

Devolution – the age of the recycling revolution

The [final recycling figures for 2016/17](#) show the average combined reuse, recycling and composting rate across Wales' 22 Local Authorities was 64%, an increase of 4 percentage points on last year's final figure and 59 percentage points higher than the rate in 1998/99, when the data was first collected following devolution. It is also 6 percentage points higher than the current Statutory Recycling Target of 58%.

Welcoming the statistics, the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

"Wales leads the way in the UK when it comes to recycling, with these latest figures confirming we are exceeding our ambitious 58% target. It is also encouraging to see Ceredigion has already met our 2025 target of 70%."

[Further figures released today](#) (external link) show the amount of biodegradable municipal waste Local Authorities are sending to landfill has reduced by 89% since the first full year of the scheme in 2005-06.

Authorities sent 90,827 tonnes of biodegradable waste to landfill in 2016-17, 77% less than the legal allowance of 390,000 tonnes. All 22 Local Authorities achieved their individual allocated allowance.

Reducing the amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill helps to cut greenhouse gas emissions, preventing the production and release of methane into the air from landfill sites.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"It is also great to see the amount of waste we are generating continues to fall year on year. This achievement is thanks to Local Authorities and householders' commitment to recycling. Together, we can continue to make improvements."

Emyr Roberts, Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales, added:

"It is great to see that Local Authorities are stepping up to meet this challenge. Less waste going to landfill shows that we are managing our resources in a better, more sustainable way.

"However, considerable amounts of recyclable material are still being thrown away. This demonstrates further opportunities to keep

resources in use for as long as possible as we aim to move towards a circular economy.”

“Producing less waste and maximising recycling will ensure that we manage our limited resources in a better way, which is good for the people, economy and environment of Wales.”

First meeting of the Welsh Revenue Authority board takes place

There are less than 6 months to go before the first Welsh taxes in almost 800 years – land transaction tax and landfill disposals tax – are introduced in Wales. Both taxes will be collected by the WRA when they are introduced on 1 April 2018.

The first meeting of the WRA’s board today in Treforest, is a significant milestone in the establishment of the new organisation, which is the first non-Ministerial department to be created in Wales.

The board discussions will concentrate on the legal establishment of the WRA and its governance arrangements. Over the coming months the focus will shift to the development of the WRA’s functions and its relationship with its customers, in particular the development of the Taxpayer’s Charter.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford announced the appointment of 5 non-executive board members and the WRA’s chief executive Dyfed Alsop, last month.

Kathryn Bishop, chair of the Welsh Revenue Authority, said:

“Taxpayers will want guidance as the new Welsh taxes are introduced and reassurance that the collection process is efficient and secure. The organisation is already working hard on this, bringing in expertise from elsewhere in Wales and in the UK.”

Commenting on what customers can expect from the WRA, Mr Alsop said:

“I want to build an organisation that is confident in delivery and inspires confidence from the people who will use it. The WRA will work in partnership with taxpayers and tax professionals, supporting them in paying tax.

“On a practical level, we’re creating a new digital organisation without a paper based history. We don’t have legacy IT systems or

contracts and we also don't have an existing cultural reputation. I'd hope this means we can shape the new organisation to respond to meet the needs of the people of Wales."

Over the course of the next 6 months, future customers of the WRA should continue to direct any queries about taxes to HMRC – this includes stamp duty land tax and landfill tax.

All updates about land transaction tax and landfill disposals tax, which will replace stamp duty land tax and landfill tax from April 2018, including guidance for the new taxes, will be published on the new WRA website. Customer registration to the tax system will be available from early 2018.

It will deliver Welsh Ministers' tax policy and follow the strategic direction set by them but will be operationally independent.

For further information about the implementation of the WRA, contact WRAimplementation@gov.wales.

[Ken Skates leads partners in push for greater road safety in Wales](#)

The Cabinet Secretary opened a high level Road Safety in Wales event in Cardiff today, bringing together key decision makers in the emergency services and local authorities. The event looked ahead to how new and emerging technologies will impact on safety on Welsh roads and how behaviour change models can be applied to reduce casualties, in particular among the most high risk groups of motorcyclists and young people.

Economy and Infrastructure Secretary Ken Skates said:

"The next decade will likely see record Welsh Government investment in our roads – alongside much needed improvements to our cycleways, footpaths, railways and airports.

"In investing in a network fit for modern Wales, we've been very clear that safety has to remain paramount, a principle which is reflected in our ambitious target to reduce those killed or seriously injured by 40% by 2020.

"Working in partnership with local authorities, the UK Government, emergency services and road safety organisations we have made excellent progress towards this target, with our roads now amongst the safest in the world. Every death on our roads is one too many, however, and I am very clear that we must continue to look at how

we can improve things further.

“It’s for this reason that we’ve continued to invest millions of pounds through the Road Safety Revenue grant, the Roads Safety Capital Grant and supporting safety cameras through Go Safe, amongst others. It’s disappointing, and a source of much frustration, therefore that one potential game changer for road safety improvements, graduated driver licencing, is still not being considered by UK Government.

“It’s my belief that this is the single biggest measure we could now see to significantly improve road safety on our roads and I’d again call on the UK Government to reassess their position and act to help ensure inexperienced drivers, and those who share the road with them, are as well protected as possible.”

The Road Safety in Wales event brings decision makers across Wales together to review and update the Welsh Government’s road safety framework. This framework informs how partners in Wales work together to ensure Welsh roads are as safe as possible, setting out targets and the actions being taken to achieve them.

Economy Secretary visits Ford in Bridgend

While at the site, the Economy Secretary met management, workers and trade unions and discussed the opportunities and challenges facing the industry in the years ahead.

Production of the new Dragon Engine is scheduled to begin in 2018.

Speaking after the visit, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure Ken Skates said:

“It was good to visit the Ford Engine Plant in Bridgend this morning and see the progress being made in preparing for the new Dragon engine production. Welsh Government support has helped bring this exciting project to the plant and it was great to see the precision manufacturing and world class skills that go into its development.

“During my visit I also got to talk to workers, management and unions about the challenges facing the automotive industry in the coming years. Electrification and the move to innovative battery

technology means there is a need to secure new products for the plant to manufacture at the site from 2020.

“I made clear that the Welsh Government will do everything in its power to work in social partnership and meet those challenges head on in order to secure a sustainable future for the Bridgend Engine Plant that can keep jobs and production in the community.”

The Welsh Government supported Ford Bridgend in winning a share of the global Dragon Engine production with a £14.6m grant offer, to safeguard a predicted 772 jobs on the site. The facility will initially be producing 125k engines, safeguarding an estimated 550 jobs but has capacity to add further lines to increase production and jobs created in the future.

Maximum tuition fee in Wales will remain £9,000 – Kirsty Williams

The Welsh Government is securing a stable, progressive and sustainable funding system, whilst also responding to the many unscheduled changes announced in England.

The Education Secretary has also confirmed an increase in the repayment threshold for undergraduate loans from £21,000 to £25,000, subject to the successful conclusion of discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury.

Kirsty Williams said:

“I will not allow the political turmoil and uncertainty in England to knock us off course from delivering on a stable and sustainable higher education system in Wales.

“Our sector does not operate in isolation and we must provide stability for our institutions to compete both domestically and internationally.

“Given the uncertain political climate in England I have carefully considered our future plans for tuition fee levels. After consulting with our Universities and the National Union of Students, the maximum tuition fee will remain at £9,000. We are also on track to deliver the most equitable and progressive student support system in the UK, starting next academic year.

“Unlike the Government across the border, we are delivering investment to support both students and universities as part of these changes.

“I also remain concerned about the rate of interest charged to students whilst they study and I will continue to discuss this with counterparts in Whitehall.”

To help universities and students from Wales, the Education Secretary has announced:

- An additional £10m will be made available to HEFCW to deal with any immediate issues arising from the tuition fee changes.
- Additional £6m to HEFCW in this financial year to deal with the short-term implications of demographic change, as well allowing them to start preparing for the implications of Brexit.
- A further £5m will be allocated to HEFCW in both 2018-19 and 2019-20 to allow our institutions to provide bursaries and grants to postgraduate students, prior to full implementation of the new package of postgraduate support in 2019/20. This will help incentivise student progress and for Welsh Students to return to Wales to study, in line with our response to the Diamond Review.

The Welsh Government will continue with their plans to introduce the most progressive student support system in the UK where all students will receive support of around £9,000 in their pocket to help with day to day costs and will provide a parity of support across all levels and modes of study.