

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT MAY

Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers update

On 25th April the government announced an update on the Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers, setting out next steps to deliver this project.

Following feedback from industry and discussions with the devolved administrations, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has today confirmed the Deposit Return Schemes for drinks containers will be introduced in October 2027.

Defra has also published a UK wide – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales policy statement on joint registration, reporting, labelling, reciprocal returns, deposit level, minimum container size, and low volume products.

Additionally, the government has published a statement on glass drinks containers.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

Rapid Flood Guidance trial for England and Wales: sign up now

On 14 May, the gov.uk Flood Forecasting Centre will launch a trial of the Rapid Flood Guidance (RFG) service which will run until 30 September.

The RFG service will give short notice updates for England and Wales to supplement the flood guidance statement.

The service aims to support the responder community to be better prepared to mitigate the impacts from rapid flooding. The service provides a new:

- advisory badge on the front page for days when there is a heightened risk of rapid flooding
- RFG product that will be issued on heightened risk days

By signing up for the trial you will receive the RFG product direct to your email inbox or by text.

Signing up will also mean that you will receive RFG tests in the run up to the launch and invitations to RFG webinars.

Announcement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rapid-flood-guidance-trial-for-england-and-wales-sign-up-now>

Council Tax: common questions answered

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) has today (10 April) published information explaining the process for challenging a Council Tax band and answering some common questions

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/council-tax-your-questions-answered>

The VOA has also recently published a blog explaining how it values properties built after the Council Tax valuation date. The blog sets out what evidence the VOA uses when making banding decisions.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

If you have any questions, please contact voamediaenquiries@voa.gov.uk.

Voluntary National Insurance payments – online service launches

On 29th April the government launched a new online service to make it easier for customers to check for and fill any gaps in their National Insurance (NI) record to help increase their State Pension.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/online-voluntary-national-insurance-payments-service-launches>

The Check your State Pension forecast – a joint service by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the Department for Work and Pensions – now includes a fully end-to-end digital solution.

The service will show customers by how much their State Pension could increase and details of the voluntary NI contributions they would need to pay to achieve this. It allows most people under State Pension age to view gaps in their NI record and pay voluntary contributions to fill those gaps, if it will benefit them.

Those who are eligible have until 5 April 2025 to pay voluntary contributions to make up gaps in their NI record between 6 April 2006 and 5 April 2018. From 6 April 2025, people will only be able to pay voluntary contributions for the previous 6 tax years, in line with normal time limits.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

Community Infrastructure Levy guidance updated

On 26th April the Department of Levelling Up and Communities updated the guidance explaining what the Community Infrastructure Levy is and how it operates.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/community-infrastructure-levy>

The update includes changes to the Community Infrastructure Levy section of the planning practice guidance to help clarify the position on retrospective planning permissions granted under s73A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, in relation to obtaining relief or exemption from Community Infrastructure Levy.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (the 'levy') is a charge which can be levied by councils on new development in their area. It is an important tool to help deliver the infrastructure needed to support local development.

Public health update

Bird flu (avian influenza): latest situation in England

On 29th April the government announced that gatherings of all poultry and other captive birds, including ducks, geese and swans are permitted.

Keepers will need to follow the requirements of the poultry gathering general licence and notify the Animal and Plant Health Agency at least seven days before the event.

www.gov.uk/government/news/bird-flu-avian-influenza-latest-situation-in-england

Councils are encouraged to share this info as appropriate.

Bluetongue virus – latest situation: End of the seasonal low vector period

On 19 April, the UK's Chief Veterinary Officer urged farmers to remain vigilant for bluetongue virus after the disease was found in cattle and sheep in Kent, Norfolk and Suffolk.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/bluetongue-virus-detected-in-a-single-cow>

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and the Pirbright Institute identified the first case of the disease in November 2023.

Farmers should continue to monitor their animals for signs and make sure their animals and land are registered with APHA.

Bluetongue does not affect people or food safety. The virus is primarily transmitted by midge bites and affects cattle, goats, sheep and camelids such as llamas. More information about bluetongue is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bluetongue>

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

Government launches fund to help farmers manage water resources

On 22nd April the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency launched a £1.6 million fund to help farmers to explore how they can better manage water for use in time of drought.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-fund-to-help-farmers-manage-water-resources>

The fund will support investigation of water demand and availability in the most water-stressed agricultural areas over the next 25-year period. Projects could include multi-farm reservoirs, treated wastewater recycling systems, water trading and sharing schemes.

Groups of two or more neighbouring farms are eligible to apply.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-water-resources-options-screening-studies-how-to-apply>.

The closing date for applications is 16 June.

Farming Recovery Fund – reminder

On 9 April, the government opened the Farming Recovery Fund to support farmers who suffered uninsurable damage to their land due to flooding.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-opens-fund-to-support-farmers-affected-by-flooding>

Under the scheme, eligible farmers can access grants of between £500 and £25,000 to return their land to the condition it was in before exceptional flooding due to Storm Henk.

Eligible farmers are being contacted directly by Rural Payments Agency outlining the support available to them through the Farming Recovery Fund and how they can make a claim.

The fund will initially be open in those areas where the Flood Recovery Framework has already been activated to help farms which have experienced the highest levels of flooding. Eligibility for the fund will remain under review by the Department for

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ensure it is supporting areas where farmland is most impacted.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate. If you have any questions, please contact: FRF@rpa.gov.uk

Wraparound childcare update

The government announced at the Spring Budget £289 million to support the expansion of wraparound childcare for primary school aged children.

This week, four early adopters have started rolling out expanded wraparound provision five months ahead of the national programme launch in September.

The Department for Education (DfE) has published a blog showcasing the work of a primary school in delivering wraparound childcare within one of the early adopter areas:

<https://teaching.blog.gov.uk/2024/04/17/offering-wraparound-childcare-at-our-schools/>

If you have any questions, please contact wraparound.programme@education.gov.uk

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30/04/24*