

BCC comments on public sector finances for January 2017

Commenting on the public sector finances for January 2017, published today by the Office for National Statistics, Suren Thiru, Head of Economics at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“The slight improvement to the UK’s fiscal position in January confirms that the government remains on track to meet the Office for Budget Responsibility’s forecast for 2016/17. The public finances in January typically show a surplus, as it tends to be a strong month for tax receipts due to the timing of self-assessment tax returns.

“Stronger than expected growth over recent quarters has boosted UK tax revenue, which means that the Chancellor is likely to report lower short-term borrowing forecasts in next month’s Budget.

“However, over the long-term, the task of restoring public finances remains significant. If UK growth becomes more sluggish, as we expect, the UK will find it increasingly challenging to generate the tax receipts needed to deliver real progress in cutting the deficit.

“The only sustainable way to boost tax receipts is for the government to create the conditions to support long-term business investment. Next month’s Budget should tackle the increasing burden of up-front costs for businesses, including action on business rates. This will help firms to deliver the type of job creation and growth needed to achieve a real strengthening of the UK’s tax base.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

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[News story: £4 million awarded for tech which gives motorists advance notice of congestion and free parking spaces](#)

From:

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Part of:

Government awards £4 million for tech projects that will cut congestion, speed up journeys and clean up the environment.

Apps that notify motorists of congestion and free parking spaces, and real time journey information for visually impaired passengers, are just some of the projects that will receive a share of £4 million government technology funding today (21 February 2017).

Nineteen councils across England will receive between £50,000 and £300,000 each for their ideas to improve journeys through digital innovation.

The government money will be spent on developing cutting edge technology such as apps and sensors which can be used to cut congestion, improve parking in city centres and alert drivers when electric car charging points become available.

Successful bidders include:

- £234,000 for Blackpool to use Bluetooth technologies to cut traffic congestion
- £182,000 for Dorset to provide advance congestion warnings for drivers on the A31 using an app
- £300,000 for Warrington to provide real-time information to businesses and public through on-street information displays, social media and phone apps
- £150,000 for Coventry for a real-time bay availability system across 450 pay and display parking spots
- £204,000 for Westminster, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham to roll out a new generation of electric vehicle charge points which will provide real-time data to motorists when they are available
- £50,000 for Peterborough to use digital technology to provide real time journey information directly to visually impaired people

Roads Minister Andrew Jones, said:

I congratulate today's winners for coming up with cutting-edge, innovative ideas that will transform journeys for passengers and motorists across the country. Technology is rapidly evolving and this important work shows that if we get it right, it can cut congestion, speed up journeys, clean up the environment, and improve accessibility.

Andrew Jones is visiting one of the competition winners, Westminster Council, today where he will see smart technology in practice including a hands-free parking app which reduces the time motorists circulate by showing available space.

Local authority	Project	Funding awarded
Blackpool	Traffic congestion and parking Bluetooth management technology	£234,000
City of York	Connected vehicle data for traffic signalling to improve congestion	£295,200
Derbyshire	Early warning system for congestion enabling drivers to communicate with one another and avoid traffic	£237,500
Dorset	Advanced congestion warnings app	£182,100
Southampton	Enabling council to deliver real time travel information to better manage road network	£90,000
Swindon	Alert system for local authority traffic managers to better disseminate congestion information	£235,000
Warrington	Using Bluetooth and Smart technology to manage traffic flow and provide real-time information to businesses and the general public	£300,000
Worcestershire	Information sharing system so traffic incidents can be dealt with quickly by highway staff and vehicles	£300,000
Newcastle	Connected bus scheme for Arriva Fleet to equip more buses with vehicle infrastructure technology.	£98,200
Portsmouth	Developing platform for Portsmouth's Traffic Management Centre, enabling communication exchange between vehicles infrastructure and other vehicles	£285,000
Reading	Improve roadworks warning, parking and traffic information	£250,000
Coventry	Real time information on parking bay availability to improve parking services	£150,000
Somerset	Provide advanced traffic signal phase and timing information for traffic on the M5 – Junction 24, through Bridgewater, to Hinkley Point	£290,000

Local authority	Project	Funding awarded
West Midlands	Real time information for HVG drivers to avoid unnecessary stops at traffic signals via hands free smartphone app	£285,000
Hounslow, Hammersmith, Fulham and Westminster	Sharing information about electric charge points by deploying parking sensors in electric vehicle bays	£204,000
Luton	To collect live car park availability data and give straight to drivers to reduce congestion by reducing time looking for spaces	£73,500
Milton Keynes	Provision of real time information with cameras/sensors and 7 laser sensors at key junctions in Central Milton Keynes enabling monitoring of all available parking	£175,000
Oxfordshire	Real-time parking information for Blue Badge, Pay and Display and electric vehicle charge points with a particular focus on vulnerable road users	£239,000
Peterborough	Real time journey information for the visually impaired with a focus on visitors being able to access the new Royal National Institute for the Blind head offices in Peterborough	£50,000

[Press release: New appointments to the Homes and Communities Agency Board](#)

Four new appointments to the Homes and Communities Agency's Board have been confirmed by the Communities Secretary Sajid Javid, as the agency takes a leading role in delivering the new homes the country needs.

Stephen Bell, Richard Blakeway, Councillor Simon Dudley and Councillor Teresa O'Neill OBE have been appointed following a recruitment process in line with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

The HCA is going through a period of change as it helps deliver a significant increase in housing supply and the Board will establish the overall strategic direction of the Agency, ensure it carries out its functions effectively and meets its targets.

The new appointments strengthen the HCA Board following the recent departures of Kevin Parry and Ian Robertson.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

This is an important period for the Homes and Communities Agency as it plays a key role in delivering the homes this country needs.

The agency will be vital for boosting housebuilding and speeding up the delivery of new homes so that everyone can benefit from having somewhere safe and secure to live.

These appointments will bring new skills, knowledge and considerable experience that will be of real benefit to the HCA's Board.

Chairman of the Homes and Communities Agency Board, Sir Edward Lister said:

I am delighted to welcome these 4 new board members, who all bring a wealth of experience and expertise that will help our organisation to increase the scale and pace of delivery, and promote new approaches to housebuilding.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my best wishes to departing board members and offer my sincere thanks for their hard work and support over the past few years.

Their work at the HCA has made a real difference to places across the country and hundreds of thousands of people have benefited from better homes and job opportunities.

- **Stephen Bell**

He will be chairing the HCA Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. He has substantial experience of the banking sector having worked as Group Chief Risk Officer and Board Director for Ulster Bank and Wellesley Group.

- **Richard Blakeway**

He has 20 years of experience of government. His previous roles include special adviser to the Prime Minister on housing, planning and regeneration and Deputy Mayor for Housing, Land and Property responsible for delivering the Mayor of London's Housing Strategy.

- **Councillor Simon Dudley**

He is currently Leader of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead as well as Lead Member for Housing. He also has a strong commercial background having previously worked as Executive Director of Global Capital Markets at Arcapita Ltd and Managing Director at Citigroup Global Markets Limited.

- **Councillor Teresa O'Neill OBE**

She is leader of the London Borough of Bexley where she has been a councillor since 1998. In addition, she is Vice Chair and Conservative Group Leader on London Councils and a member of several London advisory boards. She also has a background in the financial services sector having worked for Merrill Lynch International.

The new board members have been appointed for 3 year terms.

[News story: Culture Secretary Reappoints two Historic England Commissioners](#)

From:

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The Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, has re-appointed Alex Balfour and Victoria Harley as Commissioners for Historic England until 31st May 2021

Alex Balfour

Alex Balfour is a globally recognised leader in building and digital capability and optimising digital performance for sport, media, consumer and entertainment brands. Alex is currently Chief Executive Officer of Digital Brand Services. Previously Alex was Chief Digital Officer of Haymon Boxing, the creators of Premier Boxing Champions which reintroduced boxing to prime time network television in the USA for the first time in 30 years.

Before that Alex Balfour was Head of New Media for the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). At LOCOG he built a team from scratch that has delivered 77 digital channels to a worldwide audience of over 150 million during the Games in 2012. Alex's career in digital media began in 1994. Since then he has edited GE'97, the UK's first General Election Website, made the first consumer Internet call to a traditional telephone and developed the first online government consultation. He went on to become part of the team that produced the Guardian Newspaper's first significant websites.

Victoria Harley

Victoria Harley is a manager of Brampton Bryan Estate, Herefordshire, and concentrates on preservation and reuse of traditional historic buildings, together with landscape conservation.

Through links with the Historic Houses Association, she has wide experience in the management of historic houses. She was previously director of Sotheby's Carpet Department and latterly a freelance consultant.

She served on the National Trust Midlands Advisory Board for seven years and was a trustee of the Offa's Dyke Association. Victoria is a member of the Hereford Cathedral Fabric Advisory Committee and is a governor of two schools. Victoria was appointed as an English Heritage Commissioner in 2014. She serves additionally on the Historic Estate Conservation Committee, the Designation Review Committee, and the Ditherington Flax Mills Programme Board.

Both Alex and Victoria receive remuneration of £4090 per annum. This reappointment has been made in accordance with the OCPA Code of Practice. It is a requirement of the Code that political activity by those appointed is declared. Alex Balfour has declared that he has not carried out any such political activity. Victoria Harley has confirmed that she assisted a local Conservative candidate on the general election day in 2015.

[Press release: RPC releases latest report](#)

Having reviewed 318 submissions in 2016, the [RPC reports](#) a significant overall decline in the proportion of impact assessments which were fit for purpose at first submission, coupled with a continuing absence of the biggest post-implementation reviews (PIRs). The most common issues relating to the quality of initial submissions are: missing costs, unjustified assumptions, lack of clarity in impacts on small and micro businesses. In addition the Committee has only seen a modest number of (mainly minor) PIRs over the last year and is concerned that reviews of significant measures such as major pensions regulation have yet to appear.

Michael Gibbons CBE, RPC Chairman, said:

"As the RPC takes over as Chair of the RegWatch Europe network and we collectively shine a light on European regulation and international best practice, I am disappointed that our government departments have not really embraced the opportunity to learn from their experiences of regulation in the last Parliament. I am heartened, though, that the National Audit Office (NAO) and the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) are joining us in the call for the monitoring and evaluation of bigger measures and that

departmental analysis should focus more on societal impacts than at present.

“Although we are concerned that the overall quality of first time submissions has declined, with 28% receiving ‘not fit for purpose’ notices over 2016, there are some strong examples of good practice and some departments that consistently produce excellent assessments such as DWP, HSE, and DEFRA. We are also pleased with the general quality of the small number of submissions we’ve seen from regulators which have only recently come into scope of our scrutiny.”

Frances O’Grady TUC General Secretary said:

“I believe that it is important that any new regulation should have to be shown to be of benefit and the RPC has an important role to play as is shown in the report being published today. I also think that it is important that the RPC is given the ability to declare not fit for purpose those Impact Assessments that do not reasonably assess the benefits or costs to wider society, as proposed last year by the Public Accounts Committee.”

Adam Marshall, Director General, British Chambers of Commerce, said:

“As we enter a period of transition and change, it is vital that any and all regulatory changes due to affect British business are rigorously justified.

“It is disappointing to see that many Government departments have slipped backwards, and are not completing impact assessments to the highest standards.

“The need for scrutiny is greater than ever, and the Regulatory Policy Committee has a crucial and abiding role to play. This report is a timely reminder that government departments must justify regulatory changes properly – particularly at a time when businesses are clear that significant regulatory changes could dent both confidence and investment.”

Martin McTague, Policy Director at the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), said:

“The excellent work of the Regulatory Policy Committee once again shows the need for Ministers to improve the performance of the government departments they lead. This annual report reveals how many departments are slipping when measuring the regulatory burden they place on SMEs. The RPC has found gaping holes in impact assessments, making it impossible to identify the true cost of regulation on small businesses – something that we have found most recently with HM Treasury’s assessment of mandatory quarterly tax reporting. As the UK defines its approach to regulation post-Brexit, it’s more vital than ever the Government has a clear picture of the burden of regulation on small firms.”

Josh Hardie, CBI Deputy Director-General, said:

“Thanks to the scrutiny of the Regulatory Policy Committee, businesses can be confident that regulation is grounded in a strong evidence base. It has an important role in holding government to account.”

Looking to the future the RPC will:

- continue to work with departments and regulators to improve the quality of their analysis
- continue to remind departments and regulators of the importance of considering the impact of their actions on small businesses and wider society
- press for assurances that the government’s promise of a more efficient and proportionate system doesn’t translate into lower level scrutiny, reduced evidence or even reduced scrutiny of policies, e.g. at consultation stage
- scrutinise the government’s assessment of the impacts of the Great Repeal Bill and of subsequent Brexit related changes to the UK’s regulatory framework.

NOTES TO EDITOR

1. The Regulatory Policy Committee (RPC) is the independent advisory body set up to provide external, transparent, real time scrutiny on the quality of evidence and analysis supporting regulatory changes affecting business and civil society.
2. We give Ministers opinions in advance, to help ensure decisions on legislative proposals are based on a robust evidence base, which provides businesses and the public with confidence that the government’s claims on regulatory reform are credible.
3. RPC response to PAC & NAO reports can be found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rpc-response-to-pac-report>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rpc-response-to-nao-report-2>

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1. 318 first-time submissions from depts: a. 72% were rated fit for purpose as first submitted b. 28% received initial review notices (IRNs) or red-rated opinions
2. Decline from 80% of submissions that were rated fit for purpose as first submitted between 2012 and 2015.

3. 19 first-time submissions from Regulators, 89% were fit for purpose – an improved performance on departments.