

Press release: Government launches Small Business Commissioner to help small firms in Wales resolve payment disputes

- New Small Business Commissioner will support 208,000 small businesses in Wales to resolve payment disputes and tackle larger businesses unfair payment practices to drive culture change
- New guidance website to help small businesses with late payment issues
- Small businesses can now submit late payment complaints to the Commissioner

The Government has today (20 December 2017) launched the complaint handling service of the Small Business Commissioner to ensure fair payment practices for small businesses. This follows the appointment of Paul Uppal to the role of Small Business Commissioner.

Regulations made by Small Business Minister Margot James mean the Commissioner can now handle complaints from small businesses about unfair payment practices. The Commissioner's website is also live, providing guidance to small businesses on payment issues including how to take action if a payment is overdue.

Margot James, Small Business Minister, said:

This Government's Industrial Strategy is building a Britain in which small business can continue to thrive.

Over the last five years the amount owed to smaller businesses has more than halved from £30 billion to £14 billion. Today's Small Business Commissioner service will empower small businesses in Wales to take action if they are paid late, potentially delivering a £2.5 billion annual boost to the economy.

Paul Uppal, Small Business Commissioner, said:

Having run my own small business for over twenty years I am well aware that integrity and trust are key to running and building a successful business. My mission is to help all small businesses nurture positive and lasting relationships with their customers that work in the best interests of both.

Today I am launching a new website so small businesses know their rights, as well as how to contact me if they need further action to be taken when the larger businesses they supply owe them money.

Mike Cherry, National Chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

The UK is gripped by a poor payments crisis, over 30 per cent of payments to small businesses are late and the average value of each payment is £6,142. This not only impacts on the small business and the owner, it is damaging the wider economy.

The Small Business Commissioner is crucial to turning the tide on this late payments culture. FSB will be encouraging small businesses affected to use the service, and we hope then to see clear actions taken to tackle the worst examples of supply chain bullying.

Success will be a UK economic culture where a business that does a job promptly, is paid promptly.

The Small Business Commissioner's website guides small businesses on how to "check, chase, and choose" how to deal with unfair and late payments, that is:

- Check if the right information has been provided to the right people in order for an invoice to be paid
- Chase effectively when a payment is overdue
- Choose how to take further action, including the option of submitting a complaint to the Small Business Commissioner

This is one of a number of measures Government is taking to tackle a late payment culture. Regulations came into force in April 2017 requiring large businesses to publicly report the average time they take to pay their suppliers. This allows suppliers, including small businesses, to make informed decisions about who they do business with. Firms can check when large businesses pay their suppliers on GOV.UK. So far over 200 of the UK's largest businesses have submitted payment reports.

The Small Business Commissioner was appointed on 2 October 2017 and is based in Birmingham.

Notes to editors:

- A third of payments to small businesses are late.
- 20% of small businesses have run in to cash flow problems due to late payments.
- If small businesses were paid on time, this could boost the economy by an estimated £2.5 billion annually.
- Small businesses who wish to make a complaint can visit www.smallbusinesscommissioner.gov.uk
- Enquiries about the Small Business Commissioner can be directed to enquiries@smallbusinesscommissioner.gov.uk
- Complaints can be submitted to

Press release: Government pledges to secure the future of the Post Office

- New funding will enable the Post Office to further modernise its network and bring extra benefits to customers across the UK, with £2bn invested since 2010
- The Post Office has moved into profit for the first time in 16 years and branch numbers are the most stable they have been for decades
- Today 95% of small business customers can access day-to-day banking services in post offices, improving the business environment for small and medium-sized firms – a key part of the Government's Industrial Strategy

The Government today (20 December) announced £370 million of funding to secure the future of the UK's Post Office network.

Of that funding £210 million will be invested in continuing to modernise the network so it can continue to provide essential services and bring additional benefits to its 17 million customers across the UK, including extending opening hours and cutting queue times.

A further £160 million will help to protect 'last shop in the village' community branches and ensure everyone continues to have access to their local branch. Figures published today reveal the network has grown for the second year running, with 99.7% of people living within three miles of their local post office and number of rural branches rising to 6,185.

A key part of the Government's Industrial Strategy is improving the business environment for our small and medium-sized firms and the Government is delivering on a manifesto commitment to extend the availability of banking services to SMEs and families through the Post Office network. Today 99% of UK personal bank customers and 95% of small business customers can access day-to-day banking services in branch and last year the Post Office helped customers carry out 110 million banking transactions, an average of 200 a minute.

The funding agreement, which will run from April 2018 to March 2021, comes as the Post Office moved into profit in 2017 for the first time in 16 years, making the business less reliant on Government subsidies.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

The Post Office is at the heart of communities across the UK, with millions of customers and small businesses relying on their local

branch every day to access a wide range of important services.

With the network at its most stable in decades, this £370m of government funding will ensure it can continue to modernise and bring further benefits to customers across the UK.

Paula Vennells, Chief Executive of the Post Office said:

Making a profit for the first time in 16 years is a major milestone in the Post Office's journey to a sustainable and successful business.

We're fulfilling the promises we have made, and this is recognised by the Government's further investment in the Post Office, which will enable us to continue transforming the business to meet our customers' changing needs – a transformation that has already seen us make significant progress.

We are committed to making the Post Office matter as much tomorrow as it does today. For over 370 years, the Post Office has stayed relevant to communities the length and breadth of the UK by changing and adapting. With the Post Office now trading at a profit, we are better placed than ever to embrace the future. By continuing to invest in post offices, in our digital channels, in support services and – most importantly – by putting our customers first, I am confident that the Post Office is absolutely ready to take on the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Thanks to Government investment of more than £2bn between 2010 and 2018, the Post Office has:

- a stable network of around 11,600 branches;
- delivered its first profit in 16 years;
- modernised more than 7,500 branches;
- protected over 3,000 'last shop in the village' community branches;
- extended opening hours on weekdays and at weekends, adding almost a million extra opening hours every month;
- become the largest Sunday retailer in the UK with more than 4,400 branches open on Sunday;
- ensured 93% of people live within 1 mile of their nearest branch.

The Government will also publish its response to the Post Office Network Consultation carried out in November 2016 which helped to inform the scale and nature of today's funding announcement.

Notes to Editors

1. The Post Office has published its 2016/17 Annual Report, Financial Statements, and Network Report on its [website](#)

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[Press release: MLA pay advice recommendations](#)

On 12 November, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland asked Trevor Reaney to provide advice on salaries and allowances for Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, said:

“I would like to thank Trevor Reaney for his thoughtful advice on the approach to the salaries and allowances of MLAs in the continued absence of an Executive or sitting Assembly.

“This is a matter of significant public concern and it is right to take a considered approach. This is why I asked Mr Reaney to provide me with this advice, which I will consider carefully before responding. “

Mr Reaney’s advice is published in full here. Mr Reaney is a former Clerk and Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly and a current member of the National Assembly for Wales Remuneration Board.

PDF, 427KB, 22 pages

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Media Enquiries should be directed to the Northern Ireland Office Press Office.

Speech: “The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is one of the greatest diplomatic successes in recent memory”

Thank you Mr President.

And thank you to our briefers. Jeff, for your comprehensive presentation of the Secretary-General’s fourth report. Jo, for your update on the Joint Commission. And Sebastiano, for your summary as facilitator of the 2231 format and indeed for all of your excellent work in that capacity and that of your team.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is one of the greatest diplomatic successes in recent memory. The continued endorsement of the deal, through Resolution 2231, is another considerable achievement and also a responsibility for all of us. We remain committed to its full and equitable implementation by all parties.

As the Secretary-General’s latest report demonstrates, the nuclear components

of the deal are working. Iran is complying with its nuclear commitments. For our part, we are committed to ensuring that the Iranian people see tangible benefits, including from sanctions relief. I encourage all Member States to uphold their commitments. We welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation to further promote understanding of 2231 and of the Procurement Channel. We are committed to supporting these efforts.

However, despite this progress, four elements of the report are concerning. They relate to provisions of Annex B. They hinder the full realisation of the reciprocal benefits of the deal and they undermine faith in Iran's long term commitment to regional stability.

Firstly, we are deeply concerned by reported transfers of Iranian ballistic missile parts and related technology to the Houthis in Yemen. Such transfers would be a violation of Resolution 2231 which prohibits the transfer to and from Iran of ballistic missile technology and related materiel. These transfers would also violate Resolution 2216 which prohibits the sale or transfer of arms and related materiel to the Houthis.

The Houthi missile attack on Riyadh on 4 November deliberately targeted a civilian area. And earlier today, we heard reports of a further missile attack on Riyadh, this time aimed at the Yamama Palace. Both would have caused suffering and chaos had they landed as intended. This is clearly unacceptable and risks escalating the situation.

The transfer of weapons to the Houthis threatens regional security and stability. Their use is prolonging the conflict in Yemen and contributing to heightened regional tensions.

It is essential that the UN conducts a thorough investigation and informs the Security Council of its conclusions as soon as possible. We strongly support the Secretary-General's call for a joint meeting of the 2140 Committee and the 2231 format. This will allow for a coherent discussion of the use of ballistic missiles against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while also considering next steps to address this threat.

Secondly, we are concerned by the continued reported violations of restrictions on arms-related provisions. Evidence of these activities is mounting. The latest report indicates that the arms seized from a dhow near the Gulf of Oman and an unmanned surface vessel recovered in Yemeni waters are both of Iranian origin. These activities, which are contrary to our Security Council Resolution, give us further cause for concern over Iran's involvement in that conflict.

Thirdly, we are concerned by evidence relating to Iranian ballistic missile-related activities. Paragraph Three of Annex B calls upon Iran not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles that are designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such technology. The launch of the Simorgh space launch vehicle on 27 July made use of such technology and as such was inconsistent with Resolution 2231.

Finally, we are concerned by reports of multiple travel ban violations,

including new infringements by Major General Qasem Soleimani. This is particularly disturbing given the public nature of the violation.

Putting all these issues together, it is clear that these activities are having a detrimental impact on regional security and are undermining Iran's integration with the international community.

We remain committed to the full implementation of 2231 to uphold the historic agreement, and we are committed to working with all parties to make this a reality. But we cannot stand by and allow a Security Council resolution to be ignored and the situation in the region to be further destabilised. We urge Iran to respect all provisions of Resolution 2231 and we are prepared to work with council members to ensure that those responsible are held accountable for any proven violations.

The JCPoA and its implementation through Resolution 2231 are important elements of the international community's non-proliferation architecture and they are essential to supporting regional and global security. We are all responsible for ensuring its success. We all must honour our commitments. Iran is no exception.

Thank you.