

Communities Secretary launches consultation on park home commission fees

The consultation follows a review of the sector commissioned by the Welsh Government. While the review made several recommendations to improve standards in the sector, barely a quarter of park home operators contributed detailed financial information to the review.

Announcing the consultation, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“The review into the industry rightly highlights that commission rates are a complex issue with the potential for significant consequences. I have therefore been considering the matter very carefully before deciding to hold a public consultation.

“I have concluded that we should examine further the level of the commission charged by site owners, but, in light of the very strong representations I have received I am currently of the view that there may be a case to reduce or even abolish the commission, though I will of course want to take full account of consultation responses before coming to a final view.

“The options I will consider will include reducing or even abolishing the commission rate, as well, of course, as retaining the status quo. I would therefore like to invite the park home owners to let me have the evidence which they believe would justify the latter option, but I sincerely hope all interested parties will take advantage of the opportunity this consultation will provide to submit further information and scrutinise the available evidence.”

Informal engagement will begin immediately and the formal consultation will be published as soon as possible.

Welsh innovation receives global recognition for helping to save and improve lives

Backed by over £3m Welsh Government funding and run in collaboration with

Innovate UK, the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) has gained interest from other UK devolved nations as well as attracting attention from Ireland, Sweden and Australia.

Launched in Wales in 2013, the SBRI offers businesses – many of which are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) – the opportunity to bid for research and development (R&D) funding to develop technology-driven solutions for specific challenges facing the public sector.

Run as competitions each challenge focusses on an area of public service where solutions either do not yet exist or where partial solutions might be improved.

Areas where solutions are already being progressed include the improvement of health and patient care, medical treatments, road safety, renewable energy generation and environmental management.

To date, 14 SBRI competitions have been run in Wales, resulting in 66 contracts valued at approximately £5m being awarded to companies to develop Welsh public sector solutions: 44 contracts at Phase 1 (developing the proposal) and 22 contracts at Phase 2 (creating a prototype with a view to bringing it to market).

One of the first SBRI challenges run in Wales was by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (UHB) which wanted to develop a solution to improve patient care by helping nurses and carers reduce administration duties so they could spend more time with patients.

The target of this challenge was for nurses to spend 10% more time with patients. After two years of practical collaboration between the UHB's nurses and a small Bangor start up company, Elidir Health, a software solution has been developed which promises to increase nurses' time with patients not just by 10% but potentially up to 23%. Indeed this challenge has been so successful that Elidir Health is now working with Cwm Taf UHB as well as Betsi Cadwaladr UHB to explore how this software can be adopted across both health boards' pediatric units.

The Welsh Government's own Transport department has also made use of SBRI challenges to develop solutions to identified issues, for example improving road safety and reducing the number of motorcyclists killed or seriously injured on Welsh roads.

Of the bids submitted to this challenge two projects were selected, with the first example already complete.

Armourgel Ltd has developed a motorcycle helmet liner that will significantly reduce the impact to a rider's head during a collision. This can make the difference between a serious brain injury and a minor one.

The second project has developed a junction alert system which will soon be trialed on Welsh roads. The project will be able to test the system in peak motorcycling season and by September the company will have fully tested the system in all weather conditions and will report on its market potential.

Skills and Science Minister, Julie James is keen to point out that both these projects have the potential to save the lives of motorcyclists not just on Welsh roads but across the world, saying:

“The Small Business Research Initiative is a great example of how the public and private sector can work together to tackle societal challenges in innovative ways and deliver benefits to both public sector bodies and industry as well as the people they serve.

“My aim now is for our SBRI programme to become a mainstream tool in the Welsh public sector, promoting innovation and driving forward our technological potential.

“SBRI can open up huge opportunities for Welsh businesses and help solve some of the toughest challenges we will all face in the future and we plan to use it.”

Russian Firms Show Keen Interest in Furthering ‘Make In India’ by Involving Indian Firms

The Department of Defence Production in the Ministry of Defence organised the ‘India-Russia Military Industrial Conference’ from March 17 to 18, 2017.

BCC: Inflation a key risk to UK growth prospects

BCC comments on the inflation and public sector finances for February 2017.

21st March 2017

Commenting on the inflation and public sector finance statistics for February 2017, published today by the Office for National Statistics, Suren Thiru, Head of Economics at the British Chambers of Commerce, said:

“With inflation now surpassing the Bank of England’s 2% target for the first

time since 2013, there is further confirmation that UK price growth is firmly on an upward trajectory.

“The decline in the value of Sterling, together with rising oil and other commodity prices, is likely to maintain the upward pressure on consumer prices in the coming months. We currently forecast that inflation will remain persistently above the Bank of England’s 2% target over the near term, peaking at close to 3% in the second half of 2018.

“Rising inflation is a key risk to the UK’s growth prospects. Businesses continue to report that the rising cost of raw materials are squeezing margins, forcing many firms to raise their prices. Higher inflation is also likely to materially squeeze consumer spending in the coming months as price growth increasingly outpaces earnings growth.

“While government has little direct influence on currency movements or global commodity prices, it must do more to ease the burden of up-front costs and taxes faced by businesses, which is weighing heavily on investment decisions and growth.

On the Public finances, Suren Thiru added:

“The latest public finances data show that the government remains on course to meet the Office for Budget Responsibilities forecast for 2016/17 made in the Spring Budget, with public borrowing declining again in February. However, if UK economic growth becomes more subdued as we expect, the UK is likely to face an uphill struggle to achieve meaningful deficit reduction in the coming years as the government’s ability to generate tax receipts comes under greater pressure.”

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: Data released on appeals for 2016 GCSE and AS and A level exams

The report shows that there were 355 appeals against results made in 2016, compared to 466 in 2015 – a decrease of 24%.

This reduction is in the context of a drop in the number of GCSE, AS and A level unit entries and drop in the number of requests for reviews of marking in 2016 compare to 2015.

In 2016 211 (3.2%) of all grades challenged at appeal led to a grade change. This compares to 2015 where 49 (0.7%) of grades challenged under appeal were changed. An appeal can relate to more than one student.

This increase in successful appeals, from 31 in 2015 to 46 in 2016, follows a pilot run in 2016 to test new grounds for appeal in 3 subjects. For AS and A level geography, physics and religious studies the grounds for appeal following a review were extended to allow an appeal on the grounds of a marking error that was not corrected during the review. Traditionally, exam boards have only accepted appeals on the grounds of a procedural error.

Sally Collier, Chief Regulator, said: “The appeals pilot in three subjects is part of a set of wider changes we are making to the marking reviews and appeals system. The changes aim to make the system as fair as it can be for all students and to make sure students get the grade their performance deserved.

“We are evaluating the pilot before deciding whether to extend the additional grounds to other subjects.”

An appeal can be requested once a school or college has gone through the review of marking and moderation process if they are dissatisfied with the outcome.

The full statistical release, [Appeals for GCSE and GCE: summer 2016 exam series, can be read here](#)