

[We must continue to tackle Hate Crime – Cab Sec](#)

Speaking in the Chamber during Hate Crime Awareness week, and as newly published figures show that 2,941 hate crimes were reported in Wales during 2016-17, which is an a 22.3% increase on 2015-16, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“Much of this increase is likely to be due to an increase in the rates of reporting. This is a positive sign that victims are reporting incidences of hate crime and have confidence that they will be dealt with. Between 2012 and 2015 only 48% of hate crime victims were reporting them. Since then, a lot of work has been done to increase awareness and the confidence of victims in coming forward.

“Nevertheless, there is real concern amongst the Police, the third sector and other partners at the rising number of hate crimes committed last year. We have therefore been working closely with them to maximise the impact of our work and build communities where hate crime is not tolerated and victims are supported to the utmost.

“Abuse or discrimination against people because of their race or faith, nationality, age, disability, sexuality, gender or gender identity, is wrong. Nobody should think that they have any license to abuse people. We continue to tackle this behaviour head on. Nobody should suffer hostility, bullying or prejudice. This is why we are taking a clear stand on this issue and why we must continue our work to counter hate and build cohesion in Wales.”

[Consultation opens on appeals process for non-domestic rates in Wales](#)

A consultation opens today on improving and modernising the long established system to make sure that it's fair and works as well as it can.

All the non-domestic rates revenue raised in Wales is redistributed to local government and policing bodies in Wales.

This helps to pay for the services – education, social care, waste management, transport, housing, public protection, leisure and environmental

amenities and more – on which we all rely.

The consultation sets out how the appeals system could better reflect changing circumstances and make the best use of current technology.

Also included are specific aspects such as when information should be provided during the appeals process, the potential introduction of fees for unsuccessful appeals, new civil penalties for providing false information and the requirement to make appeals in a responsible and accountable manner.

Launching the consultation today, Local Government Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“Non-domestic rates provide £1 billion in funding for our public services so it is essential that all eligible ratepayers make a contribution.

“However, in return, we need to make sure that the system in place for dealing with appeals is as fair and transparent as it can possibly be.

“One of the key features of the rates system in Wales is that each ratepayer has a right to appeal their rates valuation if they believe it to be incorrect.

“It is important that ratepayers are paying the right amount of rates and, if this is not the case, that corrections are made as quickly as possible.

“It is equally important that every ratepayer acts responsibly in using the appeals system.

“Today marks the start of 12 weeks of consultation with ratepayers, industry representatives, other taxpayers and local authorities.

“We are very keen to hear their views as we look to make the non-domestic rates appeals system fit for the future and responsive to the needs of Welsh businesses.”

[Mark Drakeford in Brussels to meet Guy Verhofstadt MEP](#)

Over the two days, the Cabinet Secretary will meet Sir Tim Barrow, the UK Permanent Representative to the EU and key figures from the European Parliament. He will also take part in a European Policy Centre and Wales

Governance Centre *Cross Nations Panel on Brexit* alongside the Scottish Government's Brexit Minister Mike Russell.

During the meetings, the Finance Secretary will highlight the Welsh Government's priorities for Brexit – including the importance of full and unfettered access to the single market, a sensible approach to migration which protects the Welsh economy and a transition period to avoid falling off a cliff edge.

The meetings are an opportunity to continue to build a direct relationship between the Welsh Government and EU leaders and gain a greater understanding of the EU's negotiating position.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Mark Drakeford said:

“Leaving the EU is the biggest challenge of our lifetime – the decisions made today will affect Wales for decades to come.

“Today's visit is therefore very timely, coming on the back of the latest round of Brexit talks and ahead of a crucial decision this week by the European Council on whether these can progress to discuss trade arrangements.

“This is an opportunity for me to set out our priorities for a deal that works for Wales, the UK and the rest of the EU 27.

“We're hearing alarming noises suggesting a no deal is a viable outcome. This is a deeply dangerous fallacy. Walking away from talks would be a catastrophic failure which would have dire economic, security and social consequences.

“It is more important than ever for transition discussions between the UK and the EU 27 to commence as soon as possible. Business confidence is already suffering due to the uncertainty.

“The UK Government has a responsibility to follow up the positive overtures from the Florence speech with detailed proposals on withdrawal issues. Two years is the absolute minimum viable period to resolve all the outstanding issues if we are to protect the needs of businesses and citizens and avoid falling off a cliff edge.

“As a government, we will always want the best outcome for Wales and the Welsh economy. In the short, medium and long-term, we believe the only way of achieving this is by securing the closest possible relationship with the single market.

“We also continue to call on the UK government to provide firm evidence on why being outside a customs union with the EU would be of advantage to the UK in the longer term.

“Europe is one of our biggest trading partners, they are our

closest neighbour and we share a border with them. Our economic ties cannot be severed on the day we leave the EU. It is essential all parts of the UK and the EU work together to agree a way forward that meets all our needs.”

Talgarth Bakery expand production

The loan of £195,000 will enable the baked goods specialist to expand their production and invest a total of £700,000 into new production facilities at Heol-Ty-Gwyn Industrial Park, creating ten new permanent jobs and safeguard 20, bringing their total headcount to 90 people employed from the local area.

The new units will provide space for the business to move the cake plant out of the Spelter site so they can increase production, expand and concentrate on the recently acquired Burts Cakes and Biscuits, which is already well established and growing.

The company recently won very significant contracts with Morrisons and Booker, making expansion a necessity to accommodate the very high level of new business which will see the company ramp up production and increase turnover by some 40% by 2018.

Talgarth Bakery was established in 1904 and purchased by its current owner, Howard Hughes, in 1986. The company has grown steadily over that period and now serves more than 200 local customers, both retail and wholesale with some 500 products weekly in its own liveried vans with a remarkable degree of brand loyalty.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Talgarth is an important employer in the South Wales Valleys and is a company with an excellent track record of growth and profitability. I look forward to seeing the company reach its expansion goals.”

Howard Hughes Managing Director of Talgarth Bakery said:

“I want to thank the Welsh Government for its continued support in assisting our business to not just expand, but in safeguarding the jobs of our loyal workforce.”

[Our Route to becoming a Circular Economy nation](#)

A circular economy approach encourages keeping resources in circulation instead of being burned or ending their life in landfill. In a statement to Plenary, the Cabinet Secretary announced the creation of a Plastic Route Map. This will plan Wales' approach to creating a better market for recycled plastic products, made in Wales and reduce our reliance on overseas markets for waste plastic.

Studies have found the adoption of a Circular Economy could save the Welsh economy up to £2bn and has the potential to create up to 30,000 jobs. Earlier this year the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs announced a [£6.5m fund](#) for 2019-20 to help Wales move towards a circular economy.

Lesley Griffiths said:

“Wales is fully signed up to the benefits of the circular economy. The £6.5m fund I announced earlier this year will develop a significant number of small-scale capital projects to assist SMEs in making the transformation towards a ‘Circular Economy’ approach. We need to see more circular economy business models developed in Wales.”

Wales' commitment to the Circular Economy approach is further enhanced by our participation in [Circular Economy for Small and Medium sized Enterprises \(CESME\)](#) project. This European funded initiative will enable SMEs to turn environmental challenges into opportunities. Last month, Welsh Government was represented at the fifth meeting held in South Ostrobothnia, Finland – where the group visited four different SMEs that apply the circular economy approach in their activities. This included Lapua's Potato who turn waste potatoes into paper. The meeting in South Ostrobothnia follows previous CESME get-togethers here in Wales last May, Denmark, Italy and Greece.

The focus on plastics follows a package of measures the Welsh Government is considering to reduce waste and tackle created by plastic pollution. This includes examining the potential of an Extended Producer responsibility scheme, where producers are responsible for the waste they produce and a possible tax on disposable plastic. The Plastics Route Map will be published by WRAP by Spring 2018.

Further information on CESME can be found on the [Interreg Europe website](#) (external link)