

[Press release: Charity Commission publishes report on Garden Bridge Trust](#)

The Charity Commission, the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales, has today published [its findings](#) into the [Garden Bridge Trust](#) (registered charity number 1155246).

The regulator's case examined the charity's governance, specifically whether the trustees were meeting their legal duties and whether the charity was complying with charity law. It did not examine matters such as the merits of the project or how it is funded. These issues are outside its regulatory remit. The National Audit Office has published an investigation into the Department for Transport's £30 million grant towards the construction of the project and, separately, Dame Margaret Hodge MP is conducting a review of the project, including its value for money.

The Commission inspected the charity's books and records and met trustees and staff from the charity to examine:

- the awarding of contracts by the charity, including whether conflicts of interest had been declared and properly managed
- the due diligence carried out by the charity and the charity's ability to carry out a project of this size
- the funding, structure and governance of the charity

The Commission found that the trustees were meeting their duties and were acting in compliance with charity law.

The Commission also found that the processes for awarding of contracts appear to have been robust. However, trustees did not fully explore the opportunities to compare the critical paths of other comparable infrastructure projects and thus better enable themselves to assess project risk.

The Commission examined the management of conflict of interests within the charity and found that they were managed in line with the charity's policy. The regulator can also confirm that benefactors were not party to contracts made by the charity.

The trustees of the charity met required standards of financial management and were able to justify the high forward spend made by the charity and account for the spend to date. The Commission considers that the trustees could make improvements to their annual reporting, to provide greater insight to the progress made and challenges addressed in the last financial year.

Further, the charity holds no reserves but expects to meet any obligations from the use of its restricted funds. Given the reliance on using restricted

funds, the regulator would have expected a fuller description of how these funds could be used with greater detail on how the charity would meet its liabilities in the event of closure.

The charity cooperated fully with the Commission throughout its case.

David Holdsworth, Chief Operating Officer at the Charity Commission said:

We have been able to offer public assurance that the Garden Bridge Trust is meeting its obligations as a registered charity and that it has the proper financial controls in place. We are aware of the considerable public debate regarding this project. Our role is not to comment on the merits of the project but to assess concerns about its governance and ensure it is compliant with the legal framework for charities.

This case shows that high profile charities can attract considerable public scrutiny, and the public rightly expect charities to be transparent and accountable. Having trustees in place with the right skills and experience is crucial for a charity to operate effectively.

The Commission [publishes reports](#) regarding its compliance cases where it is appropriate and proportionate to publish a report, there is significant public interest in the case and its outcome and/or other charities need to be aware of the issues or lessons in the case.

The full report is available on [GOV.UK](#).

Ends

PR 12/17

Notes to editors

1. [The Charity Commission](#) is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
2. Search for charities on our [online register](#).

[Chambers of Commerce: Put](#)

practicality, certainty at the heart of Brexit negotiations

The British Chambers of Commerce publishes its Brexit Business Priorities report as a guideline for the UK government in its EU negotiations.

As the Chamber Network gathers in Westminster for the BCC Annual Conference, the British Chambers of Commerce has today (Tuesday) published a business blueprint for the UK government ahead of the upcoming Brexit negotiations.

Titled ***Business Brexit Priorities***, the report synthesizes feedback from over 400 businesses at 16 Chamber-hosted focus groups, along with nearly 20,000 responses to Chamber surveys. It puts forward priorities for action across seven key areas where business communities want practical solutions and certainty.

BCC evidence confirms that Europe will remain a key market for UK exporters and importers well into the future. As a consequence, it is imperative that the government achieves a pragmatic UK-EU deal that facilitates continued trade.

The key recommendations in the report are:

- On the **Labour Market**, the government should provide certainty for businesses on the residence rights of their existing EU workers, provide clarity on hiring from EU countries during the negotiation period, and avoid expensive and bureaucratic processes for post-Brexit hires from the EU
- On **Trade**, the government should aim to minimise tariffs, seek to avoid costly non-tariff barriers, grandfather existing EU free trade agreements with third countries, and expand the trade mission programme
- On **Customs**, the government should develop future customs procedures at the UK border in partnership with business, seek to maintain the UK's position as an entry point for global businesses to Europe
- On **Tax**, the government should guarantee that HMRC is appropriately resourced to help businesses through the transition process, and provide clarity on whether VAT legislation will continue to mirror current core VAT principles
- On **Regulation**, the government should ensure stability by incorporating existing EU regulations into UK law and maintaining these for a minimum period following Brexit, and ensure that product standards are aligned with, and recognised by, the EU to keep UK products competitive
- On **EU funding**, the government should maintain UK access to the European Investment Bank, and ensure there is no funding 'cliff-edge' for areas in receipt of EU funding
- On **Northern Ireland**, the government must avoid any return to a hard border, so that businesses can move people and goods as freely as possible.

Commenting on the report, Adam Marshall, BCC Director General, said:

“Business communities across the UK want practical considerations, not ideology or politics, at the heart of the government’s approach to Brexit negotiations.

“What’s debated in Westminster often isn’t what matters for most businesses. Most firms care little about the exact process for triggering Article 50, but they care a lot about an unexpected VAT hit to their cash flow, sudden changes to regulation, the inability to recruit the right people for the job, or if their products are stopped by customs authorities at the border. The everyday nitty-gritty of doing business across borders must be front and centre in the negotiation process.

“What’s also clear is that the eventual Brexit deal is far from the only thing on the minds of the UK’s business communities. An ambitious domestic agenda for business and the economy is also essential so that business can drive our post-Brexit success. Firms across the UK want a clear assurance that Brexit isn’t going to be the only thing on the government’s economic agenda for the next few years.”

Marcus Mason, Head of Business at the BCC, and author of the report, added:

“Since the historic vote on June 23, we have worked with Chamber business communities all across the UK to determine their key priorities for the Brexit transition.

“This report brings those practical priorities together and urges the government to adopt them in the forthcoming negotiations. Chambers of Commerce stand ready to help the government shape a pragmatic and practical approach to the coming transition, so that firms can continue to trade successfully with customers and suppliers across Europe and around the world.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

The full report can be found [here](#).

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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[CPC punishes officials for poor leadership](#)

The discipline watchdog of the Communist Party of China (CPC) exposed six cases involving officials who were held accountable for their poor leadership.

The officials were punished for poor fulfillment of their main responsibilities in strict Party governance and ineffective supervision of disciplinary violation by their subordinates, according to a circular published on the website of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) on Sunday.

The cases involved gambling, poor investigation in handling public complaints, the illegal general election of a village-level Party committee and lavish wedding banquets, in provinces of Hunan, Hubei, Shandong, Shanxi, Guangdong and Liaoning, it said.

In July 2016, the CCDI issued a regulation to hold CPC officials accountable for poor leadership, targeting leaders of Party committees and discipline inspection committees at all levels.

The circular urged Party committees at all levels to comprehensively deepen strict Party governance and make good use of the accountability mechanism in Party building.

Discipline inspection committees at all levels should perform the duties of supervision, and officials who fail to perform their duty should be held accountable.

[Judicial efficiency improved through reform: top court](#)

The efficiency of Chinese courts has been improved by 20 percent since 2013, the Supreme People's Court (SPC) announced Monday.

The SPC Monday released two white papers on judicial reform and court transparency from 2013 to 2016, recording progress made in fields including

judicial accountability, trial mechanism and adjudicative power operation.

According to the SPC, over 26 million court documents have been posted on China Judgement Online, the court document website, and the site has clocked up six billion hits by users from over 200 countries and regions.

China's courts have improved the way in which they protect human rights, preventing and correcting cases in which people were unjustly, falsely or wrongly charged or sentenced.

From 2013 to 2016, courts nationwide overturned 34 cases, involving 54 people, deemed to be miscarriage of justice, according to the SPC.

To improve litigation, nearly all courts in China have established supporting systems, the SPC said.

The top court also pledged to improve how cases are filed and legal aid accessed.

[Press center for annual political sessions opens](#)

The press center for the upcoming annual legislative and political consultative sessions opened Monday.

More than 3,000 reporters from home and abroad have registered to cover the sessions, including an increased number of foreign reporters, according to the press center.

The National People's Congress, China's top legislature, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the top political advisory body, will convene their annual sessions on March 5 and March 3, respectively.

Located in the Media Center Hotel in downtown Beijing, the press center will hold a number of press conferences with leading officials in various fields, and respond to public concerns.

As 2017 is a crucial year for the country's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), hot topics will include macro-economic development, supply-side structural reform, the RMB exchange rate and China's stock and real estate markets.