

**8<sup>th</sup> January 2010**

**Welcome to our latest Small Business Fortnight – the e-bulletin which aims to keep you on top of key small business issues and what the FSB in Wales has been saying about them.**

### **Rate relief victory**

We kick off this first edition with a very positive lobbying victory for the FSB in Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government has agreed to provide additional relief on business rates that will increase the upper limits for each category of small business rate relief by at least 20%. This follows hot on the heels of another recent success where the Assembly Government reduced the multiplier that is used in calculating business rate bills from 0.489 to 0.409. These moves were welcomed in extensive media coverage which included the [Western Mail](#), [Daily Post](#) and [BBC Online](#) as well as broadcast media.

### **Don't get carried away...**

The Welsh Assembly Government intends to impose a levy on all single use bags in Wales whenever goods and services are purchased. It covers all single use bags, whatever they are made from. It requires a levy (yet to be decided, but will be between 5p and 15p) to be charged. Records must be kept which will be subject to inspection and must be published. A fine up to £5,000 per breach (possibly more for larger retailers) may be imposed on a business if Trading Standards identify failures to follow the new procedures. The vast majority of businesses in Wales are SMEs, while the majority of retailing occurs in large businesses. As a result, the vast majority of businesses will be the hardest hit for the smallest environmental benefit. SMEs were mentioned in passing in the consultation document, and it is clear that the levy is aimed at larger businesses. We are currently asking the Welsh Government to exempt SMEs from this levy. The area of what amount to charge is also an extremely sensitive one, especially in the current economic climate, and needs to be carefully considered. The Irish single use carrier bag charge was set at a price 6 times higher than estimates of consumer's maximum willingness to pay and is currently around 20p. Stores in the UK that currently charge for single use carrier bags charge around 1-9p per bag. But there is a concern about any impact of a charge on single use carrier bags on specific groups and also on impulse shopping and stakeholders have identified that shoppers may be less likely to impulse shop if they have forgotten their bags, which may negatively impact on particular shops, especially in town centres.

### **Tell us**

The FSB is embarking on a major new initiative with the Welsh Assembly Government's Department for the Economy and Transport. They are having a complete 'back to the drawing board' review of what they spend their budget on, and they want to find out from FSB members themselves what the priorities should be, and, indeed, what things they currently do which should be consigned to the dustbin of economic history. Soon all FSB members in Wales will be receiving a letter from the Deputy First Minister asking them to take the time to fill in an online questionnaire asking them these salient points. Then there will be a number of carefully-selected focus groups with FSB members to further explore these issues. This is all being funded by WAG, but in conjunction with the FSB, and a good way for members to tell government directly what they think works, might work, and what

doesn't work. The whole project should be finished by June, so watch this space for further details.

### **Rydn riding high**

He was only with the FSB for a few days, but already found himself featured in an article for Wales' national newspaper! Rydn Reed had been standing in as temporary cover for Cardiff Office Administrator Sonia Dowler when a call came into the office about a feature the Western Mail was running on those who would be using the communication system Skype at Christmas. As a Canadian temporarily working in the UK, Rydn would be using Skype to speak to his family on Christmas morning – read the rest in the [full-page article](#)...

### **Festive stories**

Media coverage for the FSB in Wales was almost as blanket as the snow we had atop our rolling hills, as our muse-like comments were given to a whole raft of stories such as our response to [recession figures](#), [Christmas sales](#), [energy saving](#), [gritting](#) (not of the teeth kind), [downtrodden workers](#), [Wales' paucity of wealth](#), and, of course, absolutely loads of stuff on weather in just about every media outlet you'd care to mention, including prime-time television.

### **Press releases**

This week we called for a mapping study of the skills demands of small firms in Wales as employers were reporting it was still difficult to find people with the appropriate skills they need to grow their business. See the press release [here](#).

### **Assembly doings**

The National Assembly is in Recess until 11<sup>th</sup> January 2010, although the civil servants were obviously busy working on the [Food \(Jelly Mini-Cups\) \(Emergency Control\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2009](#)! The New Year Message from Carwyn Jones AM, our new First Minister for Wales, was: "The New Year is a time for looking ahead, and this is a momentous time for me as Wales' new First Minister. I am very proud to have this opportunity to serve the people of Wales by leading the Welsh Assembly Government. In 2009 we faced tough economic challenges, but our core values of social justice have served us well. I was brought up to respect the idea of chwarae teg, fair play – and now we are able to ensure Wales' strong sense of social responsibility and justice guide our young democracy. By working together in that spirit we are weathering the storm, and during the coming year we will continue the task of building the economy; we need to ensure prosperity for all." His main driver over the coming months and years will undoubtedly be the economy, which is probably why he has agreed to speak at our annual dinner this year...

### **FSB Events**

Following on from the incredible success of last year's inaugural Annual Dinner which saw nearly half of all Assembly Members attend, this year's event will be held on 10<sup>th</sup> February and should see a similar turn-out as we welcome our new First Minister, Carwyn Jones. He should still be a good draw for the proceedings, and we are honoured that he has agreed to become one of his first high-profile speaking engagements.

February will also see the start of party conference season – and the Six Nations rugby season – so we will be combining the best of both worlds and hosting an England v Wales big-screen reception at the Lib Dem conference in Swansea on the 6<sup>th</sup> February. It's sure to be packed out, and with FSB banners proudly standing either side of the big screen our coverage will be every bit as good as the BBC's. We will also be holding a WAG Cabinet Minister's lunch at the Welsh Labour conference in Swansea, as well as sponsoring conference events at Plaid Cymru in Cardiff and the Welsh Conservatives in Llandudno.

Shortly afterwards, on March 9<sup>th</sup>, we have our Annual FSB Wales Chair Westminster Reception, and are hoping to secure the services of the Secretary of State for Wales, Peter Hain, to speak.

Finally, we will also be hosting the FE Awards for Wales in June.