

# Finance Secretary launches plan to end prison sentences for non payment of council tax

Regulations will be brought forward in early 2019 to prevent any more people being jailed for council tax debt in Wales, pending the outcome of a 12-week consultation.

Unlike other forms of civil debt, courts have the power to send people to prison for up to 3 months for non-payment of council tax. A recent judicial review, brought by a woman from Bridgend, highlighted the number of people being sent to prison for council tax debt, in some cases unlawfully.

Professor Drakeford said:

“My view is that getting into debt is not a crime. The sanction of imprisonment is an outdated and disproportionate response to a civil debt issue.

“There is significant additional cost to the public purse of imprisoning individuals and such action does nothing to address the reasons for the debt owed to the local authority or to reduce the debt. In many cases, it makes the situation worse.

“We must also consider the longer term impact on the wellbeing and future prospects of people who are committed to prison and the effect on their families. There is also a knock-on impact on other public services, as more support is often needed by someone who is committed to prison and their family.”

Cases of council tax debt have increased following the UK government’s decision to abolish council tax benefit in April 2013. In Wales, to mitigate the impact of this decision, the Welsh Government in partnership with local authorities, developed a national Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS).

To increase uptake of CTRS by eligible households, the Welsh Government is running a campaign with local authorities and third sector organisations to raise awareness of the different types of support available to households.

Professor Drakeford added:

“The Welsh Government cannot take action in respect of the operation of the courts, as responsibility for this is not devolved.

“But we do have powers to amend the existing enforcement regime to

remove the power to commit people to prison in Wales for non-payment of council tax. I believe this is the right thing to do at this time.

“There are other, more appropriate enforcement actions which local authorities can use to seek payment of civil debts.”

The consultation about the removal of imprisonment for non-payment of council tax is the next step in the Welsh Government’s commitment to make council tax fairer.

[Removal of the sanction of imprisonment for non-payment of council tax](#)