

Have your say on a new small business rates relief scheme for Wales

In 2017-18, the Welsh Government is providing more than £110 million of rates relief for small businesses. The new permanent scheme will maintain this level of investment.

A consultation opens today looking at whether the scheme could provide more support to the small businesses that need it the most.

This could involve redirecting relief from certain businesses, such as national chains which occupy multiple small premises across Wales, to support businesses which are more likely to benefit.

Funding would then be reinvested in making the scheme more generous for small businesses like local shops, cafes and restaurants which might only operate from one or two premises.

In considering how the scheme could be made more generous, the consultation also looks at whether the different thresholds for relief could be increased, how much this would cost and whether, as a result, more businesses would benefit.

The consultation also looks at whether any additional types of businesses should be excepted from the scheme. Current exceptions include non-domestic properties like car parks and phone masts, as well as those occupied by councils, police and crime commissioners or the Crown.

In addition to the above, the consultation asks how the permanent scheme could be used to support certain industries or sectors, such as childcare, should there be a robust evidence base to do so.

The Welsh Government is also asking for any other views from ratepayers about how the permanent SBRR scheme could continue to be developed in the future to ensure it is responsive to business needs. Questions include whether support should be permanent or time-limited and whether it should be focused on businesses that are in line with Welsh Government priorities – whether social, economic or environmental.

Launching the consultation today, Mark Drakeford said:

“We want to provide as much certainty and security for small businesses as we possibly can. One of the best ways we can do this is by confirming that we will be introducing a £110m permanent SBRR scheme in 2018 and, in doing so, extending a tax cut that will help boost long-term economic growth for Wales.

“Today marks the start of an extensive consultation with ratepayers, business representatives, other taxpayers and local

authorities. Their views are absolutely essential to making this scheme a success and we want to work with them closely, constructively and attentively. I urge everyone to have their say before the consultation closes on Friday 13th October.”

Purnima Tanuku OBE, Chief Executive of National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) said:

“We wholly welcome this consultation. Relief on Business Rates would make a huge difference to a childcare sector beset by underfunding and rising costs. Nurseries are so important to the economy, employing many thousands of people and allowing parents to work. Business Rates have been increasing at a time when settings just cannot afford to pay more, impacting on fees to parents and relief would help to balance nursery books and keep costs to families affordable.”

[Warm Homes Nest – Report reveals benefits for homes and businesses](#)

[Welsh Government Warm Homes Nest](#) (external link) provides all householders in Wales with access to advice and support to help them reduce their energy bills. This includes a referral for eligible householders for a package of free home energy efficiency measures such as a new boiler, central heating system, loft or cavity wall insulation, or renewable technologies.

In 2016/17, the Welsh Government provided £19.5m for Nest and a further £3.9m has been levered in through the GB-wide Energy Company Obligation.

- Over 5,500 households received free energy efficiency measures.
- Average energy bill savings for households who had measures installed are estimated at £410 per year.
- 264 households benefited from new or additional benefits, with an average increase in household income of over £1,800 per household per year. This equates to a £482,500 potential increase in benefit take up this year.
- 382 households benefited from a Warm Home Discount rebate worth £140 off their electricity bill; this represents a total saving on energy bills of over £53,400.
- 77 households benefited from receiving support from their water companies. HelpU and Water Direct. They are collectively estimated to make direct savings of £14,300.

Since 2011, 190 opportunities have been created by Nest including jobs, apprenticeships and training. All installations have been carried out by Wales-based small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

One company that has directly benefited from its involvement in Nest is QRL Radiator Group, based in Newport. QRL have been supplying radiators to Nest since January 2014, all made from steel produced by TATA steel. Over 153,000 QRL radiators have been installed through Nest.

Speaking during a visit to QRL yesterday Lesley Griffiths said:

“Today’s report shows Nest continues to contribute impressively to job creation and growth in Wales. Since the scheme started in 2011, all installations have been carried out by Wales-based enterprises and over 190 opportunities have been created in the process.

“We should rightly be proud of Nest’s impact, both economically and environmentally. There is, though, no room for complacency. Tackling fuel poverty in Wales remains a significant challenge. That is why I am investing over £104 million in Welsh Government Warm Homes schemes over the next four years to improve a further 25,000 homes.

“I am confident Nest will continue its success in 2017/18. I look forward to seeing many more households who have been struggling to heat their homes benefit from the help the scheme provides”.

[AMs trumpet musical instrument amnesty](#)

The Welsh Government and National Assembly for Wales joined forces to ask Assembly Members and all staff to bring in any unwanted musical instruments so they can be provided for use in Welsh schools, who are in need.

The pilot is ahead of a national musical instrument amnesty in November.

Llywydd Elin Jones and Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams both reaffirmed their commitment to ensure that all people across Wales are able to participate in and experience arts and culture, including music.

Kirsty Williams said:

“I am committed to the idea that if a child is inspired to pick up an instrument, whatever instrument it may be, that they have the ability to access one and develop their performance and playing

skills.

“That is why I am delighted with the first Welsh Government and National Assembly for Wales Musical Instrument Amnesty. Whether it’s an unused ukulele or forgotten French horn, we want to help get these instruments into the hands of those young people who would give them a new lease of life.”

Presiding Officer Elin Jones AM said:

“I recently took part in a Ceredigion Schools Music Service orchestra for people who are learning an instrument for the first time; I played the maracas.

“Music is an important part of life; it lifts our mood, energises us and gives us a way to express ourselves, which is why it is crucial to overcome barriers to young people playing. Learning how to play an instrument can be a challenge, and having access to a good quality instrument is so important.”

The Welsh Government/National Assembly for Wales Musical Instrument Amnesty Week took place between 12-19 July.

The national amnesty will happen in November and will be coordinated through the Welsh Local Government Association. So if you can donate any good quality unwanted instruments you may have tucked away in your lofts and cupboards, then keep your eyes peeled for details.

[‘Iron Ring’ sculpture unveiled as part of £630k project at Flint Castle](#)

The winning design was selected by a panel from the Welsh Government and sponsored body, Arts Council for Wales, following a nation-wide competition to obtain proposals for an artwork concept celebrating Wales’ Year of Legends.

Begun in 1277, Flint was one of the first castles to be built in Wales by Edward I. The King later moved on to construct the north Wales castles of Beaumaris, Conwy, Caernarfon and Harlech, which today form a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The £395k monumental Iron Ring sculpture, plans for which have been unveiled today by Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, could potentially measure up to seven metres high and 30 metres wide, and

symbolises a giant rusted crown representing the relationship between the medieval monarchies of Europe and the castles they built.

The installation will be engraved with carefully chosen associated words and sayings to be developed with the local community.

When opened in 2018, visitors will be able to walk along the sculpture and enjoy elevated views across the estuary and of the castle.

Its location at Flint marks the event where the crown was famously transferred from one medieval dynasty to another, as described in Shakespeare's Richard II. Flint Castle was the setting as Richard II surrendered the crown to Henry IV – a momentous event impacting the history of Britain and Europe.

“The sculpture will take a balanced form, some buried beneath the ground, the remainder projecting into the air, to demonstrate the unstable nature of the crown,”

said George King, from George King Architects Ltd – the architects behind the ambitious design.

“The sculpture has been carefully designed to work at many scales. From afar its striking, iconic form resembles a giant ancient artefact, washed up on the shore of the Dee Estuary.

“Its scale and dynamic appearance means that it will become an instantly recognisable landmark for the area.

“However, as you approach the sculpture it becomes obvious that the piece is more than just a sculpture.”

The engravings will celebrate local landmarks, historic towns and their links with Flint Castle, as well as content about the flora and fauna of the Dee estuary.

The sculpture is part of planned wider developments outlined in a newly-commissioned regeneration strategy for Flint foreshore, aimed at greatly enhancing the visitor experience at Flint Castle, strengthening and building on community relations within the town and helping with the regeneration of this unique area.

Ken Skates said:

“It gives me great pleasure to announce plans to help improve the visitor experience at this fascinating site steeped in history during Wales' Year of Legends.

“Throughout 2017 we are celebrating the incredible people from our

past, captivating places and stories that have shaped Wales' rich heritage and culture.

"In its prime, Flint Castle played a pivotal role in not only shaping the future of Wales but that of the UK and Europe. The Iron Ring sculpture is a perfect way of marking this significance while attracting more people to visit the site, bringing positive economic benefits to the area."

Further improvements to the castle include the installation of a stainless-steel spiral staircase within the north-east tower and a masterplan to consider the wider regeneration of the Flint Foreshore.

The £217k staircase has been fitted in the same position as the original masonry staircase, allowing visitors access to the tower and an opportunity to enjoy magnificent views from a new platform installed at the top of the stairs.

The regeneration approach is in its early stages, but will look at options for the improvement to the current facilities along the shore. This will include working with Flint's RNLi, rugby club and football club to improve current facilities, and working with partners such as the Local Authority to develop visitor services at Flint Castle.

£4.2m EU funds to construct new business units in Anglesey

The development at Bryn Cefni Business Park will provide over 1,300m² of office, light industrial and storage space for businesses on the former Môn Training site and over 750m² of office space at the Anglesey Business Centre.

The construction is part of wider plans to develop Anglesey's Enterprise Zone and Energy Island Programme. Work is expected to begin in early 2018 with the units being ready for businesses in early 2019.

Finance Secretary, Professor Mark Drakeford, said:

"I am delighted EU funds are being invested to construct high quality business premises to support the growing employment and supply chain opportunities stemming from the nuclear and energy sector in the region.

"This will help create a business-ready employment hub that will assist the region to attract inward investment and capitalise fully on the developments created by the Energy Island Programme."

The units will complement other EU backed business premises in the area, including the completion of seven business units on the Llangefni site and the construction of the nearby Menai Science Park currently underway.

Earlier this year, Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, opened the first two sections of the Llangefni link road which, when complete, will connect people to training and job opportunities in the area, facilitating further economic growth.

Anglesey's Head of Regulation and Economic Development, Dylan Williams, said:

"These new units will support the continued economic growth of Anglesey, the wider North Wales region and the ongoing development of our Energy Island Programme.

"Securing £4.2m EU funds is testament to the quality of our proposals and location of these schemes. This funding will enable us to create opportunities for growth, develop the success of the Enterprise Zone, and we hope to see other infrastructure investments taking place in the future."

Planning, Regulation and Economic Development portfolio holder Councillor Richard Dew:

"We are grateful for the EU funding and to the Welsh Government for supporting our plans for much needed infrastructure improvements to enable the redevelopment of the Môn Training site and extending the Anglesey Business Centre. These developments will be very welcome to increase the availability of high-quality modern business premises to rent in the area."