

Press release: Deposit return scheme in fight against plastic

A deposit return scheme to increase recycling rates and slash the amount of waste polluting our land and seas will be introduced subject to consultation later this year, it was confirmed today.

UK consumers go through an estimated 13 billion plastic drinks bottles a year, but more than three billion are incinerated, sent to landfill or left to pollute our streets, countryside and marine environment.

To tackle this blight, the government has confirmed it will introduce a deposit return scheme in England for single use drinks containers (whether plastic, glass or metal), subject to consultation later this year. The consultation will look at the details of how such a scheme would work, alongside other measures to increase recycling rates. We hope to talk to the devolved administrations about the scope for working together on this important issue.

Similar schemes already operate in countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Germany. A deposit return scheme sees consumers pay an up-front deposit when they buy a drink, ranging from 8p in Sweden to 22p in Germany, which is redeemed on return of the empty drink container. Possible variants of a deposit return scheme include cash rewards for returning drinks containers without an upfront deposit.

This is often done through a network of 'reverse vending machines', where you insert your plastic or glass bottle or can and the machine returns your money. Once a bottle is returned, businesses are then responsible for making sure they are effectively recycled – a move that has led to a 97% recycling rate in Germany.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

We can be in no doubt that plastic is wreaking havoc on our marine environment – killing dolphins, choking turtles and degrading our most precious habitats. It is absolutely vital we act now to tackle this threat and curb the millions of plastic bottles a day that go unrecycled.

We have already banned harmful microbeads and cut plastic bag use, and now we want to take action on plastic bottles to help clean up our oceans.

Following receipt of the Voluntary and Economics Incentives Working Group report on single use drinks containers, Defra is now developing plans for a deposit return scheme for consultation later this year.

Today's announcement is the latest move in the government crackdown on plastic, following the plastic [microbeads ban](#) hailed as one of the world's strongest bans and the 5p plastic bag charge – which has [led to 9 billion fewer bags distributed](#). It sits alongside the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commitment to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

The consultation will follow the recent [call for evidence](#) by HM Treasury on taxes and charges to reduce waste from single-use plastics, so that all relevant findings can be fed into the proposals.

Plastic bottles and drinks containers have a significant impact on the environment, with discarded food and drink containers making up at least a fifth of rubbish on beaches. There are over 150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans and every year one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

Author Bill Bryson, a former president of Campaign to Protect Rural England, said:

Future generations will look back on this decision as a piece of supremely enlightened policymaking, and one that raises the prospect of the world's most beautiful country becoming free from drinks container litter at last.

The consultation will take into account views from producers, suppliers and consumers to ensure that any system introduced works across the country. The consultation will sit alongside a package of wider reforms of the current packaging waste system, which will incentivise producers to take greater responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products and to increase the amount of packaging they recycle.

Today's announcement comes ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April, where member states will gather in London and agree measures to protect our oceans.

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Press release: Countdown to high speed broadband for all begins

High speed broadband connectivity for the entire UK moved one step closer today, following the laying of legislation setting the design of the broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO).

Ofcom now has up to 2 years to implement the scheme, meaning that by 2020, everyone in the UK will have a legal right to an affordable connection of at least 10 Mbps, from a designated provider, no matter where they live or work, up to a reasonable cost threshold.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Ensuring access to reliable, high speed broadband is one of the most important things we can do to support our rural communities and businesses in Wales.

The digital sector has become an integral part of the Welsh economy and the rapid growth of many digital businesses means that reliable and fast access to broadband is vital in all communities in Wales.

This new commitment means that no matter where you live in Wales, residents will have the right to at least 10 Mbps.

Improving connectivity for homes and businesses is a central pillar of this Government's efforts to strengthen the Welsh economy, and today's announcement means that everyone can legally expect a minimum level of service from their providers, wherever they are.

Digital minister Margot James said:

In the 21st century, accessing the internet is a necessity not a luxury. We are building a Britain that is fit for the future, and we're now putting high speed broadband on a similar footing as other essential services like water and phone lines.

The Government believes that only a regulatory USO offers sufficient certainty and the legal enforceability that is required to ensure high speed broadband access for the whole of the UK by 2020. 95% of the UK already has access to superfast broadband, and the USO will provide a "digital safety net" for those in the most remote and hardest to reach places.

The specification for the USO design includes:

- A download speed of at least 10Mbps, with quality requirements for upload speeds, responsiveness of connections, and data cap; this could be delivered by a range of fixed line and wireless technologies;
- A per premises cost threshold of £3,400, enabling coverage to around 99.8% of premises. Consumers outside this threshold will be able to get a satellite connection, or would have the option to cover the excess themselves (in the same way the universal service right to a landline telephone works);
- A requirement for demand aggregation, so that people within an area can combine their per premise cost thresholds, to ensure that as many people who want to get connected do get connected;
- For it to be funded by industry rather than public funding; and
- Uniform pricing so that those connected under the USO do not have to pay more for similar services to consumers served commercially.

Although the USO minimum speed will initially be set at at least 10Mbps, this will be kept under review and we expect it to be increased over time. Ofcom advise that 10Mbps is the speed required for a typical household's use of internet access to services such as web browsing, email and video services.

Government and Ofcom are now working to put in place a number of processes to implement the USO as quickly as possible. This includes the running of a process to designate the universal service provider(s) who will be required to offer the service, giving both small and large providers a chance to put their names forward for consideration. Ofcom will also be responsible for establishing an industry fund that will support delivery of connections made under the USO.

Following the creation of new powers when the Government passed the Digital Economy Act 2017, the Government consulted on the design of the USO. The detailed response to this consultation has also been published today.

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Notes to Editors

1. Ofcom's Connected Nations 2017 report shows that the number of premises without 10Mbps broadband download and 1Mbps upload speeds is 1.1 million, or 4% of premises, compared with 1.6 million or 6% of premises in 2016
2. The designated provider will be under statutory obligation to connect people up to the cost threshold, and to connect them if they are willing to pay excess costs above the threshold.

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News story: NHS gets funding green light for new buildings, wards and beds

The funding was announced today by Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Jeremy Hunt. It is the biggest investment of its kind in the NHS in over 10 years. The NHS will spend the money on programmes to meet local demand, such as new urgent care centres and refurbishing mental health facilities.

The Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin sustainability and transformation partnership (STP) will receive £300 million to transform local hospital services. It proposes to use the funding to develop an emergency care site and a separate planned care site, with 24-hour urgent care centres at both sites.

The remainder of the money will be awarded to 39 smaller projects, including:

- £6 million to upgrade services of 8 trusts across Yorkshire
- £8 million for a new health and wellbeing centre to join up local NHS services in Kent
- £13 million for 2 new urgent care centres in Newton Abbot and Torquay, and refurbishment of Torbay Hospital's A&E department
- several million pounds for local NHS services in London, including one project worth up to £11 million

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Jeremy Hunt said:

As the NHS approaches its 70th birthday, we are backing it with one of the largest capital programmes in NHS history. As well as a whole new emergency care development in Shropshire, we are backing local NHS services with new buildings, beds and wards so that staff who have been working incredibly hard over winter can have confidence we are expanding capacity for the future.

Further major projects are also under consideration across the country and we intend to announce one large scale scheme the size of the Shrewsbury and Telford plan every year going forward based on high-quality plans coming forward from local NHS leaders.

The government is also releasing £150 million to support the NHS's work to become more efficient. This additional money will be used to:

- improve the use of a digital programme that helps the NHS use its workforce better
- enable more efficient use of energy in hospitals, which could save the NHS £12 million a year in the first 3 years
- improve pharmacy IT and administration systems to reduce medication

errors and improve patient safety