



The Elf on the Shelf yawned and stretched. It was 2 a.m. and time for his daily Zoom call with the parliament of Elves to refine the “naughty” and “nice” standards for 2020.

The connection buffered annoyingly and he joined part-way through an animated discussion on whether eating your sister’s chocolate should confine a child to the naughty list. Santa, who was chairing the call, had to intervene. “I have told you before,” he said, “we are not going to sweat the small stuff this year. Think of the big picture. These children have been under a lot of pressure and frustration is bound to creep in. I am not going to worry about minor misdemeanours. Most of them deserve a treat.” The Elves scribbled some amendments and, by magic, Santa’s nice list grew even longer.



Santa was feeling concerned about how he was going to fund the children’s presents this year. He remembered, with some embarrassment, how he had contemplated putting the reindeers on furlough, when the Coronavirus **Job** (1) Retention Scheme was first introduced by the UK government. Rudolf the **Red** (2) Nosed Reindeer had spoken out very strongly on this point. “Look, Santa,” he had said, “we only work for one night of the year, and we get paid in carrots. It is not appropriate to benefit from government money in this way. You may end up under investigation from HMRC, and what sort of example would that set?” Rudolf was right, of course. However, Santa had benefitted from government support of a different kind – he patted his tummy as he remembered how he and Mrs. Claus had taken full advantage of the **Eat** (3) Out to Help Out scheme, introduced by Chancellor **Rishi** (4) Sunak in August. Oh yes, they had helped out a lot of restaurants (incognito, of course).

Santa congratulated himself on keeping up to speed on pensions news this year, thanks to the weekly updates issued by Squire Patton **Boggs** (5). He thanked his lucky stars that he was not in the position of MP Guy **Opperman** (6), Minister for Pensions and **Financial** (7) Inclusion. Imagine trying to get a pension schemes bill through parliament this year? On the whole, Santa was in favour of the new legislation and was looking forward to the introduction of the pensions **dashboard** (8), which would allow him to see all of his pension savings in one place. He also hoped that the change to transfer legislation would lead to fewer pension **scams** (9), instigated by those seeking to line their own pockets at the expense of individual pension savers. And, looking around at the melting snow in Lapland, he had to agree that environmental, social and **governance** (10) (ESG) issues and, in particular, **climate** (11) change merited further consideration – although he acknowledged the difficulties for trustees when setting investment strategies. As sponsoring employer of the Elves and Reindeers Pension Plan, Santa also hoped that the good people in Brighton at the office of **The Pensions Regulator** (12) would be transparent and pragmatic in terms of exercising their new powers.

Santa was distracted from his musings by a further argument on naughty and nice standards breaking out in the parliament of Elves. He gave his opinion that rubbing slime into your brother’s hair was not significant (this year only). The Elves were a fractious bunch, although he really could not have managed without them. They had worked night and day in their rainbow-coloured workshops to meet the ever-changing demands of 2020. The number of requests this year for arts and crafts materials was phenomenal. And many ladies were asking for animal print face masks. Imagine that? Last year, these counted as fancy dress, not fashion accessories!

Before bringing the Zoom meeting to a close with a “Ho! Ho! Ho!” Santa updated the Elves on the magic potion that he had spent all year perfecting. The special concoction, to bring hope, health and happiness (made from fairy dust and unicorn hair), would be deposited down every chimney as he passed by on 24 December.

The Elf on the Shelf turned off his laptop and returned to the position that he had been left in, dangling by one foot from the mantelpiece. This job was not very dignified! If only the children knew what power he held as an MEP (member of Elf Parliament). He finally dozed off to sleep, dreaming of Santa’s magic potion and the prospect of a promotion to the Elf Cabinet.

**We hope that Santa’s magic potion works for all of our readers.
All the best for the festive season.**

Can you fill in the blanks for the chance to win a prize? Please email your entry to Lynn.Housecroft@squirepb.com by 5 p.m. on Thursday 17 December. In the event of more than one correct entry a winner will be drawn at random.