

Press release: Search underway for UK's first Small Business Commissioner

- Commissioner appointment an important measure in tackling late payment issues
- Expected to be based in Birmingham, the Commissioner will be a national champion for small businesses

Applications are open to become the UK's first Small Business Commissioner – a high profile role supporting small businesses in payment disputes with their larger customers.

The successful candidate will provide general advice and information, handle complaints about payment issues and direct small businesses to existing dispute resolution services. Recent findings from the payment processor Bacs report that nearly half of the UK's small-to-medium sized businesses experience late payment, with £26.3 billion owed to them in total.

Applications open today (12 February 2017) and run until Monday 13 March 2017. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is looking for candidates who have credibility with both small and large businesses; can advise parties in resolving disputes; and who have an appetite to become a national spokesperson for small businesses affected by payment issues.

The final appointment decision will be made by the Secretary of State, supported by a panel which will include Mike Cherry, the National Chairman at the Federation of Small Businesses.

Small Business Minister Margot James said:

We all rely on the UK's 5.5 million small and medium sized businesses for jobs, goods and services, and an unfair payment culture that hurts these firms has no place in an economy that works for all. This is why we are looking for an exceptional individual to help smaller firms resolve payment disputes and champion a culture change in how businesses work together.

Addressing the barriers businesses face when scaling up and growing is an important part of a modern Industrial Strategy, and this appointment will play an integral role in ensuring small businesses have the support they need to thrive and grow.

Mike Cherry, National Chairman at the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

I am delighted to be invited by the Secretary of State to be part of the selection process for the Small Business Commissioner. There is simply no excuse for a business culture where supply chain

bullying or poor payment practice are acceptable. FSB research shows that poor payment practice is on the rise, causing 50,000 business deaths each year.

Small firms need a Commissioner who will make a meaningful difference to the £26bn currently stuck in bank accounts as payments outstanding to SMEs. He or she must be given the powers and resources to tackle this, to step in to save small firms whose livelihoods are under threat, and to promote a prompt payment culture right across the economy.

The Small Business Commissioner, expected to be based in Birmingham, is just one part of a package of measures designed to tackle this and drive a real change in the UK's payment culture. Regulations coming into force in April 2017 will require big businesses to publically report on the time taken to pay their suppliers, and guidance to help large businesses comply with these changes was published last month. This will shine a light on poor payment practices and allow suppliers, including small businesses, to make informed decisions about who they do business with.