

# Press release: Tax rules for second-homes to be reviewed by ministers

A business rates 'loophole' which could be costing English councils millions in lost Council Tax is to be reviewed by ministers with a consultation launched today (7 November 2018).

Currently, second-home owners pay Council Tax on their properties including when the property is available to rent infrequently during the year.

Properties are valued for business rates when owners declare their property is available to let as 'holiday accommodation' for 140 days or more in a year.

Any property registered for business rates, rather than Council Tax, is likely to qualify for small business rate relief. This provides 100% relief from business rates, so no tax is due on properties with a rateable value of £12,000 or less.

Around 47,000 holiday lets in England are liable for business rates, of which circa 96% have rateable values of £12,000 or less. Currently there is no requirement for evidence to be produced that a property has actually been commercially let.

Genuine businesses can claim the relief to which they are entitled. However, the government is aware of concerns that owners of second homes which do not fall into this category, could exploit the system by not paying Council Tax, whilst still using local services.

Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak MP said:

We're aware of concerns that the current arrangements for valuing second homes for business rates and claiming relief do not provide strong enough protections against abuse.

We are seeking views on whether we should strengthen the checks already in place to ensure second-home owners have to pay Council Tax, while ensuring genuine holiday let businesses are able to demonstrate they are eligible for business rates relief.

The consultation will seek views on whether the current criteria should be strengthened to ensure second home owners are contributing to the local economy through the proper payment of council tax, or, for those genuinely renting out their property and supporting tourism, business rates.

View the [consultation](#) on this website – it will run until 16 January 2019.

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## **Press release: PM call with President Ghani: 7 November 2018**

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

This afternoon the Prime Minister spoke with President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan. The Prime Minister reiterated the UK's firm commitment to Afghanistan and congratulated President Ghani on the achievement of the first Afghan-led and secured election since 2001, praising the courage of the Afghan people who voted. The Prime Minister and President Ghani agreed that the elections mark an important step forward.

The Prime Minister commended President Ghani for his offer to the Taliban of talks without preconditions and the leaders agreed that the prospects for peace are more promising than they have been for a number of years. The Prime Minister pledged the UK's continuing support for a political settlement.

Both the Prime Minister and President Ghani paid tribute to the sacrifices made by UK and Afghan military personnel in Afghanistan and their continuing efforts in pursuit of peace.

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## [Press release: Women in Defence awards showcase Dstl scientists](#)

270 guests including 30 finalists from across the Defence world attended the third annual Women in Defence UK awards. Hosting the event was BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour presenter Dame Jenni Murray with the Secretary of State for Defence, The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP announcing the winners.

Dstl's Professor Petra Oyston scooped the top award in the Innovation category for her work in developing synthetic biology techniques for the next generation of materials for protection, such as use in body armour for military personnel. Petra's work included using genetically modified E. coli to provide a toughening mechanism in ceramic material and producing high strength adhesives from barnacle genes.

On receiving her award, Petra said:

I feel very surprised, there was some very stiff competition, and some absolutely brilliant women here tonight. It just speaks volumes about the high quality work we do at Dstl, and I thank the fabulous team that I've had surrounding me delivering brilliant innovative solutions for Defence.

During his opening speech, Gavin Williamson, said:

This year's nominees hail from right across Defence. Some command teams and others lead cyber. Some specialise in intelligence and others from industry. These are women who have been deployed across the world from Belize to Bosnia, from Kosovo to Kenya, who have fought terror and made Salisbury safe. Not all will take home awards, but each and every one are winners – strengthening our nation and representing the very best of British.

Other Dstl finalists included Penny Brookes, nominated in the Most Collaborative category for her work building an international research team that is delivering cutting-edge forensic techniques to benefit defence and security. Carolyn Stothard was nominated in the Unsung Heroine category – a dedicated line-manager, mentor and mediator who supports many with mental health difficulties and neurodevelopmental conditions.

Dstl's Chief Executive, Gary Aitkenhead said:

It's been an absolutely tremendous evening. I am a father of three

daughters, I was thinking about them growing and achieving what some of the women here tonight have achieved and to see three Dstl finalists doing fantastic things and for one of them to get a top award is absolutely thrilling – it's been a brilliant evening, well done to all of them.