

Press release: Businesses set for lower bills

Thousands of businesses across the country are set to benefit from falls in their business rates bills, figures released today (17 February 2017) show.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said this will give regional economies 'the edge' to drive growth for the country as a whole.

The revaluation of business rates, which will come into effect in April this year, will mean businesses across the country will get lower bills that accurately reflect changes in their local property market.

Figures show that nearly three-quarters of businesses across the country will see no change to their bills, or a reduction. For the small minority who will see an increase, there will be a system of transitional relief, to bring it in gradually over 5 years. This transitional relief is worth £3.6 billion, and will mean increases in business rate bills will be phased in over the 5-year period. This relief is on top of increases in small business rate relief.

Latest figures released by the Department for Communities and Local Government show that this will benefit regions across the country, including the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine. Bills across the northern regions are due to fall by 10% before inflation and transitional relief – a fall of £600 million a year – while businesses in the Midlands Engine will see their bills fall by an average 5% – a fall of £230 million a year.

This is on top of measures which mean that from this April, businesses will benefit from the biggest ever cut in business rates in England – worth £6.7 billion over the next 5 years. As a result, 600,000 businesses across the country will pay no business rates at all.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Our regions have huge economic potential, and can be a catalyst to driving economic growth across the country.

The revaluation of business rates will help make sure bills are accurate, with nearly three-quarters of businesses seeing a fall, or no change. In fact, the generous reliefs we are introducing mean that 600,000 small businesses are paying no rates at all – something we're making permanent so they never pay these bills again.

And across the country, there's also a £3.6 billion scheme to support companies affected by the business rates revaluation.

These measures are on top of wider reforms to business rates, which will mean by 2020, councils will be able to keep 100% of all locally-raised taxes to help fund local services, which will mean a stronger incentive for councils to support and help local firms grow and prosper. While bills will be issued by councils, valuations will be conducted by the independent Valuation Office Agency, to avoid any conflict of interest.

In the last Parliament, the government intentionally changed the timetable of the revaluation from 2015 to 2017 to provide stability for businesses after the financial crash. Government-led efforts to boost the country's economy and encourage growth have now led to 900,000 more businesses operating now than in 2010, and the government believes it is now the right time to go ahead with updating the figures on which bills are based.

The revaluation will benefit large parts of the country, with three-quarters of businesses seeing no change, or a fall, in their business rate bills. They include:

- businesses in the South West seeing an average 6% fall in bills before inflation and transitional relief – a cut of £150 million a year
- businesses across the South East benefiting from an average 1% fall in business rates bills equivalent to £50 million a year
- businesses in the East of England benefiting from an average 7% per cent fall in business rates – equivalent to £180 million a year
- West Midlands businesses benefiting from an average 7% fall in business rates before inflation and transitional relief – equivalent to a fall of almost £170 million a year
- businesses in the East Midlands seeing an average 3% drop in business rates bills – equivalent to £60 million a year

The changes are fiscally-neutral, meaning no real increase in the amount of tax raised. Key cities seeing reductions in their business rate bills include:

Northern Powerhouse:

- Durham – an average 10% cut in bills
- Newcastle – an average 11% cut in bills
- Manchester – an average 3% cut in bills
- Liverpool – an average 7% cut in bills
- York – an average 6% cut in bills
- Leeds – an average 11% cut in bills
- Hull – an average 13% cut in bills
- Sheffield – an average 9% cut in bills

Midlands Engine:

- Birmingham – an average 6% cut in bills
- Coventry – an average 7% cut in bills
- Derby – an average 4% cut in bills

[News story: Business rates revaluation: the facts](#)

The next business rates revaluation takes effect from 1 April 2017

The government is regularly required to update the 'rateable values' of business properties in England to make sure that they are paying the right amount of rates.

Alongside this we're introducing the biggest ever cut in business rates – a £6.7 billion package over the next 5 years.

This is about making business rates fairer

The revaluation will make the system more accurate by ensuring business rates bills reflect the property market.

Nearly three-quarters of businesses will see no change or a fall in their bills from 1 April 2017 thanks to the business rates revaluation, with 600,000 businesses set to pay no business rates at all.

The government will not benefit financially from the revaluation – it is a revenue neutral process.

In addition, from April 2020 business rates will switch from being linked to the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), saving businesses around £370 million in total from 2020-21.

The government is providing £3.6 billion directly to businesses to help with the revaluation

The transitional relief scheme will support ratepayers by capping and phasing in any rise in bills.

600,000 small business will pay no business rates at all

As part of the £6.7 billion package of business rates cuts over the next 5 years, the government has permanently doubled Small Business Rate Relief.

Eligible properties with a rateable value of £12,000 and below will receive 100% relief.

Eligible properties with a rateable value between £12,000 and £15,000 will also benefit from business rates relief, offering significant reductions on their business rates bills.

[News story: Advocate General appears in UKSC on behalf of the Home Secretary](#)

From:

First published:

17 February 2017

Advocate General appears in UK Supreme Court on behalf of the Home Secretary

On 15th and 16th of February 2017, the Advocate General for Scotland, Lord Keen of Elie QC represented the interests of the Secretary of State for the Home Department in the UK Supreme Court cases of R (on the application of Byndloss) (Appellant) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent) and R (on the application of Kiarie) (Appellant) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent). Both cases dealt with the issue of whether s.94B of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 complies with the procedural and substantive protections under art.8 ECHR. You can find a link to the UK Supreme Court website for further details, and to watch a recording of the hearings by clicking [here](#)

[Press release: How to fish responsibly during Somerset's elver season](#)

With the 2017 elver season under way, the Environment Agency is reminding Somerset's elver fishermen to stay the right side of the law.

Eels are an endangered species and recognised by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) as in need of protection. Fishing for elvers is allowed in England and Wales, but under strict conditions to ensure stocks are not over-exploited.

The elver season runs from 15 February – 25 May inclusive and is largely limited to the Rivers Parrett and Tone. There are approximately 200 licenced elver fishermen in Somerset who must register with the Environment Agency at the start of the season.

Sustainable fishing includes the capture of elvers for re-stocking in countries across Northern Europe where eel stocks have declined and cannot be replenished naturally.

All elver fishing in Somerset is done with hand held nets known as 'dip nets'. They are restricted in size to 1m long, 0.8m wide and 0.45m deep. Handle lengths should be no longer than 4m. Fishing from boats is prohibited and no other large nets or traps are allowed. As a further precaution, all nets must be tagged and fishermen have photographic ID.

Elvers are attracted to fresh water so to protect stocks, no fishing is permitted within 10m of any river obstruction, dam, inlet, outlet or fish pass that hinders the passage of elvers. A full list of rules can be found in the elver fishing bylaws.

Richard Dearnley for the Environment Agency said:

We recognise the majority of elver fishermen operate responsibly and respect the law. We work closely with the police in detecting illegal fishing and, where we have evidence, won't hesitate to prosecute offenders.

Any illegal or suspicious activity can be reported to the Environment Agency or Crimestoppers. If you would like to report information on environmental crime anonymously, call 0800 555111.

[Press release: West Midlands company director handed penalty by court for waste offences](#)

On 16 February 2017, Jaskaran Bhandal, Director of Oakham Environmental Waste & Recycling Ltd, Oak Farm, Kingswinford, West Midlands pleaded guilty at Wolverhampton Magistrates' Court to 1 count of failing to remove waste from the site, and 1 count of operating a waste site without an authorised environmental permit.

Mr Bhandal was fined £1,332, ordered to pay £3,265 in costs, along with a £120 victim surcharge and disqualified from being a company director for 5 years.

The charges were brought by the Environment Agency under Section 59(5) and 157 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and contrary to Regulations 12(1)(a) and 38(1)(a) and 41 (1)(b) of the Environmental Permitting (England

and Wales) Regulations 2010.

Environment Agency Officers had been working with Oakham Environmental Waste & Recycling Ltd to bring the site into compliance under their environmental permit until it was revoked. This decision was upheld at an appeal made to the Planning Inspectorate, and the company was ordered to remove all the waste from the site by 2 July 2014.

Officers visited the site in November 2015 and saw that significant amounts of new waste had been deposited at the site. Officers made a number of enquires and determined that the waste had been deposited by Oakham Environmental Waste & Recycling Ltd, after their permit had been revoked.

Officers served a Notice to Oakham Environmental Waste & Recycling Ltd in May 2016 to remove all the illegally deposited waste by 19 November 2016. Officers visited the site on 22 November 2016 and noted some attempts had been made to remove the waste but the vast majority remained in situ.

Mr Bhandal was interviewed and admitted to knowing the site did not hold the relevant permits to carry out the work undertaken, he also accepted he was unable to comply with the Notice served but this was due to financial reasons.

Speaking after the case, the Environment Agency officer in charge of the investigation said:

The successful prosecution of this case should send out a clear message that the Environment Agency is adopting a robust approach to ensuring those who flout the law are brought to justice. Despite extensive previous efforts to work with the company and seek compliance, it became apparent that prosecution remained the only option to deal with this matter appropriately.

In mitigation, the court heard that the defendant had pleaded guilty at the first available opportunity, had co-operated with the Environment Agency during the interview and that he was sorry for the offences committed.