

News story: Centenary Cities: 100 years of votes for women

Seven areas across England will benefit from a share of £1.2 million to fund projects in 2018 to mark 100 years since women were first allowed to vote, Minister for Women and Equalities Anne Milton has confirmed today (15 December).

To mark this milestone the government's 'Centenary Cities' – Bolton, Bristol, Leeds, Leicester, London, Manchester and Nottingham – will all host a range of exciting projects to celebrate as well as remember those individuals who helped to make this happen.

Every area was chosen for its strong link to the women's suffrage movement, from Manchester's proud history as the home of the Pankhurst's suffragette campaign to lesser known local heroes like Leicester's shoe factory worker Alice Hawkins who was jailed five times in the fight for women's votes.

The 'Centenary Cities' programme forms part of the government's wider plans to promote this pivotal moment in history, including the addition of the first female statue in Parliament Square – Millicent Fawcett – due to be unveiled in 2018.

The initiatives and commemorations that will take place across the country next year also aim to help inspire and educate young people about UK democracy and its importance, as well as encourage more women to get into political and public life.

Minister for Women and Equalities Anne Milton said:

Less than 100 years ago, women could not vote and could not stand as candidates for Parliament. By remembering and celebrating those individuals who fought to get the right to vote we are continuing to push for all our political institutions to reflect women's representation in society.

I want to congratulate all seven of our 'Centenary Cities' that have been recognised for their proud connection to the suffrage movement and look forward to hearing more about the projects they are planning next year.

Press release: Abstraction reform: further moves made towards Green Brexit

Access to clean and safe water supplies is essential for people and the environment, however increasing demand for water is putting pressure on supplies.

Latest data shows that five per cent of surface water bodies and 15 per cent of groundwater bodies are at risk from increasing water use by current abstraction licence holders that could damage the environment.

Today's new [abstraction reform plan](#) will improve better access to water by:

- Preventing unsustainable abstraction by reviewing existing licences and introducing more controls to protect rivers, lakes and groundwater.
- Developing a strong focus on catchment areas for water bodies to encourage more partnership working between [the Environment Agency](#), abstractors and catchment groups to protect and enhance the environment and improve access to water.
- Modernising the abstraction service to allow online applications for licences and bring water resources regulations in line with other environmental permitting regulations.

Environment Minister, Thérèse Coffey said:

The abstraction licencing system is in clear need of reform and I am very pleased to set out how we will do this in our plan. I believe our approach will work for all parties and, most importantly, will protect our precious water supplies.

Our ambition is to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it and we will keep building on our successes by enhancing our environmental standards and delivering a Green Brexit.

Making sure that abstraction is sustainable and contributes to healthy water bodies that are able to provide good support to fish and other aquatic life is at the heart of these plans.

While good progress has been made in recent years, the plan emphasises the importance of the Environment Agency, the water industry and other

stakeholders working in partnership at a catchment level to improve and protect the environment and improve access to water.

From January 2018 the Environment Agency will begin to regulate around 5,000 water users that have historically been exempt from regulation. This will create a fairer system and help protect the environment.

The Environment Agency's work to address unsustainable abstraction should see around 90 per cent of surface water bodies and 77 per cent of groundwater bodies meet the required standards by 2021.

Notes to editors:

- The Environment Agency will produce updated abstraction licensing strategies that detail the solutions to environmental issues in local areas around rivers and groundwaters and set out approaches to help abstractors access the water they need.
- Since 2008 the Environment Agency has made changes to over 270 abstraction licences to prevent over 30 billion litres of water per year being removed from the environment where abstraction is unsustainable.
- In the New Year, the Environment Agency will begin piloting and testing a digital system for handling licence applications and data reporting. Modernising these services will improve the user experience as well as supporting reforms to better protect the environment and improve access to water.
- A report will be made to Parliament by May 2019 on the progress made on abstraction reform.

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Policy paper: Water abstraction plan 2017

Updated: Updated to include the first four Initial Priority Catchments: Idle & Torne in East Midlands, The South Forty Foot in Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire (also known as The Black Sluice), East Suffolk in East Anglia and Cam & Ely Ouse in East Anglia.

These documents set out what the government is doing to reform the management of water abstraction. They summarise how we will work with abstractors to make these changes.

The abstraction plan document summarises all the changes we plan to make. It should be read alongside the more detailed documents covering environment, catchment focus and abstraction licensing service.

Press release: Paul Newby announces

actions to respond to MRO concerns

Pubs Code Adjudicator Paul Newby has today published a [Regulatory Compliance Handbook](#) setting out how he expects pub-owning businesses covered by the Pubs Code to act in a number of important areas.

The Handbook contains minimum standards dealing with areas such as communications and engagement with tenants. Another major focus is the behaviour of Business Development Managers, particularly following a tenant's request for a Market Rent Only (MRO) option.

Publication of the Regulatory Compliance Handbook is part of the PCA's response to the concerns identified in the MRO verification exercise which highlighted the low conversion rate of MRO Notices served into MRO tenancies agreed.

Mr Newby intends to monitor its use and welcomes information from tenants and organisations representing their interests about how it is being implemented.

This Handbook is a starting point and the PCA will be inviting pub-owning businesses to build on and add to this advice. The PCA will provide updates to the Handbook to deal with additional issues and developments.

As well as concerns about the way some pub-owning businesses were treating tied pub tenants when they request an MRO proposal, the MRO verification exercise also identified concerns about the time and expense involved in arbitrations, and the lack of clarity in the Pubs Code, especially on the MRO vehicle.

The PCA agrees that the arbitration process has been too slow. He has therefore taken steps to speed up the process, including the introduction of new IT and an expanded team. The PCA expects both tied pub tenants and pub-owning businesses to play their part in minimising delays and providing timely information.

The PCA understands the demand for further clarity on the Code, in particular on the question of whether an MRO tenancy requires a new agreement. The PCA has made decisions on this issue, but is currently subject to an appeal. This places limits on what the PCA can say publicly at this time.

The PCA continues to make arbitration decisions and will draw out principles from these cases in the form of further advice and guidance on the scope and application of the Code as the number of decisions increases.

Paul Newby said: "I recognise there has been concern and frustration with the operation of the Pubs Code – I share much of that. The Code is new and new law can take time to bed down but I believe we have an action plan that will deliver real progress. The results of the verification exercise that examined the experiences of tenants seeking a Market Rent Only option deeply concerned me. Concerns covered three key areas: the way some tied pub tenants are treated by pub-owning businesses when they request an MRO proposal; the time

and expense involved in arbitrations; and the lack of clarity in the Code, especially on the MRO vehicle.

“Following publication of the report I held a series of bilateral meetings with the pub-owning businesses to discuss the concerns raised by tenants in more detail. After detailed discussions with each CEO, I have produced the Regulatory Compliance Handbook. This is statutory advice to the pub-owning businesses on the behaviours I expect from them in line with their specific obligations under the Code. I will monitor formally how the pub-owning businesses implement this advice and am prepared to take further regulatory action if I do not see progress.

“I have also been listening to the concerns of tenants and other stakeholders about the arbitration process and clarity on the Code, and I am putting in place the changes to deal with the issues raised. My strong focus on increasing the pace of arbitrations will be a great help in the process of developing the key principles that will provide more clarity on the Pubs Code. I am working towards issuing substantial advice as early as possible in the first quarter of 2018.”

For further information contact office@pca.gsi.gov.uk.

Notes to editors:

1. The [MRO verification exercise report](#) was published 23 August 2017.
2. [PCA bulletin \(August\)](#), published 23 August 2017, provided the PCA’s initial response to the MRO verification exercise.
3. [PCA bulletin \(December\)](#) and Regulatory Compliance Handbook published 15 December 2017.