

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."

Press release: John Cridland CBE and

the Government Actuary's Department release reports into the future State Pension age

Two reports have been published today that will help inform the government's review of the State Pension age which is due in May 2017.

The John Cridland report looked at the key issues that drive State Pension age changes including, but not limited to:

- life expectancy
- the challenges faced by those who rely most on the State Pension
- the long-term financial sustainability of the system

The Government Actuary's Department (GAD) was asked to consider 2 alternative scenarios for the State Pension age, reflecting an adult in receipt of the State Pension for either 32% or 33.3% of their projected adult life in retirement. To do this it used figures drawn from life expectancy projections from the Office for National Statistics.

In his report, which will be considered before any decision is made on changes to the State Pension age timetable after 2028, Mr Cridland makes a number of recommendations including:

- State Pension age should rise to 68 between 2037 and 2039
- State Pension age should not increase more than 1 year in any 10 year period, assuming that there are no exceptional changes to the data used
- that all employers should have elder care policies in place which set out a basic care offer
- that people should be able to access a mid-life career MOT and review which should be facilitated by employers and by the government using online support and through the National Careers Service

Meanwhile, the Government Actuary's Department report concludes that:

- under a 32% scenario the State Pension age could rise to 69 between 2040 and 2042
- under a 33.3% scenario the State Pension age could reach 69 between 2053 and 2055

No new changes to [State Pension age](#) will come into effect before 2028 and the government is committed to maintaining a State Pension that is fair for all generations and helps to provide for the cost of living in retirement. Part of this commitment to fairness includes providing 10 years' notice of any changes to the State Pensions age.

Follow DWP on:

Press release: Trustees of Ipswich Kurdish Islamic Cultural Centre breached their legal duties, regulator finds

The Charity Commission has today (23 March 2017) [published a report](#) of its statutory inquiry into the [Ipswich Kurdish Islamic Cultural Centre](#) (registered charity number 1149580) ('the charity'), concluding that there was misconduct and mismanagement in the charity's administration.

The report sets out multiple failings by the trustees and concludes that the charity's financial management was poor.

The inquiry, which began in November 2015, found that the trustees:

- made unauthorised salary payments to one trustee amounting to £1,360, even though the charity's governing document prohibits the employment of trustees
- provided a zero interest loan to 2 members of the local community totalling £20,000 which amounted to twice the size of the charity's 2015 income
- did not have a safeguarding policy in place despite the fact that the charity operates weekend classes for children

The report also criticises the trustees' approach to engaging with the Commission, saying that their conduct fell below that which the regulator and the public expect, including by initially failing to take prompt action to address concerns identified by the Commission before it opened the inquiry. Following the opening of the inquiry, and as reflected in the report, the Commission acknowledges improvements in the trustees' conduct.

As part of the inquiry, the Commission has made an order requiring the trustees to complete a number of actions to address the failings and regulatory concerns identified.

The report states that the regulator will take further regulatory action if the trustees fail to comply with the order within a stated timeframe.

Michelle Russell, Director of Investigations Monitoring and Enforcement at the Charity Commission said:

Our inquiry into the Ipswich Kurdish Islamic Cultural Centre found serious problems and basic failures. As our core guidance, [The essential trustee](#), explains, trustees must comply with their

charity's governing document and the law and must manage their charity's resources responsibly. That hasn't always happened at this charity, putting it at risk of not being able to carry out its charitable purposes. I now hope the trustees take the necessary steps we have set out in our Order to improve the charity's governance in the future.

The [full report](#) is available on GOV.UK.

Ends

PR 21/17

Notes to editors

1. [The Charity Commission](#) is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
 2. Search for charities on our [online register](#).
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[Edinburgh students take part in Young Engineers' Competition](#)

Three 3rd year Agriculture students from SRUC's Edinburgh Campus will be taking part in a prestigious young engineers competition.

[National Statistics: Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report – 2017](#)

This report is intended to be the first reference point for a range of environmental indicators and will provide, where available, annual updates on the indicators contained within it. It is of both public and academic interest and provides a valuable resource across government in providing links to government strategies.