Window cleaning boss banned after failing to account for £1.7m

Nicola Bentley (39), from Oxted, Surrey, was the sole director of Stephenson's (National Window Cleaning) Ltd and has now been disqualified from being a company director for 7 years. Her ban is effective from 31 December 2020.

The company was incorporated in January 2017 and provided window cleaning services, predominantly for bookmakers.

The window cleaners traded for 2 years but in January 2019 entered into creditors voluntary liquidation and Nicola Bentley's conduct was referred to the Insolvency Service for further investigations.

The Insolvency Service found that from February 2018 until the company went into liquidation, Nicola Bentley's company had spent almost £1.7 million.

Nicola Bentley, however, failed to preserve accounting records and investigators could not determine if the amount was for legitimate business expenditure.

The investigation discovered that almost £640,000 had been transferred out of the company bank account to three unknown bank accounts. Nicola Bentley had also failed to keep any records that could identify the source of almost £1.7 million paid into the company bank account and whether it was legitimate business income.

From June 2017 to January 2019, the window cleaning company failed to pay all its tax obligations, with more than £405,000 being owed. Despite more than £2.1 million being paid out of the company bank account, only £1,000 was paid to the tax authorities in relation to its increasing VAT debt.

On 10 December the Secretary of State accepted an undertaking from Nicola Bentley after she did not dispute that she failed to keep sufficient accounting records and did not settle the company's tax liabilities.

Nicola Bentley is now banned from being a director of a company or, whether directly or indirectly, be concerned or take part in the promotion, formation or management of a company unless she has leave of the court

Lawrence Zussman, Deputy Head of Insolvent Investigations, said:

> Maintaining company records is a statutory requirement for every business but despite millions passing through Nicola Bentley's company bank account, she failed to provide information about her income and expenditure. The company owed a significant amount of tax yet paid only a minimal amount towards its tax obligations.

> Nicola Bentley totally disregarded her responsibilities as a director of Stephenson’s and has now been banned from the business environment for seven years.

Nicola Bentley’s date of birth is November 1981.

Stephenson’s (National Window Cleaning) Ltd (Company Reg no. 10553769).

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings.

Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a range of other restrictions.

Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is available.

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

A message from Simon Lebus, Chief Regulator, on exams in 2021

Over £200 million boost to upgrade UK labs to help scientists tackle

COVID-19 and cut emissions

- UK science facilities to be upgraded with £213 million government investment enabling researchers to respond to global challenges such as COVID-19 and climate change
- new world class equipment includes supercomputers in Cardiff to track infectious diseases, airborne sensors in London to monitor greenhouse gas emissions and a unique floating offshore wind testing lab at the University of Plymouth
- part of government's flagship Research and Development (R&D) Roadmap which committed to making the UK the best place in the world for scientists and researchers to live and work

Super computers to track infectious diseases and a first-of-its kind floating offshore wind testing lab are among the world class facilities that UK researchers will gain access to, thanks to a major £213 million government investment to upgrade the UK's scientific infrastructure.

Announced today (Wednesday 6 January) by Science Minister Amanda Solloway, the investment will equip the UK's leading scientists, universities and research institutes with new state-of-the-art equipment to drive forward exceptional research that will help the UK respond to major challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The £213 million pot includes £27 million for researchers at 43 of the UK's Medical Research Institutes across all corners of the UK providing them with access and upgrades to cutting edge equipment including ultra-high performing computers and microscopes. This will enable researchers to detect and model disease in more detail than ever before, helping the UK respond to COVID-19 and boosting resilience for future pandemics, as well as other diseases such as cancer and dementia.

The multi–million-pound investment will also provide researchers across the country with facilities to test innovative technologies to cut carbon emissions, such as a floating offshore wind turbine testing facility at the University of Plymouth, autonomous marine robotics trialled in Southampton to monitor the health of the southern oceans, as well as airborne sensors in London to monitor greenhouse gas emissions.

Other facilities to receive financial backing includes a unique 'blast diagnostics' laboratory at the University of Sheffield, which will test the UK's ability to respond to the use of explosives in terrorist attacks.

The investment will ensure the UK is the best place in the world for scientists, researchers and entrepreneurs to live and work, while continuing to attract scientific talent from across the globe.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

> The response from UK scientists and researchers to coronavirus has been nothing short of phenomenal. We need to match this excellence by ensuring scientific facilities are truly world class, so scientists can continue carrying out life-changing research for years to come as we build back better from the pandemic.
>
> From the world's most detailed telescopes tracking disease to airborne drones monitoring greenhouse gas emissions, our investment will enhance the tools available to our most ambitious innovators across the country. By doing so, scientists and researchers will be able to drive forward extraordinary research that will enable the UK to respond to global challenges such as achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The £213 million investment, delivered through the government's World Class Labs funding scheme and made through 7 of UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) research councils, covers investments in all disciplines from physical sciences to arts and humanities.

Facilities to benefit from the investment include:

- **£29 million to upgrade and replace UK scientific equipment**: upgrading and purchasing core equipment for the use of researchers across the UK. This will equip medical researchers at 43 of the UK's Medical Research Institutes, such as in Birmingham, Glasgow and Cardiff with state-of-the-art research equipment, including new high-performance computers and telescopes to study disease. It will also replace equipment that has been donated to COVID-19 research
- **£25 million to support the installation of highly sophisticated testing facilities at leading UK universities**: This includes a first of a kind offshore floating wind turbine testing facility at the University of Plymouth, and a 'blast diagnostics' laboratory at the University of Sheffield, which will test the UK's ability to respond to the use of explosives in terrorist attacks. Funding will also support new equipment at a multi-disciplinary X-ray facility at the University of Liverpool, helping scientists to understand how carbon dioxide interacts with sandstone rocks, in order to develop improved ways of undertaking carbon capture and storage to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions
- **£34 million for data and digital research infrastructure**: Upgrading the UK's digital research capabilities will enable some of the country's brightest minds to conduct pioneering analytical research that will help inform long term policy decisions. For example, urban data centres in Glasgow, Liverpool and Oxford will receive new hardware to pursue research that will show how COVID-19 has affected social and economic activity in different parts of the UK. Meanwhile, the University of Essex will be backed to conduct a large-scale household survey to understand how the pandemic has affected issues such as home schooling and family relationships
- **£33.5 million to upgrade facilities of UK scientific councils**: This will include a £20 million investment for the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) to upgrade laboratory infrastructure at its

sites in Oxford, Cheshire, Cleveland and Edinburgh. This will enable the Council to continue developing flagship projects covering a range of topics, from pre-launch satellite testing to the search for dark matter

- **£15 million for the Capability for Collections Fund (CapCo)**: investment will renew and upgrade the most vulnerable research facilities across the UK within galleries, libraries, archives and museums. It will focus on conservation and heritage, modernising these spaces which will help serve local communities for generations

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Kemi Badenoch, said:

> This investment in state of the art science and research facilities will help the UK's world-leading scientists deliver life-changing research, from tackling infectious diseases and COVID-19, to delivering Net Zero.
>
> It's vital we continue to innovate to drive our economic recovery and level up the country.

Professor Ottoline Leyser, Chief Executive of UKRI said:

> Research and innovation infrastructure is key to delivering the government's R&D Roadmap, with some of the most innovative ideas with transformative R&D potential requiring access to leading-edge infrastructures, including national research facilities, equipment and instrumentation, networks of technologies and digital infrastructures, and knowledge-based resources such as collections and museums.
>
> Outstanding infrastructure helps to convene talent from the public and private sectors and across disciplines to tackle society's most complex challenges. It acts as a magnet for researchers and innovators internationally, contributes to local and national economies, and generates knowledge and capability critical to UK policy, security and wellbeing.

The funding forms part of a £300 million commitment to upgrade scientific infrastructure across the UK, made by Business Secretary Alok Sharma, as part of the government's ambitious R&D Roadmap published in July 2020.

See the full list of investments.

Tackling chemical weapons in Syria through both OPCW and UNSC

I would like to congratulate Tunisia on assuming the Presidency and also as other colleagues have done, to welcome new members of the Security Council from India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway.

I would like also to thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu for her briefing today. We would also like to reiterate our gratitude to the Director-General of the OPCW for attending and briefing the Security Council last month. As recognised by the Security Council in resolution 2118 and subsequent resolutions, ongoing coordination between the UN and the OPCW is vital if we are to collectively resolve this issue.

At this point, I'd also like to reiterate our confidence in the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat. I recall that only a year ago, this Council adopted a Presidential Statement which unanimously reaffirmed our strong support for the work of the OPCW. Just five weeks ago, the overwhelming majority of states, parties from across all regional groups voted in favour of the OPCW budget, which included renewed funding for the IIT and other Technical Secretariat teams working on Syria.

I thank the OPCW Director-General for his 87th monthly report. In December 2013, the Security Council unanimously decided that Syria should not use, develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain chemical weapons, and should comply with all aspects of the decision of the OPCW Executive Council of 27 September 2013, which required it to submit a declaration of its chemical weapons programme within 30 days. It is deeply regrettable that 7 years later, Syria's 30-day declaration can still not be considered accurate and complete.

As we have discussed previously, the unresolved issues in Syria's chemical weapons declaration are of a serious and substantive nature. They include the unaccounted-for whereabouts of thousands of munitions and hundreds of tonnes of chemical agents. As the Director-General reported last month and again this month, they include a facility which Syria previously declared as not having been used for chemical weapons production but which OPCW evidence collected since 2014 indicates was used for the production and/or weaponization of chemical warfare nerve agents.

The ongoing threat posed to international peace and security by these unresolved issues is not hypothetical. Since Syria allegedly destroyed all of its chemical weapons stockpile in 2014, it has been found by both the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism and the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team to have used chemical weapons on at least 6 occasions. These are not hypothetical issues for the thousands of Syrian civilians who have suffered the horrifying effects on the body of nerve agents and chlorine.

As we said last month, the fact that three of the unresolved issues have

recently been closed, shows that, contrary to the assertions of some that they are artificial, they are eminently capable of resolution if Syria chooses to engage genuinely and constructively.

Mr President, there is increasing international concern about Syria's ongoing failure to comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the consequent threat to international peace and security and the chemical weapons non-proliferation regime. This is reflected in the recent decision taken by the OPCW Executive Council, which set a further deadline for compliance by Syria and recommended that the Conference of States Parties take action if Syria did not comply. Following failure to meet that deadline, the Conference of States Parties will consider that action this Spring.

As I said earlier, it has always been recognised that elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme has to be tackled through concerted efforts of both the OPCW and Security Council.

As we enter the 8th year of our consideration of this matter and as new colleagues join us on the Council, we look forward to renewing a serious and constructive discussion about the action the Security Council should take to uphold its resolutions and tackle this serious threat to international peace and security.

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 5 January 2021

Good afternoon,

I want to update everybody about vaccines

because across this entire country today there are people – everybody – making another huge sacrifice.

Teachers and pupils coping with online learning

Businesses who have borne the brunt of successive lockdowns and, of course, the amazing staff of our NHS and our care workers who are grappling with a new variant – this new variant – of coronavirus.

And I believe that when everybody looks at the position people understand overwhelmingly that we have no choice

when the Office of National Statistics is telling us that more than 2 per cent of the population is now infected

- that's over 1 million people in England –

and when today we have reported another 60,000 new cases

and when the number of patients in hospitals in England is now 40 per cent higher than at the first peak in April.

I think obviously – everybody, you all – want to be sure that we in government are now using every second of this lockdown to put that invisible shield around the elderly and the vulnerable in the form of vaccination

and so to begin to bring this crisis to an end.

And I can tell you that this afternoon

- with Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca combined – as of this afternoon

we have now vaccinated over 1.1 million people in England and over 1.3 million across the UK.

And that includes more than 650,000 people over 80

- which is 23 per cent of all the over 80s in England –

And that means that nearly 1 in 4 of one of the most vulnerable groups will have in 2 to 3 weeks – all of them – a significant degree of immunity.

And when you consider that the average age of Covid fatalities is in the 80s

You can see the importance of what we have already achieved.

And that is why I believe that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation was right to draw up a programme aimed at saving the most lives the fastest.

So by February 15th, as I said last night, the NHS is committed to offering a vaccination to everyone in the top four priority groups including older care home residents and staff, everyone over 70, all frontline NHS and care staff and all those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

And to help us with meeting this target we already have 595 GP-led sites providing vaccines, with a further 180 coming on stream later this week.

We have 107 hospital sites – with a further 100 later this week

So that is almost a thousand sites – vaccination sites – across the country by the end of this week

And next week we will also have 7 vaccination centres opening in places such as sports stadia and exhibition centres.

We know that there will still be long weeks ahead in which we must persevere with these restrictions

but I want to give you – the British people – the maximum possible transparency about this vaccine roll out with more detail on Thursday and

daily updates from Monday so that you can see day by day

and jab by jab

how much progress we are making.

Thanks very much I am now going to hand over to Chris to do the slides.