

Deposit Return Scheme approved in Wales

To: all local authorities in Wales

For info: England, Scotland, Northern Ireland

1 Overview

On 25 March 2026, the Welsh Government approved new regulations to introduce a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), signifying a key step towards a circular economy and reduced litter.¹ The scheme is scheduled for implementation in October 2027 and builds on Wales' high-performing recycling framework by improving on-the-go recycling, helping to keep valuable materials in circulation and reduce litter in public spaces.

The Welsh Government is now commencing the next stage of implementing the scheme. A Deposit Management Organisation will be appointed to oversee the project and ensure ongoing stakeholder engagement and partnerships with local authorities, industry and other stakeholders.

The scheme aligns with the Welsh Government's Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which focuses on promoting sustainable development for the future generations of Wales, alongside supporting economic growth.

2 Background

2.1 What will the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) look like?

The DRS will add a small refundable deposit on eligible drinks containers at the point of purchase. Consumers can reclaim the deposit by returning empty containers to designated return points, such as machines in supermarkets or shops. Returned containers are then collected and can be reused or recycled, extending the lifecycle of goods to reduce resource consumption.

Key features of the Welsh scheme:

- Wales will be the only UK nation to include glass bottles in its DRS.
- It focusses on on-the-go recycling to capture materials consumed outside the home that

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/deposit-return-scheme-wales-approved-tackle-litter-and-drive-reuse>

- are otherwise less likely to be recycled.
- The scheme will also explore how reusable drinks containers could be included alongside single-use deposit items.

2.2 Why is a DRS needed

Deposit Return Schemes are already well-established across Europe and the rest of the world, with the most effective schemes achieving collection rates of over 90%. The schemes are generally seen to boost recycling levels, reduce littering and promote a circular economy.

APSE's 2023 briefing on [delivering a successful DRS across the UK](#) found that recycling rates in the UK for drinks containers are around 70% lower than in other countries that have a DRS in place. As a result, many drinks containers end up in landfill or are sent to incineration plants, releasing highly polluting greenhouse gas emissions and increasing demand for virgin materials. Plastic bottles and aluminum cans are fully recyclable, yet current recycling rates indicate significant room for improvement. A DRS has the potential to create a cleaner, more segregated waste stream by ensuring drinks containers are separated by material at the point of return.

3 Implication for councils

Local councils will need to assess how the DRS interacts with existing waste management systems. Changes may be required to services such as waste collection routes and recycling schedules to reflect changes in waste volumes. Street cleansing requirements may also change as public behaviour adapts, with councils requiring a flexible approach to maintaining clean and well-managed public spaces.

Councils will need to liaise closely with the Deposit Management Organisation to define roles and responsibilities to avoid service disruption.

4 APSE Comment

It is vital that local authorities are closely involved with the design and delivery of the scheme to ensure alignment with existing waste management systems. As we urged in our 2022 [Deposit Return Scheme](#) report:

"We recommend that local councils continue to be kept fully informed as well as consulted with on the progress of the implementation in order to enable changes and modifications to services to ensure a planned and smooth transition for the introduction of the Deposit Return Scheme."

Early engagement will be essential to ensuring environmental benefits are maximised while limiting disruption to local services.

Clearly where current recyclates are removed from domestic waste the impact on collections will need to be assessed and accounted for, including what this may mean for service income, viability of collection routes and route optimisation. Considerable public education campaigns will also be

needed to ensure awareness of the new DRS scheme and public compliance, through behavior change. All of these issues continue to be a focus of the APSE waste network alongside specific forums within APSE Wales.

APSE members can sign up to our APSE networks in the following:

- [Recycling, Waste Management and Street Cleansing](#)
- [Wales](#)

These networks provide events across the year, bringing together expert speakers from across local government and the wider sector. They provide a platform to share best practice and keep members up to date on policy developments like the Deposit Return Scheme in Wales.

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- Local Government Reorganisation Network
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