

News story: Government commits to ensuring new and expectant mothers have sufficient protections from redundancy

From:

First published:

26 January 2017

Today the government is committing to making sure new and expectant mothers have sufficient protections from redundancy in the workplace.

In a [response](#) to a report by the Women and Equalities Select Committee on pregnancy and maternity discrimination, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said it will consult in due course on options to ensure new and expectant mothers in work have sufficient protections from redundancy.

Business Minister Margot James said:

We are determined to tackle pregnancy and maternity discrimination and a key part of that is making sure new and expectant mothers are supported and treated fairly by their employers.

While most businesses abide by the law, some do not. There should be zero tolerance of discrimination against pregnant women, or women who have just given birth, that's why today we are committing to making sure new and expectant mothers have sufficient protections from redundancy.

I'd like to thank the Women and Equalities Select Committee for shining a light on this issue which is a key priority of mine.

The government has also committed to considering what further guidance can be provided to both courts and claimants about existing flexibilities in the employment tribunal system to extend the time limit for bringing a case.

The 3-month time limit for bringing a case can be extended when the independent employment tribunal decides it is "just and equitable" to do so.

News story: £64 million government funding to encourage more cycling and walking to work

Thousands more people will be encouraged to cycle and walk to work thanks to a £64 million government investment, Transport Minister Andrew Jones announced today (26 January 2017).

The funding will support local projects over 3 years from 2017 to 2020 and form part of a wider government package of more than £300 million to boost walking and cycling during the current parliament. By 2040 the government aims to make this part of everyday life and walking and cycling the natural choice for shorter journeys.

The money will deliver:

- more safety and awareness training for cyclists
- extra secure cycle storage
- bike repair and maintenance courses
- road safety measures
- mapping information for pedestrians
- real time bus information through smart phone apps or information at bus stops
- increased focus on car sharing clubs

The funding will also target those looking to get back into work because access to transport and the cost of travel often restricts where people can look for work and their ability to attend interviews. They will also benefit from discount bus travel and bike loans.

Transport Minister Andrew Jones said:

We are committed to improving how people travel and this investment will ensure that people's journeys are cheaper, safer and better for the environment. It will help people to become more active and better transport planning will reduce congestion on our roads – particularly at peak times.

This investment will also help people access jobs, education and training – specifically targeting those looking to get back into work, as part of our relentless drive to make this is a country that works for everyone.

The funding could lead to:

- 95 million fewer miles in car journeys
- 99,000 extra walking trips per day

- 40,000 extra cycling trips per day

Stephen Joseph, Chief Executive, Campaign for Better Transport said:

We strongly welcome this announcement of the access fund projects and the new cycling and walking to work fund. The evidence suggests that these kinds of projects can remove barriers to work, help local communities and businesses and also tackle local transport problems by giving people attractive alternatives to car use. We look forward to working with the government, the authorities involved, and other organisations to develop and learn from these projects.

All English transport authorities (outside London) were invited to bid for the funding. The following 25 successful local authority bidders will each receive a share of the £60 million Sustainable Travel Access Fund for 2017 to 2020:

Local Authority	Award (£million)
Blackpool Council – Consortium bid with Buckinghamshire CC, Hertfordshire CC, North East CA, Stoke on Trent CC, West Sussex CC, Hampshire CC, Leicester CC, North Lincolnshire Council and Surrey CC	7.498
Brighton and Hove Council	1.485
Bristol City Council (West of England)	6.901
Devon County Council	1.5
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	0.682
East Sussex County Council	1.2
Herefordshire County Council	1.5
Isle of Wight Council	1.35
Kent County Council	1.452
Lancashire County Council – Joint bid with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	1.94
Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council	3.195
Lincolnshire County Council	0.975
Luton Borough Council (joint bid with Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council)	2.128
Norfolk County Council	1.488
North East Lincolnshire Council	1.388
North Yorkshire County Council	0.974
Nottingham City Council – joint bid with Derby City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council	2.735
Nottinghamshire County Council	0.845
Plymouth City Council	1.497
Sheffield City Region Combined Authority	7.5
Slough Borough Council	1.5

Local Authority	Award (£million)
Southampton City Council (joint bid with Hampshire County Council)	2.294
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council joint bid with -Thurrock Council and Essex County Council	3.322
Tees Valley Combined Authority	3.323
York, City of	1.312

The Cycling and Walking to Work Fund offers £3.8 million to be invested in 3 city regions over the next 12 months to connect people with employment and apprenticeships:

Local Authority	Award (£million)
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	1.5
Liverpool City Region	0.77
West Yorkshire Combined Authority	1.5

[News story: UK Minister for Asia Alok Sharma visits Thailand](#)

From:

First published:

26 January 2017

Part of:

Alok Sharma, the UK Minister for Asia and the Pacific, is in Bangkok for wide ranging talks on issues including trade, human rights and Thailand's election plans.

The UK and Thailand have a strong relationship focused on practical cooperation. Mr Sharma is here to deepen this.

In Bangkok, Minister Sharma will hold talks with Deputy Prime Minister Somkid and Deputy Foreign Minister Virasakdi to discuss the strength of the relationship and opportunities to increase trade and prosperity. Mr Sharma will speak to other political figures, to hear their views on the political situation and the prospects for elections in Thailand.

Mr Sharma will meet members of civil society organisations to learn more about their work and the challenges they face especially on freedom of expression and to express the UK's support for their work.

He will speak to businesses and investors to reaffirm that Global Britain is open for business and discuss how the UK Government can help Thai and British businesses trade with each other more.

Mr Sharma said:

Thailand is a very important partner for the UK, as proven by the fact that over 1 million British people come here every year.

I will be holding talks on the British Government's commitment to boost bilateral trade and I will encourage further progress on bringing in the rights and freedoms the Thai people need for credible elections in the future.

Further information

Follow Foreign Office Minister Alok Sharma on twitter [@AlokSharma_RDG](#)

Follow the Foreign Office on twitter [@foreignoffice](#)

Follow the Foreign Office on [facebook](#)

[Press release: Annual report of the Chief Schools Adjudicator for England](#)

The [annual report of the Chief Adjudicator](#), Ms Shan Scott, to the Secretary of State for Education, covering the period 1 September 2015 to 31 August 2016, is published today (26 January 2017). The report records the progress made by admission authorities in England in complying fully with the [School Admissions Code](#) and on the first year of operation of a new timetable for the determination of arrangements by admission authorities and for making objections to those arrangements.

In her report, Ms Scott states that the new timetable for admissions is to be welcomed and serves parents well.

Concerns about admission arrangements continue to make up the largest part of the work of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) and accounted for 200 of the total of 238 new cases of all types referred to OSA.

The Chief Adjudicator has included a number of main findings and recommendations in her report. These take account of the changing school landscape, including the growth in the number of academies and multi-academy trusts. In particular, Ms Scott recommends that the Department for Education consider whether:

- guidance might be provided to admission authorities on how to maximise the benefits of feeder schools in terms of continuity of education and shared work across schools, while ensuring that the selection of feeder schools does not cause unfairness to other local children
- guidance might be provided to multi-academy trusts to ensure that the responsibility for determining admission arrangements is clearly set out and reflected in schemes of delegation to local governing bodies as appropriate
- to bring forward proposals for local authorities to have a duty to co-ordinate all in-year admissions

The Chief Adjudicator said:

In this, my first annual report as Chief Adjudicator, I have been particularly pleased to be able to welcome the benefits of a new timetable for admissions and to recognise some good practice seen by adjudicators in the course of our work as well as having to draw attention to some failures to comply with what the law requires. The number of cases referred to the OSA was lower than in recent years with objections about admission arrangements continuing to form the largest part of our work. More objections came from parents than from any other group.

I am grateful for the work done by adjudicators, our administrative staff and legal advisers, and for their support. The OSA aims to consider each case referred to us impartially, honestly and objectively and in full accordance with the legislation that governs our powers and duties and I am confident that all my colleagues have done everything possible to meet that aim. I am confident too that in their dealings with parents, schools, academy trusts, religious bodies, local authorities and others, adjudicators and OSA staff appreciate how important the matters raised are to those concerned and that they deal sensitively and fairly with all.

1. Read the <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/osa-annual-report>.
2. Ms Shan Scott was appointed as an adjudicator in 2013 and to the post of Chief Adjudicator on 4 April 2016.
3. There are currently 8 adjudicators, including the Chief Adjudicator. All are part time and paid only for the work they are asked to undertake.
4. Adjudicators resolve differences over the interpretation and application of legislation and guidance on school admissions and statutory proposals concerning school organisation.
 - In relation to all state-funded schools, adjudicators:
 - rule on objections to and referrals about determined school admission arrangements
 - In relation to local-authority-maintained schools, adjudicators:
 - decide on requests to vary admission arrangements
 - resolve disputes relating to school organisation proposals
 - resolve disputes on the transfer and disposal of non-playing

field land and assets

- determine appeals from admission authorities against the intention of the local authority to direct the admission of a particular pupil
5. The Chief Adjudicator can also be asked by the Secretary of State to provide advice and undertake other relevant tasks.
 6. The Office of the Schools Adjudicator is a tribunal and until its abolishment in August 2013 was supervised by the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council. Once published, decisions can only be challenged through the courts.
 7. Adjudicators do not deal with complaints from parents whose child has not been offered a place at a particular school.

[Press release: Evidence review on drug misuse treatment published](#)

Public Health England (PHE) has today, 26 January 2017, published a comprehensive review of the evidence on the drug misuse treatment system in England. In comparison with other countries and the international research, it shows the system is performing well but some areas need improvement. Some of the findings include:

- 60% of all opioid users are in treatment – among the highest reported internationally
- 97% of all users start treatment within three weeks, which compares favourably with other countries
- there is a very low rate of HIV infection among injecting drug users (1%) in England

The two areas where treatment in England is not doing so well are the number of drug-related deaths, which is estimated to continue to rise, and the numbers continuing to use opiates/heroin after starting treatment.

Although fewer people are using drugs than 10 to 15 years ago, an increase in hospital admissions and drug-related deaths indicate that drug-related harms are increasing. The evidence suggests this increase is largely among a small but growing number of vulnerable, older entrenched heroin users, with poor physical and mental health.

The evidence shows that drug treatment alone is often not enough. Social factors are important influences on treatment effectiveness. Those in decent housing, employment and with good social networks are more likely to recover and remain drug-free. Effective integrated services are important to success.

Professor Kevin Fenton, National Director of Health and Wellbeing at PHE said:

Our review highlights the many benefits of drug misuse treatment for individuals, families and communities. But there are challenges ahead.

Local areas increasingly have to meet the complex needs of older long-term heroin users, often in poor health, with other problems particularly housing, poor social-networks and unemployment, which are vital to successful recovery.

Services will also need to be flexible, ensuring appropriate treatment to those seeking help for the first time, particularly with emerging issues such as new psychoactive substances or the problematic use of medication.

With every £1 spent on treatment yielding a £2.50 saving on the social costs of drug misuse, it makes sound sense for local authorities to continue to invest – helping people get their lives back on track and fully contributing to society.

PHE also published the first annual report on individuals receiving specialist treatment for drugs and alcohol misuse in prisons and other secure settings, following the successful implementation of the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) in these estates.

The data will improve our understanding of the way that treatment is delivered in secure settings and will be a valuable resource for policy makers, commissioners and service providers. This data will now act as a baseline against which future activity and performance will be measured.

Sarah Newton, Minister for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Countering Extremism said:

Recovery remains a vital part of this government's approach to tackling drugs and reducing their devastating impact.

This review shows progress is being made and sets out the benefits to individuals, their families and the communities in which they live of high quality tailored drug treatment, which can help reduce crime.

The government will continue to act to reduce the harms caused by drugs, setting out our approach in our forthcoming drugs strategy.

- Read [Evidence review of the outcomes that can be expected of drug misuse treatment in England](#)
- Read [Secure setting statistics from the NDTMS 2015 to 2016](#)
- International comparisons found England to be performing well:
 - relatively low rate (0.25%) of all 15 to 64 year olds in the population are injecting
 - the rate of drop out from treatment before 3 and 6 months (18% and

34%) is comparable to the literature (28% on average)

- The rate of Hepatitis C infection (50%) is lower than several other countries with available data
- Treatment in England is associated with a marked reduction in convictions (47%) among those retained in treatment for 2 years or who successfully completed treatment
- New Psychoactive Substance (NPS) misuse remains a threat, particularly in prisons. New patterns of drug use and health risk behaviour are also becoming established, including injecting NPS and 'chemsex', drugs used alongside high-risk sexual behaviour

Official statistics

Review reports

Public Health Matters blogs

For more information contact: