

Press release: Budget to support new housing, high streets and local services

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP welcomed [the Budget](#) and said it will boost efforts to build the homes communities need, restore the dream of home ownership, help our high streets and support councils to deliver local services.

Building on the current comprehensive package of reform and targeted investment to deliver the homes the country needs, the measures outlined in the Budget include:

- continuing to help people onto the housing ladder by announcing a new Help to Buy scheme from April 2021 and exploring proposals to deliver a new wave of shared ownership homes
- supporting councils and housing associations by removing borrowing restrictions to enable them to deliver a new generation of council housing and affordable homes
- further planning reforms to make the most of available space for homes and ensuring developers pay their fair share to support new and existing communities

Recognising the pressures faced by councils, almost £1 billion of extra funding will be provided to help deliver the services communities need and support the most vulnerable residents:

- a £650 million boost for adults and children's social care, including £240 million to support vulnerable people over winter months and help manage the impact on the NHS

This is alongside a package to support high-streets meet the new challenges brought about by changing shopping habits, providing short-term relief for struggling retailers and a long-term vision for town centres.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

This Budget provides positive news for those struggling to get on the housing ladder with certainty given on the future of Help to Buy and freeing up councils to deliver a new generation of council housing.

It also supports communities across the country by helping councils deliver services for their most vulnerable residents while also helping our high streets to flourish.

Building the homes communities need

The Chancellor has confirmed that the biggest barrier to councils building homes, the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap, has been removed entirely – freeing up councils to deliver a new generation of council housing – up to an estimated 10,000 homes a year.

In a move to help more first-time buyers get a foot on the housing ladder, a new Help to Buy scheme has been announced from April 2021 – restricted to first-time buyers and including regional property price caps to ensure it is more targeted on people who need it most.

And with most first-time buyers now exempt from paying Stamp Duty following last year's Budget – benefitting over 120,000 buyers so far – this year's Budget went a step further by extending this relief to all first-time buyers of shared ownership properties worth up to £500,000 – and making this retrospective, so any first-time buyer who has made such a purchase since the last Budget will benefit.

To make sure that the infrastructure is in place to support new and existing communities ahead of development of new homes, the Housing Infrastructure Fund has been boosted by £500 million – bringing the total to £5.5 billion with the potential to unlock up to 650,000 homes.

Grant funding of £291 million for vital infrastructure on the Docklands Light Railway in East London has been announced, meaning less pressure on existing services in the area and the potential to unlock over 18,000 homes.

The next wave of deals with 9 housing associations were announced, allocating £653 million from the Affordable Homes Programme to deliver over 13,000 additional affordable housing starts by March 2022 and £1 billion of new guarantees to support small and medium sized builders, implemented by the British Business Bank.

A [consultation](#) on a package of planning reform to allow greater flexibility to extend existing buildings upwards and allow a change of use has been launched – to ensure that the planning system is speeding up the delivery of homes and supporting the regeneration of high streets.

Support was confirmed for up to 500 neighbourhoods to develop plans to allocate or permission land for homes sold at a discount.

The government has also committed to working with local partners in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc to maximise sustainable economic growth in a response to the National Infrastructure Commission's report.

Almost £1 billion extra support for local services

This Budget has provided a boost of £650 million to help councils support the most vulnerable people in their communities. Of this £240 million will be focused on winter pressures next year with flexibility to use the remainder where it is needed most – for adult or children's services.

This is on top of the £240 million announced last month to address winter social care pressures this year.

An additional £84 million over 5 years will also be made available as a targeted children's social care fund over the next 5 years, along with an additional £55 million Disabled Facilities Grant in this financial year.

This will mean councils will be able to deliver the services their residents need while also protecting them from excessive Council Tax bills.

The Budget will also provide a further £420 million to councils to fix potholes and carry out other repairs to improve roads, allow better access to workplaces, high streets and other community facilities.

Help for the high street

A £1.5 billion plan that includes a cut to the business rates bills for small retailers worth almost £900 million over 2 years, funding to transform town centres and a relaxation of planning rules has been announced as part of the Budget to support the country's high streets.

This includes:

- the launch of a £675 million Future High Streets Fund to transform local high streets so that they can remain firmly at the heart of communities; this will be used to improve infrastructure and transport and also support areas to redevelop under-used retail space into homes and offices, helping to restore high street properties and put historic buildings back into use
- business rates relief targeted at small retailers to cut their bills by a third and a new mandatory relief for public lavatories, building on over £10 billion of business rates support since 2016
- relaxing planning rules to support new mixed-use businesses on the high street and the conversion of under-used retail units into offices and homes

This is accompanied by additional support for local leadership to prepare and implement new strategies for their high street, including a new High Streets Taskforce to offer support and advice to help revitalise high streets.

This Budget also went further to fire-up the Northern Powerhouse, fuel the Midlands Engine and back our regions across the UK by committing to refresh both strategies next year and increasing the Transforming Cities Fund to £2.4 billion to make it quicker and easier for people to get around in some of England's biggest cities.

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[Speech: Britain champions free speech, so we're leading the war on fake news: article by Jeremy Hunt](#)

John Stuart Mill stands among the greatest and most optimistic champions of freedom who lived. As long ago as 1859, he wrote: "The time, it is to be hoped, is gone by when any defence would be necessary of the liberty of the press as one of the securities against corrupt or tyrannical government."

Sadly, the argument that Mill thought settled is still raging in many parts of the world. This year, 62 journalists have been murdered and hundreds more locked up for no offence save doing their jobs. The appalling killing of

Jamal Khashoggi on October 2 provides more evidence of the risks that many journalists are forced to run.

Defending a free media must therefore be a central element of British foreign policy, in keeping with our country's role as an invisible chain linking the nations that share our values.

I write as a politician and, like many in my profession, I do not always enjoy reading what the newspapers say about me. The media sometimes make mistakes and journalists, being human, are not beyond hyperbole and excess. But none of us would wish to live in a country where newspapers are muzzled or controlled. A media willing and able to investigate wrongdoing, expose failures and criticise the mighty, provides one of the strongest defences against corruption and arbitrary state power.

The Foreign Office has always sought to encourage good governance and defeat corruption. Promoting a free media is an essential part of achieving both goals. This is not mere assertion or guesswork. Hard evidence shows a striking overlap between the countries with the least corruption and the countries with the freest media.

If you take the 10 cleanest nations in the world, as ranked by Transparency International UK in 2017, 6 of them also appear in the top 10 of the Press Freedom Index.

And the correlation holds at the other end of the scale. Of the 10 most corrupt countries in the world, 4 are also in the bottom 10 when it comes to press freedom.

It takes no great leap of the imagination to understand why. Powerful people will be deterred from abusing their positions if there is a good chance of their behaviour being exposed. The opposite is obviously true: if there is no risk of being found out by the media – or if you can reach a level where you gain immunity from scrutiny – then the powerful are far more likely to develop the sense of impunity that leads to corruption.

Next year, I will host an international conference in London on media freedom. My aim is to bring together the countries which believe in this cause in order to mobilise a consensus behind the protection of journalists. Britain will be a chain that links the nations who share our values.

We cannot physically prevent journalists from being locked up in other countries. But if governments choose to jail them without good reason, we can alert global public opinion and impose a diplomatic price.

British embassies routinely lobby their host governments if serious violations of media freedom occur – and I take up individual cases myself. When I met Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese leader, I [raised the plight of 2 Reuters journalists](#) imprisoned after reporting from Rakhine State, where more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslim refugees have been driven from their homes since 2017.

Diplomats from our embassy in Burma attended the trials of the journalists

and our ambassador spoke out against the guilty verdict.

We also support media freedom projects through our Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, named after Magna Carta. We are helping to train journalists in Ethiopia, where a new prime minister has promised a more enlightened approach, and in Venezuela, where an authoritarian government has suppressed its critics. We will seek to expand the number of journalists receiving training, including in newsrooms here in the UK.

In the era of fake news and concerted propaganda by hostile states, supporting a free media also means countering the incoming tides of disinformation. While it has never been easier to publish and receive information, it has also never been easier to spread lies and conspiracy theories. Social media offers a malign opportunity to whip up hatred and incite violence against vulnerable minorities.

So Britain is helping to lead the struggle against propaganda and the misuse of the internet. This year, the government is providing £8.5 million for this essential work in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

All of this serves our goal of promoting good governance wherever possible. Yet, in the end, I believe a British Foreign Secretary should defend the free media, not primarily for reasons of policy, but because this is part of what our country stands for. Democracy, the rule of law and freedom of expression mean nothing unless independent journalists are able to hold the powerful to account, however inconvenient this might be for those who find themselves on the receiving end.

A free media is part of the assembly of values in which this country believes, making us an invisible chain that links together like-minded nations.

One day, I hope John Stuart Mill's optimism will be vindicated and there will no longer be any need to defend this cause. Until then, we must do whatever we can to safeguard and promote a free media.

**[Press release: Foreign Secretary meets
Leader of the Syrian White Helmets](#)**



In July this year the Foreign Secretary coordinated an international effort to rescue dozens of members of the volunteer rescue service and their families from Southern Syria. This effort was in light of the threat to their lives from the Syrian regime.

The UK has since given a number of the rescue workers and their families a safe haven in communities across the country, as part of the Home Office's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme.

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Few people have to make the kind of moral choices that faced White Helmet Raed al-Saleh, who I was privileged to meet today. The White Helmets risked life and limb to save over 115,000 lives during the Syrian conflict, despite attacks at the hands of the Syrian regime and the Russian military. The UK is proud to stand behind them.

Mr Raed al Saleh expressed his gratitude to the people and Government of the UK for their support to the 3,000 men and women of the White Helmets over the past 6 years, which he said, "has enabled our volunteers to provide essential life-saving support to more than 115,000 persons and services to more than 4 million Syrian civilians who live under daily risk of violence in Syria."

Further information

Published 1 November 2018

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View the [previous joint statement on the resettlement of the White Helmets](#).

Further information

- Follow the Foreign Secretary on Twitter [@Jeremy_Hunt](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
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