

Press release: PM hosts Chinese New Year reception at Downing Street

Theresa May has hosted a Chinese New Year reception at Downing Street to celebrate the enormous contribution of the Chinese community to British life and a 'Golden Era' for UK-China relations.

On Wednesday (21 February) the Prime Minister welcomed a number of Chinese students in Britain who are involved in higher education and language learning exchanges. She highlighted the academic achievements of the community and the talent they bring to our educational institutions, and pointed to the huge learning benefits to both countries through partnerships such as the UK-China mathematics teacher exchange, which has been extended for a further two years to 2020.

Building on her recent trip to China alongside 50 businesses and organisations from across the country, the Prime Minister also welcomed guests from a range of sectors with trade links to China.

British nursery provider Busy Bees, who secured a significant early years education deal with the Oriental Cambridge Education Group during the Prime Minister's visit to China, were also in attendance. The partnership between these two businesses will generate £75m in exports in the next five years and deploy 20 British teachers to China each year.

Andrew Wong, Head Chef and owner of Michelin star restaurant A. Wong in London's Victoria, was the guest chef for the reception.

The Prime Minister also presented James Wong, Chair of the Birmingham Chinese Festival Committee, with a Point of Light Award in recognition of his inspiring work to attract thousands of visitors to the city, creating the UK's largest Chinese New Year festival. His restaurant also gives hundreds of free meals to elderly people in the local community.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

It was great to welcome people from all parts of the United Kingdom to Downing Street to celebrate Chinese New Year, the vibrancy of the Chinese community in Britain, and the deepening ties between our two countries. I was delighted to take a 50-strong business delegation with me on my recent trip to China, and found a real enthusiasm for the links between us and the opportunities we share.

But the ties that bind our country are of course about more than just business – they're about people.

James Wong's huge contribution to life in Birmingham is one shining example of someone who has helped broaden and deepen our cultural ties and I was pleased to award him a Point of Light.

I would like to extend my best wishes to everyone celebrating this special day, as we mark the Year of the Dog and a golden era of UK-China relations.

James Wong, Chair of Birmingham Chinese Festival Committee, said:

I'm fiercely passionate about raising awareness of Chinese culture and supporting the Chinese community.

Birmingham is a fantastic, multicultural city that endorses diversity and I feel fortunate to have had the backing of so many wonderful friends and colleagues on the 'Chinese Festival Committee' and beyond. I look forward to seeing our great city continue to work closely and hopefully welcome more investment from China in years to come.

Andrew Wong, Head Chef at A. Wong and guest chef at the reception, said:

Chinese New Year is the biggest celebration for my family and for the whole of China, and it's a time of year where family time is truly celebrated.

It's wonderful that Downing Street takes the time out to celebrate this event and to celebrate the diversity of London – and obviously the Chinese community is a big part of that diversity.

Press release: Hospitals, prisons and Jobcentres to refer people at risk of homelessness

For the first time, prisons, probation services, Jobcentres and NHS Trusts will be among the organisations that have a duty to help those at risk of becoming homeless and refer them to a housing authority, Minister for Homelessness Heather Wheeler confirmed today (22 February 2018).

The [Homelessness Reduction Act](#) – the most ambitious legislative reform for decades – places new legal duties on English councils to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness.

Councils will now be required to ensure the advice and information they provide is designed to meet the needs of particular at risk groups including

care leavers, people leaving prison, people who have left the armed forces, survivors of domestic abuse and those suffering from a mental illness.

In addition to new duties to refer those at risk of homelessness, the reforms will include:

- providing free information and advice on preventing homelessness and the rights of homeless people, to all residents, including information tailored to the needs of particularly vulnerable groups
- a new duty for those who are already homeless so that that local authorities will work with them for 56 days to help secure accommodation

Minister for Homelessness Heather Wheeler said:

Everyone should have a home to call their own and we have put in place strong protections to guard families and individuals against the threat of homelessness.

Our reforms – putting prevention at the heart of everything we do – are designed for lasting change and to back this up we're investing almost £1 billion over the next 4 years to break the homelessness cycle once and for all.

The government has backed the Act with £72.7 million of funding to help councils to deliver these changes. In time, it is expected that the increased preventative work brought about by the Act will lead to substantial savings for councils.

The confirmation of which public bodies have a duty to refer is part of a wider package of regulations made ahead of the roll-out of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April.

Alongside the new duty to refer, the government is continuing to work closely with key sector organisations to identify different ways services can contribute to preventing homelessness and supporting the successful implementation of the Act.

In particular, the department is working with the National Housing Federation to explore how housing associations can support the Act, including by making referrals, and working with the National Police Chiefs' Council to develop a 'test and learn' project in Brighton & Hove focusing on homelessness prevention.

The government is already taking significant action to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping through:

- providing £315 million to local authorities for their work on

homelessness, and an additional £402 million in Flexible Homelessness Support Grant funding, which local authorities can use to work more strategically to prevent and tackle homelessness pressures in their areas

- announcing £28 million for 3 Housing First pilots in Manchester, Liverpool and the West Midlands to support long-term rough sleepers off the streets and help them to end their homelessness. Individuals will be provided with stable, affordable accommodation and intensive wrap-around support. This will help them recover from complex health issues, for example substance abuse and mental health difficulties and sustain their tenancies
- investing £9 billion to build more social housing, including council homes

Case study: Southwark council

Southwark council receives the third largest numbers of homelessness applications in England. MHCLG funded Southwark to be an 'early adopter' of the act and implement measures that mirror key elements of the new legislation, including assessments and personalised housing plans and delivering bespoke prevention and relief services to households regardless of whether they are in priority need.

The latest statistics from Southwark show that from the 1 April 2017 until 31 January 2018 the number of households accepted as owed the main housing duty had decreased by 49% compared to the same period the previous year (April 2016 to January 2017), from 789 to 405. In addition, Southwark has eliminated its use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families.

The council also report that they have successfully trained staff to focus on the prevention of homelessness. This is reflected by a marked increase in positive feedback from families and a decline in the number of reviews requested by applicants. Southwark have been actively sharing their learning with over 250 other authorities across the country.

The government supported the Homelessness Reduction Bill which was introduced to the House of Commons in summer 2016 by Bob Blackman MP, and progressed through Parliament with cross party support. The Act received Royal Assent on Thursday 27th April 2017.

The government worked with a group made up of local authority and charity representatives, as well as specialists relevant to particular issues, to inform the review of the code of guidance. The new code brings together and updates existing guidance, as well as providing new guidance to cover the duties brought in by the Act. An 8 week [consultation](#) was launched on 16 October 2017 and closed on 11 December 2017.

The [Homelessness code of guidance](#) provides direction on how local authorities

should exercise their homelessness functions and apply the law in practice. It also applies to local housing and social services authorities, who are required by law to have regard to this guidance when exercising their functions relating to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. to have regard to the guidance in exercising their functions in relation to homelessness.

The duty to refer is one element of a wider package of regulations required to enable the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The regulations also set out the procedure to be followed by housing authorities when carrying out reviews of homelessness decisions, and issuing notices to applicants who deliberately and unreasonably refuse to co-operate with them. See [factsheets on the regulations](#).

How the duty to refer works in practice will be determined in each local area. For example, housing authorities may want to develop standard referral mechanisms, and public bodies may want to undertake training to support their staff in identifying people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

[News story: Annual Qualifications Market Report](#)

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[Press release: UK energy statistics: 2017 provisional data](#)



December 2017 energy statistics that allow a provisional assessment to be made of trends in energy production and consumption in 2017. A more detailed analysis will be available in Energy Trends, to be published on 29 March 2018.

Published 22 February 2018

[Press release: Department of Land Transport in partnership with British Embassy Bangkok: improving driving licence procedures for foreign nationals](#)

These improvements contribute to a wider goal of tackling road safety in Thailand, with an aim to cap the rising number of foreign nationals involved in road traffic accidents.

Improvements will focus on guidelines for obtaining a driving licence; how to prepare for the driving test; raising awareness of specific risks on the road unique to Thailand; and recaps on internationally-recognised driving standards.

Deputy Head of Mission for the British Embassy Bangkok, Margaret Tongue, says:

Reducing the number of road accidents involving British people in Thailand remains a key priority for the British Embassy. This important collaboration illustrates a shared aim of improving driving standards and raising awareness of specific risks on the roads, through developing engaging and accessible materials to aid

the driving test process that not only British people will benefit from, but also any other foreigners residing in Thailand.

Deputy Director General of Department of Land Transport, Kamol Buranapong, says:

Department of Land Transport sees the importance in creating the understanding for foreigners wishing to attain a Thai driving licence. This collaboration with the British Embassy Bangkok on this Road Safety initiative to improve process and standard of licencing process will help enhance the understanding for foreigners and, meanwhile, protecting their right as a road user under Thai laws. Foreigners can receive a Thai driving licence with the same standard procedures with any other vehicle types by receiving training about relevant laws, rules for using roads in Thailand, written and practical tests.

Based on a survey conducted with British customers needing consular services, the partnership has helped kick start three initiatives that include the production of a 45-minute English language instructional video, covering road traffic laws, road usage, techniques for driving safely and driving etiquette. This is a part of the Thai driving test for foreign nationals.

Other initiatives are the production of a 3-minute English language video explaining the process for renewing, transferring and applying for a driving licence as a foreign national and re-translation of the online driving test for English speaking applicants.

The Department of Land Transport will use these materials for English speaking applicants at all driving test centres and transport offices across Thailand. This will ensure that foreign drivers are aware of road safety rules and regulations; the consequences of their own behaviour to themselves and to others; and law enforcement in Thailand.

- Thailand welcomes just over 1,000,000 British visitors each year and it is also home to over 50,000 British people and their families.
- Safety for British people visiting, living and working in Thailand is a key priority of the British Embassy Bangkok, with road safety being an important aspect of this.
- Last year (2017), 5% of total casework (71 cases) from the Consular Department at the British Embassy Bangkok involved providing assistance to British people involved in road accidents.
- The top five provinces for road traffic accidents involving British

people are Surat Thani, Phuket, Chiangmai, Chonburi (Pattaya) and Bangkok.

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