

[“UK Government’s EU Withdrawal Bill could put us back decades” – warns Cabinet Secretary](#)

Speaking at the Royal Welsh Showground, the Cabinet Secretary said devolution had enabled Welsh Government to create policies for the specific needs of Welsh farmers, with their input.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“Devolution has allowed us to tailor our policies for Welsh farmers with an understanding of their distinct needs. I’m worried the Withdrawal Bill, coupled with their lack of engagement with us to understand the needs of Welsh farmers, will mean this understanding is lost and the industry in Wales will move back decades.

“This view was clearly reflected in last week’s report from the House of Lords’ EU Committee, which fully supported our position on the future governance of the UK.

“In Wales we have a higher proportion of sheep farmers than in England and 90% of Welsh red meat exports go to the EU. I want to make sure the support they currently get is not jeopardised by Brexit.”

The Bill as it stands means Wales will have fewer powers and flexibility than it had when in the EU. It would take away the Welsh Government’s ability to interpret EU law and tailor it for Welsh needs. It will give the UK greater power over issues such as farm payments and animal health, which have been devolved to Wales for almost two decades.

The Cabinet Secretary reassured farmers she will continue to stand up for their interests. She will today meet with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, and will raise her concerns.

The Cabinet Secretary added:

“Since this process started we’ve been working with our stakeholders to make sure the approach we’re taking in Wales benefits everyone – something that’s not happening in England.

We’re taking this process seriously. Our policy paper, Brexit and Devolution, highlights leaving the EU must be about the future, not the past. We want to work with England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to develop a strong future which benefits everyone.

“Today I’m meeting with Michael Gove and I’ll be raising all these concerns with him. I’ll be making clear this Bill has shown a complete disregard for devolution as did his decision to cancel the next two planned meetings of UK agriculture and environment ministers. These meetings are crucial as the negotiations move forward and cancelling them shows a complete lack of commitment to working together.”

As part of a continued programme of actions to support the specific needs of the Welsh food and farming industry the Cabinet Secretary will this week announce Wales will join the Atlantic Area Food Export Programme, meaning SMEs will benefit from €1.8million to increase their competitiveness in international markets.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“We’ll continue to rally behind the Welsh food and drink industry – only last week new figures showed the industry had grown by almost 20% over the past year and we want to see it continue to grow year on year with our support.”

Ken Skates demands £700m from UK Government for scrapping electrification across South Wales

Proposals for powers over rail infrastructure to be devolved to Welsh ministers should now also be progressed with immediate effect, Economy Secretary Ken Skates has said.

In a letter to UK Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling MP, Mr Skates described the decision as “extremely disappointing” and demanded answers on how and when Welsh communities would see the money promised for electrification of the mainline to Swansea.

Ken Skates wrote:

“Funding and delivery of electrification to Swansea was announced in 2012, and restated in 2014 by the Prime Minister David Cameron. There was a commitment for £105m for the delivery of the Cardiff-Bridgend section of the Main Line electrification scheme, part of a wider investment estimated at £700m to electrify the line to Swansea.

“The scheme would have delivered important journey time, reliability, efficiency and emissions benefits, promoting economic growth across South Wales. For the UK Government to announce the cancellation of this scheme at this stage and through the press, with no prior warning, was hugely disappointing.

“Yesterday’s announcement did not describe how the £105m promised would be allocated to the Welsh Government now that the Cardiff-Swansea scheme has been cancelled. Neither did it address the hugely damaging historic underspend in Wales over recent years.

“Passengers across Wales experience poor network reliability, low speeds, and capacity constraints which results in a much smaller proportion of people choosing to travel by train than in England and Scotland. It is imperative that our rail infrastructure gets the urgent funding it needs to deliver the fast, reliable and frequent services needed to support our communities and businesses, and to grow our economy.”

Mr Skates pointed out that although the Wales route area has around 11 per cent of the railway track, since 2011 it has only benefited from around 1.5 per cent of the money spent by the UK Government on rail enhancements.

He added:

“This is damaging to our economy and to our communities and either urgent investment is needed to correct this historical under-investment and the £700m shortfall, or the long awaited proposals to devolve powers to Welsh Ministers over rail infrastructure should be progressed with immediate effect, alongside a fair and proportionate funding settlement.

“I would welcome a commitment from you to ensure the estimated £700m funding that would have been provided to deliver electrification to Swansea is instead ring-fenced for projects in Wales. This must be in addition to a fair proportion of funding allocated to Wales for other rail enhancements in the future.”

[Have your say on a new small business rates relief scheme for Wales](#)

In 2017-18, the Welsh Government is providing more than £110 million of rates relief for small businesses. The new permanent scheme will maintain this

level of investment.

A consultation opens today looking at whether the scheme could provide more support to the small businesses that need it the most.

This could involve redirecting relief from certain businesses, such as national chains which occupy multiple small premises across Wales, to support businesses which are more likely to benefit.

Funding would then be reinvested in making the scheme more generous for small businesses like local shops, cafes and restaurants which might only operate from one or two premises.

In considering how the scheme could be made more generous, the consultation also looks at whether the different thresholds for relief could be increased, how much this would cost and whether, as a result, more businesses would benefit.

The consultation also looks at whether any additional types of businesses should be excepted from the scheme. Current exceptions include non-domestic properties like car parks and phone masts, as well as those occupied by councils, police and crime commissioners or the Crown.

In addition to the above, the consultation asks how the permanent scheme could be used to support certain industries or sectors, such as childcare, should there be a robust evidence base to do so.

The Welsh Government is also asking for any other views from ratepayers about how the permanent SBRR scheme could continue to be developed in the future to ensure it is responsive to business needs. Questions include whether support should be permanent or time-limited and whether it should be focused on businesses that are in line with Welsh Government priorities – whether social, economic or environmental.

Launching the consultation today, Mark Drakeford said:

“We want to provide as much certainty and security for small businesses as we possibly can. One of the best ways we can do this is by confirming that we will be introducing a £110m permanent SBRR scheme in 2018 and, in doing so, extending a tax cut that will help boost long-term economic growth for Wales.

“Today marks the start of an extensive consultation with ratepayers, business representatives, other taxpayers and local authorities. Their views are absolutely essential to making this scheme a success and we want to work with them closely, constructively and attentively. I urge everyone to have their say before the consultation closes on Friday 13th October.”

Purnima Tanuku OBE, Chief Executive of National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) said:

“We wholly welcome this consultation. Relief on Business Rates would make a huge difference to a childcare sector beset by underfunding and rising costs. Nurseries are so important to the economy, employing many thousands of people and allowing parents to work. Business Rates have been increasing at a time when settings just cannot afford to pay more, impacting on fees to parents and relief would help to balance nursery books and keep costs to families affordable.”

[Warm Homes Nest – Report reveals benefits for homes and businesses](#)

[Welsh Government Warm Homes Nest](#) (external link) provides all householders in Wales with access to advice and support to help them reduce their energy bills. This includes a referral for eligible householders for a package of free home energy efficiency measures such as a new boiler, central heating system, loft or cavity wall insulation, or renewable technologies.

In 2016/17, the Welsh Government provided £19.5m for Nest and a further £3.9m has been levered in through the GB-wide Energy Company Obligation.

- Over 5,500 households received free energy efficiency measures.
- Average energy bill savings for households who had measures installed are estimated at £410 per year.
- 264 households benefited from new or additional benefits, with an average increase in household income of over £1,800 per household per year. This equates to a £482,500 potential increase in benefit take up this year.
- 382 households benefited from a Warm Home Discount rebate worth £140 off their electricity bill; this represents a total saving on energy bills of over £53,400.
- 77 households benefited from receiving support from their water companies. HelpU and Water Direct. They are collectively estimated to make direct savings of £14,300.

Since 2011, 190 opportunities have been created by Nest including jobs, apprenticeships and training. All installations have been carried out by Wales-based small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

One company that has directly benefited from its involvement in Nest is QRL Radiator Group, based in Newport. QRL have been supplying radiators to Nest since January 2014, all made from steel produced by TATA steel. Over 153,000 QRL radiators have been installed through Nest.

Speaking during a visit to QRL yesterday Lesley Griffiths said:

“Today’s report shows Nest continues to contribute impressively to job creation and growth in Wales. Since the scheme started in 2011, all installations have been carried out by Wales-based enterprises and over 190 opportunities have been created in the process.

“We should rightly be proud of Nest’s impact, both economically and environmentally. There is, though, no room for complacency. Tackling fuel poverty in Wales remains a significant challenge. That is why I am investing over £104 million in Welsh Government Warm Homes schemes over the next four years to improve a further 25,000 homes.

“I am confident Nest will continue its success in 2017/18. I look forward to seeing many more households who have been struggling to heat their homes benefit from the help the scheme provides”.

AMs trumpet musical instrument amnesty

The Welsh Government and National Assembly for Wales joined forces to ask Assembly Members and all staff to bring in any unwanted musical instruments so they can be provided for use in Welsh schools, who are in need.

The pilot is ahead of a national musical instrument amnesty in November.

Llywydd Elin Jones and Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams both reaffirmed their commitment to ensure that all people across Wales are able to participate in and experience arts and culture, including music.

Kirsty Williams said:

“I am committed to the idea that if a child is inspired to pick up an instrument, whatever instrument it may be, that they have the ability to access one and develop their performance and playing skills.

“That is why I am delighted with the first Welsh Government and National Assembly for Wales Musical Instrument Amnesty. Whether it’s an unused ukulele or forgotten French horn, we want to help get these instruments into the hands of those young people who would give them a new lease of life.”

Presiding Officer Elin Jones AM said:

“I recently took part in a Ceredigion Schools Music Service orchestra for people who are learning an instrument for the first time; I played the maracas.

“Music is an important part of life; it lifts our mood, energises us and gives us a way to express ourselves, which is why it is crucial to overcome barriers to young people playing. Learning how to play an instrument can be a challenge, and having access to a good quality instrument is so important.”

The Welsh Government/National Assembly for Wales Musical Instrument Amnesty Week took place between 12-19 July.

The national amnesty will happen in November and will be coordinated through the Welsh Local Government Association. So if you can donate any good quality unwanted instruments you may have tucked away in your lofts and cupboards, then keep your eyes peeled for details.