

Significant support for tenants' fees ban

Last year, [the Welsh Government consulted on proposals to change the way fees are charged by letting agents, landlords and third parties to tenants in the private rented sector](#), following concerns raised by former Cabinet Secretary for Communities Carl Sargeant.

More than half of those who responded to the consultation, including a significant number of landlords, agreed that unnecessary fees should be banned.

The consultation found that there is a broad range in the level of fees that tenants are charged by agents – fees reported by tenants ranged between £50 and £1,700 just for entering into an agreement.

Key consultation findings include:

- 56% of all respondents agreed with an outright ban on unnecessary fees
- When fees are charged, tenants say that, on average, they are charged £249.47 to begin a tenancy, £108 to renew a tenancy and £142 at the end of a tenancy
- 62% of tenants said that fees have affected their ability to move into a rented property, while 86% say that fees have affected their decision to use an agent
- 61% of landlords did not know what their tenants were charged by their agent.

Rebecca Evans said:

“We received an extremely high number of responses to the consultation and I believe that this reflects the strength of feeling on this issue. Some of the fees tenants currently pay up-front are eye-watering and are affecting their ability to move into or within the private rented sector.

“I am keen to work closely with tenants, landlords and letting agents to ensure that the costs people face are reasonable, enabling them easier access to private rented accommodation. I am also seeking opportunities to work with private landlords and agents to improve and modernise the sector for everyone involved.

“Private rented accommodation is a growing part of the housing sector in Wales accounting for around 15% of all dwellings, and I want it to be a secure and attractive option.

“I have already announced my intention to bring forward a Bill which bans fees in the private rented sector. The findings from this consultation add to the evidence that action is needed to

address the fees currently charged to tenants. I will now finalise these legislative proposals and introduce a Bill to the Assembly later this year.”

More than 680 individuals and organisations responded to the consultation and a summary of those responses are being published today.

[New law proposed to protect Welsh devolution](#)

Welsh Ministers have serious concerns about the UK government’s EU Withdrawal Bill, which, as currently drafted, allows the UK government to take control of devolved policy areas, such as farming and fishing, once the UK has left the EU.

Assembly members are being asked to consider the introduction of the Continuity Bill as an emergency bill, which seeks to transfer EU law in areas already devolved to Wales into Welsh law on the day the UK leaves the EU. This will provide Welsh businesses with the legal certainty and stability they have long called for.

The Welsh Government’s preference remains for the UK government to amend their proposed EU Withdrawal Bill. But, as so much time has passed without any agreement between the governments on the amendments required, they need to proceed with the Continuity Bill as a fall-back option to protect Welsh devolution.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“The EU Withdrawal Bill , as currently drafted, would allow the UK government to take control of laws and policy areas that are devolved. This is simply not acceptable to the Welsh Government, or the people of Wales who have voted for devolution in 2 referendums.

“Decisions taken now will affect Wales for decades to come. It is vital these decisions are made in a way that respects devolution.

“We remain constructive partners in talks with the UK government about changes to their EU Withdrawal Bill – and this remains our preferred outcome. However, we are running out of time and have developed our bill to prepare for a situation where the UK government does not adequately amend its bill to respect the devolution settlement.

“It would be irresponsible to refuse to give legislative consent to

the UK government's bill while also not being prepared to put in place our own measures to give clarity about EU-derived law in Wales relating to devolved matters.

"Let me be clear, our bill will not be an attempt to frustrate or block Brexit. We are simply seeking to protect the current devolution settlement for Wales, while making sure there is legal certainty when the UK leaves the EU. This what Welsh businesses are calling for.

"The vote to leave the EU was not a vote to reverse devolution. The current devolution settlement in Wales has been backed by 2 referendums – in 1997 and 2011. This bill is about respecting the will of the people of Wales."

"Assaults on emergency workers will not be tolerated" – Health Secretary says

The Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill was introduced in UK Parliament to provide additional protection to emergency workers. In its current draft it will apply to both England and Wales.

The Bill will strengthen the current law by deeming assaults on emergency workers while carrying out their duty an aggravated assault, with the maximum penalty for this offence increasing from six months to 12.

Speaking ahead of the Senedd debate the Cabinet Secretary said:

"It is shocking to hear continued reports of emergency workers being attacked both physically and verbally while simply doing their jobs, trying to keep us all safe and well. This Bill is part of dealing with this.

"We want emergency service workers in Wales to have the same protection as those in England and on the same timescales. We are happy to support Chris Bryant MP's Bill and confirm that Wales will not tolerate assaults on our emergency workers."

The Bill will also extend police powers to take blood samples with consent, and non-intimate samples without consent, from individuals who assault emergency workers where Inspectors have sufficient grounds to believe an emergency worker has been exposed to risk of an infectious disease.

Assembly Members will need to agree for a Legislative Consent Memorandum to be laid in the Senedd.

Welsh Food and Drink to be promoted in Ireland, London and Wales on St David's Day

Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths will lead a Trade Development Visit of food and drink companies to Dublin between 28 February and 2 March.

Thirteen food and drink companies, ranging from brewers to preserves, will have the opportunity to raise the profile of their quality products and look to secure new business by meeting national buyers from across Ireland.

During the trade visit, the Cabinet Secretary will attend a business breakfast, hold a business roundtable with leading food and drink companies and investors on the challenges and opportunities of Brexit and attend a St David's day reception at the British Ambassador's residence.

Speaking ahead of the trade visit, the Cabinet Secretary said:

"There has never been a better time for Welsh food and drink – the sector is thriving and is emblematic of our nation. Sales are soaring and we are already very near to meeting our 2020 target of increasing sales to £7 billion.

"With 20% of Wales' food and drink exports already going to Ireland, this trade visit is an ideal time for businesses to build on this and secure new contacts in overseas markets. It is part of our drive to support Welsh exports, which is vital for the Welsh economy through creating and safeguarding jobs.

"With its strong economy, food-loving countries like Ireland are an essential target for our producers and contribute to our target of growing the industry by 30% to £7 billion by 2020 – a target we are very close to meeting early. Our food and drink is world-class and I am confident that the Irish market will agree."

On St David's Day producers from across Wales will also come together to challenge consumers to buy Welsh this March by taking part in the largest celebration of Welsh food and drink ever held on a UK wide level. They will take part in a series of events across the UK to highlight that Welsh food

and drink is amongst the best in the world in terms of quality and value.

For Londoners and those visiting the capital, there will be a chance to taste the many delights of Wales's excellent produce. Waitrose customers in Oxford Street and Canary Wharf will be able to sample fine Welsh produce such as traditional cheese and Welsh cakes, yoghurt and waffles, accompanied by Welsh beer or whiskey. Borough Market and rail travellers at Paddington will also offer customers Welsh food samples to taste and take away with them.

Lesley Griffiths added:

"The interest in our wonderful Welsh food and drink has never been greater. Wales' food and drink industry is a huge asset – Wales has a winner. I'm pleased so many producers are coming together to invite consumers across Wales to sample our quality produce and buy Welsh."

On St David's Day, Hannah Blythyn the Environment Minister will visit Dylans Restaurant in Llandudno to hear about their plans to expand their award winning Products.

[Hannah Blythyn delivers £7.5m boost for recycling services](#)

Last Thursday's [UK statistical release](#) (external link) revealed Wales extended its lead as best municipal recycling nation in the UK, to 12% above the UK average. In addition to leading the rest of the UK, a recent [independent report](#) (external link) showed Wales' household recycling rate is second in Europe and third in the world.

To ensure this impressive momentum is maintained and enhanced, the Minister has today confirmed she is awarding over £7.5m, to support local authority improvements in recycling services in 2017/18. The funding will be administered under the highly successful Collaborative Change Programme (CCP).

The CCP provides specialist support to Local Authorities by awarding capital grants where Local Authorities want to change services to improve overall performance and to align services better with Welsh Government policies.

The money is used to make improvements to the collection and sorting of recycling which help Local Authorities reach our ambitious recycling targets and help Wales reach its goal of becoming a zero waste nation.

The Minister confirmed the funding after visiting Merthyr Tydfil CBC's

recycling depot in Pentrebach. Merthyr has been awarded nearly £1.3m in 2017/18 with which it intends to invest in specialist machinery and equipment including a recycling baler and trolley boxes.

Hannah Blythyn said:

“Wales’ recycling success is a real devolution success story. In the 20 years since Wales said yes, our recycling rate has increased from just over 5% to 64% – the third best in the world. Only last week it was officially confirmed Wales has increased its lead over the rest of the UK.

“This is excellent news but I know there is still plenty of room for more. Our recycling achievements have been massively boosted through improvements and expertise provided by Welsh Government funding. This is why I am approving over £7.5m for this year towards the Collaborative Change Programme. This funding will enable local authorities to adopt practices that lead to further improvements and help us achieve our ambitious targets”.

Leader of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Councillor Kevin O’Neill said:

“Since the implementation of the Welsh Government funded Collaborative Change Programme, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has gone from a failing authority rated 22nd in Wales to 9th in Wales; achieved by recycling 62% of its municipal waste.

“Changes that were made to the recycling collection services include us going from a co-mingled to a multi stream collection; reducing residual waste capacity and changing the infrastructure of the Council’s recycling depot. We would of course like to offer a sincere thank you to all residents in Merthyr Tydfil who recycle and who have helped to reach these recycling figures.”