

[Grenfell Tower site update: summary and Q&A from 8 December 2020 online event](#)

At our online event on 8 December 2020, we updated attendees on the safety works taking place at the site. We also explained the principal contractor procurement currently underway, and how the community can be involved in the process.

We shared details of how the community can have their say about the Tower and the future memorial, as well as giving a reminder about the health and wellbeing services available.

Event attendees were able to post questions to our panel from the Grenfell site management and programme team, and a member of the local NHS health team.

[BHC Honiara distributes vegetable seeds and gardening tools to Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock](#)

The British High Commission in Honiara yesterday (18th January) handed over millions of vegetable seeds and gardening tools to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

British High Commissioner to Solomon Islands and Nauru, His Excellency Dr. Brian Jones handed over the more than 5 million vegetable seeds and about 618 gardening tools to the Ministry.

Handing over the items, High Commissioner Jones said:

Every new seed planted brings hope. And in 2021, a sign of hope for the future is even more important.

He said the UK Government is proud to support the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock replenish its stocks of vegetable seeds and garden tools, to ensure that they can support vulnerable gardeners across the provinces.

At this time of year, as we face cyclone season, a good supply of

seeds is the best form of savings account in the rural areas. Even if a disaster hits and damages vegetable gardens, a supply of seeds can get people's gardens growing again and restore food security. And as low-lying areas of Solomon Islands face uncertainty in the future from climate change, food security is ever more vital.

Dr Jones said 2021 will be a tough year, even as we see the shoots of our recovery from coronavirus worldwide.

I am pleased to support the Ministry in its agricultural extension work, ensuring people have access to good quality seeds and the tools to grow them, across the provinces of Solomon Islands.

Receiving the items, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock Hon. Senley Filualea expressed gratitude to the people of Great Britain for seeing fit to donate seeds to the people of Solomon Islands through his ministry.

As you are aware, the Solomon Islands budget for 2021 is not yet decided on due to the many uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. But our needs are still there and are many. The need to ensure our people can live through this pandemic times and the need to keep our economy afloat are great challenges for us at this time.

The challenges of the 2019 COVID-19 are still here with us in 2021. We were hoping that this year will be different but as you may have heard from the global news on status of COVID-19, it is increasing again. And despite some efforts on the availability of vaccines, we were also informed that it will take months before Solomon Islands can even have some vaccines available and the vaccine programs other countries are rolling out as well will take months, which means we will still have months of negative economic growth and food insecurity before we can all come out of this pandemic.

He said the gifts, are timely.

These are New Year gifts for our farming household around the country and I am honoured Excellency Dr. Brian Jones to receive these gifts on their behalf. "My ministry will ensure the distributions will reach far wide to all provinces in the country.

Hon. Minister Filualea on behalf of the DCGA government, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and people of Solomon Islands thanked the UK Government for the timely support to the people of Solomon Islands.

Further information

British High Commission Honiara
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Miss Solomon Islands becomes 168th Points of Light awardee

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, as Head of the Commonwealth, has recognised current Miss Solomon Islands, Ms. Gladys Habu, as the 168th recipient of the Commonwealth Points of Light award in honour of her exceptional voluntary service raising awareness of climate change.

Gladys is an environmental activist who has campaigned for many years on a local and international level to advocate for increased awareness of the impact of climate change.

When she was 14 years old, Gladys first saw how rising sea levels were starting to affect an island near her home. Five years later, Kale Island, where her grandparents had lived, completely disappeared.

Gladys is now working with other young people from across the world ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) taking place in Glasgow in November this year to drive forward greater awareness of the effects of climate change for Pacific Island countries.

She is also a UNICEF Pacific Supporter, focused on improving child and maternal health and acting as a role model to young women on the island.

As part of the legacy of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London 2018, Her Majesty the Queen – as Head of the Commonwealth – is thanking inspirational volunteers across the 54 Commonwealth nations for the difference they are making in their communities and beyond, by recognising a volunteer from each Commonwealth country every week.

By sharing these stories of service, the Commonwealth Points of Light awards celebrate inspirational acts of volunteering across the Commonwealth and help inspire others to make their own contribution to tackling some of the greatest social challenges of our time.

The reigning Miss Solomon Islands beauty pageant said:

Climate change is not just an environmental crisis. It is a health crisis and a social crisis as well. As much as it is affecting our men, it is leaving our women and most importantly our children, vulnerable every day. Nonetheless I will forever value the fighting spirit our people have, to wake up each morning and face the challenge. When I began my advocacy work, I did it with so much heart and passion.

In all honesty, to be granted this prestigious award by Her Majesty the Queen today, is more than I have ever imagined. In recognition of my work, you have also recognised our reality, living on the frontline of this climate crisis. Thank you for acknowledging the urgency in this issue.

I am humbled to be a Commonwealth Points of Light awardee and will continue to play my part. It is my hope that this award will also encourage our people to take the stand in leading this fight as a nation. Embracing nature has always been part of me. But the loss of our island, Kale, is my drive to fighting for protection.

Dr Brian Jones, British High Commissioner to Solomon Islands and Nauru said:

Changes in our climate already impact people's lives and livelihoods in the Pacific Islands. Already vulnerable to earthquakes and cyclones, intensive forestry and fisheries further affect traditional crops, coping mechanisms and biodiversity. Further changes from global warming will put some communities on the brink of devastation. Gladys is a powerful advocate of the need to act now and a positive example to young people of how to bring about change. I'm proud she has been awarded the Commonwealth Point of Light; it adds further prominence and power to her valuable message and work.

The Commonwealth is a diverse community of 54 nations that work together to promote prosperity, democracy and peace. The Heads of Government meeting brought together leaders from all the 54 Member countries to reaffirm common values, address shared global challenges and agree how to work to create a better future for all citizens, especially young people.

Voluntary service is a vital part of this agenda, which is why Her Majesty The Queen has chosen to recognise outstanding volunteers across the Commonwealth in this special way.

Last year's recipient of the Points of Light Award was Marilyn Ghedi founder of the Katupika, Wagina and Kia (Kawaki) Women's Group. [Read her story here](#)

Further information

1. The Points of Light awards recognise outstanding volunteers every day of the week – people whose service is making a difference in their communities and whose story can inspire others to creative innovative solutions to social challenges in their own communities and beyond.
2. Points of Light began in America under President George H. W. Bush and today over 6,000 US Points of Light have been recognised. The scheme has the support of all living US Presidents.
3. Since 2014 the UK Prime Minister has been recognising a daily Point of Light from the UK, with over 1,500 volunteers now recognised.
4. Commonwealth Points of Light is a continuation of this programme with a special series of awards recognising inspirational volunteers throughout the Commonwealth, coinciding with the UK being the Commonwealth's Chair-in-Office of for the next two years. One volunteer from each of the 54 Commonwealth countries was recognised in the days leading up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April 2018. Following the success of this programme, Her Majesty The Queen decided to continue this work and award one volunteer from each Commonwealth country every week.
5. Read more information about the [Commonwealth Points of Light recipients](#) here

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[Government tackles late payments to small firms to protect jobs](#)

- Government to strengthen Prompt Payment Code, ensuring larger companies pay their suppliers on time
- required payment period to small businesses slashed in half to 30 days, with commitments to be made personally by CEOs or Finance Directors

- tougher rules come as government looks to increase powers of the Small Business Commissioner to protect jobs and growth as we build back better from the pandemic

An overhaul of the Prompt Payment Code (PPC) to crack down on delayed invoices owed to small businesses has been announced by the government today (19 January).

Under new reforms, companies that have signed up to the Prompt Payment Code will be obliged to pay small businesses within 30 days – half the time outlined in the current Code.

Despite almost 3,000 companies signing the Code, poor payment practices are still rife, with many payments delayed well beyond the current 60-day target required for 95% of invoices. Currently, £23.4 billion worth of late invoices are owed to firms across Britain, impacting on businesses' cash flow and ultimate survival.

To help tackle the problem, businesses owners, Finance Directors or CEOs will be required to take personal responsibility by signing the Code, acknowledge that suppliers can charge interest on late invoices under the Code and that breaches will be investigated. Those signed up to the Code will redouble their efforts to ensure payments are made on time and breaches will continue to be publicised by the government in order to encourage compliance.

The move comes as the government seeks to strengthen the powers of the Small Business Commissioner (SBC) to ensure larger companies pay their smaller partners on time. New powers proposed in a recently closed consultation include legally binding payment orders, launching investigations and levying fines.

Small Business Minister Paul Scully said:

Our incredible small businesses will be vital to our recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, supporting millions of livelihoods across the UK.

Today, we are relieving some of the pressure on small business owners by introducing significant reforms to the UK payments regime – pushing big businesses to pay their suppliers on time.

By signing up to the Prompt Payment Code and sticking to its rules, large firms can help Britain to build back better, protecting the jobs, innovation and growth which small businesses drive right across the UK.

According to the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), around 50,000 businesses close every year due to late payments, damaging Britain's prosperity and threatening jobs.

Small businesses account for two-thirds of UK private sector employment and more than half of business turnover. Late payments impact their bottom line, which can hold back investment or job creation and, in the worst cases, lead to job losses and business closures.

The reforms will help to build a culture of prompt payment between companies and challenge UK businesses to change their practices and stand by small partners at a critical time for the UK's economic recovery.

The changes coming into effect immediately are:

- requiring a company's CEO or Finance Director, or the business owner where it is a small business, to personally sign the Code to ensure responsibility for payment practices is taken at the highest level of an organisation
- introducing a new logo for signatories to use in external communications to show their commitment to the Code, making it more damaging to a company's reputation to breach it
- acknowledgement as a condition of signing the Code that suppliers can charge interest on late invoices
- enabling administrators of the Code to investigate breaches based on third-party information

In addition, the new requirement for signatories to pay 95% of invoices from small businesses (those with less than 50 employees) within 30 days will be effective from 1 July 2021. The target for larger businesses will remain 95% of invoices within 60 days.

Interim Small Business Commissioner Philip King said:

I am delighted to launch the reformed Prompt Payment Code. In addition to their current public commitment to pay 95% of all payments to their supply chain within 60 days, signatories of the reformed Code have committed to paying 95% of their small business suppliers within 30 days. I commend those signatories who make further individual commitments to go further and settle invoices sooner.

Late payment causes real hardship to small businesses, and the issue is more prevalent > than ever due to the continued impact of the pandemic. Code signatories of all sizes demonstrate their commitment to ending the culture of late payment and helping to increase business confidence. I encourage businesses of all sizes to implement ethical business practices and sign up to become a Code signatory and join us on our journey to aid business recovery post COVID-19".

Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) National Chairman, Mike Cherry, said:

A late payment crisis was massively stifling the UK economy before

Covid hit. The pandemic has deepened it. FSB has campaigned for good payment practice to become the norm across the UK economy, not least through a toughening of the Prompt Payment Code and the adoption of 30 days as the new maximum payment period.

It's good to see the progress announced today by BEIS and especially the outgoing Small Business Commissioner that has driven this agenda. It's now time for swift delivery, and for all existing and future PPC signatories to implement 30 days as the new maximum. Ending our pernicious poor payment culture for good over the coming months will be fundamental to turning our hopes of economic recovery into reality.

The Confederation of British Industry's Chief UK Policy Director, Matthew Fell said:

COVID-19 has once again highlighted the importance of maintaining healthy supply chains.

Small companies are the backbone of the economy, but remain the most at risk from a late or unpaid invoice – particularly after months of pressure on cashflow. Businesses have been making good progress to improve payment practices, but more can be done.

Introducing new rules to drive faster payments to smaller businesses will strengthen supply chains, benefiting the firms that need it most, and shortening the road to recovery.

The PPC currently has over 2,800 signatories, who are required to pay 95% of their invoices within 60 days or else be publicly struck off the Code until substantial changes to their payment practices have been made.

When a company is struck off the Code for poor practice, this is publicly announced by the Small Business Commissioner's Office. A record of signatories and struck-off companies is maintained on the [Prompt Payment Code](#) and SBC websites.

The changes to the Code sit alongside a [consultation on the powers of the Small Business Commissioner](#), which closed on 24 December 2020. The government will publish consultation responses and take forward proposed reforms in due course.

[Joint Statement on Carrier Strike](#)

Group 2021 Joint Declaration Signing

Press release

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace and US Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher C. Miller have co-signed the UK-US Joint Declaration for the Carrier Strike Group 2021 deployment.



The UK and US have confirmed their joint participation in the Carrier Strike Group's upcoming deployment. Crown copyright.

The Joint Declaration supports UK Carrier Strike Group, led by the UK's aircraft carrier, HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH, on its inaugural deployment this year. The Carrier Strike Group will be complemented by US Marine Corps and US Navy personnel and equipment, including a detachment of US Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II aircraft and the US Navy's destroyer, USS THE SULLIVANS (DDG-68).

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

This joint declaration paves the way for the US Navy and Marine Corps to be joining the HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH Carrier Strike Group this year for the inaugural Carrier Strike 21 deployment.

I am delighted that the UK now possesses a 21st century Carrier Strike capability, which has been greatly assisted by the unswerving support and cooperation of the United States at all levels over the past decade.

This deployment embodies the strength of our bilateral ties and reflects the depth and breadth of this vital defence and security partnership.

The UK reached a major milestone in December when it declared its Carrier Strike programme had achieved Initial Operating Capability following a series of multi-national exercises throughout 2020. This Joint Declaration paves the

way for a successful inaugural operational deployment of the UK Carrier Strike Group alongside its allies.

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