

Press release: Appeal your tax bill online

The initiative means people no longer have to print out, manually fill in and post their forms. It is also drastically cutting the number of applications being returned, as incomplete or inaccurate forms can be amended over the phone with the help of HMCTS staff.

Over 2,000 taxpayers have already benefitted from the quicker, streamlined system, with on average a quarter of appeals made online since the scheme was introduced.

The move is part of the Government's £1 billion investment to digitise the court service, making it quicker, simpler, and easier to access for everyone.

Justice Minister Lucy Frazer said:

We are spending £1 billion on transforming the justice system so it is fit for the digital age.

Allowing people to submit their tax appeals online is just one example of how we are making the system quicker, smarter, and much more user-friendly.

Online appeals are submitted to the tax tribunal service so that the case can be considered by a judge and, if necessary, proceed to a hearing.

The simplified forms spell out exactly what steps applicants must have already taken, preventing people from wasting time submitting applications which are then returned.

The online tax system continues to develop and in the early stages of 2018 will be extended to cater for an increased range of business.

Other examples of the government's court reforms which are making access to justice easier for everyone include:

- Launching the first divorce application services online at four sites – making the process easier to understand for divorce applicants and helping to progress applications.
- A new paperless system, in operation at Lavender Hill Magistrates' Court, which means thousands of offenders caught dodging fares or using fraudulent tickets can now be punished more swiftly and effectively.
- The increased use of video links – meaning more vulnerable victims can give evidence away from the courtroom and without having to meet their attacker face to face.

News story: Multimillion pound government funding boost for cycle safety

Cyclists in a number of cities will benefit from a £7 million government investment in projects to improve road safety, helping create more bike-friendly areas.

The funding has been announced as part of the Department for Transport's cycle safety review, which will help ensure that our roads are as safe as possible for all who use them.

Eight cities, which the government has already been helping to lead the way in promoting cycling, will be given the chance to bid for an additional £6.5 million of funding to trial new schemes which improve safety. This will support the government's aim of encouraging more people to cycle as part of everyday journeys.

The remaining £0.5 million will be set aside to support Cycling UK's [Big bike revival](#) – a successful initiative which is helping to get more people cycling safely and confidently across the country.

Cycling Minister Jesse Norman said:

Everyone should be able to take advantage of the huge health and environmental benefits of cycling.

While Britain has some of the safest roads in the world, we want to encourage more people to take up cycling. This funding, as part of our overall cycling and walking strategy, will help local councils to make their roads safer for everyone.

Paul Tuohy, Chief Executive of Cycling UK, said:

Last year the big bike revival reached more than 50,000 people in England, and produced more than 6,000 regular cyclists, so the project represents incredible value for money.

I'm delighted that the Department for Transport has recognised its significance by funding it for another year so we can get even more people cycling every day.

[Video: We're investing an additional £6.5 million in English cities, to fund](#)

[safer cycling projects](#)

This announcement is part of a drive to ensure that everyone across the country feels safe when cycling. It will be up to local authorities to decide what sort of schemes to bid for – the Department for Transport has invited bids from the 8 councils and will be looking to support schemes which improve safety for cyclists, and which also deliver benefits for pedestrians.

Jesse Norman made this announcement on a visit to see how government funding has made cycling in Bristol easier and safer, helping increase the number of people who cycle in the city.

The Department for Transport launched the first ever statutory [Cycling and walking investment strategy](#) in April 2017, to encourage more people to cycle and walk. This sets out how the government will deliver its ambition for cycling, and outlines how the £1.2 billion of funding available over the period to 2021 will be spent.

The cycle safety review was launched in September 2017.

The 8 cycle city ambition cities are:

- Bristol
- Leeds
- Cambridge
- Birmingham
- Norwich
- Manchester
- Newcastle
- Oxford

[Press release: New tougher electrical safety standards to protect private tenants](#)

Recommended new safety measures to better protect private tenants by reducing the risk of electric shocks or fires caused by electrical faults were published for [consultation](#) today (17 February 2018) by Housing Minister Heather Wheeler.

Five yearly mandatory electrical installation safety checks for all private rented properties and safety certificates for tenants, to prove checks and repair work have been completed, are part of a package of independent recommendations to improve safety.

The government is also consulting on how best to enforce the strengthened safety regime along with whether landlords who do not comply should face tough penalties of up to £30,000.

As well as making homes safer for tenants, electrical installation improvements benefit the landlord as a material improvement to their properties, helping prevent fires which could cause costly and significant damage.

According to the most recent data tenants in the private rented sector face a higher risk of electrical shock and fires caused by electrical faults in their homes compared to social housing tenants.

To address this the government introduced new powers in the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to set and enforce tougher electrical safety standards in the private rented sector and established a working group of independent experts from industry and a range of other sectors to develop recommendations.

This builds on other measures already introduced or planned to improve the quality of private rented properties including fines of up to £30,000 for rogue landlords and agents and banning orders for the worst offenders.

The government is also supporting a Private Member's Bill which will require all landlords to ensure their properties are safe and give tenants the right to take legal action.

Housing Minister Heather Wheeler said:

Everyone deserves a safe place to live. While measures are already in place to crack down on the minority of landlords who rent out unsafe properties we need to do more to protect tenants.

That's why we introduced powers to enable stronger electrical safety standards to be brought in along with tough penalties for those who don't comply.

We want to ensure we strike the right balance between protecting tenants while being fair for landlords. So I want to hear from as many people as possible whether these independent recommendations are the right approach.

Independent recommendations published for consultation today, include:

- 5 yearly mandatory electrical installation safety checks for all private rented properties.
- Mandatory safety certificates confirming installation checks have been completed along with any necessary repair work provided to both landlord

and tenants at the beginning of the tenancy and made available to the local authority on request.

- A private rented sector electrical testing competent person's scheme should be established to ensure properly trained experts undertake this work. This would be separate from existing building regulations competent person.
- Landlord supplied electrical appliance testing and visual checks of electrical appliances by landlords at a change of tenancy should be promoted as good practice and set out in guidance.

Today's consultation seeks views on each of the safety recommendations as well as how best to approach enforcement – including what the penalty for non-compliance should be.

Final proposals will follow the conclusion of Dame Judith Hackitt's [Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety](#). Dame Judith is due to submit her final report to ministers in spring this year.

Legislative powers only cover the private rented sector. We will publish a social housing green paper in spring which will cover a wide range of issues including the safety and quality of social housing.

The government has also provided UK consumers with the highest ever levels of protection, investing an extra £12 million each year in the product safety system through the new [Office for Product Safety and Standards](#).

See the consultation: [Electrical safety in the private rented sector](#). The consultation runs until Monday 16 April 2018.

Latest data from the English Housing Survey (2015-16) shows 60% of homes in the private rented sector had all 5 recommended electrical safety features installed compared to 74% of local authority homes and 76% of housing association homes. These 5 features are modern PVC wiring, modern earthing, modern consumer units, miniature circuit breakers and Residual Current Devices.

As part of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 the government introduced powers to set requirements for electrical safety standards in the private rented sector along with their enforcement through secondary legislation. A working group of independent experts was established to provide recommendations to ministers.

Representatives from the following organisations were part of the working group: Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, British Gas, Electrical Safety First, Chief Fire Officers Association, Association of Residential Letting Agents, Shelter, Residential Landlords Association, National Approved Lettings Scheme, British Property Federation, National Landlords Association, Local Government Association, Chartered Institution of Environmental Health,

Institution of Engineering and Technology, NAPIT and Electrical Safety Round Table and the Health and Safety Executive.

There are existing regulatory requirements to help protect tenants:

- mandatory 5 yearly electrical installation checks for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 requires landlords to keep installations in the property, including the supply of electricity, in good repair and proper working order
- building regulations since 2010 have required all circuits in new or rewired homes to comply with the wiring rules in BS 7671 and include the installation of a Residual Current Device (RCD) covering any new circuits in the consumer unit since July 2008
- local authorities have powers, through the Housing Act 2004, to take action where there are electrical hazards in a property

Government has announced tough new powers to crack down on bad practices, stamp out overcrowding and improve standards for those renting in the private sector: Current and proposed powers include:

- introduction of civil penalties of up to £30,000 as an alternative to prosecution
 - extension of Rent Repayment Orders to cover illegal eviction, breach of a banning order or failure to comply with a statutory notice
 - database of rogue landlords/letting agents convicted of certain offences from April 2018
 - banning orders for the most serious and prolific offenders from April 2018
 - introduced protection for tenants against retaliatory eviction where they have a legitimate complaint and stopped landlords from serving an open-ended eviction notice at the start of a tenancy
 - required landlords to install smoke alarms on every floor of their property, and test them at the start of every tenancy, and to install carbon monoxide alarms in high risk rooms
 - councils can make a direction to remove permitted development rights to convert properties where there are local concerns about the change of use
 - government supports the further measures in [Karen Buck MP's Private Member's Bill](#) to protect tenants in both the social and private rented sectors, which passed at the second reading on Friday 19 January
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News story: Lord Ahmad congratulates The Gambia on Commonwealth re-entry

Lord Ahmad handing the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting invitation to President Barrow

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister for the Commonwealth, visited The Gambia on 15 and 16 February to offer congratulations on the country's re-entry to the Commonwealth.

The Minister met with senior government ministers, including President Adama Barrow, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ousainou Darboe, and Vice-President Fatoumata Tambajang, where he discussed the Government's commitments to reforms in keeping with the Commonwealth's principles of democracy, equality for all citizens, and good governance.

Lord Ahmad said:

The UK warmly congratulates the people of The Gambia on this country's re-entry to the Commonwealth family of nations. When the Foreign Secretary visited last year, he met many Gambians who share the common values of the Commonwealth and wanted to re-join – and who felt as if they had never truly left.

We have welcomed the Government's progress on human rights and governance over the past year. It is important now that there is continued, concerted commitment and tangible action: human rights, freedom of expression, equality for all, and strengthening rule of law are critical building blocks for a sustainable, successful democracy.

I am delighted to have formally invited, on behalf of the Prime Minister, President Barrow to the UK for the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April, and we look forward to working with The Gambia as a Commonwealth partner once more.

Lord Ahmad also met with civil society organisations, human rights groups, and members of the international community, including to hear about the challenges facing many women and girls, from lack of access to quality education, to FGM, early marriage and inequality.

Further information

Speech: PM press conference with Chancellor Merkel: 16 February 2018

It's a pleasure to be in Berlin once again and I thank Chancellor Merkel for hosting these talks today. You may recall, she was the first Head of Government that I visited after becoming Prime Minister in 2016, I think underlining the importance of the relationship between our two countries.

Our partnership is vital in defending our shared values and promoting our interests around the world. We are standing side-by-side in Eastern Europe as part of NATO efforts to reassure our allies and deter Russian aggression.

Our Armed Forces are supporting the Iraqi Government to liberate territory in their brave fight against Daesh in the Middle East.

And in areas such as global health, climate change, clean energy, UK-Germany cooperation has shaped the international agenda.

Security

In our talks today, we have discussed the speech I will give to the Munich security conference tomorrow, in which I will reiterate that the UK remains unconditionally committed to European security – and set out my vision for a unique new partnership between the EU and the UK on defence, information sharing, security and law enforcement.

Because as the threats we face grow and evolve, our structures and capabilities must keep pace.

Whether the challenge comes from North Korea's attempts to nuclearise the Korean Peninsula or the Islamist terrorists that continue to seek to do us harm.

We must work together and use all the levers at our disposal to keep people across Europe safe.

Foreign policy

On foreign policy, we already work very closely together.

Today Chancellor Merkel and I have reaffirmed our commitment to the Iran nuclear deal and the need for full implementation by all sides that we made in October last year. And we agreed that as we continue to work to preserve the deal we also share US concerns about Iran's destabilising activity in the Middle East.

We stand ready to take further appropriate measures to tackle these issues.

We also discussed the Western Balkans Conference, which I look forward to Chancellor Merkel attending in London in July.

Prime Minister Theresa May and German Chancellor Angela Merkel

Prosperity and Brexit

Of course, it is not only in defence of our shared values that the UK and Germany rely on one another.

Trade between our nations secures and generates hundreds of thousands of jobs in both countries, with hard work, enterprise and innovation at its foundation.

Our proud history of commerce goes back to at least the 12th century with the trade between the Hanseatic cities and English ports.

And it is vital to people in both the UK and Germany that this shared tradition continues.

And so we have referred in our discussions to the UK's vision for a bold and ambitious economic partnership once the UK leaves the European Union.

I want to ensure that UK companies have the maximum freedom to trade and operate within German markets – and for German businesses to do the same in the UK.

Much progress has already been made in the Brexit negotiations and we both welcomed the agreement reached last December to secure rights for more than a hundred thousand German nationals in the UK and a similar number of UK citizens living here in Germany.

We're now ready to enter into the next phase of negotiations and our immediate goal is to agree a time-limited implementation period, with the latest round of talks between the UK and the Commission due to begin on Monday.

Conclusion

The UK and Germany's shared history, values and culture make us vital partners and strong allies both bilaterally and through NATO, the G7 and the G20.

And we will continue to work together to strengthen these ties for years and decades to come.