

Press release: Helping you get home for Christmas with miles of roadworks lifted

To help journeys flow more smoothly and to keep disruption to a minimum, more than 97 per cent of motorways and strategic A-roads will be roadworks-free in time for Christmas, meaning motorists and hauliers alike can get on with last-minute shopping and delivery journeys with as little disruption as possible.

Where it is safe to do so, roadworks will be lifted or suspended on England's motorways and major A-roads by 6am on Friday 21 December until 12.01am on Wednesday 2 January.

Highways England's customer service director Melanie Clarke said:

We're doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible for this Christmas getaway and that's why we're keeping more than 97 per cent of our road network free from roadworks.

We know that the Christmas period is one of the busiest times on our roads and we'd also like to remind people about the importance of checking their vehicle before setting off on their journeys. Simple things like checking your fuel and oil levels, tyre pressures and that all lights are working properly, can keep you moving and the network flowing.

Highways England traffic officers will be working around the clock, patrolling the network to help those people who do get into difficulty.

And the company responsible for managing England's major road network is also reminding people to leave plenty of distance between themselves and the vehicle in front to avoid tailgating.

Statistics the company released earlier this year show that one in eight of all road casualties are caused by people who drive too close to the vehicle in front, with more than 100 people killed or seriously injured each year.

To celebrate the importance of the major A-road and motorway network in bringing families together over the festive break, a [special animation](#) has been produced.

The animation – hosted on the Highways England YouTube channel – follows the journeys of several people travelling home for Christmas with some notable landmarks on England's road network sighted along the way. It also features a cameo appearance from Michelin-starred chef Glynn Purnell travelling to cook Christmas dinner for Santa in the North Pole.

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.

[Press release: On third anniversary of Tim Peake's space mission; report reveals over 2 million inspired by education campaign](#)

The UK Space Agency ran a £3 million education campaign alongside the mission to the International Space Station, which blasted off three years ago tomorrow (15 December), to inspire a greater interest and understanding of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as well as space.

The campaign – the largest and most successful ever organised for a European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut – encompassed 34 separate projects and covered a spectrum of ages and subjects, including mass participation experiments in schools using seeds that had been in space.

British ESA astronaut Tim Peake said:

Principia was a unique opportunity to engage a young audience in science and human spaceflight. This was only possible thanks to the efforts of the UK Space Agency, ESA and hundreds of volunteers who embraced the potential of this mission through a wide range of educational projects.

Tim was the second British astronaut, after Helen Sharman, and the first to fly with the European Space Agency. He spent six months in space, carrying out scientific experiments on the International Space Station.

The report, produced by the UK Space Agency, found one in three UK schools took part in at least one Principia activity. Every region of the UK ran school activities with all projects accessible to boys and girls. The majority of the 34 projects focused on primary school children although some

went right through to university.

The report also found:

- Over 900,000 people have taken part in Destination Space workshops and other activities, created by the Association for Science and Discovery Centres and run at centres across the UK
- 600,000 pupils from 8,600 schools took part in the Rocket Science seed-growing experiment led by the Royal Horticultural Society
- 400,000 students took part in the Cosmic Classroom with a live link to Tim on the International Space Station in partnership with Tes Global

Tim returned to Earth on 18 June 2016 yet the legacy of the Principia Mission and its education programme continues. All the [Principia education resources](#) are available for teachers, students and the public online and they continue to be used.

The UK Space Agency is now making a further £65,000 available for education and outreach programmes under its [Space for All scheme](#).

Grants of up to £10,000 will be awarded to schemes that use space as an inspiring context for learning and may include:

- delivery of curriculum enrichment activities
- delivery of activities to promote careers in the space sector
- delivery of activities to engage the public
- pilot studies to support any of the above

This comes on top of £325,000 the Agency awarded to the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC) last week to create new resources based on real scientific and engineering challenges, including those facing the operation of UK spaceports, rockets and spaceplanes.

Together, up to 14 UK science centres and museums will deliver activities to 200,000 children and adults until March 2021, building on the success of ASDC's Destination Space education programme from the Principia Mission.

[News story: GC responds to the FSA review of food standards delivery](#)

FSA review

FSA surveyed local authorities between March and May 2018 across the three countries and 104 replied. It assessed how local authorities plan and prioritize food standards work, the resources and capacity they have and how they measure success of programs.

The current approach to delivery of food standards controls is set in the Food Law Code of Practice (FLCOP), which has separate versions covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

[Michael Walker](#), Referee Analyst and head of the Office of the Government Chemist, LGC welcomed the review:

“Food must be safe and consumers must have the information they need to help make informed choices about the food they buy; responsibility for this rests firmly with those who make and sell food. There is however a legitimate expectation of government oversight. There is ample legislation covering food standards including the quality, composition, labelling, presentation, chemical contamination and advertising of food. But policy responsibility for and delivery of official controls of food standards (i.e. ‘enforcement’) exist in a complex landscape.

I welcome this review and its findings. The conclusions are refreshingly candid in recognising the failures in the system. FSA is to be applauded in its aims to address the failures.

Much can be done to improve consistency of approach and effective targeting of resources. But it is openly acknowledged in the report that it is highly unlikely that available resources to deliver food standards controls will increase in the near future without intervention by central government. Thus there is a tension between the ambitious aims of the review and the practical ability to deliver sustainable modernisation in the short term.

With the community’s full support, and knowing the calibre and experience of the team responsible for Regulatory Compliance in FSA, I look forward to the successful outworking of this review.”

A full article on the review and the GC response can be found on [Food Safety News](#) and the published review can be found on the [FSA website](#).

For any enquiries related to food testing to meet standards contact the Government Chemist

[Press release: Regulator of Social Housing publishes 2018 Global accounts](#)

The social housing sector increased its investment in new and existing properties, according to the [2018 Global accounts of private registered providers](#), published today (14 December 2018) by the Regulator of Social Housing.

The annual Global accounts report is based on an aggregation of the financial

statements of private registered providers of social housing who own or manage at least 1,000 homes (together representing more than 95% of the sector's stock).

The main findings for 2018 are:

- There was a small increase in the underlying surplus generated, which was used to support additional borrowings to fund capital investment
- Capital investment increased this year with £1.7bn in existing stock and £10.8bn in new housing supply, which includes social housing and properties for sale and market rent
- The sector raised more than £10bn (2017: £7.6bn) in new debt facilities from banks and capital markets with borrowings (drawn debt) increased by £3.0bn to £72.5bn.
- Expenditure on repairs and maintenance of existing social stock at £5.0bn increased by 3% compared to 2017
- The operating surplus from social housing lettings decreased by 2% to £5.0bn – the period covers the second year of 1% rent reductions on general needs units and, for the first time in 2017-18, providers also had to reduce rents on most supported housing properties
- The value of the properties held for sale at the year-end was £5.6bn, mainly consisting of land and work in progress rather than completed properties. This was an increase of 17% on 2017
- The sector's future capital commitments totalled £28.6bn (of which £12.4bn has been contracted) is an increase of 17% compared to the figure reported in 2017.

This year's publication also includes an annex on the [Value for Money \(VfM\) metrics](#), which were introduced alongside the April 2018 VfM Standard.

Providers are required to report against seven metrics specified by the regulator; the annex contains the results of these metrics and accompanying narrative. The initial findings show a wide range in performance across the sector, with distinctive characteristics for particular groups of providers such as early years Large Scale Voluntary Transfers and supported housing providers.

Fiona MacGregor, Chief Executive of RSH, said:

2018 saw the sector deliver a strong financial result whilst increasing its investment in both new supply and existing properties. Record levels of debt finance were arranged, leaving the sector well-funded for the future. >

The increase in capital spending commitments is also to be welcomed as the sector seeks to provide good quality homes to meet a range of needs. However, increased activity, particularly where this is tied to uncertain market conditions, brings increased risk. Provider boards must continue to monitor, manage and mitigate the potential effects of the risks to which they are exposed.

The headline social housing unit cost data, based on 2018 submissions, is included in the Global accounts data file, alongside the 2018 VfM metrics data.

1. The annual releases are available on the [Global accounts collections page](#).
 2. Under International Financial Reporting Standards most mergers in the sector are accounted for using the purchase accounting method. This requires the receiving organisation to report the fair value of the net assets acquired – effectively the balance sheet – as a gain (or profit) in the year of acquisition. The gain will usually be considerably more than the annual trading surplus generated by the merging organisation, and so will inflate reported surpluses in the year of acquisition. Subsequent years will not be affected.
 3. The Regulator of Social Housing promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants. For more information visit the [RSH website](#).
 4. See our [Media enquiries page](#) for press office contact details. For general queries, please email enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or call 0300 124 5225.
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News story: Online right to work checks

The [Home Office Right to Work Checking Service available on GOV.UK](#), gives employers access to up-to-date, real-time information about migrants' right to work, making it easier for individuals to prove their rights in the UK.

The Right to Work Checking Service is secure and free to use. It was launched in April this year, however until now, employers have still needed to request paper documents alongside using the service. The changes will mean that employers can use the online service to demonstrate they conducted the necessary right to work checks on migrants and avoid a penalty if they are found to be employing illegal workers.

Immigration Minister, Caroline Nokes said:

This is another step we are taking to simplify and modernise the immigration system. The online Right to Work Checking Service makes the checks simpler for employers and provides greater security as they no longer need to rely on physical documents when checking a migrant's status, further reducing the risk of forged documents being presented.

Above all, our new checking service makes it easier than ever for migrants to view and prove their right to work in the UK.

The service is voluntary for employers and individuals. Migrants may demonstrate their right to work using either the existing document check or the [online check](#).

Individuals will be able to authorise their current or prospective employer to see information about their immigration status to conduct the check and will be able to see exactly what information will be shared.

The online Right to Work Checking Service can be used by non-EEA nationals who hold biometric residence permits or biometric residence cards and EEA nationals who have been granted settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme. EEA nationals who have not been granted settled status under the EEA scheme will still need to demonstrate their right to work through the appropriate documents, such as their national passport, as now.

The changes being made today will also make it simpler for UK nationals without British passports to demonstrate their citizenship by enabling them to use short birth or adoption certificates, which they can get for free, instead of the long versions.