

Many thanks for all the enquiries about the 'Policy Portfolio leads' - I will be in touch very shortly.

'Rates' are the big issue this month - but there are other issues too, including your chance to tell the EU about the admin headaches it causes and an opportunity to 'manage' Government office!

Rates – an explanation and suggestions for action.

Rates! Check your valuation

Rates - good news and bad news for the SW

Your comments please on

Business Regulation and Employment law

Tax or VAT payments – help withdrawn

No Win No Fee Solicitors

EHO, HSE and Trading Standards

Diary Date – February 19th to 21st for the SW Policy Weekend

Job advert for a Non-Executive Director, Government Office for the South West

Admin headache – tell the EU what makes matters worse

Food Standards Agency warns food business operators about bogus emails

Rates – an explanation and suggestions for action.

To keep the business rates system fair and up-to-date, all rateable values are reviewed every 5 years to make sure they reflect changes in the market.

By law, the valuations are based on the rent paid in April 2008. It is really bad luck that that date is just about at the top of the market – but that is the law and it cannot be changed to affect things that have already happened.

What we can influence and what we are trying to influence is the form the transition relief will take. In the past the 'relief' has been to limit any increases to no more than 20%. In a few cases this has resulted in businesses reaching the end of the transition period and still having an increase of 30% or more to take them to the new valuation.

We are trying to get any increases staggered over the whole period so that nobody faces a massive hike at the end of the period – but we do not know if the computer system can cope with that.

If you want to lobby, call for a better transition system as described above and for a small business rate relief scheme as good as that in Scotland.

For yourself, we strongly recommend you read and follow the suggestions outlined below.

Rates! Check your valuation

If you own or occupy business premises you should check the details of your business rates valuation as soon as you receive it to make sure you pay the correct business rates. The valuations are going out this month and will be used by local councils to calculate next year's business rates bills.

The new valuations are effective from 1 April 2010 and clearly show the details of the business property, whether it is a shop, an office or a warehouse, including the number of rooms, their description and size, and the value applied to each area. For pubs, and other licensed property, the valuation will show the levels of fair maintainable trade, instead of floor space.

There is a new website – www.voa.gov.uk/2010 - where you can compare your valuation with others and make contact if there are any issues. All of this can be done without any professional knowledge of the business rates system.

If you are really unhappy about your new valuation seek professional advice. DO NOT get involved with any organisation that asks for fees up front.

Rates - good news and bad news for the SW

And as there are changes to the property valuations, there are also changes to the Small Business rate relief limits.

The lower level has risen from £5000 to £6000. Below this figure businesses applying for the relief will pay just half rates. The upper limit has increased from £10,000 to £12,000. So businesses applying for the relief will get a reduction on their rates, so long as their rateable value is less than £12,000. This relief is paid for by other ratepayers. But if your rateable value is less than £18,000 (up from £14,999) you can apply for a special rate.

Full details can be found at

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1348215.pdf>

The bad news is that properties in the SW have increased in value by more than most other English Regions. So there could well be some members who used to get the relief, but with the new valuations, even with the higher levels of relief, no longer qualify.

Your feedback please:-

Business Regulation and Employment law – how is this affecting you? Are you aware of or have noticed any effects from the Government's approach to 'business regulation and in particular employment legislation'.

FSB reps will be discussing this at a meeting on November 5th and up to date feedback would be really helpful

Tax or VAT payments – help withdrawn

The FSB is looking for examples of businesses that used HMRC's Business Payment Support Service and are now having it withdrawn. This covers agreements made to pay tax over a period instead of on one date. [Email us](#) your experiences.

No Win No Fee Solicitors

At the first inkling of any problems we should all check our insurance policies and FSB membership details to see if we are covered – but all too often we forget or think this is something simple we have dealt with before and have no need to 'bother' the FSB's legal helpline.

And then we find the other side has employed a 'no win, no fee' solicitor. And because we did not 'bother' the legal helpline we are now without cover and on our own. Typical examples are where there is an accident or it involves employment law.

Several members have been in this situation recently and literally had to prove their innocence – or pay the people to go away – ouch!

If you have been in this situation in the last year or so, it would be really helpful to have the details for use as a case study – and I will anonymise the information if preferred.

Food and Hospitality Businesses – have you noticed a change in the way regulation is inspected and enforced?

The Environmental Health Officers (EHO), the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Trading Standards are co-operating in Devon, Dorset and Cornwall to improve the way regulation is implemented. The various regulations around the food and hospitality industries have grown like Topsy and the resulting inspection and enforcement structure leaves a lot to be desired.

The various bodies are working together across Dorset, Devon and Cornwall and trying to reduce the number of inspections; where possible having one inspection across all legislation.

Have members noticed any difference?

What do you think?

Please send your feedback on the items above or anything else to Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

Diary Date – February 19th to 21st for the SW Policy Weekend – following the highly successful event held in January this year, the SW Policy Unit will be holding a similar event February 19th to 21st at the Wessex Hotel, Street. Regions will be invited to send members new to Policy as well as senior regional officers. Please get in touch if you are interested.

Job advert for a Non-Executive Director, Government Office for the South West.

Government Office for the South West is seeking to appoint a Non-Executive Director to join their Management Board and would particularly welcome applicants from the private sector, in order to complement the skills and expertise of their existing Board members.

The post holder will add value by offering independent and constructive challenge to the Board. The post is non-remunerated, but reasonable travelling expenses will be met.

The post is advertised on the Public Appointments website (<http://www.publicappts-vacs.gov.uk/>) and further details can be obtained from jon.bright@gosw.gsi.gov.uk or astrid.chaplin@gosw.gsi.gov.uk

Admin headache – tell the EU what makes matters worse

Following FSB lobbying, the EU now has an on-line questionnaire for you to register your problems and suggestions on administrative burdens. Your input will be taken into account in the preparation of EU measures reducing administrative burdens. Contributions and feedback from the Commission will be summarised in periodic reports published on the Enterprise and Industry website.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/admin-burdens-reduction/form_en.htm

The questionnaire will be online til December 31st

Food Standards Agency warns food business operators about bogus emails

The Food Standards Agency is warning food business operators about bogus emails that appear to be a financial scam to extort money from companies wishing to export rice to the UK. The emails are using the FSA Scotland name as a basis for the submission of information and demand payment of £650 for a registration fee.

<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2009/aug/bogusemails>

And as ever any comments or information about issues affecting your business are always very welcome.

Vivienne Rayner MBE
SouthWest Policy Manager

vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk