

Press release: PM: Thousands have saved money already thanks to Government's stamp duty cut

The Prime Minister will be in Wokingham, Berkshire, today [Wednesday 3 January] to meet one of the estimated 16,000 people who have already benefited from changes to stamp duty announced by the Government in the Autumn Budget.

The stamp duty changes will mean a saving of up to £5,000 for first-time buyers in Wokingham.

The Government has abolished stamp duty altogether for first-time buyer purchases up to £300,000, and made this relief available for the first £300,000 of properties worth up to £500,000, providing help for people in higher value areas.

The changes mean a stamp duty cut for 95% of all first-time buyers who pay it and no stamp duty at all for 80% of first time buyers, with savings of up to £5,000.

Over 16,000 first-time buyers are estimated to have already saved thousands of pounds since the changes took effect in November, with over a million first-time buyers set to benefit in total over the next five years.

Ahead of the visit, Prime Minister Theresa May said:

I have made it my personal mission to build the homes this country needs so we can restore the dream of home ownership for people up and down the UK.

In the Autumn we set out ambitious plans to fix the broken housing market and make sure young people have the same opportunities as their parents' generation to own their own home.

This has had an immediate impact, with thousands of people already making savings thanks to our stamp duty cut, and over a million first-time buyers over the next 5 years are expected to save money that they can put towards a deposit, solicitors' fees or furniture.

We are building a Britain that is fit for the future and our message to the next generation is this – getting on – and climbing up – the housing ladder is not just a dream of your parents' past, but a reality for your future.

The stamp duty change builds on the steps already taken to help young people enter the housing market – including the successful Help to Buy scheme and

introduction of Lifetime ISAs.

At the Autumn Budget the Government announced the UK will deliver an average 300,000 additional homes each year by the mid-2020s through targeted new financial support and reforms to the planning system. These measures mean that we are on track to raise annual housing supply by the end of the Parliament to its highest level since 1970.

The Budget set out a series of other measures to boost the housing market including:

- Providing £1.1bn to help prepare sites for developers to build homes on
- Providing £1.5bn in SME loans to build houses
- Providing £630m to provide infrastructure to accelerate homes on small sites
- Providing £1bn in borrowing for councils to build new council homes
- Providing £2.7bn of grants to local authorities for strategic infrastructure to support new house building
- Investing £400m to transform estates
- Providing financial guarantees worth £8bn to support housebuilding
- Reforming developer contributions to ensure that funding for new infrastructure and affordable housing is made simpler and quicker

[News story: Annual return deadline imminent](#)

Charities with financial years ending on 31 March 2017 have less than four weeks to go before the final deadline to file their annual return.

By law, these charities must submit a return by 31 January 2018, no later than 10 months after the end of their financial year.

Thousands of charities have already filed their returns but there are still many that have not.

They run the risk of trying to file nearer to deadline day without the correct documentation or, crucially, the password they need to access the online service and then going into default.

To avoid the possibility of this happening, please either [file your annual return for 2017 now](#), if you know what you need to submit, have a current working password, know your charity number and have kept your [charities details, such as email and contact address and current trustees up to date](#).

Alternatively, please make sure you [know where your password is, or apply for a new one](#) (please note this will take at least 24 hours and can only be sent

to the email address we have on file). Then [update your charity's details](#) before reading our [detailed guide into how to prepare your annual return, including what you need to submit](#), based on your charity's chosen structure.

[File your 2017 annual return now](#)

[Press release: British Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson visits Kuwait](#)

British Secretary of State for Defence Gavin Williamson visits Kuwait today, Wednesday 3 January 2018, for the first time since his appointment in November 2017. During his visit he called on His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He also called on the First Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and congratulated him on his recent appointment.

This visit is an important opportunity to build on the excellent defence co-operation between the State of Kuwait and the United Kingdom as part of the close and cordial bilateral relations which exist between our two countries. The United Kingdom welcomes the important role which Kuwait is playing in the region – as a key partner in the Counter-Daesh Coalition, as a major humanitarian donor and as a mediator in regional disputes – and more widely as Kuwait joins the United Nations Security Council for 2018-2019

[News story: Independent doctors to be rated by the Care Quality Commission](#)

New changes mean that, for the first time, all healthcare organisations in England that offer regulated care will be rated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Organisations will have to display their inspection ratings so patients can clearly see safety standards.

The CQC's current ratings programme – which covers hospital care, social care and GPs – will be extended to include more than 800 additional providers. This includes independent doctors that offer primary care online.

The CQC will require providers affected by these changes to publicly display

their rating, for instance on their website or business premises. This will allow patients to make an informed choice when deciding which care service they want to use.

The ratings scheme has been 'future-proofed' to cover services that may develop in the future. It will ensure that new services are also given a rating.

The changes will bring the services in line with the rest of the NHS. It will reassure patients who use digital GP apps provided by independent doctors about the quality and safety of the service they are choosing.

The CQC will now develop an approach for how it will rate the additional services. The CQC will continue to inspect these services and publish its findings in the meantime.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

With our NHS now in its 70th year, we are planning ahead to guarantee safer and better care for patients in the years to come. These changes are a world first for patient safety, modernising our tough Ofsted-style inspection scheme so we keep pace with the changing landscape of healthcare, as well as helping tech-savvy patients to make informed decisions about their care.

Sir David Behan, Chief Executive of the Care Quality Commission, said:

CQC's ratings of health and care services are helping people to make informed choices about their care as well as supporting providers to improve. Never before has the public had such clear information about the quality and safety of their health and care services.

CQC already inspects and publishes reports for these additional services. The ability to award ratings to them will bring increased transparency for the public about the quality and safety of their healthcare.

We look forward to taking this work forward in the new year.

[Press release: Shoppers could face](#)

higher prices due to soft drink merger

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has been carrying out an initial investigation into Refresco's proposed \$1.25 billion (about £935 million) purchase of Cott's worldwide beverage manufacturing business.

In the UK, Refresco and Cott manufacture, package and distribute soft drinks for a number of well-known brands, supermarkets and shops.

Each business produces a range of different soft drinks, which are then packaged in a variety of formats and sizes. The CMA's initial investigation into the merger did not find any competition concerns for the majority of these products.

However, both companies supply juice drinks using a special aseptic production process that allows them to be sold preservative-free and without refrigeration.

Only one other competitor in the UK currently supplies third parties with juice drinks using this production process. The CMA is therefore concerned that, after the merger, the combined business might be able to increase prices or lower quality standards.

Rachel Merelie, CMA Acting Executive Director and decision maker in this case, said:

These companies supply well-known UK shops and brands with soft drinks, who in turn sell these to thousands of people daily. It is therefore important that we address any issues to ensure that shoppers do not lose out.

We have looked at all aspects of this merger and have concerns that the merger could lead to reduced competition in the manufacturing and packaging of certain juice drinks. This may result in higher prices or quality standards slipping for stores and brands, with potential knock-on effects to end-consumers.

The CMA will now refer the merger for an in-depth investigation unless Refresco offers acceptable undertakings to address competition concerns.

All information relating to the merger is available on the [case page](#).

Notes for editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law.

2. Enquiries should be directed to the Press Team, on 020 3738 6191 or press@cma.gsi.gov.uk.

3. For information on the CMA see our [homepage](#), or follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Sign up to our [email alerts](#) to receive updates on merger cases.