

News story: Biometric annual report 2017: update

Once the Home Secretary has had time to consider the report, it will then be laid before Parliament.

The role of the Biometrics Commissioner was established by PoFA and Paul Wiles was appointed as the second Commissioner on 1 June 2016.

His role is to provide independent oversight of the regime which was established by PoFA which came into force on 31 October 2013 to govern the retention and use by the police in England and Wales of DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints.

In addition to various casework responsibilities in relation to DNA and fingerprints, he also has a UK-wide oversight function as regards their retention and use by the police on national security grounds.

The Commissioner's 2017 report, which will be published on this website once it has been laid before Parliament, deals primarily with developments since the publication of his 2016 report.

It covers his casework activities, the general operation of the PoFA regime and a variety of issues that have arisen in connection with its operation in both the normal policing and national security spheres.

If you have any queries, please contact Justin Hawkins on 07792 551301.

News story: Free bus passes for older and disabled people protected for the future

Disabled and older people in England will continue to benefit from free off-peak bus travel for the foreseeable future, keeping them connected with their local towns and cities.

Bus passengers aged over 65 or with a disability have been entitled to travel free of charge on any off-peak local service in England since 2007, thanks to the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme.

The government has now amended legislation to protect the scheme in its current format, so that it can continue for years to come.

Buses Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

Being able to get out and about is hugely important for older and disabled people to keep their independence and play a role in their local community.

Buses help connect people, homes and businesses and nearly 10 million people in this country are already benefitting from free off-peak bus travel.

The legislation underpinning our important bus pass scheme is now set for the future, meaning this group will be able to access their local services and amenities.

The legislation behind the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme has been amended so that it no longer needs to be reviewed every 5 years. New regulations will ensure millions of older and disabled people up and down the country can continue to make use of buses to go about their daily lives.

In addition to the bus pass scheme, the government provides £250 million every year for bus services in England, £40 million of which helps to fund routes that may not be commercially viable but which are considered socially necessary – ensuring people are connected with their local services and communities.

Francesca Di Giorgio, Inclusion Policy Manager at RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) said:

Blind and partially sighted people rely on bus services to get to work, visit friends and family, and be part of the community. Buses are a vital lifeline bringing independence to many people with sight loss.

We are really pleased that the concessionary bus pass scheme will continue to run, guaranteeing free off-peak bus travel for people registered blind and partially sighted.

Dave Bracher, Campaigns Manager, Spinal Injuries Association said:

Buses provide a lifeline to many of our members, enabling them to be active in their local communities, commute to work, visit family and friends and undertake a host of other activities.

We know that having a spinal cord injury, like any disability, attracts significant additional costs – and this initiative helps people financially and to lead active, engaged and fulfilled lives.

[Press release: Estate agent cartel directors disqualified](#)

This follows an investigation that resulted in 5 Somerset estate agents being fined more than £370,000 last year for secretly agreeing between themselves the fees they charged.

Mr David Baker and Mr Julian Frost were, at the time, both directors of Abbott and Frost Estate Agents Ltd. in Burnham-on-Sea. This was one of a group of estate agents who agreed to fix their minimum commission rates at 1.5%, so denying local home owners the chance of getting a better deal when selling their property.

During the investigation, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) identified that a number of directors were actively involved in the cartel or were aware of it and failed to take any steps to stop it.

The CMA secured legally binding undertakings from two of these directors – Mr Baker and Mr Frost – which have the effect of disqualifying them as directors and preventing them from being involved in the management of any UK company.

Mr Baker has been disqualified for 3.5 years, and Mr Frost has been disqualified for 3 years.

The CMA is continuing to investigate whether to seek the disqualification of other directors of companies involved in the fee-fixing agreement.

The CMA has the power to seek the disqualification of an individual from holding company directorships, under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, where they have been director of a company which has breached competition law and their conduct makes them unfit to be a director.

This is the second time a disqualification has been secured on grounds that the company broke competition law, the previous case being in December 2016.

[Michael Grenfell](#), Executive Director for Enforcement at the CMA, said:

Agreeing prices with competitors is one of the most serious ways a company can break competition law, as it harms individuals, businesses and the economy.

When, as in this case, estate agents agreed among themselves commission fee rates, the effect is to stop people from shopping around for the best deal on one of the biggest financial decisions any of us make – selling a house.

Company directors have an important responsibility to ensure that

their companies don't engage in illegal anti-competitive practices.

Today's news should send a clear message to directors that if their companies breach competition law they risk personal disqualification.

Notes to editors:

1. More information on this investigation including details of the CMA's full decision can be found on the [case page](#)
2. On 31 May 2017 the CMA imposed fines totalling £370,084 on 5 of the 6 agents involved- the 6th was granted immunity as part of a leniency agreement as they were the first to report the cartel to the CMA
3. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law
4. Under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, the CMA has the power to apply to the court for an order disqualifying a director from holding company directorships or performing certain roles in relation to a company for a specified period if a company of which he or she is a director has breached competition law. The Act also allows the CMA to accept a disqualification undertaking from a director instead of bringing proceedings. A disqualification undertaking has the same legal effect as a disqualification order
5. The Competition Act 1998 prohibits agreements, practices and conduct that may have a damaging effect on competition in the UK. The Chapter I prohibition in the Act prohibits anti-competitive agreements and concerted practices between businesses ('undertakings') which have as their object or effect the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within the UK. Any business found to have infringed the Competition Act 1998 can be fined up to 10% of its annual worldwide group turnover
6. 3 out of the 6 estate agents qualified for [leniency](#), which means the CMA will not seek disqualification against their cooperating directors, as long as the estate agents continue to comply with the terms of their leniency agreements with the CMA
7. The disqualification of Mr David Baker takes effect from 11 April 2018 for a period of 3 years and 6 months and the disqualification of Mr Julian Frost takes effect from 24 April 2018 for a period of 3 years. Mr

Baker resigned as a director of Abbott and Frost on 31 January 2018

8. For more information on the CMA see our [homepage](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Sign up to our [email alerts](#) to receive updates on Competition Act 1998 and civil cartels cases
9. Media enquiries should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk, or call 020 3738 6460

Open consultation: Litter and refuse: updating enforcement guidance

We want to know what you think about our guidance on proportionate and effective use of fixed penalties for littering and related offences. This guidance applies to England only.

The guidance is relevant for other environmental fixed penalty powers such as for abandoned vehicles, fly-tipping, parking, and offences related to domestic waste bins.

We committed in the Litter Strategy for England to publish improved guidance to promote proportionate and responsible enforcement. We intend to put this guidance into the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. Land managers in England have to have regard to this code.

Press release: Interim Director for Serious Fraud Office announced

The Attorney General, Jeremy Wright QC MP, has today announced an update on recruitment for the next Director of the Serious Fraud Office (SFO).

David Green CB QC will leave the SFO on 20 April following 6 years as Director. David has overseen major successes and breakthroughs over recent years, including 6 convictions for rate rigging offences, the first SFO conviction after trial of a corporate entity for offences involving bribery of foreign officials and obtaining a number of high profile Deferred Prosecution Agreements.

Following a Civil Service Commission led process, a preferred candidate has been selected by the Attorney General to lead the SF0. They are currently undertaking the final stages of the appointment process and managing their exit from their current position. We will make an announcement in due course and the new Director will take up the role later this year.

Mark Thompson, currently the SF0's Chief Operating Officer has been appointed as the Interim Director and will take on the role from 21 April.

Mark Thompson joined the SF0 in 2004. He headed the SF0's Proceeds of Crime Division from 2012 to 2016 and became its Chief Finance Officer in May 2015. Prior to joining the SF0, Mark started his career as a police officer with the Metropolitan Police before qualifying as a chartered accountant in 1997 and working for the National Audit Office and KPMG Forensic.

Commenting on the decision to appoint Mark Thompson as Interim Director, the Attorney General Jeremy Wright QC MP said:

I am grateful to Mark for taking on the role of Interim Director of the SF0. Mark has a wealth of experience in tackling corruption and economic crime and he is well placed to lead the SF0 effectively at such a crucial time. He will continue to work closely with the SF0's experienced General Counsel, Alun Milford.

Economic crime, at all levels, is a growing and changing threat and tackling it is a priority for the Government. The SF0 will continue to undertake crucial work to investigate and prosecute some of the most serious and complex economic crime, working closely and collaboratively with other agencies.

I would like to thank David Green personally for his service and wish him well for his next endeavour.

As set out in the Criminal Justice Act 1987, the Attorney General appoints the DSFO.

David Green's term ends on 20 April. This is following a 4 year contract that was extended for 2 years.