

[Are you missing out on help with your council tax?](#)

As part of its pledge to make council tax fairer, the Welsh Government is working to improve take-up of its council tax reduction scheme, which provides support for almost 300,000 households in Wales with their council tax bills.

You may be entitled to pay less council tax if:

- you believe you live on a low income
- you live alone, or with people/children who do not pay council tax
- you are a student
- you are disabled
- you are severely mentally impaired

The Welsh Government has joined forces with local authorities, MoneySavingExpert.com and third sector organisations to develop simple and consistent advice to ensure all households in Wales have the information they need about their entitlements to support them to pay their council tax bill.

Finance Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“Ensuring every household in Wales receives the council tax support they are entitled to is an important part of the Welsh Government’s commitment to making council tax fairer.

“Local authorities are taking some innovative action to identify and target eligible households and we will ensure this good practice is shared and adopted throughout Wales.

“There are many discounts, reductions and exemptions available and I would encourage everyone to check the Welsh Government website to see if they could be paying less council tax.”

The Welsh Government is committed to exempting care leavers under 25 from paying council tax from 1 April 2019, subject to the necessary regulations being approved by the National Assembly.

[New projects announced to get Year of](#)

Discovery underway

This fourth themed year will give people compelling reasons to visit Wales while being encouraged to rediscover Wales and find something new about Wales and about themselves.

The Deputy Minister, said:

“By coming together and working in partnership, our themed years have given Wales a strong voice – in a very competitive marketplace. We know that our themed year campaigns are generating over £350m a year for the economy.

“Wales’ strengths are adventure, culture and the outdoors, and the aim of our themed years is to reinforce these strengths – we will return to these themes time and again, to ensure that we have clear and consistent messages about what Wales has to offer. This will be more important than ever as we work to adapt to the challenges and opportunities ahead.

“In 2019 we want to encourage our visitors to discover Wales anew, to discover new parts of Wales and to try out enriching outdoor, adventure and cultural experiences across the country. We’ve had a great start to the year with the Sunday Times Magazine choosing Wales as one of the rising stars of 2019, alongside places such as Morocco and Iceland, Georgia, Portugal, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Croatia, and South Africa.

“Wales is full of hidden corners; as well as world-class attractions, and these projects which I’ve seen are an excellent way for people to discover more about Wales, find a hidden corner and try out a new experience.”

The Minister visited the team at fforest, Cilgerran who are celebrating 12 years since starting the business. The team have recently revealed a new project for 2019, in collaboration with The Representative Body of the Church in Wales, which has been supported through the Welsh Government’s Tourism Product Innovation Fund.

The SpiritCymru project will create a network of discovery, connecting chapels and churches in west Wales through unique cycle touring journeys and overnight stays in remote historic church and chapel buildings – which provide a window of discovery to the rural communities and small legends of Wales.

James Lynch, fforest, said:

“We know that there are some 800 chapels and churches in the rural and coastal communities of Wales – many of which are facing an

uncertain future. SpiritCymru will celebrate and promote the heritage values of these beautiful buildings and provide a new sustainable model for continued community engagement and use.”

Alex Glanville, Head of Property Services at the Church in Wales, said:

“This is an exciting opportunity to work in partnership with fforest to find a new, innovative purpose for churches that have been closed. These buildings remain special places which will find a new audience through SpiritCymru.”

The unique sleeping pods are an installation, not a conversion. Comfortable, self-contained, rooms based on a Japanese / Scandinavian concept and designed for cyclists’ needs, warmth and comfort at the end of a long day of adventure. Journeys will begin and end at fforest in Cilgerran with bookings being taken from the Autumn.

The Minister also visited another new venture in Ceredigion. Ty Cwch, Cwmttydu is the first accommodation in Wales for outdoor activities made entirely from refashioned shipping containers. For Year of Discovery, Ty Cwch will work with local outdoor activities instructors offering tailored discovery courses in the Spring. This innovative accommodation has a Visit Wales quality assured glamping accreditation. Further information available on www.Tycwch.wales.

Nigel Humphrey, Ty Cwch, said:

“A Year of Discovery is a very appropriate theme with the growing popularity of outdoor activities. This might be for groups or families who want organised activities or merely to get away from it all and enjoy the great countryside. The Welsh coast is highly suited to both. Working with our partner ICY UK we are looking forward to putting on discovery courses next year.”

A multi-media international campaign on the theme of discovery will run throughout 2019. The campaign is on digital, television, on on-demand platforms, and in key travel hubs from January here in Wales – with the main marketing push across the rest of the UK taking place in March around the key holiday booking times. The emphasis is on encouraging everyone to find their own experience in Wales and sharing on social media.

Future funding of social care a priority for government – Vaughan Gething

He will take over the work of chairing the inter-Ministerial group on paying for social care, which was set up last year to investigate the future funding options and social care models to meet rising demand.

The group will use the report by Professor Gerald Holtham about a social care levy as the basis for its work. The report, which was commissioned by the Welsh Government, will be debated by the National Assembly today.

Mr Gething said:

“How we meet the costs of caring for an ageing population is a complex and challenging question, which faces most of the developed world.

“We have made enormous progress in improving healthcare and tackling illness, helping us all to live longer, disease-free lives and our model of social care needs to keep pace given the importance of people’s individual independence and of its interplay with the wider healthcare system.

“The Welsh Government has prioritised social care and we are committed to developing innovative funding models to support future costs.

“A levy is one of the options for raising additional funding for social care. This requires careful consideration alongside all other options including insurance models.”

Professor Holtham’s idea for a social care levy was one of four new tax ideas to emerge from the national debate about new taxes in the summer of 2017. His report and economic analysis was published in June 2018.

Today, Assembly Members will debate the report and ideas for raising additional funding for social care in the future.

The Welsh Government has prioritised funding for health and social services combined – official Treasury figures show spending per person on these functions increased by 3.8% in Wales in 2017-18, the highest increase of any of the four UK countries.

Spending per person on health and social services in Wales is 11% higher than in England – equivalent to an extra £290 per person.

Finance Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“The proportion of people over the age of 75 years in Wales is projected to increase by more than 40% by 2030, and by more than 70% by 2040; and the number of people over 85 is projected to more than double by 2040.

“All this is good news, but it does mean that we need to find a longer-term way of funding social care to help people live independently.

“It was against these forecasts that Professor Holtham proposed a levy on income to help pay for care.

“He proposed the proceeds from the levy helping to fund the immediate costs of care for older people, with the remainder being placed in a ring-fenced fund and invested to help cover expected increases in the demand for care by future generations.”

First Minister starts New Year with no-deal Brexit warning

In December, Mark Drakeford made clear his opposition to the prospect of a no-deal Brexit when he met Theresa May at Downing Street, claiming it would have ‘seismic repercussions’ for Wales.

With just 10 weeks to go until the UK leaves the EU, the First Minister confirmed the Welsh Government has further intensified its work on no-deal contingency planning as it becomes increasingly apparent the UK government has failed to negotiate an acceptable deal.

Mark Drakeford said:

“It is deplorable that 2019 opens with an unmistakable crisis over Brexit.

“We have been brought here by a UK government which has prioritised a vain attempt to hold the Conservative Party together above the national interest. The UK government has never attempted to build a cross-party consensus for its strategy and has never seriously tried to agree an approach to the negotiations with the devolved administrations. As a result, we are only 81 days away from crashing out of the EU without a deal.

“Such an outcome would be hugely damaging. Claims of a ‘managed no-deal’ need to be dismissed for the nonsense they are. Leaving without a deal would be hugely damaging and must be avoided.

“Our white paper, Securing Wales’ Future, details a basis for a sane and rational approach to EU withdrawal. We cannot agree with an outcome which results in tariffs or other barriers which will make it harder for Welsh business to export, stoke inflation by increasing the costs of imports and, most seriously of all, disrupt the integrated pan-European supply chains that so many of our major employers rely on to thrive, and in some cases, survive.

“Under a no-deal Brexit the viability of the NHS and other public services will be severely compromised and our key economic sectors – agriculture and food production, hospitality, as well as highly skilled sectors and universities – are equally imperilled by a self-defeating migration policy.

“Many businesses have been making contingency plans for a long time. For those who haven’t, now is the time to do so and our Brexit portal is the starting point for businesses who need to find out more. Likewise, every public body in Wales; local authorities, universities, health boards and others will be making preparations for a no-deal.

“However, make no mistake, it would be impossible to fully alleviate the effects of no-deal. It is simply not a viable option and must be avoided.

“Since the referendum we have found the UK government too opaque, too slow, and too secretive. Now is the time for full transparency and co-operation and the Welsh Government as a willing partner.”

[Sustainable drainage regulations come into force](#)

The mandatory regulations introduced by the Welsh Government will help reduce flood risk and improve water quality.

The regulations will also help to ensure that environmental standards are maintained and improved in a post-Brexit world, with the issue of flooding addressed in an environmentally friendly way through sustainable methods.

Further benefits from the regulations include improving the surrounding wildlife and biodiversity and helping to reduce pollution on new housing

developments through the use of effectively designed and constructed SuDS.

SuDS work by making use of landscape and natural vegetation to control the flow of surface water and reduce the risk of flooding. Designs can include ponds, permeable paving and swales, which slow down the discharge of surface water more than conventional piped drainage.

Surface runoff water can also be a major source of pollution, both directly and from overwhelmed sewers discharging into rivers. SuDS are designed to reduce surface water runoff and improve water quality while being more resilient and longer lasting than conventional drainage.

Around 163,000 properties in Wales are at risk of surface water flooding and employing sustainable drainage systems is estimated to reduce flood damage by up to 30%.

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

“Flooding can have a devastating impact on home owners and it is important that every effort is made to protect houses and limit the damage caused by surface water flooding.

“Last year saw several instances of severe flooding in Wales highlighting the importance of introducing measures to combat the challenges faced by climate change.

“We hope that these regulations will have a positive impact for future generations and help ensure Wales maintains its high environmental standards post-Brexit.”