News story: Autumn Budget 2017: 25 things you need to know

1. There are over 32 million people in work – near a record high

The rise in employment over the past year has been driven by full time workers. Unemployment is also at its lowest rate since 1975.

In 2017 growth has remained solid, but slowed slightly at the start of the year. The UK economy is forecast to grow by 1.5% in 2017. It will then grow at a slightly slower rate in the next three years, before picking up in 2021 and 2022.

Inflation is forecast to peak at 3% in the final months of this year, as measured by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). It will then fall towards the target of 2% over the next year.

2. Borrowing has fallen by three quarters since 2010, but debt is still high

In 2009-10 the UK borrowed £1 in every £4 that was spent. Last year it was £1 in every £16.

The fall in borrowing means we are adding less to our debt every year. However the UK still has a debt of over £1.7 trillion – around £65,000 for every household in the country.

The money will make sure the government is ready on day 1 of exit. It will include funding to prepare the border, the future immigration system and new trade relationships.

4. £6.3 billion of new funding for the NHS

£3.5 billion will be invested in upgrading NHS buildings and improving care.

£2.8 billion will go towards improving A&E performance, reducing waiting times for patients, and treating more people this winter.

5. Abolishing stamp duty land tax (SDLT) on homes under £300,000 for first-time buyers from 22 November

95% of first-time buyers who pay stamp duty will benefit.

First-time buyers of homes worth between £300,000 and £500,000 will not pay stamp duty on the first £300,000. They will pay the normal rates of stamp duty on the price above that. This will save £1,660 on the average first-time buyer property.

80% of people buying their first home will pay no stamp duty.

There will be no relief for those buying properties over £500,000.

6. 300,000 new homes a year, an amount not achieved since 1970

£15.3 billion new financial support for house building over the next five years – taking the total to at least £44 billion. This includes £1.2 billion for the government to buy land to build more homes, and £2.7 billion for infrastructure that will support housing.

The government will also create 5 new ‘garden’ towns.

Changes to the planning system will encourage better use of land in cities and towns. This means more homes can be built while protecting the green belt.

7. The National Living Wage and the National Minimum Wage will increase from April 2018

The National Living Wage for those aged 25 and over will increase from £7.50 per hour to £7.83 per hour from April 2018. Over 2 million people are expected to benefit. For a full-time worker, it represents a pay rise of over £600 a year.

The National Minimum Wage will also increase:

21 to 24 year olds	18 to 20 year olds	16 and 17 year olds	Apprentices
£7.38 per hour	£5.90 per hour	£4.20 per hour	£3.70 per hour

8. The tax-free personal allowance will rise with inflation to £11,850 from April 2018

The personal allowance – the amount you earn before you start paying income tax – will rise from £11,500 to £11,850. This means that in 2018-19, a typical taxpayer will pay £1,075 less income tax than in 2010-11.

9. Fuel duty will remain frozen for an eighth year

In 2018, fuel duty will remain frozen for the eighth year in a row, saving drivers £160 a year on average.

10. A new railcard for those aged 26 to 30

The government will work with the rail industry on a new railcard which will be introduced from spring 2018.

11. Duty on beer, wine, cider and spirits will be frozen

The cost of a pint of beer or cider will be 1p lower than if duty had risen by inflation. The cost of a typical bottle of wine will be 6p cheaper.

Cheap, high-strength cider will be subject to a new band of duty.

12. Duty on tobacco will rise

The duty on cigarettes will increase by 2% above inflation. Hand-rolling tobacco duty will increase by 3% above inflation.

13. 95% of passengers will not see an increase in their Air Passenger Duty

Air Passenger Duty will be frozen for all economy passengers and all short-haul flights. It will rise for premium fares on long-haul flights, and on private jets.

14. Households applying for Universal Credit will get more upfront support

Households in need who qualify for Universal Credit will be able to access a month's worth of support within five days, via an interest-free advance, from January 2018. This can be repaid over 12 months.

Claimants will be eligible for Universal Credit from the day they apply, rather than after seven days. Housing Benefit will continue to be paid for two weeks after a Universal Credit claim.

Low-income households in areas where private rents have been rising fastest will receive an extra £280 on average in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

15. Electric and driverless cars

The UK will set out rules so that self-driving cars can be tested without a safety operator.

An extra £100 million will go towards helping people buy battery electric cars. The government will also make sure all new homes are built with the right cables for electric car charge points.

16. The world's first national advisory body for artificial intelligence (AI)

The Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation will set standards for the use and ethics of AI and data. This will allow the UK to lead the world in developing practical uses for the technology.

17. More investment in maths and science in schools

Schools will get £600 for every extra pupil who takes A level or Core maths.

£27 million will help improve how maths is taught in 3,000 schools. £49 million will go towards helping students resitting GCSE maths.

£350,000 of extra funding a year will be given to every specialist maths school that is set up across the country. The number of fully-qualified computer science teachers will also rise from 4,000 to 12,000.

18. £64 million for construction and digital training courses

£34 million will go towards teaching construction skills like bricklaying and plastering. £30 million will go towards digital courses using AI.

This funding is provided in advance of launching a National Retraining Scheme that will help people get new skills. It will be overseen by the government, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). They will decide on other areas of the economy where new skills and training courses are needed.

19. A £220 million Clean Air Fund for local areas with the highest air pollution

Local authorities will be able to use this money to help people adapt as steps are taken to reduce air pollution. Possible ways the money could be spent include reducing the cost of public transport for those on low incomes or modernising buses with more energy efficient technology.

The money will come from a temporary rise in Company Car Tax and Vehicle Excise Duty on new diesel cars.

20. Reducing single-use plastics waste

The government will seek views on reducing single-use plastics waste through the tax system and charges. Disposable plastics like coffee cups, toothpaste tubes and polystyrene takeaway boxes damage our environment.

This follows the success of the 5p carrier bag charge, which has reduced the use of plastic bags by 80% in the last two years.

21. Business rates will switch to being increased by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) 2 years earlier than planned

Business Rates will rise by CPI from April 2018. Business rates currently rise by the Retail Price Index (RPI), a different way of measuring inflation which tends to be higher than the CPI.

Business rates revaluations will take place every 3 years, rather than every 5 years, starting after the next revaluation, currently due in 2022.

22. Pubs in England will continue to receive a £1,000 business rates discount next year

The discount applies to pubs with a rateable value of up to £100,000.

23. Stopping digital multinationals who hold intellectual property in low-tax countries from avoiding tax

The government will also look to change international corporate tax rules to ensure digital companies pay a fair amount of tax.

24. More money for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

The devolved administrations will all get increased spending power in devolved areas, including education, health and transport. Each devolved administration can decide where this will be spent:

- There will be an increase of £2 billion for the Scottish Government
- There will be an increase of £1.2 billion for the Welsh Government
- There will be an increase of £660 million for a Northern Ireland Executive

Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will be able to claim VAT refunds which will save them around £40 million per year.

25. Funding for transport across England

£1.7 billion will go towards improving transport in English cities. Half will be given to Combined Authorities with Mayors, and the rest allocated by a competition.

An extra £337 million will go towards a fleet of new trains on the Tyne & Wear Metro.

An extra £6 million will go towards the Midlands Connect motorway and rail projects.

Transport links along the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford corridor will be improved by:

- completing the rail link between Oxford and Bedford, and Aylesbury and Milton Keynes
- setting up a new East West Rail Company to speed up work on the rail link between Bedford and Cambridge
- £5 million to help develop plans for Cambridge South Station
- building the Expressway road between Oxford and Cambridge

News story: UK Government Budget delivers for Scotland

The Chancellor announced a freeze on spirits duty. The freeze will give our world leading distillers the confidence needed to invest and grow their businesses and encourage new firms to enter the market. A bottle of Scotch is now £1.15 cheaper than it would otherwise have been since ending the duty rise in 2014.

The UK Government is also committed to supporting hardworking people across

Scotland. Fuel duty has been frozen for the eighth successive year, which will save the average driver in Scotland nearly £9 every time they fill up their car. The UK Government is also extending the rural fuel duty rebate scheme for the Scottish Islands until 2023, allowing drivers in those remote communities to continue to benefit from a 5p per litre reduction in fuel costs.

Scotland’s Oil and Gas industry will benefit from the introduction of a Transferable Tax History, which enables oil companies to pass on their tax history to new buyers when they sell their UK oil and gas fields. This will encourage investment in North Sea oil production, safeguard jobs and ensure that the UK benefits from every last drop of oil.

As well as continuing to support the Tay Cities and Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Deals announced at Autumn Statement 2016, the Chancellor today revealed that the UK Government would begin formal negotiations for a Borderlands Growth Deal. Once agreed, this deal will support local priorities and bolster the region’s economy.

The personal tax allowance – the amount you can earn before you start paying income tax – will rise from £11,500 to £11,850 in April 2018. In 2018-19, increases the UK Government has made to the personal allowance will benefit 2.4 million people in Scotland, compared to 2015-16.

Scotland’s emergency services will also directly benefit by a new move to enable Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to claim VAT refunds – saving them more than £40 million annually.

Scottish charities will also reap the rewards of more than £3.3 million of LIBOR funding raised from fines levied on banks. In addition to this, the UK Government will provide £2.2 million to support improvements to the Lady Haig’s Poppy Factory in Edinburgh.

The Chancellor also set out plans – as a result of Barnett consequentials – to boost the Scottish Government’s budget by £2 billion.

Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell said:

> This Budget demonstrates the UK Government is delivering for Scotland.
>
> From support for city deals and some of our finest charities to landmark tax measures on oil and gas and whisky, this Budget backs Scotland’s great industries. This is in addition to the £2 billion of extra spending power the Scottish Government will have as a result of this Budget.
>
> This Budget will directly benefit people right across Scotland as we work to create an economy fit for the future.

Further information

The Scottish Government’s block grant will increase in real terms over the Spending Review Period between 2015 and 2020. The boost will give the Scottish Government even greater spending power to bolster Scotland’s productivity and increase growth, as part of a successful UK economy. The Scottish Government can choose how to spend this increase in its budget alongside the increased tax and borrowing powers that it took on earlier this year. This will mean the Scottish Government is more accountable for its investment decisions.

By the end of the year, the UK Government will publish the first breakdown of changes in devolved administrations’ block grant funding. This will increase transparency and allow greater scrutiny of the UK’s funding arrangement. This breakdown will be published on an annual basis.

Press release: A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon first railway bridge beam lift

New photos of giant bridge beams being lifted over one of the country’s main railway lines have been released by Highways England, as the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme successfully reaches yet another milestone.

Giant steel girders being lifted over the East Coast Main Line railway last Sunday (19 Nov).

The photos, which were taken during the night, early on Sunday 19 November, show two pairs of twin steel girders weighing 100 tonnes each being lifted by a 500-tonne, giant crawler crane with back up support from a 100-tonne mobile crane.

The work, which happened during a four-hour closure of the railway line between 2 and 6am last Sunday, was completed with one hour to spare, after the railway’s overhead power lines were isolated and protected during the tricky manoeuver.

The steel beams will be joined by another three over the coming weeks and will form part of the bridge that will carry the new, 6-lane (three in each direction) A14 Huntingdon bypass over the East Coast Mainline once the 21-mile, £1.5bn A14 upgrade project is completed by the end of 2020.

A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon project director for Highways England, David Bray, said:

> The successful installation of the first two bridge beams over the East Coast mainline is the culmination of two years of planning and the fact that the team was able to do this in around three hours is a credit to the level of expertise at our disposal on this project.

> We've just marked our first year of construction and we're a quarter of the way into our programme already. The improvements we are delivering between Cambridge and Huntingdon are vital for the local area and for the country's economy. We set out to deliver world leading infrastructure improvements a year ago, this is exactly what we have been doing so far and we look forward to continuing to deliver our challenging programme in record time.

You can see a new fly-through simulation of the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme on the Highways England YouTube Channel.

For the latest information about the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme, including job and training opportunities, visit the scheme website, follow @A14C2H on Twitter and like our Facebook page.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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Press release: 28 years' ban for directors of consumer credit broker which took money without permission

The individuals disqualified are: Mark Robert Kennedy for 8 years; David John Carter Mullins for 8 years; Edward John Booth for 7 years; and Christopher Brotherton for 5 years.

All four were the directors who had responsibility for SMM trading with lack of commercial probity from October 2013 whereby SMM:

- induced members of the public to provide bank/credit card details so that SMM could take money without their knowledge or consent
- did not provide services in accordance with which representations
- made misleading statements in respect of refunds to its customers, company bankers and FCA when challenged
- did not carry out any work for its upfront fee
- charged customers who had already paid an upfront one-off fee, monthly fees without their permission, knowledge or any clear explanation or justification

Kennedy, Mullins and Booth shared responsibility for allowing SMM's website to remain active, resulting in £181,393 being taken from individual bank accounts, after SMM had agreed with Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to remove from public access and sight all such offending websites.

At liquidation on 31 August 2014 SMM had liabilities totalling £357,628, with assets estimated to be £6,000.

SMM traded as an internet credit broker from August 2011 using the trading styles/brand names MoneyGaGa (to October 2013); Loan Zoo; Loan Junction; and i-loans direct. After October 2013 SMM allowed one of Mr Kennedy's other businesses to trade his brand the1loan through SMM.

Up to October 2013 SMM had utilised a platform designed by a former director. That platform was dispensed with and a new platform was introduced by Mr Kennedy, who provided technical expertise and finance to support SMM. Mr Kennedy was only formally appointed as a director of SMM between 30 May 2014 and 11 June 2014, though was the key individual in its operation after October 2013.

Customers came to SMM via other companies (described as 'affiliates') websites, called 'pingtrees'. Customers searched for loans online and input their details. SMM paid for these leads and the customers' details would be prepopulated into SMM's website. The customer base for SMM was, in the majority, individuals who had been turned down by lenders.

SMM duped its ‘customers’, who were searching for loans, into paying a brokerage fee of up to £69. SMM effectively did nothing in return for that fee. Its websites and correspondence with customers – and its merchant service provider – made misrepresentations which delayed the refunding of sums to customers. The directors then misled the FCA in stating that SMM’s websites had been shut down, when in fact they had not, resulting in even more moneys being extracted.

SMM also directed customers/enquiries to other brokers, with the consequence that these people were exposed to the potential to be charged a number of times by similar brokers.

In May 2014 the FCA made contact with SMM who promised to make changes to its processes and remove or amend certain webpages. These changes were not done as SMM had promised and the company entered a creditor’s voluntary liquidation on 31 July 2014.

The Insolvency Service investigation, found that SMM:

- induced members of the public, via its website payment pages, to provide bank or credit card details in order that SMM could deduct a brokerage and/or membership fee without the customers’ knowledge and or consent. It did not make it clear that a fee would be taken nor what that fee would be
- changed its wording on fee charging in March 2014 but by April 2014 it had reverted back as it had affected SMM’s revenue
- failed to provide the service in accordance with which representations had been made
- told customers that SMM needed to notify the individual lenders it had contacted on the customers’ behalf as a justification for not making refunds immeiately. SMM did not contact lenders.
- did not, as it claimed to its bankers and customers, compare loan products from a wide range of lenders
- implied to its bankers that customers saw its home pages and arrived at the website prior to a Payment Page, which was knowingly not the case
- provided screenshots to the company bankers that were different to the website operated by SMM and in particular included an opt-in box for the Terms and Conditions on the Payment Page, which was absent on the website
- did not carry out any work for its upfront fee. All customers received the same ‘offers’, many of which were unsuitable for the customers’ needs. As a result SMM was unable to ascertain what loans, if any, had been secured by its customers
- commenced to charge customers who had already paid an upfront one off fee monthly fees of £4.99 in May 2014 with no apparent justification

The Financial Ombudsman Service received 656 customer complaints about SMM between January 2014 and May 2014. On 20 May 2014, SMM informed the Financial Conduct Authority that the websites would be taken down by “…no later than 10am tomorrow”, and thereby made inoperative. Email traffic between the director showed them discussing how the websites would have the appearance of being off-line and unviewable or accessed publicly including “we can always ‘take them down’ for now like the1loan appears taken down but we all know is not.” Between 21 May 2014 and 30 May 2014 the websites remained live and operating, resulting in at least a further £181,393 being removed from customers.

Commenting on the disqualifications, Cheryl Lambert, Chief Investigator at the Insolvency Service, said:

> This company was a shark feasting in a pool of the most vulnerable and financially distressed. It took advantage of their desperation for immediate funds, and its own technical expertise, to induce the unwary into a trap from which it was difficult to escape.
>
> The system that was created resulted in some of the least financially sophisticated members of society having their banking and personal details pinging around a school of sharks to create a feeding frenzy.
>
> This was utterly cynical and thoroughly reprehensible commercial activity.
>
> The disqualification of the four people directly responsible is a warning to all directors. The Insolvency Service is continuing to pursue the rogues, chancers and recklessly greedy. There will be a direct personal consequence to the activities undertaken behind the corporate veil.
>
> The Insolvency Service would like to thank the Financial Conduct Authority for their co-operation in this case.

Notes to editors

Secure My Money Ltd (CRO 07713650) was incorporated on 29 July 2011. Its registered office before liquidation was Beechfield House Winterton Way Macclesfield Cheshire SK11 0LP. It traded via the internet with a physical presence at Beechfield House, Winterton Way, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 0LP.

Secure My Money Ltd was placed into liquidation on 31 July 2014 with Jonathan Elman Avery-Gee and Stephen Leonard Conn of CG&Co of 17 St Ann’s Square, Manchester M2 7PW appointed joint liquidators. Secure My Money Ltd was dissolved on 9 March 2017.

The Secretary of State accepted an 8 year undertaking from Mark Robert Kennedy (DOB November 1964) on 25 September 2017. The disqualification commenced on 16 October 2017 and Mark Robert Kennedy is of Monte Carlo, Monaco, 9800.

The Secretary of State accepted an 8 year undertaking from David John Carter Mullins (DOB February 1980) on 29 November 2016. The disqualification commenced on 20 December 2016 and Edward John Booth is of Stockport, Cheshire.

The Secretary of State accepted a 7 year undertaking from Edward John Booth (DOB December 1986) on 6 September 2016. The disqualification commenced on 27 September 2016 and Edward John Booth is of Stockport, Cheshire.

The Secretary of State accepted a 5 year undertaking from Christopher Brotherton (DOB December 1985) on 6 September 2016. The disqualification commenced on 27 September 2016 and Christopher Brotherton is of Clwyd.

A disqualification order has the effect that without specific permission of a court, a person with a disqualification cannot:

- act as a director of a company
- take part, directly or indirectly, in the promotion, formation or management of a company or limited liability partnership
- be a receiver of a company’s property

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings. Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a range of other restrictions.

The Insolvency Service, an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), administers the insolvency regime, and aims to deliver and promote a range of investigation and enforcement activities both civil and criminal in nature, to support fair and open markets. We do this by effectively enforcing the statutory company and insolvency regimes, maintaining public confidence in those regimes and reducing the harm caused to victims of fraudulent activity and to the business community, including dealing with the disqualification of directors in corporate failures. Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is available.

BEIS’ mission is to build a dynamic and competitive UK economy that works for all, in particular by creating the conditions for business success and promoting an open global economy. The Criminal Investigations and Prosecutions team contributes to this aim by taking action to deter fraud and to regulate the market. They investigate and prosecute a range of offences, primarily relating to personal or company insolvencies.

All public enquiries concerning the affairs of the company should be made to: Cheryl Lambert, Head of Outsourced Investigations, Investigations and Enforcement Services, The Insolvency Service, 3rd Floor, Abbey Orchard Street, London SW1P 2HT. Tel: 0207 596 6117. Email: Cheryl.Lambert@insolvency.gsi.gov.uk.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 7674 6910 or 020 7596 6187

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on: