

[Council tax payers in Wales continue to pay less than England](#)

The Welsh Government release shows that average Band D council tax for Wales in 2017-18 stands at £1,420, £171 less than the average Band D in England, which stands at £1,591.

The average band D council tax rise in Wales is also lower than the figure for England based on estimates published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The average increase in England in 2017-18 is 4.0% and the increase in Wales is 3.3%.

Through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS), the Welsh Government has also maintained its support to almost 300,000 households who need assistance in meeting their council tax bills. Of these approximately 220,000 pay no council tax at all.

Welcoming today's figures, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government Mark Drakeford said:

"Councils here are facing some real financial challenges but these latest figures show we are protecting local government from the worst of the cuts handed down by Westminster and, in doing so, protecting the taxpayer; a situation that has not been replicated on the other side of the border.

"In 2017-18, we are increasing funding for local government by £10 million compared to 2016-17. Under the funding floor we introduced in the Local Government Settlement, no council will have to manage on less than 99.5% of the cash provided to them last year, and most will have more.

"While our Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) is playing a key role in tackling poverty in Wales we're currently looking at how we can make the system fairer for those who less able to contribute. We'll make a further announcement on our plans during the course of this Assembly term."

[Global buyers get a taste of Wales in](#)

an effort to reach new markets post-Brexit

As part of the Welsh Government's commitment to raise Wales' global profile as a first-class place to do business, it is hosting the largest ever showcase of Wales' food and drink industry. The event, being held in the Celtic Manor, brings together producers, buyers and food industry professionals.

The two-day TasteWales event is hosting over 50 buyers from countries across the globe, including the Far East, Middle East, North America and Europe, over 100 UK buyers and in excess of 100 Welsh producers.

The event has Meet the Buyer opportunities, where influential domestic and international buyers can meet with Welsh food and drink producers to explore the potential of working together and identify new trade channels.

It also boasts an Innovation Skills and Business Zone where attendees will have the opportunity to see new developments and learn more about the support available for businesses in the sector.

Food and drink is already one of Wales' largest sectors, employing over 223,000 people and worth over £17bn to the Welsh economy annually.

Exports for the sector have grown by 95% in the past decade and continue to grow, up 13% in the first six months of 2016 compared to the same time in 2015.

Speaking ahead of TasteWales, the Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

"We are extremely proud of our high-quality food and drink and recognise the enormous value it brings to our economy. Food and drink is a priority sector for the Welsh Government and this is why we have set an ambitious target to grow the sector by 30% by 2020.

"Food and drink exports have grown considerably and I am keen to see this continue. There are challenging times ahead as we navigate towards a future outside of the EU, particularly given almost 90% of our food and drink exports go to the EU. We continue to call for full and unfettered access to the single market, a request which has been replicated in discussions with representatives of the industry.

"However, in light of the UK's decision to leave the EU, it is now more important than ever we promote the very best the food and drink industry has to offer and continue to make an impact in global markets. Today's event is part of our response to overcoming future challenges and provides an exciting opportunity for Welsh producers to strike new deals with some impressive and influential

buyers.”

Minister moves to protect Welsh language promotion and facilitation grants for 2017-18

The money will provide core and project funding to 77 organisations over 2017-18 to deliver a variety of activities. Groups that will benefit directly from this fund include:

- Yr Eisteddfod Genedlaethol
- Cymdeithas Eisteddfodau Cymru
- Mentrau Iaith
- Merched y Wawr
- Young Farmers Clubs Wales
- Papurau Bro Welsh – language local newsletters
- Urdd Gobaith Cymru
- Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru

Minister for Life Long Learning and Welsh Language Alun Davies said:

“Our aim is to promote the use of Welsh in every day life across the whole of Wales through opportunities to use the language, and supporting organisations to protect and strengthen the position of the Welsh language. These grants recognise the contribution of these organisations to the future well-being of the language.

“I’ve always maintained that Government does not have a monopoly on the future of the Welsh language. Many other bodies, both national and local, societies, schools, employers, families and individuals, all have their parts to play. The language is part of who we are and it belongs to everyone.

“All of us have a part to play in advancing its future and this money will in no small part help us all towards realising our shared ambition of one million Welsh speakers.”

Independent recommendations will have positive impact on the IPFR process says Vaughan Gething

The NHS Wales IPFR process is the mechanism used by all health boards in Wales to make decisions on access to treatments that are not routinely available for individual patients.

The review was established in July 2016 with a particular focus on considering the “clinical exceptionalism” decision making criteria for IPFR and the scope to reduce the number of IPFR panels in Wales. Central to the review was the patient perspective.

The review’s comprehensive findings were published in January and are available [here](#).

Ahead of his Oral Statement in the Senedd this afternoon, Vaughan Gething said:

“My approach to this review has been to be open, inclusive and transparent from the outset involving all political parties, the public and the NHS in Wales.

“I’m pleased that the consensus is that this is a helpful piece of work that makes thoughtful and pragmatic recommendations that will help health boards deal with what are sensitive and very often complex decisions. I am particularly pleased that the patient voice has centre stage in the report.

“The good news from the report is that many aspects of the system are working well and the review group have made helpful recommendations to strengthen those and improve upon other aspects of the process.

“The review concluded that the principle for making decisions at an individual patient level about access to a treatment should be based upon the level of expected clinical benefit and whether the treatment offers reasonable value for money.

“With regards to reducing the number of IPFR panels, the review group have recommended it would not be the best way forward.

“The review has suggested improvements to the overall process to support health boards make these highly complex and sensitive decisions. This includes clarifying when it is appropriate to use the IPFR process, and strengthening quality assurance.

“I would like to thank the review group, once again, for their hard

work and commitment in completing this complex piece of work. I would also like to express my gratitude to all of the patients who have been involved in the review process. The evidence they've provided in the workshops that have taken place across Wales has been invaluable.

"I have written to all of the health boards to confirm the implementation of the recommendations by September.

"I believe the recommendations in this report, when implemented, will have a positive impact on the IPFR process. It will make the system more easily understandable and less prone to being misused. Something I'm sure the people of Wales will welcome."

Communities Secretary launches consultation on park home commission fees

The consultation follows a review of the sector commissioned by the Welsh Government. While the review made several recommendations to improve standards in the sector, barely a quarter of park home operators contributed detailed financial information to the review.

Announcing the consultation, the Cabinet Secretary said:

"The review into the industry rightly highlights that commission rates are a complex issue with the potential for significant consequences. I have therefore been considering the matter very carefully before deciding to hold a public consultation.

"I have concluded that we should examine further the level of the commission charged by site owners, but, in light of the very strong representations I have received I am currently of the view that there may be a case to reduce or even abolish the commission, though I will of course want to take full account of consultation responses before coming to a final view.

"The options I will consider will include reducing or even abolishing the commission rate, as well, of course, as retaining the status quo. I would therefore like to invite the park home owners to let me have the evidence which they believe would justify the latter option, but I sincerely hope all interested parties will take advantage of the opportunity this consultation will provide to

submit further information and scrutinise the available evidence.”

Informal engagement will begin immediately and the formal consultation will be published as soon as possible.