

News story: Alun Cairns' New Year message for 2019

Looking back over the past twelve months, Wales has once again proven its credentials as a world-renowned destination for inward investment and increasing opportunities.

One of my highlights has been the activity culminating in the tolls being scrapped on the Severn Crossings in mid-December. From when I took the decision in consultation with the Transport Secretary and Prime Minister, there has been endless conversation and excitement about what the removal of this physical and psychological barrier will mean for commuters, tourists and businesses alike.

This year was another unprecedented year in our political and constitutional history. As well as navigating our ongoing exit from the European Union, the first Wales-only taxes for 800 years came into effect. Two new devolved taxes were introduced by the Welsh Government following the transferral of powers to the National Assembly for Wales – the Land Transaction Tax on property, which is a new Welsh version of stamp duty, and the Landfill Disposals Tax, which replaces landfill tax.

The UK Government placed our devolution settlement on a firmer foundation with the introduction of the new reserved powers model on 1 April. This enabled more decisions to be put in the hands of Welsh Ministers, giving them important new levers to grow the Welsh economy and to deliver better public services for the Welsh public. The regulations also brought into force many of the further powers devolved to the National Assembly and Welsh Ministers under the Wales Act 2017, including powers over elections, transport and the environment.

Aside from landmark legislative changes, the UK Government secured over half a billion pounds in additional funding for the Welsh Government, announced a review of its borrowing powers and invested £120 million for a North Wales Growth Deal through the Treasury's UK Budget earlier this year. This will rebalance our economy and provide the Welsh Government with greater spending power, while keeping taxes low and ensuring debt continues to fall.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer also announced more than £36 million of UK Government funding in Swansea to support cutting-edge building materials which generate electricity, supporting the UK Government's mission to at least halve the energy use of new buildings by 2030. This recent funding award, means Swansea University has now benefitted from over £150m of UK Government funding since 2010.

It wasn't just the construction industry that benefitted this year. World-leading entrepreneurs in Wales will benefit from an additional £51 million to create the technologies of tomorrow. Philip Hammond is set to expand successful 'catapult centres' which are fuelling innovation across the

country, including in Wales, as part of the UK's ambitious, modern Industrial Strategy.

So far this funding has helped to create hundreds of new products, services and inventions including portable pollution sensors, cellular therapies to fight cancer and LED treatment for blindness. In Wales, this funding will go to the Compound Semiconductor Catapult in Cardiff, which will open its Innovation Centre early next year. Bringing together academics and businesses to develop new technologies in one centre will support areas of our daily lives from the next generation 5G mobile networks to improving scanning at airport security.

But set against a backdrop of change in our relationship with the European Union, this year it has been more important than ever to broaden our horizons and forge new trading partnerships with nations further afield. We have also continued to demonstrate that the UK Government is committed to supporting Welsh exporting businesses, as I witnessed Wales' international impact during trade missions to the United States, Hong Kong, China, Kuwait and South Africa.

These missions are underpinned by an ambitious new Export Strategy to increase exports as a proportion of our GDP to 35% and provide streamlined and targeted support for businesses of all sizes to raise productivity, boost wages and protect employment across the UK.

Back on home soil, Aston Martin is investing a further £50 million at its St Athan facility to become its centre for electrification and the home of its Lagonda brand, creating an additional 200 jobs to bring a total of up to 750 high skilled jobs to South Wales.

We have celebrated our domestic and global impact as part of the Wales Week in London festival, hosting events to promote Welsh products and recognise the strength and diversity of our language and culture. The Royal Welsh Show provided an excellent opportunity to engage with the agriculture industry and underline the importance of the rural economy to Wales as we secure the best outcome from the EU exit negotiations.

The UK Government in Wales will continue to work closely with other Whitehall departments to champion Welsh interests and ensure investors and businesses see Wales as a progressive trading partner. Over the coming year, we will continue to promote stable economic growth, build opportunities for everyone and maximise our potential after leaving the European Union.

On behalf of my ministerial colleagues and the whole of the UK Government, I wish you a happy and prosperous new year.

News story: Investigatory Powers Tribunal appeals route introduced

From today, judgments made by the Investigatory Powers Tribunal can be appealed in certain circumstances.

The Rules of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal have been updated to reflect this.

They have also been revised to reflect the evolution of practice and procedures in the Tribunal since they were written in 2000.

This follows a public consultation that was held on the rules in November 2017.

The Investigatory Powers Tribunal provides a right of redress for anyone who believes they have been the victim of unlawful action by a public authority improperly using covert investigative techniques.

It is also the appropriate forum to consider claims alleging the infringement of human rights which are brought against the security and intelligence agencies.

Security Minister Ben Wallace said:

The Investigatory Powers Tribunal plays a vital role in helping ensure the use of investigatory powers by law enforcement, our intelligence agencies and local authorities are properly authorised, necessary and proportionate.

The new appeal route will provide the ability to seek redress, assuring people of the stringent safeguards including those put in place by the Investigatory Powers Act.

The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 introduced a right of appeal for decisions and determinations of the tribunal on points of law that raise an important point of principle for practice, or if there is some other compelling reason for granting an appeal.

The appeal route will not operate retrospectively so it will not be possible to appeal judgments made before 31 December 2018.

Where permission to appeal is granted, appeals will be heard by the Court of Appeal in England and Wales or the Court of Session in Scotland.

The updated Rules, which set out the procedures that the Tribunal should follow, also include a non-exhaustive list of the functions of Counsel to the Tribunal and provisions regarding the disclosure of evidence.

The Investigatory Powers Act brought together powers already available to the security and intelligence agencies and law enforcement to obtain communications and data about communications. It ensures that these powers, and the safeguards that apply to them, are clear and understandable.

It radically overhauls the way these powers are authorised and overseen, including through the creation of a powerful new Investigatory Powers Commissioner to oversee how these powers are used. And it ensures the powers are fit for the digital age.

Press release: £38 million to boost accommodation for London's homeless

- London boroughs to join forces in providing extra homes for the capital's homeless – backed by government funding
- New body to ensure tens of thousands of families have somewhere safe to stay
- Move builds upon concrete government action to reduce homelessness and end rough sleeping for good by 2027

Thousands of extra homes will be made available for vulnerable Londoners at risk of becoming homeless, Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP has announced today (31 December 2018).

Through an innovative new scheme – the first of its kind – London boroughs join forces to provide safe accommodation for families on the edge of homelessness, backed by almost £38 million of funding from the government's £1.2 billion overall investment in tackling homelessness.

The additional homes will help provide a long-term, stable solution for vulnerable families struggling to find secure accommodation, providing a safety net for those who may otherwise feel they have nowhere else to go.

Currently, all London boroughs are responsible for providing accommodation for those at risk of homelessness both inside and outside their area. However, this can often lead to areas competing for the best accommodation – driving up prices and slowing down the provision of quality housing for the most vulnerable.

The new scheme will stop this from happening by encouraging London boroughs to work together in boosting accommodation to tackle homelessness across the capital.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

Everyone deserves a safe and secure home. I've seen for myself how hard each of the London boroughs works to provide those that are homeless with the support they need and a roof over their heads.

This radical new way of working and unprecedented collaboration between the boroughs and government will make a real difference – providing more accommodation for the vulnerable and helping them to get back on their feet and away from homelessness for good.

Councillor Darren Rodwell, London Councils' Executive Member for Housing & Planning, said:

With so many homeless households and so little accommodation available, London faces the country's most serious homelessness challenge.

Capital Letters is a crucial opportunity to do things differently – and we are extremely pleased to have the government's support for this innovative work.

Through collaboration, boroughs will collectively strengthen our market position and secure much better housing options for homeless Londoners.

To date, 11 London boroughs have signed up to the scheme, with more expected to come on board in the future. Over the next 3 years, the scheme is expected to help over 35,000 households within Greater London out of homelessness.

London Councils are now working to establish the not-for-profit company who will deliver the Capital Letters programme. They will be tasked with providing this vital service on behalf of the boroughs and will undertake the management of the homes which are provided.

The joined-up approach will also give those at risk of homelessness the chance to stay closer to where they currently live, meaning that disruption to their employment or education can be reduced during what is already a difficult time.

Capital Letters is being supported by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as part of the government's commitment to addressing homelessness and encouraging collaborative solutions to tackle the issue.

Government funding of £37.8 million has been allocated over the next 3 years to 2022 to support this programme.

A group of 11 boroughs will join Capital Letters initially, with others expected to become members at a later stage.

These boroughs are:

- Tower Hamlets
- Bexley
- Haringey
- Waltham Forest
- Brent
- Ealing
- Barking and Dagenham
- Croydon
- Lewisham
- Redbridge
- Southwark

Capital Letters has a social mission. All members of the Capital Letters team are part of an efficient, effective, and dynamic service helping homeless Londoners. Through working in partnership, Capital Letters is at the forefront of tackling London's homelessness crisis.

London Councils represents London's 32 boroughs and the City of London. It is a cross-party organisation that works on behalf of all of its member authorities regardless of political persuasion. Read more about [London Councils](#)

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[News story: 2019 New Year Message from Secretary of State for Scotland](#)

I'm not going to pretend that 2018 has been an easy year. In Scotland and across the UK, the past 12 months have brought home the difficulties of leaving the EU. Brexit has amplified divisions – between political parties, within political parties and outside politics too.

The people I meet in Scotland simply want Brexit sorted. I understand that. I agree with them that we need to move on to the many other things that matter to us in our daily lives.

For that to happen, 2019 must be a year of compromise and pragmatism. It must be a year when we set aside divisions and work together for the good of the country. Even after a tough 2018, I'm confident that can happen.

We can leave the EU, respecting the result of the 2016 referendum and the votes of 17.4 million people across the UK, and we can do so in a way that protects jobs, supports business and allows us all to get on with our lives.

The Prime Minister has negotiated a deal with the other EU member states that delivers on all of that. We can leave in an orderly way, with a transition period that will allow us to finalise our future arrangements with the EU, wave goodbye to the despised Common Fisheries Policy and begin to strengthen our trading relationships with the rest of the world.

But we will all need to summon the spirit of compromise. As we enter the final three months before we leave the EU, the time has passed for politicians seeking to use Brexit to bring about a General Election or an unwanted second independence referendum.

The last thing we need, the last thing the country needs, is more division. Instead, we should be the crossing the 't' and dotting the 'i' of Brexit, then moving onto focus on other issues.

Scotland's economic performance continues to lag behind that of the UK as a whole. Both Scotland's governments must work together to address the challenges we face. That's why, in 2019, my priorities will be jobs and prosperity in Scotland. We will soon have new growth deals covering Ayrshire, Borderlands and Moray, on top of the more than £1 billion the UK Government has already committed to economic regeneration in and around Scotland's seven cities.

And like everyone else in Scotland, I want to see the Scottish Government getting to grips with our struggling NHS, our under-performing schools and our woeful rail network. What I do not want is to see Nicola Sturgeon expending all her energy trying to use Brexit to campaign for a second independence referendum. That issue was settled decisively in 2014.

So I say, let's work together. In 2019, let's finish the job of leaving the EU and refocus so we can make real progress on the things that matter to us all. I know we can do it.