

Press release: Reduced tolls on Severn bridges begin 8 January 2018

Drivers who use the Severn bridges are reminded changes to the TAG payment system take place from 8 January 2018.

Those who pay by top-up with a Trip TAG through online banking will need to update their payment details to Highways England's account from 8 January 2018. Account holders will still be able to pay through the website or phone.

Drivers paying by direct debit will not need to take any action – their accounts and balances will be transferred automatically and their payments adjusted to reflect the new charges.

The changes have been shared by letter with holders of TAGs – the prepayment system that allows regular travellers to cross without stopping to pay manually.

Clive Perkin, Highways England Divisional Director of Strategy and Planning, explained:

We're very proud to be taking over the responsibility for these iconic bridges which provide such important links between Wales and England.

We're also looking forward to welcoming staff currently employed by Severn Crossing PLC into Highways England.

From midnight on 8 January vehicle charges will be exempt from VAT, reducing the overall charge for individual crossings from £6.70 to £5.60.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

The UK Government's decision to reduce the tolls will cut costs for commuters and tourists, and present exciting opportunities for businesses operating in Wales and over the border.

I'm absolutely sure that reducing and then removing the tolls will boost Welsh employment and strengthen Wales' position within the United Kingdom – that is why I made it my number one priority as Secretary of State.

After 8 January the crossings will operate as normal with just a few small changes to signs at the toll plazas.

Staff currently employed with Severn Crossing PLC have all been offered employment with Highways England.

Details of the changes and actions necessary are available on the [Severn Crossings website](#).

Background information: Severn Bridges (M4 and M48) daily charges after 8 January 2018

Vehicle Category	Current daily toll charges	Daily charges after 8 January 2018
Category 1 (Cars and other vehicles up to 9 seats)	£6.70	£5.60
Category 2 (Goods vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes, small buses)	£13.40	£11.20
Category 3 (Goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes, large buses)	£20.00	£16.70

- Category 1: £5.60, with the Season/Shared TAG at £98.56 (20% discount based on 22 trips per month).
- Category 2: £11.20, with the Season/Shared TAG at £197.12 (20% discount based on 22 trips per month).
- Category 3: £16.70, with the Season/Shared TAG at £330.66 (10% discount based on 22 trips per month).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: Civil/crime news: CWA bulkload spreadsheet updated](#)

You need to use version 1.21 of the bulkload spreadsheet to submit claims in Contract Work and Administration (CWA).

This is now available for you to download on GOV.UK.

The updated version 1.21 allows the reporting of the amended domestic violence evidence requirements introduced on 8 January 2018.

It replaces version 1.20 which should no longer be used for submissions.

You can find out more by downloading guidance on GOV.UK – see below.

Further information

[Submit a CWA claim online](#) – to download updated ‘provider bulkload spreadsheet’

[News story: GLD lawyers open up £12bn of government work to SMEs](#)

On 8 January, thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be able to bid for up to £12bn of government contracts more easily, thanks in part to the work of government lawyers.

Chris Stanley, a lawyer within the Government Legal Department’s (GLD) Commercial Law Group has spent the past year condensing some 50,000 words of the existing Crown Commercial Service (CCS) contract terms into a new slimline Public Sector Contract. The finished document promises a more user-friendly route to government work and a quicker, more streamlined way of working. Not having to wade through dense contracts will save money and resources not only for SMEs but also within government itself.

“SMEs are the backbone of our country,” Prime Minister Theresa May told a gathering of small businesses and trade associations last year. “I want to build an economy that works for all and that means working with, and listening to, smaller firms’.

The new Public Sector Contract is a collaborative effort by the Government Digital Service (GDS), focusing on user research, content design and interaction design, the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) and the legal review of both GLD and the law firm DLA Piper. This multidisciplinary team is working to bring policy and digital together to deliver contracts.

Chris paired with Tracy Hughes, a content designer from the Digital Marketplace team at GDS. The two went through the entire draft document line by line, cutting and trimming the more opaque legalese and getting rid of any duplication, so that the meaning was clearer and more comprehensible for non-lawyer users.

It was not by any means an easy trade as Tracy’s focus was on plain English, which Chris admits went against his natural legal inclination to wordiness. But they eventually achieved a compromise: “It was definitely the best way to ensure that the content is more accessible to everyone while remaining legally sound,” Chris said.

But how do you go about cutting down a government contract so substantially?

According to Chris, the chief difference is that “The existing content is presented in a clearer and more concise way, while frequently unnecessary provisions have been moved into modular optional Schedules” .

One of the major benefits is that a small organisation or company that does not have a dedicated legal team will now be better able to understand and adapt the Public Sector Contract to its needs by merely selecting those elements it needs to apply.

The benefits also apply for public sector buyers. Chris explains: “There are some smaller organisations that may not have extensive procurement experience. They are run by skilled people but they won’t always have the resources to deal with complex contracts. Without a user-friendly government framework they are likely to pay a far higher price for goods and services using less favourable terms.”

Public sector buyers which have greater legal capabilities, such as the Ministry of Justice, will still be able to adapt the contract to suit their more specialised requirements.

The prize is considerable: the government facilities management (FM) marketplace alone is worth around £12bn and covers everything from mechanical and electrical engineering to cleaning.

The new contract will not only make it easier for companies to bid for government work but will also establish a benchmark for good business ethics by integrating some new corporate social responsibility obligations. “We want our suppliers to be good corporate citizens,” Chris says.

Warren Smith, Digital Marketplace Director hails the collaboration. “This shows [One Team government](#) working at its best and gives us a solid platform on which to build further reforms.” While Jason Waterman, Director at the Crown Commercial Service, adds: “This is a key initiative and will set a new standard for government contracts bringing our offering in line with the very best in commercial practice.”

The new Facilities Management Contract will launch on 8 January 2018.

[Press release: Tivvy Skips Ltd prosecuted for burning waste in Devon](#)

A Devon skip company has been ordered to pay £5,500 in fines and costs for illegally burning waste. The case was brought by the Environment Agency.

Tivvy Skips Ltd runs a small waste transfer station near Tiverton and operates under an environmental permit. On 6 January 2017 the site was

inspected and waste was seen being placed in a dumper truck, before being transferred into a skip and burned.

The condition of the skip and debris found around it indicated the burning of waste was a 'routine occurrence'. Alan Hutchings, the site manager at Tivvy Skips, blamed the illegal burning on a member of staff who he claimed was doing it without his knowledge.

A court heard the Environment Agency had previously warned the company about burning waste, but it had ignored the warnings.

Richard Tugwell, of the Environment Agency, said:

Burning waste is illegal and poses a serious risk to the environment and human health. The motive is nearly always financial as it reduces the amount of waste a company has to legally dispose of.

Courts take these offences seriously and where we have evidence, we won't hesitate to prosecute.

Appearing before Exeter magistrates, Tivvy Skips Ltd was fined £3,000 and ordered to pay £2,500 costs after being found guilty of breaching Regulation 38 of the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2016.

Since the offence, the company has introduced new management procedures and was found to be compliant during a recent inspection.

Press release: River pollution costs Devon farmer £9,500 for leaky silage clamp

Silage effluent is an acidic liquid produced by the silage making process which is a serious pollutant if it enters a watercourse.

A farmer has been ordered to pay £9,500 in fines and costs for polluting a tributary of the River Exe in Devon. The case was brought by the Environment Agency.

On 16 July 2015, Environment Agency officers visited Cleave Farm, Templeton near Tiverton following a report of pollution. They found a tributary heavily

contaminated with sewage fungus for 100 metres before it entered a larger stream that was also contaminated with sewage fungus.

The pollution was traced to a silage clamp at Cleave Farm. The farmer, Winston Reed, told officers the silage effluent should have been directed to a slurry store, but was leaking into a watercourse from a surface water ditch. Officers were told a drain in the farm yard had been blocked off, but cracked concrete around the drain had allowed effluent to escape into the surface water system.

Silage effluent is an acidic liquid produced by the silage making process which is a serious pollutant if it enters a watercourse.

Exeter Crown Court heard that Winston Reed either by himself or his company, Reed Farms Ltd, which is currently in administration, is a persistent polluter. In 2006 Winston Reed was cautioned for allowing slurry to enter a stream. Then Reed Farms Ltd caused significant pollution incidents in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, which resulted in the company being either prosecuted or cautioned.

Since 2012, Officers had tried to work with Mr Reed to bring about changes at the farm to improve infrastructure, including visits from the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme.

Mischka Hewins of the Environment Agency said:

We always prefer to work in partnership with farmers to achieve compliance through advice and guidance. It's disappointing when this fails and our only option to change behaviour and prevent pollution is to prosecute.

Anyone concerned about pollution to water or land can call the Environment Agency's free 24-hour incident line on 0800 807060.

On 15 December 2017, Winston Kenneth Reed pleaded guilty to causing a water discharge activity without an environmental permit, namely the discharge of silage effluent, which is polluting matter, from Cleave Farm, Templeton, Tiverton, Devon into inland freshwaters contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010. Fined £2,000 plus £120 victim surcharge. Ordered to pay Environment Agency costs of £7,500

The term 'sewage fungus' describes a group of micro-organisms, which contain filamentous bacteria, fungi and/or stalked protozoa. Their presence is an indication of organic/nutrient pollution in a watercourse.