

WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

Week ending Friday 31 July

New commissioner to tackle late payment culture

Government has set out proposals for a Small Business Commissioner to help tackle payment disputes and other unfair practices. The Small Business Commissioner's responsibilities will include helping small businesses handle disputes over late payment and other supply chain practices, as well as helping firms access advice, support, mediation and conciliation services, with the power to look into complaints and report on its findings. The proposals are linked to government's pledge to deliver a small business conciliation service and to tackle unacceptable payment practices. This is one of a number of measures to tackle late payment. The Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 introduced a reporting requirement for the UK's largest companies to report on their payment policies and practices. The Small Business Commissioner will be able to use this data to name and shame those linked to unfair payment practices.

(Source: [BIS](#))

Liberal Democrat shadow team confirmed

Liberal Democrat Leader Tim Farron MP has confirmed his shadow team and spokespeople this week, which include:

- Economics: Baroness Susan Kramer
- Foreign Affairs/Chief Whip/Leader of the house: Tom Brake MP
- Education: John Pugh MP
- Business: Lorely Burt
- Energy and Climate Change: Lynne Featherstone
- Local Government: Mayor of Watford, Cllr Dorothy Thornhill
- Transport: Baroness Jenny Randerson
- Environment and Rural Affairs: Baroness Kate Parminter
- Culture Media and Sport: Baroness Jane Bonham-Carter

(Source: [Liberal Democrats](#))

Environmental organisations and the AA question VED changes

The Automobile Association (AA) has joined environmental organisations in questioning the changes to Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) announced in the Summer Budget. An AA survey of motorists demonstrated that 59% thought the VED changes would penalise low emission vehicles. In an open letter to the Prime Minister ten environmental groups also cited the VED changes as a policy that could have negative environmental impacts. Chancellor George Osborne had announced that CO₂ banding for VED would remain in the first year, introducing a flat standard rate, with the exception of zero emission vehicles, in subsequent years.

(Source: [BBC](#) and [Green Alliance](#))

Temporary relaxation of EU drivers' hours rules

The industrial action at the Port of Calais and incidents at the Euro Tunnel terminal and Channel Tunnel has caused major disruption to cross-Channel commercial vehicle traffic through the Tunnel and to some ferry routes to and from Kent. This has resulted in Operation Stack being implemented on the M20. The Department of Transport has agreed to a temporary and limited, exceptional relaxation of the enforcement of EU drivers' hours rules. The temporary relaxation applies only to drivers whose journeys are delayed due to the industrial action or disruption at Calais and who:

- have used a cross channel ferry or Eurotunnel to reach or leave Kent
- are waiting within Kent for departure to mainland Europe
- are driving a commercial vehicle operated from an operating centre in Kent and whose journey has been disrupted

This temporary relaxation applies from 00:01 on Thursday 30 July 2015 and will run for a period of 30 days at the times when Operation Stack is in place.

(Source: [DfT](#))

CBI – Quarterly Industrial Trends Survey

According to the latest CBI Quarterly Industrial Trends Survey, manufacturing growth continued in the three months to July, but exports are set to weaken. The survey of 445 firms reported slower growth in total new orders in the quarter to July, though it remained above average. Growth in total new orders, output and numbers employed are projected to remain firm over the next quarter. The volume of new export orders rose slightly, but the outlook for the next quarter is gloomier. Survey respondents continue to report sharp falls in competitiveness in the EU, likely linked to Sterling rises earlier in the year. Political and economic conditions abroad were also seen as a constraint on orders by a significant number of firms. Investment intentions remain broadly similar to the last quarter, staying above their long term averages, with plans for spending on building and plant and machinery improving slightly.

(Source: [CBI](#))

Week ahead

The House of Commons and House of Lords are on summer recess until 7 September

