

Minimum price for alcohol Bill becomes law

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 is part of the Welsh Government's wider efforts to reduce excessive drinking, recognising the impacts it 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.

The Bill was approved by the National Assembly for Wales in June.

A Bill receives Royal Assent when Letters Patent under the Welsh Seal signed with Her Majesty's own hand signifying Her Assent are notified to the Clerk of the Assembly. The Bill then becomes an Act of the Assembly.

The Ceremony where the First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones applied the Welsh Seal to the Letters Patent was attended by the Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething.

First Minister, Carwyn Jones said:

"This legislation takes a sensible, targeted approach to a very real and evident problem in Wales today, by tackling the availability and affordability of cheap, strong alcohol.

"In Wales, we have a proud tradition of taking action to protect the health of the public. This new law is part of our wider efforts to improve and protect the health of the population of Wales."

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

"I'm delighted our landmark legislation to tackle the availability of cheap, strong alcohol in Wales has now become law.

"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.

"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.”

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 which will be launched this autumn.

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

Cabinet Secretary for Finance visits Eisteddfod to talk about the impact of Brexit and funding challenges for public services

He will speak about the impact of Brexit on children, young people and their families in his annual Eisteddfod address at an event sponsored by Children in Wales, the national umbrella body for organisations and individuals who work with children, young people and their families in Wales.

The speech follows a period of intense debate, throughout the UK, about the type of Brexit deal the UK Government can negotiate with the EU before leaving in March 2019.

Professor Drakeford said:

‘Wherever we have the opportunity, we are arguing for a Brexit which protects Welsh jobs, Welsh businesses and Welsh public services.

“I believe the impact of Brexit is already being felt in people’s everyday lives.

“The price of Brexit internationally is reflected in the continuing devaluation of the pound. That is how investors around the world take into account our declining economic prospects. That devaluation works its way into inflation and higher prices at the till for families in Wales.

“If families are trying to manage on welfare benefits which have been frozen, then the very conditions which created Brexit in the first place – the sense of being cut off from the mainstream and being abandoned to bear the burden of austerity alone – are being intensified.”

Professor Drakeford will later talk about the funding challenges facing public services in the eighth year of austerity and budget cuts from the UK Government.

He will say: “The additional tax and borrowing powers devolved to Wales go some way to enable us to continue funding our essential public services and mitigate the consequences of a continuing programme of austerity from the UK Government, which shows little sign of ending, despite the damage it has done to public services and the wider UK economy.

“A number of difficult choices lay ahead. The Welsh Government is committed to leading that work, in partnership with local authorities, the third sector and others, to make sure that we deliver the funding and policies for the benefit of the people of Wales, for the services they rely on and for the communities where they live.”

The Finance Secretary will be speaking on Wednesday, 8 August 2018 from 1.30pm at the WCVA Building at Baltic House, Cardiff Bay and from 3.30pm on the Welsh Government stage in the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff Bay.

[TrawsCymru passenger numbers travelling in the right direction](#)

The First Minister announced funding for a trial of free weekend travel on the Traws Cymru bus network in March 2017. Data covering July 2017 to March 2018 shows the scheme has generated an additional 133,391 passengers on weekends across the TrawsCymru network or an increase of 65.49%, compared to the equivalent period in 2016-17.

TrawsCymru is the Welsh Government funded, long-distance bus network for Wales comprising a number of routes, the latest of which connected Aberystwyth with Carmarthen and Port Talbot before continuing on to Cardiff.

Before the end of 2017, Ken Skates announced additional funding to local authorities to enable them to introduce a package of improvements to the TrawsCymru bus and coach connections linking Aberystwyth with Carmarthen, Swansea and Cardiff.

Following feedback from passengers, the service introduced a modern wheelchair accessible high floor coach on the daily Aberystwyth to Cardiff long distance service, which provides a more comfortable journey for longer distance passengers, complemented by the introduction of a shorter route which offers quicker 'end to end' journey times.

The service operates a more comfortable long distance coach equipped with coach style seating, on board toilet and free WiFi.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

"The trial of free weekend travel on the Traws Cymru bus network has certainly shown some excellent early results. Passenger numbers are up and we are getting more people using buses on the network across Wales.

"This is great because it encourages more people into the habit of using buses, helping us support other routes across Wales.

"When you look, for example, at the benefit of the investment we've made to strengthen services between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen, Swansea and Cardiff the numbers tell a very clear story – more people are using the services and that's good for the communities and the economies along those routes.

"We listened to passengers and introduced coaches onto this key route, and we significantly reduced journey times. Along with the additional stop in Port Talbot, this long-standing service added more value to already vital public transport links to and from rural Wales, giving passengers extra choice on this key strategic route.

"Our improvements seem to have made the difference for our passengers. This has easily exceeded projected passenger growth figures of 20% on TrawsCymru weekend services, which were predicted at the start of the trial.

"These figures across Wales are encouraging and I hope we see further improvements in the future."

Sell2Wales reaches contract milestone

Every year, more than £6 billion pounds worth of opportunities are advertised through Sell2Wales, which is part of Business Wales, the Welsh Government's flagship business support programme. And this figure is rising as a growing number of public and private sector buyers are using Sell2Wales to make their tenders more accessible.

Of the 22,000 contracts awarded so far Sell2Wales has reported that approximately two thirds have been to Welsh suppliers, and that 75 per cent of these have been to Welsh SME's.

The 22,000-contract milestone was reached with the awarding of work to Aberystwyth-based Aber Heating Engineers who won a contract to supply the National Library of Wales with chillers, worth over £280,000.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said

"I am pleased to confirm that Sell2Wales' has now facilitated the award of 22,000 private and public sector contracts. This important milestone demonstrates Sell2Wales' success in providing an easy to use link between business and the public sector at large.

"The range of contracts available via the platform is huge, encompassing everything from engineering, marketing and IT, to construction, health and safety advice and professional consultancy, and offering opportunities for companies of all shapes and sizes. It is particularly heartening to see the number of Welsh SME's securing business through the service.

"Sell2Wales really does offer opportunities for businesses of all types to grow and develop simply by signing-up to the platform and receiving its regular, tailored alerts about work on offer. I would encourage companies not currently signed up to find out more about this valuable service."

Sell2Wales offers businesses the chance to work with every aspect of the public sector in Wales including; local authorities, the NHS, universities and colleges, and UK and Welsh Government departments and agencies.

It was the sheer scope of opportunity that attracted Aber Heating Engineers to the portal as Mark Sandford, Director, explains: "Opportunities to win work arise frequently and the Sell2Wales portal is very simple to use, allowing you to easily search for opportunities and submit appropriate bids for work either through Sell2Wales or via its links to other portals.

"Sell2Wales has become an important part of our new business strategy. To think we are the winners of the 22,000th contract award is mind boggling and we are delighted to be a part of the Sell2Wales success story."

Apply now for funding to help with costs of school uniform and sports kit

The new fund, PDG Access, is targeted at learners who are eligible for free school meals or children who are looked after and are going into reception class or Year 7 in September and aged 4 or 11 in special schools, Special Educational Needs (SEN) Units or Pupil Referral Units.

The fund will also cover funding for equipment for out of school hours trips, including outdoor learning, and equipment for activities within the curriculum, such as design and technology.

Education Secretary Kirsty Williams and WLGA Leader Debbie Wilcox have urged parents/carers of eligible children to speak to their council today about applying for the new funding.

Kirsty Williams said:

"We want all our pupils to have access to the same opportunities – whether in or outside of school – and PDG Access is about making sure that happens.

"We know that the costs of school uniform, sports kit and equipment for other activities can all add up so it's really important that parents and carers are aware of this new fund and know where to apply.

"If you think you're eligible for PDG Access then speak to your council today and you could soon receive £125 to help with these costs."

Councillor Debbie Wilcox (Newport), WLGA Spokesperson for Education said:

"I would encourage any parents or carers who think they're eligible for this fund to contact their local authority.

"Local authorities want to support all our pupils to benefit from the same opportunities, which is why WLGA will look forward to

continuing discussions with Welsh Government to ensure that such vital funds are maintained and protected.”