



**YOUR QUESTIONS
CHARLIE WESTON**

Can both the Help-to-Buy and First Home schemes be used to purchase our house?

Q My partner and I have been saving for the last 10 years. Can we get Help-to-Buy as well as the First Home Shared Equity scheme to buy our first home?

A The Help-to-Buy (HTB) scheme allows first-time buyers to get a tax rebate of up to €30,000, or 10pc of the purchase price of a newly-built home – whichever is less.

In the case of self-builds, a rebate of up to €30,000, or 10pc of the approved valuation of the property, is available under HTB, said Ian Lawlor, managing director of Lotus Investment Group, which lends to developers. With the First Home Scheme (FHS), the State and participating banks pay up to 30pc of the cost of your new home in return for a stake in the property.

As the FHS was extended to self-builds on September 20, 2023, you can also avail of this scheme if building your own home, as long as certain conditions are met, he said. The FHS, for example, cannot be used to purchase the site.

The HTB scheme can be used in conjunction with the FHS once you are eligible for both, though the maximum equity stake you can apply for under FHS is 20pc of the purchase price if this is the case. Eligibility for HTB is assessed by the HTB and is separate from the FHS, Mr Lawlor said.

Q We recently had a smart meter installed. We live in a rural area. I believe there are different tariffs for different areas. Can you explain these and which is the best one to be on? Also is there any merit in

switching providers?

A Smart meters are being rolled out to every home, farm and business. They are considered the “next generation” of electricity meter, said Daragh Cassidy of comparison site Bonkers.ie. They can communicate directly with your energy supplier, and send it near real-time data about your energy usage. You will no longer need to submit a meter reading. It also means you will be able to get more valuable insights into your electricity usage. Smart meters also allow you to sign up to a smart tariff.

There are lots of different types of smart tariffs. But what they all have in common is that they charge you a different rate for your electricity depending on when you use it. All suppliers must offer a standard smart tariff (SST) with a peak rate between 5pm and 7pm when electricity is most expensive. A night rate applies between 11pm and 8am when electricity is cheapest.

And there is a day rate for electricity consumed outside these times, Mr Cassidy said. Some suppliers also have tariffs with a super-low overnight rate for those with electric vehicles and some have tariffs that offer free electricity at weekends. The best plan for you will depend on when you use your electricity.

Those in rural areas will be charged a slightly higher standing charge but where you live doesn't make any difference to the smart tariffs available to you. You do not have to sign up to a smart tariff for now if you don't want to. No matter the type of tariff you are on, there is always merit in switching provider

every year. Most suppliers offer big discounts – up to 20pc or more for an entire year – to new customers to entice them to switch, Mr Cassidy said.

Q My husband and I divorced after 25 years of marriage. I had made a will prior to our split where I had left an investment property to him in the event I pre-deceased him. Now we are divorced, I assume this bequest is automatically revoked? I don't want him to inherit this property, or indeed anything from me, any more in the event I pre-decease him.

A Separation or divorce of itself does not revoke a will and the contents of the will remain valid unless amended or revoked, said Sonia McEntee, principal with Sonia McEntee Solicitors. Although divorce removes spousal entitlements (known as the legal right share) if there is a specific bequest in a will, the former or separated spouse can still inherit that item.

This is because the law assumes that what you direct in your will is what you want to happen on your death. Of course, tax exemptions for spouses would no longer apply either.

Wills should always be reviewed or revised following divorce or separation. In these circumstances, it's important to take legal advice to ensure your wishes are correctly reflected, taking account of all of your circumstances, Ms McEntee said.

It is assumed you have not remarried. You should be aware that any will you make now would be invalidated by a future marriage, unless that marriage is specifically contemplated by the will. This can also cause confusion later in respect of legal entitlements.



The Help-to-Buy scheme can be used in conjunction with the First Home Scheme once you are eligible for both