

New measures to help tackle waste crime come into force

Under the waste duty of care, householders are required to ensure that waste produced on their property is transferred to an authorised person for disposal and can be prosecuted if they do not. However, taking someone to court is not always the most appropriate response for this type of offence and can take a great deal of time and effort.

Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government Hannah Blythyn said:

“We know that over 60% of fly-tipped waste comes from households. However, often people in these households haven’t fly-tipped the waste themselves, but they have failed to carefully check who they passed their waste to for disposal.

“We all have a responsibility to prevent our waste from getting into the wrong hands, and these regulations will provide councils and Natural Resources Wales with alternative way of tackling the issue.

“We consulted widely on these proposals and received widespread support. Local authorities who responded asked for a consistent, national approach to setting penalties and for the level of the penalty to be proportionate to the offence.

“However, we recognise that not all householders will be aware of their duty of care responsibilities and so we are developing a campaign to help people to understand their obligations.’’

By using fixed penalties this will allow local authorities to have a more efficient enforcement system and this not only frees up much needed resources but it can also help act as an effective deterrent.

The regulations have set the fixed penalty at £300 and enforcing authorities have the discretion to offer the option of an early payment of £150. Councils can retain the receipts to help contribute towards the costs of dealing with waste crime. They will still have the option to exercise their existing criminal prosecution powers for offences they believe require a fixed penalty.

New funding to help prevent and reduce suicide in Wales

Mental health is one of the Welsh Government's top priorities. To support this, Ministers continue to spend more on mental health services than on any other part of the Welsh NHS, with £655m being invested in 2018-19.

Each year in Wales around 300 to 350 lives are lost through suicide. The Talk to Me 2 Strategy has led to an increased focus on multiagency working to prevent suicide, with plans established in all areas of Wales.

In delivering the Welsh Government's response to the National Assembly for Wales' Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's inquiry into suicide, the Minister is announcing today that an additional £500,000 a year will be invested to specifically support national and regional approaches to tackle suicide and self-harm prevention.

These include:

- Recruiting National and Regional leads across Wales;
- Implementation of the support after suicide post-vention pathway to support those bereaved by suicide, as well as a full review of support and targeted investment to improve this;
- Improved awareness and availability of resources including Help is at Hand and a new suicide prevention website developed by the national advisory group talktometoo.wales;
- Guidance on suicide prevention training for staff across public services;
- Funding to support programs and initiatives that have been shown to be effective.

Health Minister, Vaughan Gething said:

“Improving mental health and well-being and preventing suicide continue to be a priority for the Welsh Government.

“We can't always predict who will be affected by suicide. However, suicide can be prevented if we reduce the risk factors that make it more likely. That's why we will target the additional investment we are making towards actions that can help prevent and reduce suicidal behaviours, as well as providing appropriate support to communities to address this complex issue.

“As a society, we all need to work together to prevent suicide. Friends, families, organisations, and communities all have a part to play.”

Ebbw Vale train frequency enhancement scheme starts

Economy and Transport Minister Ken Skates has announced a reopening of the feasibility study into increasing the frequency of trains running from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff.

He is also calling on the UK Government once again to invest more fairly in Wales' rail infrastructure, especially given the continued concentration of UK Government railway enhancement spending in the wealthier parts of the UK.

Welsh Government entered into a contract to deliver the Ebbw Vale frequency enhancement scheme with Network Rail, but took appropriate steps to pause and review it when costs began to escalate.

Network Rail (Wales Route) fully supported this, and worked closely with Welsh Government to reduce costs, and make sure all expenditure on the scheme delivers the required outcomes.

It will now resume its task to look at the process needed to bring four trains an hour to the line by 2024, as part of the South Wales Metro.

Due to be completed by early summer, it will form part of the case to the UK Government for investing in the non-devolved railway.

Transport Minister Ken Skates said:

“Ebbw Vale needs a high quality and regular rail service – one that can support jobs, investment and economic development in the wider area.

“We are delivering a step change in the provision of rail services in Wales. Our investment through the Wales and Borders rail service contract and in the first phase of the transformation of the South Wales Metro demonstrate what the Welsh Government can deliver when given responsibility and funding.

“This is against a context for rail infrastructure delivery across Wales that is still unnecessarily complex, fragmented and underfunded. Current arrangements in investment in the railway in Wales are a reflection of the time in which they were created, predating devolution. Twenty years on, the Secretary of State for Transport in Westminster continues to retain control of railway infrastructure in Wales.

“The imperfect devolution settlement is the root of many of the problems with our railway. The ongoing lack of infrastructure

enhancement investment limits the capacity for new services, restricts the speeds of new trains, and fetters our ability to open the new stations we want to see. When we have intervened, we have done so using devolved budgets. We shouldn't forget that it was Welsh Government funding that led to the reopening of the Ebbw Branch line and not the owner and funder of the infrastructure.

"Keith Williams' root-and-branch review of Britain's railways is an opportunity to reform the railway and create the fully integrated public transport network that Wales needs. Our expectation is for the Williams review to set out a clear path for further devolution to Wales.

"In the meantime, we need fair funding from the UK Government – it must invest given its continued responsibility for rail infrastructure."

[Plum choice – Denbigh fruit given protected food name status](#)

The fruit, which had its application submitted by the Denbigh Plum Group, boasts the only native variety of plum in Wales and has seen a resurgence of plums being grown in the area over the last decade.

The Denbigh Plum is the 16th Welsh product, and Wales' first fruit, to gain the EU's prestigious protected food name status.

The EU Scheme recognises quality agricultural food and drink products that surpass strict qualifying criteria. Food and drink products awarded protected food name status under the EU Scheme receive Europe-wide protection against imitation, misuse and fraud.

The European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status, which forms part of one of three special European Protected Food Name (PFN) designations will help raise the profile of Denbigh town and its surrounding area too.

The Welsh Government is working with Defra to ensure the current PFNs continue to enjoy protection rights within the UK once we leave the European Union through the creation of a new scheme replicating the existing benefits.

The new scheme will continue the successful legacy of PFNs in Wales and provide vital support as the EU Scheme transitions into a new UK scheme. The scheme will also continue to support producers in Wales to achieve the EU status under new terms once we exit Europe.

The Welsh Government has provided support to PFN producers for more than six years and its funded programme is part of the reason why Wales has been so successful in developing and achieving new PFNs in the last decade.

Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“I’m delighted The Vale of Clwyd Denbigh Plum has been honoured with protected food name status and hope it will prove a welcome boost for businesses in the area.

“With Brexit fast approaching, we are determined to support Welsh food and drink businesses and ensure they are given all necessary help in a challenging marketplace.

“This prestigious title should help strengthen the Vale of Clwyd Denbigh Plum’s identity and allow it to further its brand not only in Wales, but across Europe and other markets too.

“We are proud that so many Welsh food and drink businesses have been successful in their applications for protected food name status. It is testament to the high quality and unique nature of their produce.”

Peter Jones, chairman of the Denbigh Plum Group, said: “This will have a positive effect on not only Denbigh but the whole of the Vale of Clwyd.

“Over the last ten years we have seen a massive resurgence in plums being grown in the area and it is fantastic to see this hallmark of quality is now being recognised across Europe.

“We have long campaigned for this protected food name status and will now concentrate our efforts on further promoting the Vale of Clwyd Denbigh Plum and supporting efforts to cultivate it and grow it in the area.”

Estyn to be in schools more often as curriculum preparations continue

The change is just one of a series of measures designed to improve standards in schools – turning the focus to teaching and learning, the well-being of

pupils and teachers and reducing unnecessary bureaucracy.

Under proposals for revised inspection arrangements – to be phased in from September 2021 – Estyn would be in schools more than once within a seven year cycle, providing more frequent assurances to parents and the wider community about the standards being achieved and priorities for improvement.

In the shorter-term, Estyn will play a greater role in supporting schools to prepare for the new curriculum.

In order to allow for these changes to take place, the Welsh Government will be consulting on extending the current inspection cycle from 7 to 8 years.

This would mean there would be a partial suspension in school inspections from September 2020- August 2021 but inspections of schools causing concern, local authorities and independent schools will still continue.

Revised inspection arrangements will start to be phased in from September 2021 but this will be a gradual process over a period of years – helping schools to adapt to the new curriculum whilst maintaining and raising standards.

Kirsty Williams said:

“An effective Inspectorate is one that provides assurance that standards are being met, whilst also supporting schools to maintain improvement.

“The proposed changes are part of a broader culture change that we need to see in our schools – and culture change always takes time. There is no big-bang approach when it comes to an issue like this.

“We are moving to a model of evaluation and improvement more in line with high performing education systems across the world. What remains constant is our focus on raising standards and attainment for all.

“Estyn will have a crucial role in making this happen and that’s why they should have a greater role in supporting schools both prior to and following the roll out of the new curriculum.”

The Chief Inspector of Estyn, the education and training inspectorate in Wales, Meilyr Rowlands, said:

“I welcome today’s announcement and look forward to continuing to work closely with headteachers and schools on curriculum reform. We will soon be launching a consultation to gather views on all of today’s proposals before we implement any changes.”