

Civil/crime news: Twitter customer service feed for providers

Providers now have the option of contacting the Legal Aid Agency through the @LAAHelpTeam Twitter account to raise concerns about applications and billing.

LAA Chief Executive Jane Harbottle said: “This provides an alternative way for providers to tap into the expertise of our customer services team.

“We are looking for new ways to improve the experience and support available to contracted firms providing legal aid services.

“We’ll keep a close eye on how well it is working and will appreciate feedback to make sure it is a success.”

Finding the service

The Twitter handle for the service is @LAAHelpTeam and this is the full link:

<https://twitter.com/LAAHelpTeam>

How will the service work?

The account will be monitored from 9am to 3pm daily. During this time-frame our aim will be to respond to provider activity within 1 hour of posts being made.

We will be putting out a wide range of posts, including:

- hints and tips to improve understanding of our processes
- guidance on how to use our daily chat service
- spotlighting training opportunities provided by the LAA, providers and your rep bodies

Further information

<https://twitter.com/LAAHelpTeam>

UK Statement on the Albanian Chairmanship to the OSCE Permanent Council

Mr Chair, Ambassador Igli Hasani,

I align with the statement delivered on behalf of the EU and wanted to add some remarks in my national capacity.

We warmly welcome the Prime Minister to Vienna and thank him for outlining the priorities of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship in 2020.

The UK is a strong proponent of the OSCE, which is a critical multilateral institution for European and Euro-Atlantic security. At the heart of the OSCE is conflict prevention and conflict resolution. These require a number of elements – upholding OSCE principles and commitments; having an effective early warning system; mediation; monitoring; and ensuring no abuse of power in individual countries.

We welcome your Chairmanship's prioritisation of conflict resolution, including the work of the Special Monitoring Mission and the Trilateral Contact Group, as well as the resolution of the other protracted conflicts in the OSCE. We too attach great importance to the work of the OSCE's field presences across the region.

As incoming Chair of the Security Committee – I would like firstly to thank Albania for this opportunity, and His Excellency the Prime Minister for identifying as priorities organised crime, countering violent extremism and cybersecurity. We will work with your delegation to finalise a work plan for the year and will brief the Permanent Council on this in February.

As chair of the Men Engage Network, I commend your focus on the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and the promotion of the role of women in peace and security. Nationally, we have identified as a priority, the need to increase the number of women mediating and meaningfully participating in peace processes. It is well known that this meaningful participation of women brings more informed decision-making and more sustainable results on the ground. It is key to achieving durable peace.

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict remains a top priority for the UK. Our aim is to tackle the stigma endured by survivors of sexual violence, secure justice for survivors and shatter the culture of impunity by bringing those responsible to account, as well as strengthen efforts to prevent sexual violence in conflict.

We also appreciate your planned focus on combating violence against women. A society where individuals enjoy the same opportunities, rights, obligations and security regardless of their gender should not only be an aspiration. We

should all take tangible steps to achieve this.

We wish the CiO and the excellent team in Tirana the very best in the important year ahead in the OSCE. You can be assured of the UK's support.

Farm Payments Bill introduced to provide certainty and continuity

The Government has today (9 January) introduced legislation to provide continuity for farmers across all four corners of the UK and ensure farming subsidies are paid for 2020.

The Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) (DPLC) Bill has been introduced in Parliament to give governments across the UK powers to administer direct payments to farmers for 2020.

It follows the Chancellor's recent announcement confirming the same level of funding for direct payments for 2020 as for 2019.

After this, the Agriculture Bill will provide a new system of farm support, moving away from direct payments in England towards an approach where farmers are paid public money for the 'public goods' they produce – such as enhancing air and water quality, tackling climate change or improving animal welfare.

A Defra spokesperson said:

Leaving the EU means we can take back control of agricultural policy and fund our own farm payments domestically.

The Agriculture Bill, which will shortly be returning to the Commons, will see us move towards a new system that rewards farmers for enhancing the environment and producing the food we all enjoy in a sustainable way.

The legislation we have introduced today enables us to make Direct Payments to farmers for the 2020 scheme year– giving much-welcomed certainty to our farmers and food producers.

PM call with President Rouhani of Iran: 9 January 2020

The Prime Minister spoke to President Rouhani of Iran this morning.

They discussed the situation in the region following the death of Qasem Soleimani and the Prime Minister called for an end to hostilities.

The Prime Minister underlined the UK's continued commitment to the JCPoA and to ongoing dialogue to avoid nuclear proliferation and reduce tensions.

He raised the continued detention and mistreatment of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and other dual nationals in Iran and called for their immediate release.

Oxfordshire wood-chipping company caused fire-risk

A company on the edge of the Chilterns that recycled wood has been fined, and its director banned from similar roles, after investigators found it was storing nearly 4 times as much waste allowed by law.

In what a district judge called "blatantly criminal," the Environment Agency estimated Red Jon Ltd held 1,790 tonnes of wood at the site in Pyrton, near Watlington, whereas no more than 500 tonnes can be kept in one place in any 7-day period.

Oxford magistrates' court heard the mountains of wood posed a significant fire-risk to the area, which included two schools, residential property and a park.

Julia Leigh, senior environmental crime officer for the Environment Agency in Oxfordshire, said:

I visited the site on numerous occasions, explaining which activities were and weren't allowed, but Red Jon were not able to make sufficient changes to comply with the law and reduce the risk to the environment and the local community.

Waste crime can undermine legitimate businesses. The Environment Agency works closely with businesses to help them comply with the law. In cases like this, where individuals consistently operate illegally, we have no hesitation in prosecuting them, as we want to

make sure waste crime doesn't pay.

On Wednesday 8 January 2020, district judge Kamlesh Rana fined Red Jon Ltd, formerly of Shirburn Road, Pyrton, £15,000, and company director Patrick Cassidy £860. The two were ordered to equally share costs of £28,000, Cassidy also paying a victim surcharge of £86.

Cassidy, 68, of Sneyd Hall Road, Bloxwich, West Midlands, is now banned from being a company director.