

Kathryn Bishop confirmed as first chair of the Welsh Revenue Authority

In just over a year, Wales will raise taxes for the first time in 800 years when stamp duty land tax and landfill tax are devolved. Land transaction tax and landfill disposals tax will replace these two taxes in Wales from 1 April 2018.

The Tax Collection and Management (Wales) Act, which was passed by the National Assembly in April 2016, established devolved tax arrangements in Wales, including the creation of the Welsh Revenue Authority (WRA) to collect and manage devolved Welsh taxes.

The WRA is the first non-ministerial department of the Welsh Government and will become operational in April 2018. Over the next four years, the WRA will collect more than £1bn of tax revenues.

Confirming Ms Bishop's appointment, Professor Drakeford said: "In just over a year, Wales will be responsible for collecting and managing our own taxes when land transaction tax and landfill disposals tax are introduced.

"We are making significant progress in our preparations for tax devolution and the WRA will play an integral part in this.

"It will be responsible for collecting and managing more than £1bn of tax revenues over the next four years – revenue which is crucial for our public services.

"I am pleased to be able to confirm Kathryn Bishop's appointment as the first chair of the WRA. Kathryn brings a wealth of experience to the role and will provide the WRA with the leadership and vision to ensure a smooth transition as Wales takes on tax powers."

Ms Bishop said:

"I am delighted to be appointed as chair of the WRA – a new public body with an important function in Wales – and I look forward to working with the implementation team and the stakeholders."

Ms Bishop's appointment as chair of the WRA follows a fair and open recruitment exercise regulated by the Commission for Public Appointments. A pre-appointment hearing by the National Assembly's Finance Committee endorsed her appointment.

Speech: Commercial Secretary on the Northern Powerhouse

I am delighted to be here to join those committed to building a Northern Powerhouse in order to help people and businesses in the North of England to pool their strengths and take on the world. Brexit makes this even more important.

Economic success by region goes up and down. In the 15th century East Anglia was the centre of a boom based on the wool trade. That has left us a legacy of amazingly beautiful churches, as well as being the UK's leading region for agriculture.

The industrial revolution started in England and was centred here in Manchester – with prosperity rising extraordinarily fast here in consequence – what better symbol of that than Manchester's beautiful Town Hall.

But all the same, London has been dominant nationally for over 1,000 years. This has been even more true in recent years with the success of our financial and related services.

One of our objectives in bringing forward the Northern Powerhouse and similar ideas is to drive growth across the whole of the country. As I see it our purpose is to increase northern prosperity and GDP per head both absolutely and relatively.

We can do this through a combination of political change – by 5 May Manchester, Liverpool City region and Tees Valley will have new mayors – and by investment in infrastructure, skills, research and development and trade.

As an ex-businesswoman, I know that success also depends on focus and on working together on a plan. This is why we published our [strategy for the Northern Powerhouse](#) and pitchbooks of [investment opportunities](#) that I was promoting at MIPIM, the world's leading property fair at the beginning of the month.

But we also need you, our partners, to make the Powerhouse a success. Today is an important opportunity for us to agree on what to do.

And today, I am delighted to announce that almost ninety leading Northern businesses, universities and organisations have now pledged their support for the Northern Powerhouse. We now have partners representing a range of business sizes, sectors and locations across the North – and a special welcome to the eight new partners who have just joined us.

And we already have some key strengths.

This is a region that's home to over 15 million people – far more than London, far more than Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland put together. There are over a million businesses here. Half the nation's cars are produced in the North and almost half our exports of medicines.

Seven international airports fly to over 250 locations. Twelve major ports. Around 30 universities – with Manchester, Durham, Sheffield and Leeds counted among the best in the world. And we have great sporting prowess, especially in football. I was told at MIPIM, that football success is a big draw for investors.

I would like to touch on 4 key themes that I think are important for us in order to take advantage of these strengths.

First, we need our cities in the North to be genuinely well connected – that means both good rail and road links within the region, and to the rest of the UK. Ease of movement between and within cities really helps win business and investment.

I saw that myself at Tesco, when we decided to invest in a depot near Irlam. We were attracted by the regeneration of the Manchester Ship Canal – the chance to take hundreds of lorries off the road and to transport products from the port at Liverpool more sustainably and efficiently.

In the [Autumn Statement](#) we announced a new National Productivity Investment Fund worth an extra £23 billion and targeted at areas critical to boosting our long term productivity. This builds on the transport plans already in the pipeline to help the North worth £13 billion up to 2020 – such as improved transport and rail links, and a commitment to improve the Manchester orbital motorway (M60).

There will now also be a £690 million for local authorities across England to unclog the congestion that blocks our urban road networks and hits productivity as products and working people waste time sitting in jams. We announced in the [Spring Budget](#) that the North would benefit from an extra £90 million to tackle strategic roads pinchpoints to unblock congestion and get people and products moving.

We are making an extra £1 billion available for digital infrastructure and 5G. This is important because it will facilitate the roll out of smart motorways with variable speeds to ease congestion and better wifi on trains and in due course provide a network for electronic and even driverless cars, likely to be one of the most vital aspects of our fourth industrial revolution. History can be made at Nissan in Sunderland – and elsewhere.

It is clear to me that a key ingredient to productivity and growth – and indeed happiness in the work place – is a greater emphasis on skills. We made a big announcement in the [Budget](#) of a root and branch reform of our technical education. This will take time, but T-levels, as well as maintenance loans for students in higher level technical education, will bring real benefits to the North, where there is already such a strong tradition of industrial and technical skills. This will combine with our efforts to give many more people

the chance to do quality apprenticeships from April this year.

The national nuclear college in Cumbria which will help train employees for Hinkley and Sellafield is a pioneering example of this Northern tradition of technical excellence.

And over a third of apprenticeship starts in 2016 were in the North.

On top of that, we have a dedicated [Northern Powerhouse Schools Strategy](#) across the whole of the North. And from next year, our new Mayors will have control over adult education budgets.

A third theme close to my heart, as a former director of both large and smaller firms, is enterprise. This is partly a matter of culture; of curiosity like that of Richard Arkwright, of cotton tycoon John Rylands or Robert Peel father of Prime Minister Peel, all from the north; and of getting the best out of people and capital.

But we believe government can help to oil the wheels. For example:

- We have agreed over £3.3 billion in Growth Deals in the North –including another half a billion agreed at last November's Autumn Statement. That of course includes the International Advanced Manufacturing Park in Sunderland.
- 17 Enterprise Zones established in the North from April 2012 to March 2016 The region's first 9 EZs have attracted nearly 900 jobs, close to 200 companies and over £1.3 billion of private sector investment. Chinese investors have told me they like the reassurance the Enterprise Zone status gives.
- We have step changed investment in R&D post Brexit with an extra £2 billion a year across the UK by 2020. Northern R&D communities will benefit. We already see Manchester as the world-leading home of graphene and Newcastle as the pioneer of research into ageing.

However, I urge businesses here – of all shapes, sizes and sectors – to contribute your ideas and your experience to the [Industrial Strategy](#) that is out for consultation until 17 April.

Another productivity enhancer is trade. Research shows that firms that export are more productive. I can understand that from my 15 years of experience at Tesco. We built a huge overseas business. The opportunity of operating internationally is a magnet of talent and the need to innovate overseas, learn from new competitors and take your best ideas abroad, all improve your business – which has to be in good shape to support the export effort.

Northern businesses are already exporting over £53 billion in products and £27 billion services exports and can do more. There are even a few surprises of which Boris Johnson would be proud: we export Northumberland palm trees to Dubai (Treelocate), Yorkshire salmon to Canada (The Salmon Man) and Berwick horse bedding to the jockey clubs and stables of Asia (Bedmax shaving).

Attracting international investment into UK is key and fortunately the North has real global cachet and many friends around the world. Football teams have

made Northern cities household names everywhere.

And it's not just football – we've held the Commonwealth Games here and the Tour de France. The North was home to LS Lowry, Norman Foster and David Hockney. We've had countless iconic British musicians from here – from the Beatles to Morrissey. Hull too is flying the flag this year as our city of culture with a £5 million refurbishment of Hull New Theatre. When I was Culture Minister I attended the moving Somme commemoration and the Library with its digital leadership and its intellectual property centre for entrepreneurs.

We must also take advantage of the Great Exhibition of the North in Newcastle-Gateshead next summer – expected to attract millions of visitors to celebrate the art, culture and design of the North.

But investment is not only in culture and services. Infrastructure investment can offer investors sound returns and long term opportunities. This is why we have put together a new investment pitchbook for the Northern Powerhouse highlighting £24 billion worth of opportunities for foreign investment here.

It was good to hear today from Department for International Trade about what we are doing in this regard and in particular what Northern businesses and promoters are doing in San Francisco, a case study in how we can succeed together.

The north has a great history of innovation from the birth of steam to the first splitting of the atom. It had the dynamism to fire the industrial revolution and that is still in its DNA.

It also has a great tradition of civic and cultural success and industrial philanthropy which can be renewed. I am picking up the reins from Jim O'Neill, my Mancunian predecessor, and I will play my own part in getting you the infrastructure, investment and support you need to become a global economic heavyweight, at the very heart of the British economy. The action we take in government depends upon the contribution you make as partners and the knowledge and experience that you share with us and each other. I look forward to a very constructive discussion today as we map the way forward together.

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30 Mar 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have described the Scottish Government's new Mental Health Strategy as a 'missed opportunity' after the details of it were announced in Holyrood today.

In his response, Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs called for far greater investment in services than what the SNP is proposing.

Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs MSP said:

"Like many of the organisations involved in delivering mental health services and supporting those with mental health problems, I do not believe this strategy will make the transformative change we all want to see.

"This mental health strategy simply doesn't live up to the promises the First Minister has made on rights, resources and reforms.

"It is clear that the mental health sector is not satisfied with the strategy and increasingly feel they have not been listened to and included.

"If the Mental Health Strategy is going to signpost the development of better mental well-being in Scotland for the next decade, then we need to see a far greater investment in services and vision than what the SNP is proposing.

"We also need guarantees that the Scottish Government will be able to deliver it, especially as no report card was ever produced for the last strategy.

"The Mental Health Strategy is a missed opportunity and is simply not good enough to deliver a new approach to mental health in Scotland. SNP Ministers need to think again."

Statement to Parliament: MCA business plans: 2017 to 2018

Maritime and Coastguard Agency's business plan for 2017 to 2018 released.

I am proud to announce the publication of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) business plan for 2017 to 2018. The MCA does vital work to save lives at sea, regulate ship standards and protect the marine environment. The agency affects not just those working on the coast or at sea, it upholds the legacy of our great maritime nation.

The business plan sets out:

- the services that the agency will deliver and any significant changes it plans to make
- the resources the agency requires
- the key performance indicators, by which its performance will be assessed

This plan allows service users and members of the public to assess how the agency is performing in operating its key services, managing reforms and the agency finances.

The business plan will be available electronically on GOV.UK and copies will be placed in the libraries of both houses.

Eurosceptic MPs must resist the temptation to meddle with the Great Repeal Bill

No sooner was Article 50 triggered than David Davis's "Department X" sprang into action. The Secretary of State has today [launched the white paper for the Great Repeal Bill](#).

The Bill gets its name from its immediate, crucial effect: the repeal of the European Communities Act 1972. This is the prerequisite to restoring full Parliamentary sovereignty over our laws, but it isn't the only thing that needs to happen to ensure a "smooth and orderly exit".

It's for that reason that, despite its name, the Bill's second effect will be to vastly extend the UK statute book, effectively copying and pasting all current EU law into UK law. This means inserting thousands of regulations and directives into British statute, a reminder of the degree to which Brussels exerted its powers during our membership.

Doing so has two benefits – first, it ensures that on the day after Brexit there is no immediate disruption by a sudden reversion either to pre-1972 laws or to a vacuum in areas where Westminster hadn't the power to legislate while we were in the EU. And second, it ensures that any deviation from or scrapping of EU laws that takes place as part of Brexit will require Parliament's approval – a right and proper restoration of democratic control.

This approach brings with it two complications, one objection and one temptation.

The first complication relates to the role of the European Court of Justice.

ECJ case law – the thousands of judgments on how EU law should be interpreted – is an important extra element of the way in which EU law operates in this country. To copy across the legislation and regulations but not to incorporate the case law would blunt the effect of the Bill, meaning that Brexit would still see sudden adjustments in the law overnight.

Davis's solution is for the Bill to "provide that any question as to the meaning of EU law that has been converted into UK law will be determined in the UK courts by reference to the CJEU's case law as it exists on the day we leave the EU." This means that May will remain true to her promise to end the authority of the ECJ over our law post-Brexit – no new rulings in Luxembourg will have any power. Parliament will be able to overrule and alter those past judgments, as will the Supreme Court. In effect, a current snapshot of EU law, including its case law, will be transposed, to be edited at will by sovereign British institutions whenever they might wish to do so.

The second complication is that a perfect, word-for-word, copy of EU law won't quite do the job once we leave the EU. For obvious reasons, it routinely refers to the powers of EU institutions, to the EU treaties and to all manner of other organisations and legal structures that we will have left once we leave the EU.

To take a random example, the legislation which defines [the framework for agricultural regulation](#) is needed for all the other, product-specific, agricultural regulations to function and make sense; Parliament would want to retain that, at least in the short term, to ensure a smooth Brexit. But in its current form it empowers the EU Commission to change the definitions of products and alter how tariffs apply to them; Parliament obviously wouldn't want to give the Commission that power after we have left the EU.

This means that there are many small amendments that need to be made during the copying across process in order to make these laws work in a solely British context – mostly changing references from EU institutions to UK institutions, and altering references to the treaties to become references to other parts of the Great Repeal Bill.

This could all just be done in the drafting of the Great Repeal Bill. But that would take time up-front, and would risk bogging the important principles of the Bill down in niggling. Davis's answer is for the Bill to provide for a power to make these alterations through secondary legislation after the Bill has become an Act.

It is this power that gives rise to the objection. Such powers, known rather arcanelly as "Henry VIII" powers, inevitably reduce Parliamentary scrutiny over the changes that are being made. The Government argues that the timing is too tight to have full debates and votes on every one of what could be thousands of what are really technical edits. Furthermore, the White Paper points out that some of the detail won't be agreed until when (or if) a Brexit deal is struck – and waiting on the whole process until then is impractical given the need to ensure an orderly Brexit. Critics fear that ministers will use their new power to change the nature, rather than just the technical wording, of the law – ditching particular regulations outright, for

example. The words “Tory power grab” are sure to issue forth from one Labour, Lib Dem or SNP MP before long.

The White Paper includes a promise that this won’t happen: “The Great Repeal Bill will not aim to make major changes to policy or establish new legal frameworks in the UK beyond those which are necessary to ensure the law continues to function properly from day one.” Opposition MPs might not find that sufficiently reassuring, but there is another aspect which allays their concerns rather more strongly. Because EU law is also in effect in the devolved nations, the Great Repeal Bill will also give the same power to ministers in the devolved administrations. Even if May and Davis harboured a secret desire to implement sweeping policy changes without Parliamentary approval, they would be very unlikely to grant Labour in Cardiff and the SNP in Holyrood the opportunity to do the same. Devolution acts as a disincentive for the UK government to over-reach itself.

This leaves us with the temptation presented by the Great Repeal Bill. The power of the moment – the return, at last, of full democratic control over our laws – and the name of the Bill itself whets Eurosceptic appetites to start instantly tearing up the EU laws that they have railed against for so long. Why not start tabling amendments to the Bill now, to delete bad regulations and torch red tape instantly, without having to wait to undo it after March 2019?

There is plenty of demand for a bonfire of EU red tape. [This site called in November](#) for the Chancellor to establish a task force to advise on a new and better post-Brexit regulatory regime. The *Daily Telegraph* followed our call [this week](#) and has launched a campaign on the topic.

But it would be a serious error to go jumping in with attempts to deregulate instantly by meddling with the Great Repeal Bill. There is a good reason why we and the *Telegraph* have both suggested that the Government should prepare for action after Brexit, rather than start cutting out particular EU laws in the Brexit process. Those who wish to hobble Brexit, or even prevent it entirely, are studying the Bill with a wolfish eye. They can see that it is complex, and that it must run on a tight timescale. They know that complexity equals opportunities to raise concerns, mount attacks and perhaps inspire rebellions. They view it as a major opportunity for their promised “fightback”.

If Eurosceptic MPs were to start trying to mess with the Bill, they would be giving Farron, Heseltine et al exactly what they want. They might even find themselves in the same lobby as those who loathe everything they believe in.

Last year’s referendum victory was the product of a sustained exercise in self-denial. When Eurosceptics indulged our temptations, talking high theory and dragging out historical analogy, we lost. When we exercised self-denial, studying to learn what would win and working to focus on the issues that interested less obsessive voters, we won. This trial is just the same: do what makes you feel good, and risk losing the great prize; knuckle down and do what must be done, and finally secure what you have always wanted.