

Political Monitor for IRC

Week commencing 8th February

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Westminster

Government

Anti-social behaviour



The **Department for Communities and Local Government** has outlined its support for a range of activities as part of a cross-Government drive to ensure that the public is able to live in neighbourhoods free from the effects of anti-social behaviour. Communities and Local Government have produced a short leaflet setting out the role of the police and councils in tackling anti-social behaviour which also contains advice on how to go about contacting them. The leaflet will be delivered to over 10 million households.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/antisocialbehaviour/>

John Denham calls for community champions to tackle anti-social behaviour



Communities Secretary **John Denham** this week issued a rallying call for an army of community champions to challenge anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhoods.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1461758>

Healey: Over £60m to lay green foundations of eco-towns



Housing Minister **John Healey** has backed the country's biggest ever green home building programme. Four areas sharing £60m cash are to build over 600 new homes to the toughest ever environmental standards. These new "eco-show homes" will be built in and around the four pioneering eco-town locations, introducing nearly 2,000 people to green living and saving them hundreds of pounds on bills. Nearly a third of these homes will be affordable.

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/Content/detail.aspx?NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=411005&SubjectId=2>

New advisory committee to boost delivery of packaging strategy



Dan Norris, the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Environment, has announced the appointment of a new, restructured, Advisory Committee on Packaging (ACP). The new Committee will advise Government on how to achieve the ambitions outlined in the UK's Packaging Strategy, 'Making the most of Packaging', published in June 2009. The Committee will advise government on: the functioning of the producer responsibility regulations for packaging waste; packaging optimisation including embedding eco-design and promoting greater use of recycled materials;

incorporating carbon and life cycle analysis considerations into the producer responsibility system; and maximising the environmental benefits of recycling packaging waste.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2010/100208a.htm>

Reality TV peer lectures small business



Lord Sugar has said some businesses complain about a lack of finances from banks as "an excuse for their own failings and inadequacies". He told peers that during an economic downturn, business have the option of either "complaining about things not being as good as they would like them to be or getting on with things and viewing it as a wake-up call."

Britain is getting tidier new research shows



New figures from Keep Britain Tidy show some improvement in the amount of litter found in Britain's streets, parks and public spaces but there is still more work to do. The Local Environmental Quality Survey England (LEQSE), funded by **Defra**, showed that in the last year the number of sites where non-alcoholic drinks cans and bottles were found was down from 57% of areas surveyed to 51%, with small decreases in the number of sites with cigarette ends, fast food litter, broken glass and discarded food.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2010/100211a.htm>

Help for thousands seriously injured at work



Thousands of people with serious industrial diseases who miss out because they cannot trace their employers' insurance records should be able to claim compensation following Government proposals announced this week. In a consultation paper the **DWP** sets out plans to create an Employers' Liability Tracing Office to help people track down their employers' liability insurance policies, and an Employers' Liability Insurance Bureau to provide a fund of last resort for those who are unable to trace them.

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/newsroom/press-releases/2010/february-2010/dwp025-10-100210.shtml>

National Minimum Wage workers: Travel and subsistence expenses schemes



The Treasury has launched a consultation that looks at addressing the problem of the potentially exploitative arrangements which are implemented for some temporary workers paid at or near the National Minimum Wage (NMW).

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/consult_minimumwage_expenses.pdf

Opposition Parties

Liberal Democrats launch high streets policy



Liberal Democrat Leader **Nick Clegg** has set out plans to revitalise Britain's high streets, ensure the future of the Post Office, and help small businesses establish and grow in a fairer marketplace.

[http://www.libdems.org.uk/latest_news_detail.aspx?title=Liberal Democrats launch plans to revitalise Britain's high streets&pPK=56d33f4c-fa03-4776-8fe8-8aa57f27c119](http://www.libdems.org.uk/latest_news_detail.aspx?title=Liberal_Democrats_launch_plans_to_revitalise_Britain%e2%80%99s_high_streets&pPK=56d33f4c-fa03-4776-8fe8-8aa57f27c119)

Parliament

Written Questions: Food: Supermarkets



Jessica Morden, Newport East, PPS to Secretary of State for Wales: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance his Department provides to supermarkets on how to use out of date food which is still safe to eat.



Jim Fitzpatrick, Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: The Government do not currently provide specific guidance to supermarkets on what to do with 'out of date' food which is still safe to eat. This would include food past its "best before" date, which indicates the period in which food is of optimum quality, but after which is still perfectly edible. It would also include food past its "display until" date, as these are used for stock control, and although retailers may remove food from sale once the "display until" date has passed, it has no bearing on food safety or quality. "Use by", however, is mandatory for food that will, after that date, become unsafe to eat and should be thrown away.

Where it is of sufficient quality, consuming food that has passed its "best before" or "display until" (but not past its "use by") date is, environmentally, a much better option than treating it using even the most advanced technologies. Organisations such as FareShare collect such good quality surplus food and redistribute it to vulnerable people in the community. Many supermarkets already support FareShare, and the Secretary of State has recently written to supermarket CEOs to ask them to think about how this support can be increased further still.

The Government are also collaborating with WRAP (the Waste and Resources Action Programme), the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the food industry to improve the clarity and consistency of food date marks and storage and usage guidance. The aim of this project is to improve date labelling practice and consumer understanding, thus reducing food waste while increasing understanding of food safety.

Written Questions: Alcohol: Under-age Sales



Sandra Gidley, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Health: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many retailers were convicted of an offence of selling alcohol to under-age people in the last 12 months.



Alan Campbell, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office: In 2008 there were 459 prosecutions leading to 366 convictions. During the same period 2,824 penalty notices for disorder were issued by the police.

Written Questions: Retail Questions



Lord Lee of Trafford, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Defence and for Culture, Media and Sport, Liberal Democrat Whip: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the Working Group on Traditional Retail Markets has met; if so, who attended; what were the main decisions taken; and when it is next due to meet.



Lord McKenzie of Luton, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Department for Work and Pensions: The first meeting of the Working Group on Retail Markets was held on 1 December 2009 and was attended by the right honourable Rosie Winterton MP, CLG Minister for Local Government and Minister for Regional Economic Development and Co-ordination at BIS, CLG officials, senior officials from BIS, DCMS, DEFRA, DH, DWP, the Food Standards Agency, and the Local Government Association's markets champion, Councillor Dave Goddard. The Retail Markets Alliance co-ordinated markets industry representation at the meeting. Representatives from Country Markets and a social enterprise market also attended.

At the meeting the working group agreed:

- To publish the terms of reference for the group on the newly created webpage for markets on the CLG departmental website:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/citiesandregions/regeneration/approachretail/markets/>

- To meet up three times a year and report on progress to the right honourable Rosie Winterton MP, CLG minister with responsibility for markets, and Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Minister for Food at BIS after the second meeting of the working group in the spring;
- To set up ad hoc project groups for specific work strands;
- To develop a good practice guide that will be directed both to markets managers and the market traders representatives in markets to share good practice and ideas of good market management and finance, and;
- To develop skills and encourage new market traders in market business start up and develop entrepreneurship skills for existing traders.

The working group has since agreed to set up a further project group to look at market management models. The next meeting of the working group will be held in March 2010.

Written Questions: Carbon Emissions



Anne Milton, Shadow Minister for Health: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps are being taking to encourage retailers to reduce their carbon emissions; what representations have been received on campaigns organised by not-for-profit organisations to encourage retailers to conserve energy; and if he will make a statement.



Joan Ruddock, Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change: The Government has in place a number of measures to encourage retailers to reduce carbon emissions. These include the CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme, which will enter into force this year; advice and support, including through the Carbon Trust and Business Link; and a range of financial incentives to encourage energy efficient investment, including Enhanced Capital Allowances and interest free energy efficiency loans for small and medium enterprises. DECC also works closely with DEFRA in efforts to help retailers reduce carbon emissions from products and services.

In addition, the retail sector and the Government are working together to develop a low carbon action plan for retail. BIS, DEFRA and DECC are currently working in partnership with the British Retail Consortium and the Association of Convenience Stores to identify key priorities and actions to improve the environmental performance of the retail sector.

I am aware of representations on this subject from the 10:10 campaign; these are being considered as part of the work outlined above.

Written Questions: Non-domestic rates: Empty Property



Stewart Jackson, Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Meriden of 5 January 2010 on non-domestic rates: empty property, if he will place in the Library a copy of the representations made by the other groups listed.



Barbara Follet, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, Minister for the East of England: The representations from the: Association of Convenience Stores; The Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire; Weymouth and Portland Chamber of Commerce; and The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, have been placed in the Library of the House.

My answer of 5 January 2010 incorrectly recorded the Weymouth and Portland Chamber of Commerce representation as being two representations, one from the Weymouth Chamber of Commerce and one from the Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce. On further investigation, the letter from the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation was in fact from an individual member writing in a private capacity and not a representation from the Institute itself. It has, therefore, not been placed in the Library of the House on data protection grounds.

Our reforms to empty property relief are principled and right for the long-term. They provide a strong incentive on owners to bring empty property back into use, helping to improve access to premises for businesses and so to exert a downward pressure on commercial rents. However, we provided owners with real help to manage short-term pressures in a difficult property market by exempting all empty properties with rateable values up to £15,000 from business rates in 2009-10.

We have listened to the continued concerns of owners and are extending the temporary measure for a further 12 months-to cover the whole of 2010-11-and we are uprating the threshold to £18,000 in line with the general movement of property values at revaluation.

Written Questions: Non-domestic rates: Valuation



Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Meriden of 16 December 2009, Official Report, column 1298W, on non-domestic rates, what the (a) postcode and (b) percentage change in rateable value was in respect of each of the hereditaments included in the answer.



Barbara Follet: The following table gives the 50 hereditaments in Greater London, with their post codes, which showed, as at 29 May 2009, the largest percentage increase in rateable value between the compilation of the 2005 and the 2010 Ratings List. It also shows the percentage change in each hereditaments bill between 2005 and 2010 after transitional relief has been applied, but before other reliefs. Table available at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100210/text/100210w0016.htm>

The figures in the table are based on those in the Department's 2009 consultation document entitled: "The Transitional Arrangements for the Non-Domestic Rating Revaluation 2010 in England". A copy of this can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/nndrrevaluation2010>

Early Day Motion: Labelling of red tractor farm products and British food Production

Lindsay Hoyle; Nigel Evans; David Crausby; and Jim Dobbin: Tabled the following motion:

That this House welcomes the launch of unified labelling across the Red Tractor assurance schemes; acknowledges that assured food indicated by the Red Tractor logo is getting an ever-increasing profile, making it more important that all sector standards comply with the same core values; notes that improvements to the scheme will help shoppers identify that the products they are buying are from a Red Tractor farm; believes that the clearer labelling system will also promote positive messages about the high quality of British food production, in turn supporting the

Government's food vision and encouraging consumers to buy British; and calls on the Government to pledge vocal support for any measures aimed towards strengthening British food-producing industries.

Scotland

Rates fall for most Scottish Businesses

Scotland's small businesses received extra funding with news that 60% of businesses will see their rates fall by an average of £1300. The news was announced by SNP Finance Secretary **John Swinney** as he set out the support available to help small businesses.

<http://www.snp.org/node/16263>

Stakeholder

Workers face second year of pay freezes

Workers will face a second year of having their pay frozen even though inflation is starting to increase, a new report predicts. The Labour Research Department (LRD) said the rate of wage freezes was accelerating despite RPI inflation increasing by 2.4pc in the year to December. Pay freezes were now a bigger proportion of all wage deals than at any time during the recession, accounting for a third of settlements in recent months, it was found.

<http://www.lrdpublications.org.uk/>

UK sales fall prompts fears of 'double-dip' recession

Fears that Britain may already be succumbing to a "double-dip" recession materialised as it emerged that 2010 opened with the worst January for the high street since comparable records began 15 years ago. Figures from the British Retail Consortium sales monitor registered a 0.7pc drop in like-for-like sales last month, compared with a year before – the steepest January fall since the survey began in 1995, and in stark contrast to economists' expectations of an increase of 0.5pc.

<http://www.brc.org.uk/>

Post office closures consultation a 'sham'

The national consultation that led to the government's controversial post office closure programme was deeply flawed and so ineffective that it was regarded by many consumers as "a sham" according to research carried out by the consumer champion Consumer Focus. It reveals that although record numbers of people responded to the exercise, the Post Office

failed to engage with them and missed the opportunity to understand how the planned cutbacks would destroy local communities.

CVAs do not offer level playing field, says HMV

The use of Company Voluntary Arrangements on the high street is coming under fresh fire, with retail giants such as HMV calling for a "level playing field" in terms of property payments as use of the insolvency procedure continues to grow. The CVA procedure typically allows a retailer to agree compensation with landlords for closing stores and slashing rents. The alternative to a CVA is often an administration that results in big job losses.

All party line-up of speakers to appear at FSB Annual Conference

Small businesses will be hearing from a cross party line-up at the FSB's Annual Conference this year. Lord Mandelson and the First Minister of Scotland Alex Salmond will both address the conference, held at the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre, as small businesses examine how they can support a full economic recovery this year. Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron and Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, Nick Clegg, have also been invited. The event – the largest non-Governmental small business conference in the country – will be opened by the Lord Provost of Aberdeen, Peter Stephen and the theme will be 'The Brave Heart of Small Businesses'.

<http://www.fsb.org.uk/News.aspx?loc=general&rec=5898>

Banks facing commercial property meltdown

All over the UK, negative equity is now widespread in the whole of the commercial property sector - one informed estimate says it could be as much as £50bn. In the case of shopping centres, it is now common for centres to be worth less than the cash loaned by banks to allow the owners to buy them during the boom. Banks have been renegotiating loan terms and extending loan periods hoping that the problems would be resolved in what is known as "extend, amend and pretend" or "delay and pray".

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/8504770.stm>

Supermarkets discounting alcohol despite calls for curbs

Supermarkets are offering more discounts on alcohol despite calls to end special deals. The latest statistics reveal a quarter of the all beer sold online at Tesco, Asda, Ocado and Sainsburys was on offer last month, up seven per cent on the same period a year ago. Increases were also seen on the sale of spirits and wine. Chief medical officers are calling for minimum prices per unit of alcohol, warning lower prices are linked to greater alcohol-related health problems.

Employers set to keep squeezing pay

Employers who did not offer their staff pay increases during 2009 are likely to continue to freeze salaries for the rest of this year, analysis published today reveals. The Labour Research Department (LRD), an independent consultancy that conducts research on behalf of trades unions, said that many workers would face a pay freeze for the second year running over the next 12 months, despite Britain's economy moving into recovery and signs that inflation is now beginning to return.

'Tidal wave' of business failure feared as tax help scheme ends

The Government has been warned that it faces a succession of company closures and redundancies when a scheme to allow firms to delay their tax payments expires. Experts say the 'Time to Pay' programme has been a resounding success and has kept many businesses afloat in the recession, since HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) would normally have first call on their money and could have pushed them into liquidation or administration. Insolvency firms expect that the £4.8bn scheme, which has helped 160,000 businesses employing 1.2 million people, will be axed after the expected May general election, so companies will have to stump up their delayed VAT, national insurance and other tax payments.

Corporate Manslaughter fines to reach millions

Businesses convicted of the criminal offence of corporate manslaughter can be fined millions of pounds with a £500,000 minimum under final guidelines published yesterday. The Sentencing Guidelines Council (SGC), the body that sets sentencing bands for criminal offences, said fines "may be millions of pounds and should seldom be below £500,000" in its final guidance document. "The advice is clear – punitive and significant fines should be imposed both to deter and to reflect public concern at avoidable loss of life," the SGC said.

UK recession has left one in eight shops empty

One in eight shops in Britain's town centres are empty, according to a new report, and the country faces a "fundamental reshaping of high streets". The alarming findings highlight the damage that the recession has helped to inflict on high streets. The worst affected locations include Margate, in Kent, where 27pc of shops are empty, and Wolverhampton, in the Midlands, where vacancy rates have hit 24pc. Overall, 12.4pc of shops in Britain were empty at the end of December, according to the Local Data Company, which analysed almost 700 locations and for the first time included town-centre shopping developments.

Family of shopkeeper jailed for attacking violent customer criticises prosecutors

The family of a shopkeeper who was jailed after defending himself against a violent teenage customer hit out at his prosecution after appeal judges ordered the man's immediate release.

The judges cut Sangha's term to four months, resulting in his immediate release from HMP Hewell, in Worcestershire, where he has been serving his sentence.

Independent bookshops closing at a rate of 'three a week'

More than one in ten independent bookshops went out of business last year as the sector suffered its worst slump in a generation. Aggressive discounting by supermarkets and internet retailers combined with difficult trading conditions meant that independent membership of **The Booksellers Association** fell by 101 to 1,289 shops, the trade body said.

http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article7024007.ece