A child in England has a tooth removed in hospital every 10 minutes due to preventable tooth decay, according to data published by Public Health England (PHE) today, Friday 6 April 2018.

With the government's [Soft Drinks Industry Levy](#) coming into effect today, PHE's [Change4Life campaign](#) is reminding parents that sugary drinks, including juice drinks, energy drinks, cola and other fizzy drinks, are one of the main sources of sugar in children's diets.

Consuming too much sugar is one of the leading causes of tooth decay and childhood obesity. Tooth decay can be prevented by cutting down on sugar as well as brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.

Tooth extraction remains the most common reason for hospital admissions in 5 to 9 year olds. Figures show around 141 children a day – some just a year old – are having teeth removed. This means around 60,000 days are missed from school during the year, as well as causing problems with eating, sleeping and even smiling.

PHE's Change4Life campaign is encouraging parents to:

1. Swap sugary drinks for lower or no sugar alternatives, including water and lower fat milks. The [Change4Life website](#) has plenty of easy drink swaps and helpful tips for families.
2. Limit fruit juice and smoothies to a total of 150ml per day and only consume with meals – they count as a maximum of one portion of our 5 A Day.
3. Ensure children brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste (once before bedtime and once during the day) and remind them to 'spit not rinse', as rinsing washes away the protective fluoride. Brushing should start as soon as the first tooth appears and children should be supervised up to the age of 7.

Taking these steps can lead to fewer days off school and fewer trips to the dentist, although children should go as often as their dentist recommends.

Dr Sandra White, Dental Lead for Public Health England, said:

It's upsetting to see so many children admitted to hospital with tooth decay, but swapping out sugary drinks could be an easy win for busy families.

Parents can also help prevent decay by making sure their children's teeth are brushed twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and reducing how much sugar they're eating and drinking.

Parents can visit the [Change4Life website](#) for helpful swaps and tips, and download the new [Change4Life Food Scanner app](#) to see the sugar, fat, salt and calories in popular foods and drinks.

Sugar facts:

- a can of energy drink contains on average 13 cubes of sugar (based on a 500ml can)
- a can of cola contains on average 9 cubes of sugar (based on a 330ml can)
- a juice drink with added sugar contains on average 5 cubes of sugar (based on 200ml juice drink pouch)

Speech: "We cannot ignore what has happened in Salisbury."

Thank you very much Mr President.

We didn't seek this meeting but we take requests from the Council to meet very seriously and I am pleased to be able to update the Council on some developments, but I am also pleased to be able to provide the intellectual clarity our Russian colleague has called for and I will stick in my statement to the facts.

Following the poisoning on 4 March in Salisbury of Sergei and Yulia Skripal, the UK has launched one of the most comprehensive and complex investigations into the use of a chemical weapon ever, it involves more than 250 police detectives. They are supported by a range of specialist experts and partners. They are trawling through more than 5000 hours of CCTV. They are examining more than 1350 seized exhibits. And they are interviewing more than 500 witnesses.

Mr President, in the UK the police are independent of government but if there are more details we can share with the Council as the investigation proceeds, we would be very happy to do so.

We all know what that investigation is under ways, it's because a military grade nerve agent was used in an attempt to kill civilians on British soil. It was carried out recklessly, and it was carried out without regard for public safety. It was a weapon of mass destruction. A British Police Officer was in a critical condition alongside the Skripals. And ordinary members of the public going about their daily business were put at risk.

Mr President, I am glad not only to be able to inform the Council that Yulia Skripal is able to communicate and is getting better, I can also clarify what the Russian Ambassador said about consular access. We have received a request from the Russian consulate. We have conveyed it to Yulia Skripal. And we await her response. This is an obligation under international law that the British Government takes very seriously but there is also the question of Ms Skripal's own wishes which need to be taken into account.

Mr President, the Russian Ambassador had several points to make about the UK demands of Russia. As he outlined, on 12 March we asked the Russian Government a clear question. Russia refused to respond and said it considered the request 'null and void'. It was indeed true, Mr President, that we asked for a response within 24 hours for an answer to the question how did a Russian developed military grade nerve agent come to be on the streets of Salisbury? And did that mean that Russia had lost control of its CW stocks? We said that Russia should declare its Novichok programme to the OPCW. We gave 24 hours Mr President because this is a weapon of mass destruction. It is no ordinary poisoning and no ordinary attack and in our view the circumstances justified that tight deadline. But, notwithstanding that, the Russians said to us the request was 'null and void'. They did not say 'please give us more time', they did not come to us and say 'we would like to look into this with you'. They rejected the very premise of the request.

We have said, as the Russian Ambassador quoted, that it is highly likely Russia carried out this assassination. The British Government came to that conclusion because the positive identification by experts at Porton Down of the specific chemical used is a type of Novichok nerve agent. Porton Down, Mr President, is an accredited laboratory under, and it conforms to, the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is allowed to conduct protective research. The second reason that helped us come to our conclusion was the knowledge that Russia has produced this nerve agent within the last 10 years and remains capable of doing so and as the Prime Minister made clear within the British Parliament we know that the Russian state has investigated ways of assassination through the use of nerve agent. The third reason is Russia's record of conducting state-sponsored assassinations and I don't want to detain the Council Mr President by going through a long list but I can provide examples if anyone would like to hear them. And we also made our own assessment that Russia views defectors as suitable targets for assassination and indeed there are public statements from Russian leaders to that effect.

I'd like if I may, Mr President, just to say something about the use of the phrase 'highly likely'. We use this phrase because under the British system only a court can finally determine culpability so the use of the phrase 'highly likely' is a reflection on the judicial process and should not be construed as casting doubt whatsoever on the likelihood of Russia being

responsible. I would also like to take this opportunity to address the Russian Ambassador's comment about Porton Down contradicting the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson. There was no contradiction. The Foreign Secretary was making clear that Porton Down were sure the nerve agent was a Novichok – a point they have subsequently reinforced. He goes on in the same interview to make clear why based on that information, additional intelligence and, as I said, the lack of alternative explanation from the Russians, we have reached the conclusion we have. What the Foreign Secretary said then, and what Porton Down have said recently, is fully consistent with what we have said throughout. In contrast Mr President we have had innumerable theories from the Russians, I think we have counted some 24 in all. On 21 March for example the Russian Foreign Ministry said they believed terrorists did it. On the 14 March, Mr Lavrov said the British response was aimed at distracting from Brexit. Mr President, the use of chemical weapons on any country's territory is far too serious for these theories to hold water.

The Chemical Weapons Convention, which came into force 21 years ago, is clear in its Article VII that states must adopt legislation criminalising activity prohibited under the convention. That's why the UK is conducting a full investigation of the incident, including under our own Chemical Weapons Act. Because of this, in addition to the UK criminal investigation, we invited the OPCW, the relevant international body, to assist in verifying our analysis and this is on the basis of Article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention. This mandates the Technical Secretariat to provide technical assistance and technical evaluation to States Parties.

Everything we have done, Mr President, has been consistent with the Convention on Chemical Weapons. And if I may say so, Mr President, I won't take any lectures on morality or our responsibilities under Conventions from a country, which as this Council debated yesterday, has done so much to block the proper investigation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The UK's track record on that, Mr President, speaks for itself.

On 21 March, OPCW deployed a team to the UK to visit the locations where the victims were exposed to a toxic chemical. The DG briefed the OPCW Executive Committee yesterday on their actions. OPCW expert staff collected environmental samples from the scene and biomedical samples from the victims. OPCW has verified the chain of custody. These samples have been sent to several designated laboratories for testing. Analysis from the laboratories will now be returned to the OPCW, who will produce a report. Contrary to the Russian claims, Mr President, the United Kingdom looks forward to sharing its findings once we have received that report.

Yesterday, Russia tabled a resolution at the OPCW Executive Committee proposing a joint investigation. Mr President, there are several ways to view this joint investigation. I think the metaphor that I find most apt is that of an arsonist turned firefighter, but in this particular instance, the arsonist wishes to investigate his own fire.

Having failed to get a joint investigation, the resolution only received 6 out of 41 votes in favour. And without waiting for the outcome of OPCW testing, Russia has reverted to a familiar path of undermining the international institution involved. There is no other construction we can

place for Mr Lavrov's remarks today that Russia "will accept results of the OPCW Salisbury poisoning investigation only if Russian experts participate in it." I am sorry Mr President, but that does not make it an independent investigation.

If Russia insists on having its own experts, it seeks to move away from the Chemical Weapons Convention's stipulation and it is setting a test that no independent investigation could credibly tolerate.

This is part of a wider pattern of irresponsible Russian behaviour. Russia discredited the Joint Investigative Mechanism into use of chemical weapons in Syria. Members of the Council will be familiar with the pattern of aggression over the years in Georgia and Crimea. There has been the shooting down of MH17, and there has been a bungled attempt at a coup in Montenegro. And each time, Mr President, these acts are accompanied by distortion and disinformation. The same sort of distortion and disinformation we saw yesterday in the Hague, in the Russian press conferences, and in the Security Council today.

Mr President, whilst we ourselves would not have called this meeting today, we hope to be able to brief the Council further once we receive the report from OPCW. We do believe that it is right that the Security Council remains seized of this flagrant use of chemical weapons, and it is that use which threatens international peace and security. The threats to the chemical weapons convention from attacks in Syria, in Malaysia, and now the United Kingdom pose a serious challenge to the non-proliferation regime that this Council and others have carefully constructed in response to the terrible events of the past. There is one country among us Mr President, Russia, which is playing fast and loose with our collective security and the international institutions that protect us.

It is that reason, Mr President, that leads people to accuse Russia and to take steps against her. It is not out of lack of friendship with the Russian people or lack of respect from Russia as a country. My own Foreign Secretary visited in the hope of establishing a more productive relationship with Foreign Minister Lavrov. But we cannot ignore what has happened in Salisbury. We cannot ignore Russia turning a blind eye to the use of chemical weapons in Syria and in Salisbury. And we cannot ignore the way that Russia seeks to undermine the international institutions, which have kept us safe since the end of the Second World War.

Mr President, we believe that the UK's actions stand up to any scrutiny. We have acted in accordance with the CWC throughout, and through the body charged for these purposes, the OPCW, we are happy to come to Council at any time. We would be very willing to hold an open briefing at our Mission here in New York if there are Members of the UN that still have questions. We have nothing to hide, Mr President, but I do fear that Russia might have something to fear.

Thank you very much.

Rebuttal by Ambassador Karen Pierce, UK Permanent Representative to the UN,

at the Security Council meeting on Salisbury

Thank you very much Mr President, I won't detain colleagues for very long. There is another very good quote from Alice in Wonderland which is: "sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast" so I think that's the quote the suits my Russian colleague best. I just wanted to say that I am committed to keeping the Council updated. We will share with the Council at the Council's request as much information as we can, as and when we have it and in accordance with developments.

News story: Minister for Africa offers congratulations on Sierra Leone elections

On behalf of Her Majesty's Government, I would like to congratulate President Julius Maada Bio and Vice President Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh of the Republic of Sierra Leone on their electoral success.

I also congratulate the people of Sierra Leone on this peaceful conclusion to a tightly contested election.

The National Electoral Commission and the other electoral management bodies have delivered a credible and transparent process, recognised as such by international and domestic observer missions.

I also pay tribute to former President Ernest Bai Koroma, who steered the country through the terrible Ebola epidemic from 2014 – 2016, for his commitment to a peaceful transition.

The UK now looks forward to developing further the relationship between our countries and working with the new President and his administration to support a bright future for Sierra Leone. I also look forward to welcoming them to the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.