

New law to resolve remaining COVID-19 commercial rent debts now in place

- New law comes into effect to provide a legally binding arbitration process to resolve certain outstanding commercial rent debts related to the pandemic
- commercial landlords and tenants encouraged to negotiate agreements using the Code of Practice
- if they cannot agree, the new binding arbitration system can be used as a last resort for eligible businesses
- general moratorium on commercial evictions ends today

A new law is now in place to help resolve certain remaining commercial rent debts accrued because of the pandemic, Business Minister Paul Scully has announced today (Thursday 24 March).

The 'Commercial Rent (Coronavirus) Act 2022' received Royal Assent today. This means that from today a legally binding arbitration process will be available for eligible commercial landlords and tenants who have not already reached an agreement. This will resolve disputes about certain pandemic-related rent debt and help the market return to normal as quickly as possible.

The law applies to commercial rent debts of businesses including pubs, gyms and restaurants which were mandated to close, in full or in part, from March 2020 until the date restrictions ended for their sector. Debts accrued at other times will not be in scope.

The law comes into force today in England and Wales.

Business Minister Paul Scully said:

This new law will give commercial tenants and landlords the ability to draw a line under the uncertainty caused by the pandemic so they can plan ahead and return to normality.

Landlords and tenants should keep working together to reach their own agreements where possible using our Code of Practice to help them, and we've made arbitration available as a last resort. Tenants who can repay their rent debts in full, should do so, and when they cannot, landlords should try to share the burden, so we can all move on.

The government encourages commercial landlords and tenants to negotiate their own agreement where possible, so that an arrangement to resolve debt is mutually agreed, instead of resorting to the arbitration process.

Today is the last day of the general moratorium on commercial evictions and restrictions on Commercial Rent Arrears Recovery (CRAR) in England and Wales, but eligible firms remain protected for the next 6 months during which arbitration can be applied for or until the conclusion of an arbitration.

The moratorium has provided firms with breathing space to negotiate how to address the cost of commercial rent debts caused by the pandemic before the new law came into place.

Last year, the government published an updated [Code of Practice](#) to provide commercial landlords and tenants with a clear process for settling outstanding debts. The Code sets out that tenants who can pay their rent debt in full should do so, and that in the first instance, tenants unable to pay in full should negotiate with their landlord in the expectation that the landlord shares the burden where they are able to do so, and only as far as necessary, by waiving some or all rent arrears or giving time to pay.

The Code of Practice applies across the UK. The 'Commercial Rent (Coronavirus) Act' applies to England and Wales. Scotland has adopted an alternative approach to commercial evictions since the start of the pandemic, due to different property legislation and market conditions.

For those tenancies that fall within scope of the Act and have failed to reach agreement, either party can apply for arbitration unilaterally, as a backstop after negotiations have failed. Parties are free to continue to negotiate outside of the legal arbitration process. The Code signposts tenants and landlords to forms of alternative dispute resolution, such as mediation, if they wish to pursue this.

The window to apply for arbitration will be six months from the date legislation comes into force. Arbitrators may award a reduction of protected rent debt and/or time to pay, with a maximum period to repay of 24 months.

The legal arbitration process will be delivered by arbitrators appointed by approved arbitration bodies from a list of suitable and available arbitrators.

Arbitration bodies will have to go through an approval process to demonstrate their suitability to administer the scheme. BEIS will publish a list of approved arbitration bodies in due course, and where a dispute is eligible, landlords or tenants will be able to apply directly to any approved arbitration body to appoint an arbitrator.

BEIS and DLUHC will also issue further guidance to landlords and tenants as well as to arbitrators on how the process will work for all parties.

More than 500 rough sleepers given new start thanks to Housing First scheme in West Midlands

- 515 people find new accommodation thanks to Housing First Scheme in West Midlands
- Pilot tackles homelessness for people with multiple and complex needs
- Having a place to live gives tenants better access to community support, health care and social benefits

Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Mayor Andy Street today met a number of people in Walsall who are benefitting from the region's successful Housing First pilot (24 March 2022).

Backed by £9.6 million government funding the WMCA pilot gives people who have experienced rough sleeping a home with intensive support for problems such as mental, psychological, or emotional ill health, drug or alcohol dependency, or experience of domestic violence and abuse.

Unlike other schemes, housing is provided regardless of whether people take up the support that is offered. They are given a choice about where to live, the services on offer to them and whether they wish to use them, and the evidence has shown that this leads to positive outcomes.

Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes said:

Walsall has shown that the Housing First model works for people who have been stuck in a cycle of rough sleeping for years.

The tenants we met today have shown the importance of having a safe place to call their own as they help to address the trauma, addiction, and mental health issues they may face and to begin to turn their lives around.

Housing First is one of a range of measures put in place to end rough sleeping including our Rough Sleeping Initiative and the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme.

Housing First principles were introduced in England in 2016, after success in America, Canada, and in European countries including Denmark, France, and Finland and were a government manifesto commitment announced in the 2017 Autumn budget.

In 2018, £28 million was allocated to the West Midlands (WMCA), Greater Manchester (GMCA) and Liverpool City Region (LCRCA) and pilots were set up to

test, if this type of intervention could be successful in supporting England's most entrenched rough sleepers.

The pilots now in their fifth year have cumulatively supported over 1,000 of the most entrenched rough sleepers across 23 Local Authorities. Without provision such as Housing First, these individuals would not be in accommodation. A comprehensive external evaluation of the pilots will be published in full in 2023.

Peter (54) was a drug user with a history of depression and was homeless after not coping with the loss of family members. He was given a Housing First flat in 2020.

If it weren't for Housing First, I would still be on the streets begging, sleeping rough. Having people urinate on me, try and beat me up and try and set me on fire.

Having my own place is absolutely heaven – I haven't got any worries and I get a lot of support, if it weren't for this scheme and my support worker I'd probably be dead.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, added:

Since day one as Mayor I have made tackling homelessness and rough sleeping a top priority.

That's why I was so determined to secure a Housing First pilot for the West Midlands, and why I am delighted it has proved such a success with more than 500 rough sleepers helped into a home of their own.

Where Housing First has proved such a breakthrough initiative is in the way in which it not only provides a home for people to call their own, but also the wrap-around support that allows some of society's most vulnerable people to tackle their demons and move forward in life.

We know the country's finances are challenged and difficult decisions have to be taken, but I am hopeful that the pilot's success in the West Midlands will lead to the government extending our Housing First scheme and ultimately allow us to help more vulnerable people across the region into a home of their own.

Councillor Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader of Walsall Council said:

We're really proud of what has been achieved in Walsall to date in partnership with GreenSquareAccord and Walsall Housing Group.

The Housing First model doesn't just change lives for the better –

it's my firm view that it has saved lives too. Our strong partnership is key to this success story.

Walsall Housing Group Corporate Director of Operations Fay Shanahan said:

By working with our partners in Walsall we have been able to make a real difference to the lives of people struggling with homelessness.

We have had huge success in supporting rough sleepers to sustain their tenancies, proving how the Housing First approach of combining a stable home with tailored support really works.

Paul Wright, Director of Specialist Support at GreenSquareAccord, said:

This innovative pilot scheme doesn't just help homeless people into accommodation of their own, but it enables us to offer specialist and targeted ongoing support. Four years into the programme, we have housed and supported over 100 rough sleepers and have had no tenancy failures.

The joined-up approach that has been adopted between the local council, landlords and us as support provider, all working together, has helped to make this a fantastic success.

The West Midlands pilot is the first in the country to exceed its target of bringing 500 people off the street and into Housing First accommodation.

The pilot has provided funding for Housing First to be delivered across the seven WMCA region areas and supported the following number of people in each area:

- Birmingham – 175
- Walsall – 102
- Solihull – 25
- Wolverhampton – 50
- Coventry – 67
- Dudley – 38
- Sandwell – 58

[UK launches negotiations with Canada](#)

on a new, modernised trade deal

The UK and Canada will today launch negotiations on a new Free Trade Agreement in Ottawa.

International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan will meet with her counterpart, Canadian Minister for International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development Mary Ng to formally launch talks that aim to bring benefits for both countries and strengthen a trading relationship already worth over £19 billion in 2020.

Building on the benefits of the UK-Canada Trade Continuity Agreement, the new Free Trade Agreement will go further than ever before in areas like innovation, digital, data, the environment and women's economic empowerment.

For example, the adoption of digital trading systems can make trade cheaper, faster and more secure for businesses. This could see more than 10,000 UK small and medium-sized businesses benefiting from lower barriers to trade such as simplified paperwork, encouraging more businesses to start trading with Canada.

The UK is Canada's third largest trading partner and Canadian demand for imports is projected to grow by 45% by 2035. Canadian-owned businesses employ 108,000 people across the UK and additional investment resulting from a new deal could support jobs across the country and help level up the UK.

International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

The UK and Canada are close friends and international allies who believe in the value that free and fair trade brings to livelihoods and communities.

Our trading relationship with Canada was worth over £19 billion a year in 2020 and there is huge potential to strengthen and grow trade between our two countries. We want a new deal for the 21st century – one that will boost our thriving services sector, promote higher standards of living and act as a beacon for others to follow in its world-leading commitments on climate change and women's economic empowerment.

A new UK-Canada FTA could bring benefits including:

- Boosting the UK's world-renowned services sector by making it easier for services providers to trade in Canada, benefiting areas such as research and development, legal services, and finance. The UK is the second-largest exporter of services in the world, with services accounting for almost half (48%) of UK exports to Canada in 2020.
- Reducing barriers for goods exporters such as the processes and administration that disproportionately affect SMEs. Goods exports to

Canada were worth £6.1 billion in 2020. Reducing these barriers can help businesses make the most of existing preferential tariffs.

- Stimulating more Canadian investment in the UK, supporting jobs across the country. Over 108,000 people were employed by Canadian companies in the UK in 2019.
- Helping women access the full benefits of trade. In the UK, up to £250 billion could be added to the UK economy if women scaled businesses up at the same rate as men. A UK-Canada deal will seek to promote opportunities for women and break down barriers.
- Enhancing cooperation on tackling climate change by promoting green trade and supporting commitments including those in the Paris Agreement.

Negotiating a new agreement with Canada is also a vital part of our plan to build new trade routes for the UK's services and digital economies and to refocus British trade on the faster-growing parts of the world. This includes our accession to CPTPP, a vast free trade area populated by half a billion people and with a joint GDP of £8.4 trillion in 2020.

Martin McTague, Federation of Small Businesses National Chair, said:

The launch of these trade talks marks a really important step forward.

A third of our members who export see Canada as an important market, and they'll be hoping that these discussions result in an ambitious free trade agreement that enables more small businesses from both sides of the Atlantic to realise the benefits of trading internationally.

A dedicated SME chapter should be placed at the heart of any future agreement to ensure that small businesses can make best use of the FTA's provisions.

Sally Jones, EY Partner in Trade Strategy, said:

Negotiations to upgrade the UK-Canada trade relationship are a welcome step which will enhance the deep and long-standing ties between the UK and Canadian business communities. This is a significant opportunity to agree new and ambitious trade provisions which will benefit the UK services sector.

Enhanced cooperation fostering greater regulatory dialogue and cooperation, and enhancing cross-border digital trade and innovation can help the UK continue to be a leading provider of services around the world.

Jerry Lawson, Founder, Frog Bikes, said:

As a British manufacturer we always look to find ways to grow our sales and promote our British brand. Canada and the UK share many similarities including the love of sports. Since Frog Bikes launched in Canada, we have seen a steady growth in the sales of our bikes, as the market has enjoyed the benefits of our lightweight bikes.

The introduction of an upgraded Free Trade Agreement between the two countries will make it far easier to sell Frog Bikes in Canada as well as removing any non-financial barriers thereby speeding up the time taken to put our bikes in the hands of Canadian stores selling to the parents and children in Canada.

The first round of negotiations is expected to start next week. Ahead of the launch, the Secretary of State will co-chair the UK-Canada Trade Continuity Agreement (TCA) Joint Committee meeting to reflect on the progress made in areas such as trade and sustainable development one year since the agreement came into force.

During her first visit to Canada in her role as International Trade Secretary, she will also visit Toronto to meet with UK and Canadian businesses based in the city.

She is expected to meet with a range of Canadian pension funds, including CPP Investments, which has invested nearly £15 billion into the UK. She will also celebrate the consortium partnership, MCS, between British firm, Mace and two Canadian companies, Comtech and SYSTRA Canada, on one of the country's most ambitious rail infrastructure programmes.

Background

- The UK's negotiating objectives can be found [here](#)
- The UK-Canada Trade Continuity Agreement was signed in 2020

[West Bromwich anglers caught fishing illegally in the dark](#)

The incident happened in July 2021 and their cases were brought to Redditch Magistrates Court by the Environment Agency on Monday 7 March 2022 where 33-year old Krzysztof Budzynski, of Gladstone Street and 43-year old Rafal Szalczewski, of Glover Street both pleaded guilty to the offences of the removal of fish and the removal of eel.

Both anglers got the same penalty, including a fine of £100 for the first offence and £200 for the second offence. Costs of £135 were awarded to the

Environment Agency and there was a victim surcharge of £34, amounting to £469 for each angler.

The defendants were found in possession of fish and eels that they had removed from the river on 23 July 2021 at 10.40pm by a Birmingham Angling Association (BAA) club bailiff. The bailiff then contacted West Mercia Police and the fish, which included Chub, Perch and Bream, and the anglers' fishing equipment, were seized by a police officer and handed to the bailiff.

The fishing rights at the location where the anglers were found are owned by the BAA and the rules state that any fish caught must be returned alive, and fishing is only allowed until one hour after sunset. Night fishing is not allowed. All of the fish and eels were found to be dead.

Following the verdict, Nichola Tomlinson, fisheries enforcement team leader for the Environment Agency, said:

This case demonstrates great partnership working as it involved West Mercia Police, the local angling club and the Angling Trust to enable us to bring about a successful prosecution. Whilst on this occasion both men had a valid fishing licence, it is also imperative for anglers to observe fishing byelaws.

It also shows how seriously the courts take these offences and we hope the penalty will act as a deterrent to any angler who is thinking of breaking fishing byelaws.

Not complying with the byelaws can incur a fine of up to £50,000 and, as in this case, offenders can also have their fishing equipment seized.

The Environment Agency carries out enforcement work all year round and is supported by partners including the police and the Angling Trust. Fisheries enforcement work is intelligence-led, targeting known hot-spots and where illegal fishing is reported.

Anyone with information about illegal fishing activities can contact the Environment Agency Incident Hotline 24/7 on 0800 80 70 60 or anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

[Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Switzerland, James Squire](#)

News story

Mr James Squire has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Swiss Confederation and Her Majesty's non-resident Ambassador to the Principality of Liechtenstein.



Mr James Squire has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Swiss Confederation and Her Majesty's non-resident Ambassador to the Principality of Liechtenstein in succession to Ms Jane Owen. Mr Squire will take up his appointment during January 2023.

Full name: James Squire

Married to: Kate Squire

Children: Three

2019 to 2022 Head of North East Asia and Pacific Department, FCDO
2018 to 2019 Head of Democratic People's Republic of Korea Department, FCO
2018 Deputy Head of Mission, Kabul, FCO
2015 to 2017 Head of Pakistan Unit, South Asia and Afghanistan Directorate, FCO
2013 to 2014 Head of Global Threats and Asia Team, UK Mission to the United Nations, New York
2011 to 2012 First Secretary Peacekeeping Finance, UK Mission to the United Nations, New York
2008 to 2010 Deputy Head, Human Resources Department, FCO
1999 to 2007 Fund Manager, Schroders plc

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