

Fiona Dickie on becoming the Pubs Code Adjudicator

Today I step up to become the Pubs Code Adjudicator at a time when the pubs sector faces an unparalleled threat from COVID-19 and the livelihoods of tied tenants are on the line. It is vital that my focus is on upholding the principles of the Pubs Code through this emergency. It is now more important than ever that tenants have the benefit of their statutory rights and protections, and that the regulated pub-owning businesses (POBs) are adhering to the Pubs Code principles of fairness and transparency.

Directors of all the POBs regulated by the PCA have signed a declaration which stops the clock on many important Code rights. These arrangements ensure that these rights are preserved and protected, but do not stop any tenant from taking any available Code step to access their rights.

It is important that the industry as a whole has a safe journey through the difficult days the country is facing. We all want to see a strong tenanted pub sector at the other end, and this means taking an intelligent approach to regulation. The PCA is here to assist the journey. However, I am acutely aware of the stress and uncertainty tied pub tenants are facing at this time, and of the potential for a long-term impact on their businesses and their relationships with their POB of large rental debts from the period of lockdown. My involvement in promoting Code rights as the industry pulls itself out of the impact of the outbreak will be sustained for as long as it takes

I am expecting POBs to make themselves accountable for how they are supporting, and can support, their tenants to ensure they survive the outbreak, by being transparent and fair about their approaches. This includes being consistent and documenting their conversations with individual TPTs, in line with Pubs Code requirements. I understand that tenants may be feeling financial and mental strain in these uncertain times, and this makes it all the more important that POBs take care to ensure that they behave towards them in ways which cannot be received as oppressive or unreasonable.

While my immediate priorities include ensuring the POBs are complying with the Pubs Code and their individual declarations and are supporting their tenants through the emergency and as they return to trading, I am also focusing on wider priorities around the promotion and upholding of the Code.

I will be working with the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the delivery of the statutory review of the Pubs Code with the aim of supporting and strengthening Code rights. In addition, I will be leading on concluding the investigation against Star Pubs and Bars.

It is critical that tenants are aware of the rights and how to access them and so I have made efforts to raise and maintain awareness of the Pubs Code among tenants and the wider industry a personal priority. My team and I will

be working to adapt different methods of communications during this time to make them more accessible. More information will be published on the PCA website and we will be launching social media channels to provide more regular updates.

I was new to the pub trade 30 months ago when I took up post as Deputy Pubs Code Adjudicator, but I am not now. I have worked closely with the sector and understand the challenges of the role, but I know the PCA now needs to make a difference at an extraordinary time.

I intend to be clear and frank with the POBs about my expectations that they deliver on their statutory obligations. I will be a strong champion for the rights and protections Parliament has given to tied tenants through the Pubs Code.

As PCA my objective will be to drive the progress forward and ensure that tied tenants can emerge from today's emergency and prosper tomorrow.