

Minimum price for alcohol Bill approved

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill is part of the Welsh Government's wider efforts to reduce excessive drinking, recognising the impacts this can have on people's health and well-being.

The new law will address longstanding and specific health concerns around the effects of excess alcohol consumption, which is estimated to lead to nearly 55,000 alcohol-related hospital admissions a year, costing the Welsh NHS over £150m annually. In 2016, there were 504 alcohol-related deaths in Wales.

The legislation supports the Welsh Government's comprehensive strategy to tackle hazardous and harmful drinking by tackling the availability and affordability of cheap, strong alcohol, which is part of wider efforts to improve and protect the health of the population of Wales.

Following approval by Assembly Members, the Bill will become law once it has received Royal Assent.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

"I'm very pleased the National Assembly has given its seal of approval to our landmark legislation.

"Last year alone, there were over 500 alcohol-related deaths and nearly 55,000 alcohol-related hospital admissions in Wales, with the direct health care costs attributable to alcohol amounting to an estimated £159m. But even more of an issue – is the devastation that lies behind these figures. Devastation for families, impacts on communities, and consequences for our NHS staff and support services – as they all cope with the aftermath of alcohol-related death and disease, every day.

"This legislation provides us with an opportunity for a step change. It gives us a chance to do more to address alcohol-related harms. And ultimately, it gives us a chance to do more to try to save lives. This legislation takes a sensible, targeted approach to a very real and evident problem in Wales today. But it will be supported by a range of additional actions being taken forward to support those in need – forming part of the Welsh Government's wider Substance Misuse Strategy.

"Wales, like so many other western countries, has a problem with cheap, strong, readily-available alcohol. This legislation will make an important contribution to addressing this issue."

Once enacted, the new law will allow Welsh Ministers to introduce a minimum

unit price for alcohol supplied in Wales. It will make it an offence for alcohol to be supplied below a minimum price made up of that minimum unit price, the strength of the alcohol and its volume, specifically targeting cheap, strong alcohol.

The legislation will target and aim to reduce the amount of alcohol being consumed by hazardous and harmful drinkers, whilst minimising impacts on moderate drinkers.

The level of the minimum unit price for this purpose will be specified in regulations made by the Welsh Ministers following a consultation this year.

The new minimum pricing regime is currently expected to come into force during the summer of 2019.

[New Ministerial group to tackle homelessness in Wales launched](#)

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“I have been very clear that Wales must lead the way on tackling youth homelessness, with bold new approaches and interventions that make a real difference. It’s vital that government works with partners to help young people to avoid crisis situations and get into stable accommodation.

“Today we are announcing a task and finish group, to be chaired by Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans, to lead on this important area of work, building on the extra £10m to tackle youth homelessness I announced at the end of last year.

“I said when I helped to launch this campaign that the words ‘youth’ and ‘homelessness’ do not belong together. We will continue to work with the End Youth Homelessness Cymru campaign to ensure all young people in Wales have a safe place to call home.”

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“Through this group we will ensure that across government and beyond, in areas such as social services, education, mental health, substance misuse and youth justice, we have a unified approach to prevention, and to supporting young people who are homeless to obtain somewhere safe and secure to live.”

“The group will also advise on the implementation of the Housing First approach across Wales, including evaluation. Housing First is an innovative approach that has been proven to work, providing homeless people with accommodation and then offering them the support they need to be able to sustain a tenancy themselves. I’m looking forward to taking the lead on this work.”

Frances Beecher, Chief Executive of Llamau , which is the lead charity in the End Youth Homelessness Cymru campaign, said:

“We are delighted to see further commitment from the Welsh Government to ending youth homelessness in Wales which will build on the progress that End Youth Homelessness Cymru has made over the last year.

“We’re looking forward to continuing to work with Welsh Government to ensure that more young people are prevented from becoming homeless and that young people get the right support as soon as they need it.”

[Vote on introduction of ban on microbeads to take place](#)

The proposed ban will apply to the supply and manufacture of ‘rinse-off’ personal care products which contain plastic microbeads.

Plastic microbeads are a common ingredient in many hand cleansers, face scrubs, toothpastes, shower gels, cosmetics and other personal care products. When washed down the drain, they are too small to be filtered out in sewage treatment systems, so a proportion enter the marine environment, causing harm to marine life.

Last month, the Welsh Government tabled the Environmental Protection (Microbeads) (Wales) Regulations 2018. If voted through the Senedd today, the ban will make it an offence to manufacture any rinse-off personal care products which contain plastic microbeads. It will also be an offence to supply rinse-off personal care products which contain microbeads.

If agreed following today’s vote, the ban will come into force on 30 June.

The Minister for Environment, Hannah Blythyn, said:

“Microbeads in rinse-off products are unnecessary and harmful to

sea life. A ban will reduce pollutants from entering our seas and is an important step to safeguarding our marine environment.

“This ban is part of a range of measures here in Wales to reduce waste, tackle plastic pollution and increase recycling. For example, our local authority targets for household recycling mean we recycle 75% of plastic bottles collected from households, compared with 57% across the whole of the UK.

“2018 is Wales’ Year Of The Sea and we’re taking action to tackle plastic pollution, including signing up to the UN Clean Seas pledge earlier this month. We’re also developing water refill points at key communities along our Wales Coast Path, helping reduce further the amount of plastic entering our seas.”

Steps to further improve animal welfare of pets unveiled

Wales has led the way on measures to improve the standard of animal health and welfare and has introduced a number of pieces of legislation in recent years, including a welfare-focused licensing scheme for licensed breeders; the requirement for dogs to be microchipped; and bans brought in on the use of electronic shock collars and the cosmetic docking of dogs’ tails.

To further improve welfare standards for puppies in Wales, the Cabinet Secretary has confirmed her intention to build on the improvements made since the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014 were introduced by investigating the potential banning of third party sales. Officials will now look at options to take this forward.

Speaking in plenary, the Cabinet Secretary also confirmed a review of the microchipping Regulations will take place to include research into the levels of compliance and enforcement.

Consideration will be given to whether there is a benefit in extending the Regulations to include other species, including cats.

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, there is a duty of care on all owners and keepers of animals to ensure their welfare needs are met, including the costs associated with owning a pet. However, people’s circumstances can change.

Work will get underway to explore what veterinary provision, assistance and advice is available to people who need help in caring for their pets, possibly at times of illness or emergency, such as fleeing from a violent household.

Revised Codes of Practice for horses and dogs will be published before summer recess and a consultation on the revised Cat Code will commence in the autumn.

The Rabbit Code will be reviewed and work will start on identifying if there's a need to introduce any new Codes, such as for primates and other exotic pets, or racing greyhounds.

In 2016, RSPCA Cymru made a case for the introduction of an Animal Offender Register in Wales and a Task and Finish Group was established to consider the evidence. The draft final report states that due to the absence of practical solutions which would enable the creation of such a register, and the lack of UK-based evidence to support the impact that some stakeholders believe one would have, the Group does not recommend the development of a register at this time. The Cabinet Secretary will receive the final report before the Summer Recess.

The Cabinet Secretary has also asked RSPCA Cymru to provide evidence about whether the recommendation in the 2014 Wooller Report that the RSPCA Inspectorate receives statutory status under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is workable in Wales.

Cabinet Secretary said:

"As a Government, animal welfare is a priority for us. In Wales, we pride ourselves on having excellent animal welfare standards and expect everyone to reflect this by being responsible owners.

"We have introduced a number of pieces of legislation in recent years which underlines our commitment to continue improving standards of animal health and welfare in Wales.

"In Wales, we demand high standards from our licensed breeders and sourcing a healthy puppy which can be seen with its mother, or rehoming an animal from a reputable Animal Welfare Establishment, is the first, fundamental step towards being a responsible owner. Yet the illegal importation of puppies, driven by huge demand, continues to be a problem.

"I believe the potential banning of third party sales is worthy of investigation and I will be discussing options with officials to take this forward.

"I am today announcing a range of measures to help us build on our success to date. This includes a review of our Microchipping Regulations, support for owners whose circumstances change and the publication of updated and new Codes of Practice.

"Embedding a culture of responsible ownership cannot be achieved in isolation and I am grateful for the dedication and passion shown towards animals in Wales. There is always more that can be done but we are proud, as a nation, to be leading the way in raising

standards of animal welfare.”

Registered Social Landlords Bill gains Royal Assent

Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Rebecca Evans, who attended the sealing ceremony at the Welsh Government offices in Cathays Park, said:

“Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) play a vital role in helping us to meet our commitment to create 20,000 new affordable homes by 2021. They, in turn, require the sector to continue to have the freedom to use private sector borrowing to supplement the Welsh Government’s social housing grant and other funding programmes.

“This Act will help secure much needed affordable homes and more options for Welsh Government to maximise the positive contributions RSLs make to the communities in which they work. It also provides certainty for private sector partners who have made long term commitments to funding an independent RSL sector.

Stuart Ropke, Chief Executive of Community Housing Cymru, said:

“We are pleased that Welsh Government has acted decisively to pass this legislation to ensure the independence of housing associations in Wales. The Act will ensure that housing associations can continue to attract private investment and build the affordable homes Wales needs as we work towards the target of 20,000 affordable homes in this Assembly term.”

The Act amends and removes powers which are deemed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to demonstrate central and local government control over Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). It also introduces new powers to reduce local authority influence on RSL Boards.

Without reclassification back to private sector organisations, funding for RSLs to build and improve social housing would have to compete with other Welsh Government capital project priorities.