

The Pensions Ombudsman to continue tenure

Press release

Anthony Arter will continue in his role as the Pensions Ombudsman for another year.



Minister for Pensions Guy Opperman said:

The role of the Pensions Ombudsman is to lead an independent, customer-focused organisation offering an accessible service for handling complaints.

This is a challenging time to lead the service, having taken on new responsibilities and undergone a major transformation to provide an enhanced digital experience. Anthony's experience in the role will be a real asset in the year ahead.

Pensions Ombudsman Anthony Arter said:

I am delighted that my term as the Pensions Ombudsman has been extended for twelve months. We have made great inroads into improving the customer journey over recent years and especially the last year given the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside the continued long-term trend of increased demand.

I expect these challenges to continue over the coming year, as the impact of the pandemic on the financial landscape becomes clearer.

I have an excellent team of staff and volunteers at the Pensions Ombudsman, and look forward to working with them and our newly-expanded Corporate Board to further improve the service offered to our customers in resolving their pensions disputes.

In recent years, the office has seen a steady increase in business, which also includes the transfer of the Early Resolution Service from The Pensions Advisory Service to the Pensions Ombudsman in March 2018.

The main responsibilities of the Pension Ombudsman are to:

- investigate and determine pensions complaints
- investigate and determine disputes concerning the Pension Protection Fund, and hear appeals against decisions made by the Financial Assistance Scheme manager
- work with the Pensions Ombudsman Board to set the strategic direction for the organisation
- and build constructive and effective relationships with external and internal stakeholders, including the DWP and its Ministers.

Further information

- The Pension Ombudsman is entitled to an annual remuneration of £143,095 for this full time role.
- Two roles are fulfilled, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Pension Protection Fund Ombudsman.
- The Pensions Ombudsman is a statutory tribunal and Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) sponsored by the DWP.

Media enquiries for this press release – 0115 965 8781

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Published 22 July 2021

[Health chiefs encourage more pregnant women to get their COVID-19 vaccine](#)

The data, from Public Health England (PHE), shows these were all women aged under 50 years of age, who reported that they were pregnant or could be pregnant at the time of receiving the vaccine. Of these, 20,648 women have received their second dose.

On 16 April 2021, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advised that pregnant women should be offered the coronavirus (COVID-19)

vaccine at the same time as the rest of the population, based on their age and clinical risk group.

Some pregnant women will have been vaccinated before this date if they are clinically vulnerable or are a healthcare worker, therefore these figures are likely to be much higher.

It is preferable for pregnant women in the UK to be offered the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines where available, as there is more safety data available on these vaccines in pregnancy.

Vaccines Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

It is brilliant to see so many pregnant women coming forward for their COVID-19 vaccines, ensuring they protect themselves and their baby from this awful virus.

While uncommon, severe illness from COVID-19 is more likely in later pregnancy and infection increases the risk of a premature birth. The COVID-19 vaccines are one of the best defences against infection, preventing at least 11.7 million infections in England alone.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at PHE, said:

It is encouraging that thousands of pregnant women have received a COVID-19 vaccine – we strongly urge anyone who has not yet taken up the offer to get both doses as soon as possible and for pregnant women to come forward for their second dose 8 weeks after their first dose.

The vaccines continue to save thousands of lives and we are confident that they can be safely offered to pregnant women, but if you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to discuss these with a healthcare professional.

Dr Edward Morris, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said:

We are encouraged to see more than 50,000 pregnant women in England have received one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. We recommend vaccination in pregnancy as it's the most effective way of protecting women and their babies from severe illness and premature birth.

We are concerned that increasing rates of COVID-19 infection will adversely impact pregnant women. Of the pregnant women in hospital with COVID-19 last week, 95% were unvaccinated. We hope this

reassuring data will help those undecided consider taking up the offer of a vaccine.

Gill Walton, Chief Executive of the Royal College of Midwives, said:

It's really encouraging that so many pregnant women have already come forward to the vaccine – particularly bearing in mind this figure doesn't include the pregnant health and care workers or those who are clinically extremely vulnerable who would have received at least their first vaccine before 16 April. We're all very aware of just how widely the virus is still circulating.

That's why it's so important for pregnant women to take up the vaccine. We are seeing increasing numbers of pregnant women being admitted to hospital with serious illness, almost all of whom are unvaccinated. Pregnant women are at greater risk of serious illness if they get COVID-19, and those with severe COVID-19 are twice as likely to experience a stillbirth and 3 times as likely to have a preterm baby. Getting the vaccine is the best way to keep you and your baby safe.

So often, we mark out pregnancy landmarks in weeks, what size the baby is at 12 weeks or 22. Now we have a new landmark – 8 weeks between the first jab and the second. If you have any concerns or any questions, speak to your midwife who will help you make the right decision for you and your baby.

Though uncommon, severe illness due to COVID-19 is more likely in later pregnancy. Pregnant women who do get symptomatic COVID-19 infection are 2 to 3 times more likely to give birth to their baby prematurely.

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are recommended for pregnant women in the UK because these vaccines have been given to over 130,000 pregnant women in the US and the data has not raised any safety concerns.

Women who are planning pregnancy, who are in the immediate postpartum period, or who are breastfeeding can be vaccinated with any vaccine, depending on their age and clinical risk group.

The JCVI will continue to closely monitor the evidence on COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy and will update its advice as required.

New data from PHE today also shows the vaccination programme has directly averted over 52,600 hospitalisations (approximately 8,800 admissions in those aged 65 to 74; 20,300 in those aged 75 to 84; and 23,500 in those aged 85 and over).

Anniversary of the downing of flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine: UK statement

World news story

Deirdre Brown, Deputy Head of the UK Delegation to the OSCE, marks the 7th anniversary of the downing of flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine and the loss of 298 people.



Thank you Mr Chair. This year we marked the 7th anniversary of the downing of Flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine and the loss of 298 people from 17 countries, including 10 British nationals. The United Kingdom expresses its deepest condolences to all those who lost their loved ones.

The United Kingdom reiterates its full support for the efforts over seven years to pursue truth, justice and accountability. To provide answers for the next of kin.

The Dutch trial has entered the final stage and we look forward to its conclusion. We continue to support the work of the Joint Investigation Team and commend its painstaking dedication.

The United Kingdom supports the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Australia in their call for the Russian Federation to accept State responsibility and to cooperate fully with all efforts to establish accountability, in accordance with [UNSC Resolution 2166](#).

Published 22 July 2021

Consultation launched on fairer and simpler boat registration scheme

Boat owners who keep or use their vessels on Environment Agency (EA) waterways are being urged to have their say on [newly proposed registration charges](#) which will be introduced from 2022.

All boats kept or used on the non-tidal Thames, the Upper Medway or Anglian waterways (Rivers Great Ouse, Nene, Stour, Ancholme, Welland and Glen) must be registered with the Agency, with registration charges contributing to the operation of the waterways as well as the upkeep and management of the rivers, locks and facilities.

As the second largest authority of navigable waterways in the country, the EA wants to replace the current scheme – which can be inconsistent and complicated for customers – with a fairer and simpler charging regime across its three main waterway areas.

The proposals also include increased charge levels over a three year period which will be essential for delivering the required service to its boating customers. This would see a 6% increase in the first year (from January 2022), 4% in the second year and held for the final year.

Currently, funding from boat registrations does not fully cover the cost of services that the EA provides for boating customers, and in the absence of revised charges from January 2022, the EA would see around £2 million of under-recovered costs over the next three years.

Through a more consistent and modern charging scheme, the Environment Agency can continue to:

- maintain assets such as locks, moorings, landings and bridges
- carry out channel maintenance and tree management
- carry out important health and safety work, such as improving walkways and access
- undertake its operational activities including lock service and compliance work

Alice Mayne, Deputy Director for Navigation at the Environment Agency, said:

Boat registration charges are hugely important for keeping our waterways open and making sure they are safe for both recreational boaters and those who rely on them for business.

Our waterways also receive income from other sources, including the government and commercial activities, but for a number of years our funding has not met our investment needs, and this has impacted our standards of service and the condition of our navigation infrastructure and facilities.

That's why we are proposing a simpler, fairer and more transparent charging system that is consistent across our waterways. This is something our customers have told us they want, and following extensive engagement, we have now incorporated their feedback into our final plans.

This additional funding will make us more financially resilient and ensure we can provide a more sustainable service.

The EA has 18,000 direct boat registration customers, mainly made up of private boat owners with 160 small river businesses. Overall there are 28,000 registered boats on the EA's waterways, with 98% private and 2% business; 80% are powered boats and 20% unpowered.

The new charging proposals are also part of the Environment Agency's new Navigation Business Plan that sets out a sustainable future for its waterways.

The consultation is open for eight weeks until the 16 September and [can be found here](#).

[Civil news: extension of HPCDS contracts to 30 September 2022](#)

News story

We are issuing contract extension notices for the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme.



Extension notices are being issued shortly to tell providers that Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme (HPCDS) contracts will be extended to 30 September 2022.

Why are you extending?

Work is being carried out by the Ministry of Justice to develop its policy approach for the delivery of HPCDS services.

The current contract expires on 30 September 2021. This further extension of HPCDS contracts will allow the ministry extra time for this work.

We explained our right to extend contracts by a further 12 months when we wrote to HPCDS providers in July 2020.

What happens next?

You do not need to do anything to accept the extension. We will begin to issue notices of the extension to the 2013 HPCDS contract to individual providers shortly.

The new schedules will be issued before the current contract ends on 30 September 2021.

Published 22 July 2021