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2 Feb 2017



The SNP's business rates hike has been slammed by its own party, after a nationalist north east branch was priced out of a hotel it's been using since the 1970s.

The Banff Springs Hotel in Aberdeenshire has been hit with a £50,000 rates rise thanks to Scottish Government changes.

As a result, it's been forced to pass on that additional cost to customers, or face going out of business.

And now it's emerged the Banff and Macduff branch of the SNP is one of those customers refusing to pay the increased rate.

It told the hotel: "The increase in hire fee is excessive to say the least. Should this apply ... I can confirm there will be no further booking and our business will be taken elsewhere."

The embarrassing revelation was raised at First Minister's Questions by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson, as she attacked the SNP on its increasing of business taxes.

That move, along with income tax hits to be announced in the budget later, makes Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

However, instead of addressing the concerns shared by her north east branch, she merely said the hotel would have an opportunity appeal the rise.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"Even the SNP's own branches are opposing the hike in business rates, so perhaps it's time for Nicola Sturgeon to listen.

"These unfair increases, which see businesses like the Banff Springs Hotel paying more than double their current rates, could force closures and job losses.

"The SNP won't listen to reason or hard evidence, so perhaps it will take notice now it's been embarrassed in the Scottish Parliament.

“If the First Minister’s own party doesn’t support this policy, surely even she recognises it’s time to do something about it.”

To see the letter of complaint by the SNP Banff branch, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hotel-complaint.jpg>

The SNP organisation has been using the hotel since 1976:

<https://www.facebook.com/BanffandMacduff/posts/1104255902998301>

[Press release: Benefit cap restores fairness to the system](#)

New analysis has revealed how the cap restored fairness to the system – before they were capped, nearly 180 households were getting the equivalent of a pre-tax salary of at least £57,000 in benefits.

Since its introduction in 2013, 26,000 households who were previously capped have moved into work, with a further 14,000 reducing their housing benefit claim, or ending their claim altogether. Anyone eligible for Working Tax Credits is exempt from the cap, providing a clear incentive to move into work.

The new benefit cap, limiting the total amount workless households can receive in benefits to £20,000 across the UK or £23,000 within Greater London, is now in place across the country following its successful rollout.

Work and Pensions Secretary Damian Green said:

Since the benefit cap was introduced in 2013, people in tens of thousands of households have moved into work. The new lower cap continues to build on that success by incentivising work.

There are over three quarters of a million job vacancies across the country, and we are determined to do everything we can to help people into work.

We are creating a country which works for everyone, and the lower cap ensures the system remains fair to both the taxpayers who pay for it and to those people who need it.

Anyone eligible for Working Tax Credits is exempt from the cap, providing a clear incentive to move into work. People claiming Carer’s Allowance,

Guardian's Allowance, and most disability benefits are also exempt from the cap, ensuring those who cannot work are supported.

The Department for Work and Pensions is also working closely with local authorities, and will have provided them with over £1 billion of Discretionary Housing Payments by the end of this Parliament to support people transitioning to our reforms, as the new cap is introduced.

The new benefit cap is set at £20,000 a year outside London and £23,000 in Greater London to reflect higher rent costs. For single people without children, the cap is £15,410 in Greater London and £13,400 elsewhere.

Anyone working and receiving Working Tax Credits is exempt from the cap, as are households where someone receives Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP), or the support component of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Those claiming Carer's Allowance or Guardian's Allowance are exempt from the new cap, in recognition of the valuable contribution they make to society.

Statistics on the new lower benefit cap will be released in May 2017.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5111

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[News story: CMA welcomes new Project Director](#)

From:

First published:

2 February 2017

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has today announced the appointment of Alison Gold as a Project Director.

Alison joins from the BBC, where she was Head of Strategy at the BBC Trust.

Daniel Gordon, CMA Senior Director, Markets, said:

I am delighted to welcome Alison to the CMA. She impressed us deeply with her leadership abilities and experience of public policy gained at the BBC Trust, and I am very confident that she

will be a very strong addition to the CMA's senior leadership team.

Alison is the fourth and final recruit to join us following the last successful campaign, which attracted a very competitive field. Fred Houwen, Tim Geer and Lucilia Falsarella-Pereira have each already started in their new posts.

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. For CMA updates, follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Flickr](#), [LinkedIn](#) and like our [Facebook](#) page.
2. Alison Gold joins from the BBC where she was Head of Strategy at the BBC Trust, running a core part of the BBC's governance and regulatory system and acting as a senior adviser to the Chairman and Board of the BBC. She was previously a strategy management consultant at KPMG and at a media sector specialist advisory firm.
3. Media enquiries should be directed to Simon Belgard (simon.belgard@cma.gsi.gov.uk, 020 3738 6472).

[Press release: Huge response to dangerous driving proposals](#)

From:

First published:

2 February 2017

Thousands of people have had their say on plans to introduce life sentences for killer drivers.

The consultation, which opened on 5 December 2016, attracted over 1,000 replies in just 3 days, reaching more than 9,000 when it closed yesterday (1 February 2017).

The overwhelming response is one of the highest for a Ministry of Justice (MOJ) consultation, and included contributions from victims, bereaved families, road safety groups and charities.

Justice Minister Sam Gyimah said:

Killer drivers ruin lives. While we can never compensate for the loss of a loved one, we are clear that the punishment must fit the crime.

So I would like to thank the thousands who have contributed to this consultation. We will now carefully consider each of these and will set out our plans as soon as possible.

The consultation sought views on whether the current maximum penalties available to the courts should be increased.

The proposals included:

- increasing the maximum sentence for causing death by dangerous driving from 14 years to life
- increasing the maximum sentence for causing death by careless driving whilst under the influence of drink or drugs from 14 years to life
- creating a new offence of causing serious injury by careless driving, with a maximum sentence of 3 years
- increasing minimum driving bans for those convicted of causing death.

The plans build on the government's pledge to consider sentencing powers available to the courts for the most serious driving offences. The government will consider the responses and set out its plans in the coming months.

Notes to editors

- The UK has one of the best road safety records in the world – but deaths and serious injuries cause devastation to victims and their families.
 - The [consultation](#) looked at the most serious road offences. It did not cover other driving or regulatory offences such as speeding, the setting of drink drive limits, the basic offences of careless or dangerous driving and driving whilst using a mobile phone.
 - This follows further action in 2015, when the government increased the maximum custodial sentence for causing death whilst driving when disqualified from 2 to 10 years. A new offence of causing serious injury when driving whilst disqualified was also created, with a maximum penalty of 4 years imprisonment. It also brought into force the statutory requirement to extend a driving ban to take account of any time spent in custody.
 - Sentencing remains a matter for independent judges, with decisions made based on the full facts of the case.
 - For more information call the MOJ press office on 020 3334 3503 or 020 3334 3529.
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[News story: Defence Secretary hails global outlook of Midlothian naval engineers](#)

Sir Michael Fallon visited MacTaggart Scott, who design, build, install and maintain engineering systems for the Royal Navy – the company’s “shop window” – and 40 of the world’s navies, including the US, French, Canadian, Australian and South Korean.

The visit is part of the Defence Secretary’s on-going engagement with Scotland’s industrial base, 10% of which is defence-related, directly supporting 11,000 Scottish jobs with thousands more sustained. During the visit he met with some of the company’s 32 engineering apprentices, which make up nearly 18% of the firm’s industrial workforce.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

MacTaggart Scott is a terrific example of the benefits that combining innovation, a global outlook and an entrepreneurial spirit can deliver for Scotland as part of the UK.

They are a leading hub of international naval innovative design, manufacture and maintenance and should also be applauded for investing in our young people through their apprenticeship programme.

MacTaggart Scott designed, built and installed the huge lifts that will carry jets and helicopters between the flight decks and hangers on the Royal Navy’s new aircraft carriers, HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales, currently being built in Rosyth. They also design and build helicopter handling systems, and are competing for contracts relating to the new Clyde-built Type 26 on which the first steel will be cut this summer.

Remarkably, the company has been involved in every submarine built for the Royal Navy since 1915, and manufacture and provide support to a range of specialist submarine equipment, including stealth mast raising equipment for periscopes, optronics and communications equipment, sonar handling gear, hydroplane, rudder and ballast tank valves and actuators for submarines across the globe.

Bill Marsh, Managing Director of MacTaggart Scott said:

Our innovative work for the Royal Navy’s surface ships and submarines provides us with a vital shop window which sees half of our £35m turnover come from export.

Our ambition is to design, manufacture and install vital equipment and provide through life product support to every single Royal Navy ship and submarine.

- MacTaggart Scott is a privately owned engineering company founded in 1898 and employs 350 people, 32 of whom are apprentices.

Defence Budget

- The UK is investing £178bn in a decade long equipment programme.
- The UK Defence budget has a “double lock” which ensures that it will rise every year by at least 0.5% annually, above inflation and always exceed 2% of GDP.

UK

- Trade with the rest of the UK makes up over half of Scotland’s exports, and is four times the value of exports to the rest of the EU.
- The UK Government is firmly committed to the future of Defence in Scotland and its continued vital role in Defence.
- Scotland is home to military bases that provide essential capabilities for the Defence of the UK as a whole.
- By 2020, Scotland will be home to all of the Royal Navy’s submarines, one of the Army’s engagement and resilience Infantry Brigades, one of three RAF fast jet main operating bases and new P8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft.