

# [New Solicitor General sworn in](#)

Michael Ellis QC MP has been sworn in as Solicitor General for England and Wales.

The Attorney General, Geoffrey Cox QC MP, and the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Robert Buckland QC MP, spoke at the ceremony to welcome the Solicitor General to his role.

Speaking after the ceremony the Attorney General said:

“I warmly welcome Michael Ellis to his role as Solicitor General for England and Wales. I look forward to working with him as a Law Officer in upholding the rule of law at the heart of Government decision making and in our independent public interest roles.”

Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

“Michael’s extensive experience as a barrister makes this an eminently sensible appointment. I have no doubt he will approach the role of Solicitor General with the rigour and scrutiny required and I look forward to working with him in due course.”

Commenting on the ceremony, Michael Ellis QC MP said:

“It is an honour to be sworn in as Solicitor General for England and Wales and I thank everyone for the warm welcome they have given me since my appointment.

It is a great privilege to be appointed as a Law Officer of the Crown and I look forward to working with the Attorney General to play my part in making law and politics work together at the heart of Government decision making.”

Alongside the Attorney General, the Solicitor General will oversee the work of the Law Officers Departments which include the Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office, and the Government Legal Department and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate.

The Solicitor General also carries out a number of functions in the public interest, such as considering unduly lenient sentences, and taking action when there has been a contempt of court. These functions are carried out independently of their role as a government minister.

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## [Lord Chancellor Swearing-in Speech:](#)

## Robert Buckland QC

Mr Attorney, I'd like to thank the Lord Chief Justice for what I was going to say was a generous welcome, a frank one is more accurate! But I genuinely very much look forward to working with him and indeed other members of the Bench here present and other judicial colleagues. I'd also like to thank my predecessor, David Gauke, a mere solicitor, for his deep commitment to supporting the judiciary and the rule of law.

It is with the deepest sense of pride that I appear before you as Lord Chancellor. Many of us in this court will be familiar with the long and ancient history of the office, stretching back as it does to before the Norman Conquest. The names of some of the office holders echo down the generations: Becket, Wolsey, Thomas More, Francis Bacon. The names of others are, shall we say, somewhat more notorious, but we'll draw a veil of charity over that.

I am one of as yet very few people from Wales to have had the honour of wearing these robes. The most recent of my compatriots was Lord Elwyn Jones, appointed in 1974. As the Lord Chief Justice referred to, we share several similarities. First, he was, like me, born and raised in Llanelli, and second, he practised at the Bar, sat as a Recorder and was a Law Officer too. Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, Elwyn Jones took office in a minority Government at a time of great political uncertainty. He did go on however to serve as Lord Chancellor for five years, so let us see whether the similarities end there.

When preparing for this ceremony it was reassuring to recall that I have had some practice – after all, I have borne direct witness, when I was Solicitor General, to four of my predecessors being sworn-in!

Like them, I am before you today, and I have sworn an Oath that I will defend the independence of the judiciary and respect the rule of law. It is the safeguard of fairness and freedom in our society, providing for important principles like equality under the law and access to justice. And for me, this has far more than formal relevance.

Indeed, I realise that this is the first time I have appeared in this Court from this side of the bench. It has been my privilege, first of all as junior counsel and then as a Law Officer of the Crown, to have appeared here from counsel's row addressing a succession of appellate benches over the past 25 years or so. So for me, the law and its practice have dominated my adult life – I have lived it, which is why today is not just a political pinnacle, but a legal one for me too.

What led me here? As a criminal barrister, I learnt about the power of advocacy; of giving those whose liberty was on the line a voice and ensuring that they were treated equally under the law, addressing hundreds of juries, prosecuting and defending in thousands of cases on the circuit and here in London too. The Wales circuit, the greatest circuit in the known world.

As a Recorder in a Crown Court, I saw the benefit, but also the difficulty, in delivering justice effective and efficiently – which is why I take a particular interest in our courts and tribunals reform agenda.

And, after election to Parliament by the people of South Swindon, which I have the honour to represent, and as the Solicitor General for nearly five years, I saw the importance of the separation of the branches of the State and the role of the law officers in ensuring that the Government respects and upholds the rule of law.

The judiciary, as one of these branches, is rightly independent. Judges must be free to give their judgments without fear or favour. And as Lord Chancellor, I will endeavour to be sure-footed and steadfast in my solemn Oath to defend that hard-won independence.

You, the judiciary, bring huge knowledge, experience and expertise to the judgments you make. I know that these can often be challenging and complex cases. And I want to thank you for the dedication and careful diligence with which you approach those decisions.

This year we mark some important anniversaries. Today is exactly 70 years since the coming into force of the 1949 Legal Aid and Advice Act. Legal aid being provided for the first time in a structured way in certain cases in our higher courts, before the system further evolved to embrace a wider category of case. Having practised predominantly in cases involving criminal legal aid, I remain firmly of the belief that as far as possible the right support must be provided for those who need it, particularly where actions of the state directly affect the liberty, livelihood or welfare of the individual.

And in that spirit, I believe deeply in the benefits of public legal education, something I focused on during my time as Solicitor General and something, I know, my Lord Chief Justice, you too are keen to promote.

And as we mark the centenary of the Act of Parliament that enabled women to become lawyers for the very first time, we can be encouraged by the fact that more than half of trainee solicitors and barristers entering the professions are now women. That is great progress, but we still need to see more diversity, in all its forms, throughout the ranks of the professions and in the judiciary. And I will do all I can to promote this agenda in my time as Lord Chancellor.

The evolution and endurance of this great office of state remind us where we have come from – how our rights and opportunities have evolved alongside an endurance of the essential principles upon which our justice system and society rely. The foundations of those institutions, I believe, are fundamentally strong and the roots of the principles and values we hold dear are deep.

And I will work hard to maintain our international reputation for excellence we have when it comes to our legal services and our judiciary.

Here at home, I want people to have confidence in a justice system that is

fair, open and accessible, that protects victims and makes our streets safer – a justice system of which we can all be proud and whose values will and must endure.

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## [Ask a silly question...](#)

DVLA's services on Google Assistant and Amazon's Alexa allow motorists to ask DVLA when their vehicle tax is due by providing the registration number. These services have been used over 47,000 times by more than 20,000 unique users since they launched 2 years ago.

While most people have asked when their tax is due, some have asked some slightly more unusual questions, including:

- how do you get chewing gum off a leather settee?
- how do I apply for Love Island?
- do you know a good vegan recipe for chicken?
- are red cars the fastest?
- what time is lunch?
- is it going to rain in Ellesmere Port today?
- what did you think of the Bumblebee movie?
- how can I stop my flatmate drinking my milk?
- where are my socks?
- is this rash normal?

DVLA Chief Executive Julie Lennard said:

We want motorists to be able use our services quickly and easily and voice assistants are becoming more and more popular. While some of the questions customers have asked us fall a little outside our area of expertise, we will continue to make our services simpler, better and safer.

Nearly 98% of interactions with DVLA are now carried out using DVLA's digital services.

Anyone wishing to try out the Alexa Skill can [download it](#), or if they have Google Home or Google Assistant on their phone or tablet they can ask it to "Talk to DVLA" or "Ask DVLA".

### **Notes to editors**

The Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa Skill allow customers to confirm details about their vehicle in the same way as they could by using the [Vehicle Enquiry Service on GOV.UK](#).

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## UK Committed to Climate Action

I'm delighted to be here at the opening of the Partners for the Environment Forum, which the British High Commission in Singapore has co-organised with the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources this year. I'd like to extend a warm welcome to everyone in attendance and in particular to our UK guests, some of whom will be speaking at the conference today:

- Ms Claire Kneller, Head of International Food at the Waste Resources and Action programme (WRAP)
- Ms Annabelle Baker, Director and Sustainability Champion for Lush Asia.

I'm also delighted to be here at the official kick-off to Singapore's Week of Climate Action, which many of you here will be involved in to varying capacities.

This is a particularly significant year for both the UK and Singapore: 200 since Raffles arrived and influenced the course of Singapore's history. And to mark its importance and celebrate the strong relationship between our two nations, we have launched a year-long Singapore UK Partnership for the Future. So while the impetus for us putting stronger focus on the UK-Singapore relationship might have been historical, this partnership is very much focused on how we can work together to build security and prosperity in our two countries and also contribute to the management or solution to global challenges. It is a dynamic partnership that can impact not just UK and Singapore, but also the region and beyond.

Under the Partnership, the UK and Singapore will continue to work together to address important global issues. We have gathered here today to address one of the most urgent challenges that will affect every human being in the next century and beyond: Climate Change.

The science is clear. The resounding message from societies across the world is clear. The message from my children – and no doubt your children – is clear. We must act now and create an ambitious and radical transformation across our economies to avoid a climate catastrophe in the next decade. This not only means transitioning from fossil fuels to green sources of energy, it also means a significant change in how businesses operate and how we go about our everyday lives, specifically the way we consume and manage waste as a society.

The UK has a strong track record of climate action:

- We were the first country to introduce legally binding, long-term

emission reductions targets through the Climate Change Act in 2008. Under this framework the UK has demonstrated that climate action can be a win-win for the environment, for the economy, and for our quality of life. And it has not come at an economic cost – between 1990 and 2017, we reduced our emissions by 42 % while growing the economy by 72 %.

- We released our Clean Growth Strategy in 2018, mapping out how we will decarbonise our economy in the UK. We now produce over 36% of the world's offshore wind and I'm pleased to share that Britain ran coal free for about 2 weeks this year – the longest period since the 1880s.
- This roadmap works alongside our UK Industrial Strategy which builds on our world leading R&D capability – we have put Clean Growth at the heart of this have made it one of our four Grand Challenges.
- We also know that clean growth and the adoption of a circular economy framework doesn't have to come at a huge cost and offers considerable economic benefits – we estimate that UK businesses could benefit by up to £23bn (around \$50bn SGD) per year through low cost or no-cost improvements in the efficient use of resources (DEFRA).

We continue to show climate leadership:

After Parliament declared a climate emergency in June, the UK government set a legally binding target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions across the UK economy by 2050. We are the first major economy in the world to legislate for such a target and are encouraging others to do the same. No doubt this is a huge challenge we have set ourselves and meeting it will require a huge acceleration of policies and practice designed to deliver it. We are clear that delivering a net zero target must be a joint endeavour, crossing political boundaries, and encompassing all parts of society.

In a similar vein to Singapore, we will run our Green is Great Britain and Northern Ireland Week on the 4th-8th November, in conjunction with our "Year of Green Action Campaign" (YOGA)

The UK's Green Finance Strategy and the City of London's Green Finance Institute (GFI) was also launched on the 2nd July – an essential part of the puzzle in order to achieve our climate commitments. The strategy ensures that financial risks and opportunities from climate and environmental factors are integrated into mainstream financial decision making.

More specifically on waste reduction and the circular economy, we recognise that plastic pollution in particular, is one of the greatest challenges facing the environment today.

I saw Sir David Attenborough speak last year: His programme, Blue Planet 2 had a profound effect across the world, waking us up to the impact of marine litter. But in many ways, he at 92, was only repeating and amplifying what

our children have been saying to us too.

Addressing the crisis of ocean plastics requires a truly global approach to developing a solution. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting back in April 2018 offered a huge opportunity for us to act collectively to protect the marine environment from the extreme stress and threats our oceans are now under. As part of this summit, the UK announced a £61.4 million fund to work with Commonwealth countries to turn the tide on plastic entering the marine environment. This fund will support a number of initiatives, including; the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance and the Commonwealth Marine Plastics Research and Innovation Framework.

It seems incomprehensible that we don't yet have a clear understanding of how much plastic is actually in the ocean. Our understanding of the impact of micro plastics on human health and marine ecosystems is even more limited. This is why I'm pleased to announce that through our science and innovation network in Singapore, we have just published a joint report with the National University of Singapore, that captures the marine litter and plastics R&D landscape in Southeast Asia, I urge you all to read this report which is free and available to download on our gov.uk website.

The UK has committed itself to eliminating all avoidable plastic waste by 2042. In 2018, the UK released our landmark Resources and Waste Strategy that directly addresses waste reduction programmes while helping boost the domestic recycling market and ensuring tougher controls on waste exports. This builds on the success of 1) our 5p carrier bag charge which has taken fifteen billion plastic bags out of circulation, 2) our ban on plastic microbeads in personal rinse-off products and 3) our plans to introduce a deposit return scheme for single use drinks containers. I'm also pleased to say, that under this strategy, we recently announced that all cotton buds, plastic straws and stirrers will be banned in England from April 2020, with Wales and Scotland also taking a similar approach.

## **Conclusion**

We look forward to working with Singapore and sharing our experience in the region, through organisations like the Waste Resource & Action Programme (WRAP), who launched their global division in 2018, and who have been integral in delivering UK policy objectives at home, including the highly successful UK Plastics PACT. And organisations like the UK's Ellen MacArthur Foundation that champion circular economy frameworks. All that is left for me to do, is to wish you all a fruitful time here at the Partners for the Environment Forum. I strongly encourage you to engage us and each other in your efforts towards a more sustainable, circular future. We look forward to working with you.

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## Debt bosses' failings lead to £7.6 million shortfall in funds

Darren Dean Varden (54), of Bury, Lancashire, and Philip Andrew Nuttall (58), of Congleton, Cheshire, were directors of Varden Nuttall Limited, a debt solutions provider based in Bury.

Philip Nuttall was an insolvency practitioner, licenced to act in relation to insolvent individuals and companies. Together with a small team at Varden Nuttall, he administered Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs) – formal agreements between a debtor and their creditors to pay back money owed.

At its peak, the company handled over 3,000 IVAs but neither Philip Nuttall nor Darren Varden properly fulfilled their duties as directors, failing to adequately supervise the bank accounts that held the IVA funds.

In August 2015 a major accounting discrepancy was noticed and, following an internal investigation, an estimated £6.6 million shortfall was identified.

Philip Nuttall was obliged to inform his regulatory body and, after an assessment of his conduct, the regulatory body took the decision to revoke Philip Nuttall's licence in early March 2016.

Varden Nuttall Limited entered administration shortly afterwards. After realising the scale of the financial shortfall, the appointed administrators filed civil action against the two directors in May 2017.

Darren Varden accepted personal liability for the shortfall, and entered an IVA rather than declaring bankruptcy.

Philip Nuttall, however, disputed the allegations and the matter went to trial in May 2018. As a result of the court proceedings, he was made personally liable for the shortfall, too, found by the court to be £7.6 million.

Varden Nuttall's administrators had also filed a report on the directors' conduct to the Insolvency Service, which triggered an investigation in September 2016.

Upon closer scrutiny, investigators uncovered further misconduct by the pair.

Varden Nuttall was one of several companies owned by Release Money Group (RMG) Limited, an umbrella company of which both men were also directors. Despite knowing there was a potential shortfall at Varden Nuttall and that, due to a cross-guarantee held by the bank, group assets could be required to settle it, from October 2015 Philip Nuttall and Darren Varden acted to remove assets from RMG.

They recycled monies around other management companies through an elaborate trust scheme to wipe out two director's loans with a combined value of more



than £1.6 million that they had taken out through RMG. These assets would likely have been used to help reduce the shortfall at Varden Nuttall.

The Secretary of State has since accepted disqualification undertakings from Phillip Nuttall and Darren Varden, for 9 and 7 years respectively. The pair are disqualified from being involved, directly or indirectly, in the formation, promotion, or management of a company without leave from the court.

Anthea Simpson, Chief Investigator for the Insolvency Service, said:

Philip Nuttall and Darren Varden abused the trust of their clients, people suffering with debt problems, by failing to adequately oversee the company's financial transactions. That alone would have justified their disqualifications in this case but they compounded the issue when they used a convoluted trust scheme to repay loans that would otherwise have been assets in the administration.

This conduct has resulted in Philip Nuttall and Darren Varden being prevented from acting as directors again for lengthy periods of time.

Philip Andrew Nuttall is of Congleton, Cheshire (formerly New Mills, Derbyshire) and his date of birth is February 1961. His ban, effective from 17 July 2019 lasts for 9 years. His licence to act as an Insolvency Practitioner was withdrawn by the ICAEW with effect from 1 April 2016.

Darren Dean Varden is of Bury, Greater Manchester, and his date of birth is June 1965. His ban, effective from 11 April 2019 lasts for 7 years.

Varden Nuttall Limited (Company Number 04669168).

Release Money Group (RMG) Limited (Company Number 07154076).

Other companies which formed the Release Money Group were:

- Debt Release Direct Ltd (Company Reg no. 04730443), which was incorporated on 10 April 2003, and went into Administration on 24 March 2017
- Your Claim Refunded Ltd (Company Reg no. 07398617), which was incorporated on 06 October 2010, and went into Administration on 25 October 2016

[More information on Individual Voluntary Arrangements \(IVAs\).](#)

A Disqualification Order or a Disqualification Undertaking has the effect that, without specific permission of a Court, a person with a disqualification cannot:

- act as a director of a company
- take part, directly or indirectly, in the promotion, formation or

- management of a company or limited liability partnership
- be a receiver of a company's property

Disqualification Undertakings are the administrative equivalent of Disqualification Orders but do not involve court proceedings. Persons subject to a disqualification are bound by a [range of other restrictions](#).

[Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct](#).

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on: