

Business owners urged to #KnowYourRates



#KnowYourRates to be aware of any impending rise in business rates

Politicians want further action by the Scottish Government

With changes to business rates in the offing from 1 April, business owners may want to know the real cost rather than continuing under a veil of uncertainty.

The Scottish Property Federation is actively encouraging ratepayers to find out what their rates are likely to be.

David Melhuish, director of the SPF, is urging businesses to check draft 2017 rateable values on the Scottish Assessors' Association portal to gauge the differences in rates that can be expected, following reports of expected increases in rates running to £10,000s for some businesses.

The SPF has also taken to Twitter using #KnowYourRates to encourage businesses to check new rates liabilities sooner rather than later.

David said: "We have been hearing pretty much on a daily basis from concerned businesses about the uncertainty of how much their rates are set to change. Businesses may not see their new rates valuations appear in the post until shortly after 15 March so we are encouraging firms to check draft valuations on the Scottish Assessors Association website, where a postcode search is available.

"The outcome of the revaluation – the first for seven years dating back to the early stages of the 2008 recession – is

very mixed for business sectors and locations. While some ratepayers in the retail sector are seeing their valuations reduced, hospitality and licensed trade ratepayers in particular are in some instances facing significant increases.

“Many businesses still don’t realise how much or even whether the revaluation will increase their rates, so we are trying to get the message out and encourage people to check now before the new rates bills come into effect from April.”

Meanwhile the debate on business rates continues after an apparent U-turn by the Scottish Government on rate increases which some business owners regarded as crippling.

Andy Wightman MSP, Local Government spokesperson for the Scottish Greens, has called for a future parliamentary debate on how and where business rates are decided as the Government’s review is too limited.

At yesterday’s meeting of Holyrood’s Local Government Committee, Mr Wightman proposed annulling the 2017 Non-Domestic Rates Order to prompt an explanation from the Finance Secretary about how rates are decided.

In 18 years of devolution the rate of Scotland’s second highest-yielding tax has never been voted on by the full Holyrood chamber and it has been ten years since the rate was voted on by a committee.

The Finance Secretary agreed that wider scrutiny is needed and that a fuller debate can be had after the Barclay Review is completed in the coming months.

Andy Wightman, Local Government spokesperson for the Scottish Greens and MSP for Lothian, said: “Proper scrutiny of non-domestic rates, which generate almost £3billion a year for council services, has long been needed. It’s extraordinary that it took the prospect of annulment to prompt today’s discussion at committee, and I look forward to a wider debate

in Parliament once the Barclay Review is complete.

“It should be remembered that the Barclay Review is very narrow in focus, and only asks how to reform the system as it exists. Instead we should be asking whether business rates are fit for purpose at all, and this should be part of the ongoing discussion in this Parliament about reform of local taxation. How businesses are taxed should be a fundamental tool that local councils can use to respond to local needs.”

Miles Briggs Lothian Conservative MSP has asked any businesses in his constituency who are facing significant rises to contact him so that he can make representation to the Finance Secretary Derek Mackay.

“While I welcome the Scottish Government’s belated recognition of the business rates crisis that faced so many Edinburgh pubs, cafes, restaurants and other hospitality operators and its decision to cap their rates rises at 12.5%, other businesses and organisations in the city who are also facing massive rises received absolutely nothing from the Scottish Government’s announcement.

“This is unfair and suggests the Scottish Government simply hasn’t understood the level of concern that exists across all sectors with rateable properties.

“ Some retail premises, offices, nurseries, and other firms- as well as public sector buildings like hospitals- are still facing very significant rates hikes which will put real pressure on their viability and lead to questions about jobs.

“ I urge businesses and organisations who are still going to be hit hard by the revaluation to both appeal their new valuations and contact me so that I can make further representations to Derek Mackay and ask if he will consider additional support for other small businesses and organisations who are also seriously affected by the revaluation.”

To check your draft 2017 rateable values see the postcode search facility on the Scottish Assessors' Association portal (www.saa.gov.uk) which also includes links to further professional advice and explains how and when concerned ratepayers may appeal their assessments.