# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Consultation to remove the sanction of imprisonment for the non-payment of council tax** |
| **DATE**  | **11 June 2018** |
| **BY**  | **Mark Drakeford, Cabinet Secretary for Finance** |

Earlier this year, the Welsh Government launched a campaign to increase awareness about the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the other forms of support available to people to help them pay their council tax bills. We are working with local authorities and third sector organisations to ensure households in Wales receive the help they are entitled to.

Today, I am launching a consultation about removing the sanction of imprisonment for the non-payment of council tax. This is the next step in making council tax fairer in Wales.

Payment of council tax is vital to maintaining the services on which we all rely every day. But it is also right that those who are less able to contribute are treated fairly and with dignity. I believe we should reconsider the appropriateness of enforcing the non‑payment of council tax by way of committal to prison.

I do not believe the sanction of imprisonment is a proportionate response to a civil debt. The additional costs associated with imprisoning someone for non-payment of council tax; the failure of imprisonment to address the underlying cause of the debt and the impact on the future and wellbeing of those who are sent to prison and those closest to them can no longer be left unchallenged.

There is a growing body of evidence and research from across Wales and the UK, collated by local authorities, debt advice services and other organisations, which questions both the impact and effectiveness of imprisonment for non-payment of council tax.

It is proposed that regulations will be brought forward in early 2019 to remove the sanction of imprisonment in Wales, subject to the outcome of the consultation. Under this proposal, no individual could be imprisoned for council tax debt from that point on.

Today marks the start of a 12-week consultation with taxpayers, local authorities, voluntary organisations and other industry representatives. It is an important opportunity to make our council tax system fairer and I am keen to hear views and work with stakeholders to improve our approach.

We will continue to work with local authorities and debt advice agencies to ensure local authorities in Wales adopt best practice to support individuals who are in council tax arrears.

The consultation is available at: <https://beta.gov.wales/removal-sanction-imprisonment-non-payment-council-tax>