

Cabinet Secretary considers a Wales wide approach to tackle nitrate pollution

Following an extensive [consultation on Nitrate Vulnerable Zones](#) last year, the Cabinet Secretary said work would get underway with partners over the coming months to develop the right balance of comprehensive regulatory measures, voluntary measures and investment.

This will also include exploring further options to provide land managers with flexibility, where these would achieve the same or better outcomes than a regulatory approach.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“Pure, clean water is vital to human health and well-being, as well as to natural ecosystems and economic development. While nitrogen is a vital nutrient that helps plants and crops grow, high concentrations are harmful. The agricultural use of nitrates is a major source of water pollution.

“We had a considerable interest in our consultation on Nitrate Vulnerable Zones, reflecting the importance of water quality to Wales as a nation.

“Most respondents recognised the significant impact nitrate pollution is having on our waters, businesses and human and environmental well-being throughout Wales and agreed further action was needed.

“Poor nutrient management is still a major problem across Wales. Pollution of this kind is entirely preventable and is simply not acceptable in the 21st century.

“We should not at the end of 2017 see significant stretches of some of our most well known and popular rivers largely devoid of fish, proving just how much work remains to be done.

“Wales’ waters need much greater protection from agricultural pollution and that is why I am minded to introduce a whole Wales approach to tackling nitrate pollution from agriculture.

“Over the coming months, I intend to work in partnership with our stakeholders to get the right balance of comprehensive regulatory measures, voluntary measures and investment. I also intend to explore further options to provide land managers with flexibility, where these would achieve the same or better outcomes than a regulatory approach.

“We have some of the finest countryside and stretches of water in Europe which we have a duty to protect and enhance. This new regulatory approach will help deliver this and ensure current and future generations continue to benefit from our natural resources.”

Minister visits Citizens Advice Swansea Neath Port Talbot to discuss Universal Credit

The Minister talked to staff who provide valuable information and advice to people across the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot area to learn about some of the concerns they have raised.

Rebecca Evans said:

“Citizens Advice provided advice and information to over 18,000 people last year – and they tell me that the largest number of enquiries were from people experiencing welfare benefit problems.

“Many vulnerable people across Wales are facing challenges as a result of the UK Government’s welfare reforms, including the introduction of Universal Credit, which have particularly hit low income earners, families and the poorest.

“The Welsh Government continues to fund Citizens Advice Swansea Neath Port Talbot, which enables the fantastic team here to help people make the most of their household income and to resolve problems with welfare benefit claims.

“The vital work done by this fantastic team working across Swansea and Neath Port Talbot makes a big difference to many people.

“However, I am deeply concerned about the fundamental flaws and complexities of Universal Credit. I am extremely disappointed that the UK Government is persisting with its roll-out, despite our calls on them to halt this and address the problems.

“There are still some claimants waiting more than six weeks for their first payment. I am seeking reassurance from Damian Hinds MP, the Minister for Employment that those claiming Universal Credit, including people living in Swansea, who will now have to claim it, will receive financial support over the Christmas period.

“The DWP’s solution to tackling the delays in payments is an

advance of a claimant's indicative award. This is not a robust solution for people who are struggling. This loan has the potential to push people into more debt and rent arrears."

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Finance Secretary announces new permanent small business rate relief scheme for Wales

The new permanent scheme will limit the number of properties eligible for small business rate relief to two per business in each local authority, preventing larger businesses and national chains from benefiting from the scheme.

This will allow relief to be targeted more effectively to support small and local businesses and release £7m every year to be re-invested to support small businesses.

In addition to providing more than £110m of support for small businesses in Wales every year, the new permanent small business rate relief (SBBR) scheme will also provide:

- Additional support for the childcare sector, increasing the upper threshold for rates relief for childcare providers from £12,000 to £20,500.
- Targeted support for small hydropower projects, in line with the Budget agreement with Plaid Cymru.
- £5m to extend the temporary high street rates relief scheme into 2018-19;
- An extra £1.3m for local authorities for 2018-19, for them to use their discretionary powers to provide targeted relief to support local businesses which would benefit most from additional assistance.

The Finance Secretary also announced today an extra £9m and £22m will be allocated in the final Budget in 2018-19 and 2019-20 respectively, to support the switch from RPI to CPI for business rates from April 2018.

Professor Drakeford said:

“I have previously set out my intention to introduce a permanent small business rates relief scheme from 1 April 2018.

“This will provide certainty and security for small businesses in Wales, delivering a tax cut to businesses drive long term economic growth. I am pleased to announce the details of the permanent

scheme today.

“This year, we have provided small businesses with more than £110m of support to help them pay their bills. Our permanent scheme, which will be in place from 1 April, will maintain this level of support from the Welsh Government.

“In line with our tax principles, the permanent scheme will target support more effectively towards those businesses which will benefit most – supporting jobs and growth and delivering wider benefits for our local communities.

“My intention is to take a progressive, fair and transparent approach towards local taxation in Wales, which continues to provide vital funding for local services.

“Delivering a permanent relief scheme for small businesses is a key step in delivering this.”

Changes to the SBRR scheme are being introduced following a public consultation on a permanent scheme in the autumn.

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