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“ALARMING” RISE IN CONSUMER DECREES

There were more small claims decrees for debt against Scottish consumers in Q1 2017 than in any other first quarter on record, according to figures released today by Registry Trust.

Registry Trust is the non-profit organisation which collects decree and judgment information from jurisdictions across the UK, including small claims and summary causes and ordinary cause decrees in Scotland.

In the first quarter of the year, 6,879 debt decrees were registered against consumers in Scotland, over a third higher than the same period last year. The average value of a consumer decree rose seven percent to £2,692, bringing the combined value of all decrees to £18.5m, almost 50 percent higher than Q1 2016.

The trends for small claims and summary causes and ordinary cause decrees were broadly consistent, albeit the increase in the number of small claims and summary causes decrees was larger.

Only 3.71 percent of decrees were marked as satisfied in Q1 2017, far lower than the 11.83 percent of satisfied debt judgments in England and Wales, where satisfaction rates are generally higher owing to legal differences.

Under a new initiative from Registry Trust, lenders are being encouraged to notify the Trust directly when a decree has been settled to their satisfaction. At the moment, the onus lies with the consumer to take the action, which is logical but does not work well enough in practice. Lender notification would make an immediate difference in Scotland, helping transform access to credit for thousands of consumers.

“The increase in the number of decrees looks alarming, particularly as the average value is rising at the same time,” said Registry Trust chairman Malcolm Hurlston CBE. “Elsewhere in the United Kingdom consumer judgments have risen while average values have fallen.”

In Q1 2017 Registry Trust received 8,542 requests to search the register for Scotland online at www.trustonline.org.uk. TrustOnline allows anyone to search for decrees and similar information registered against businesses and consumers in any jurisdiction across the British Isles and Ireland. "It is a unique benefit for consumers to be able to check the debt record of any person or business with which they may be transacting," said Mr Hurlston. "Negative information would certainly make me think twice."

ENDS

Statistics

- All consumer decrees Q1 2017 (compared with Q1 2016)
 - Total: 6,879 (up 36 percent)
 - Value: £18.5m (up 46 percent)
 - Average: £2,692 (up seven percent)
- Small claims and summary cause decrees Q1 2017
 - Total: 6,326 (up 38 percent)
 - Value: £10.3m (up 44 percent)
 - Average: £1,622 (up five percent)
- Ordinary cause decrees Q1 2017
 - Total: 553 (up 18 percent)
 - Value: £8.3m (up 48 percent)
 - Average: £14,936 (up 26 percent)

Notes for editors

Registry Trust is a non-profit company established in 1985 to become the Registrar of County Court Judgments. It maintains public records of decree and judgment information for jurisdictions in the British Isles and Ireland. These records are an important factor in avoiding debt and in supporting responsible lending decisions, which in turn underpin a modern and stable economy.

Registry Trust holds a public register of Scottish decrees. By agreement with the Scottish Courts Administration Service it collects details of undefended money decrees entered in the small claims, summary and ordinary causes sheriffs' courts in Scotland.

From November 28 2016, a change to Scottish law was evoked whereby 'simple procedure' replaced the previous small claims procedure and part of the summary cause procedure. Simple procedure is a court process designed to provide a speedy,

inexpensive and informal way to resolve disputes where the monetary value does not exceed £5,000.

Decrees are removed from the register if paid in full within one calendar month of the issue date and Registry Trust is informed, but will otherwise remain registered for six years. If fully paid outside the one calendar month, defendants can apply to have the record marked as 'satisfied' to improve their credit rating. Failure to pay within one month is proof of unmanaged debt.

Anyone may search for entries against a named person or business at a stated address or a corporate body in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland by visiting Registry Trust's website www.trustonline.org.uk or by writing to Registry Trust, 153–157 Cleveland Street, London W1T 6QW.

To view the full set of statistics, please visit www.trustonline.org.uk/press.

There is currently no register of liability orders which leads to relative underpayment of council tax and business rates.

For more information about Registry Trust's aims, structure and accountability as well as information about its range of products beyond the register of decrees and judgments please visit www.registry-trust.org.uk. The site includes RT View—free interactive mapping software which displays aggregated decree and judgment data for Scotland, England and Wales by region, local authority and ward back to 2001.

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