

News story: UK at the forefront of international efforts to tackle corruption

New legislation, powers and tools to tackle corruption in the UK have been heralded in a new report, which comes just days after an international watchdog gave the UK top marks for its response to dirty money.

Among the achievements across the past 12 months listed in a cross-government review of the [Anti-Corruption Strategy](#) was the Criminal Finances Act – which saw the first use of new powers. The new national economic crime centre and a central government network to reduce the risks of bribery and corruption are also highlighted as commitments fulfilled this year.

According to the assessment of the strategy, which aims to support national security, prosperity at home and abroad and public confidence in our institutions, nearly all the commitments due this year have been met while laying the foundation for the rest.

Ben Wallace MP, Minister of State for Security and Economic Crime, said:

Corruption and economic crime undermine our economy, damage our international reputation and have a corrosive effect on individuals and communities. This report shows our determination to tackle these threats and that the UK remains in the vanguard of international efforts to tackle corruption. I am delighted with the progress made.

As part of the strategy, which was published last December, the government has brought the Criminal Finances Act into force, including additional powers for law enforcement agencies to identify and recover corrupt and criminal funds. The act introduced unexplained wealth orders, which can be used to compel individuals to explain the sources of their wealth. The first UWOs have been issued relating to assets of £22 million.

The new National Economic Crime Centre (NECC), housed within the National Crime Agency, fulfils another Strategy commitment. Additionally, the UK is strengthening its framework for combatting corruption by evaluating our systems through international reviews including the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global standard setter for anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing. According to a Mutual Evaluation Report published by FATF on 7 December, the UK is world-leading in the fight against illicit finance.

A further action taken since the Strategy was published is the launch of a new government Counter-Fraud Profession. This is a professional network of more than 3,000 civil servants who specialise in tackling fraud, bribery and

corruption. It allows them to access training and share their expertise in order to enhance the quality of their risk assessments and investigations.

In addition, last month the government launched the Serious and Organised Crime Strategy, which includes an investment of at least £48 million over the next 18 months for a package of capabilities to tackle economic crime and illicit finance.

Individual government departments are responsible for implementing specific actions from the Strategy and these are overseen by the Prime Minister's Anti-Corruption Champion, John Penrose MP. In Copenhagen in October he launched a campaign to make it harder for criminals to hide the proceeds of corruption and crime behind complex corporate structures by increasing transparency of the ownership of companies and other entities.

Mr Penrose said:

Tackling corruption at home and abroad doesn't just keep us all safe; it means our economy grows faster, creates a level playing field for our exporters and shows the world that post-Brexit Britain will always be a fair and trusted trading partner.

This is the first annual progress update on the government's Anti-Corruption Strategy. Together with last week's FATF report, which gave Britain a top-notch international anti-corruption ranking, it shows we're steadily making the UK a tougher place for criminals and the corrupt.

The government's 6 priorities under the Strategy are:

- reducing the insider threat in high risk domestic sectors such as borders and ports
- reducing corruption in public procurement and grants
- promoting integrity across the public and private sectors
- strengthening the integrity of the UK as an international financial centre
- improving the business environment globally
- working with other countries to combat corruption

Of the 134 commitments in the Strategy, 30 contained elements due for completion by the end of 2018. Of these, 26 have been completed and 2 have been partially completed. Work has begun on the remaining 2 elements and is on track to be completed by next year, according to the report.