

**Explanatory Memorandum to:**

- 1. The Welsh Revenue Authority (Powers to Investigate Criminal Offences) Regulations 2018**
- 2. The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (References to Welsh Revenue Authority Financial Investigators) Order 2018**

This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Welsh Revenue Authority Implementation Directorate and is laid before the National Assembly for Wales in conjunction with the above subordinate legislation and in accordance with Standing Order 27.1.

**Cabinet Secretary's Declaration**

In my view, this Explanatory Memorandum gives a fair and reasonable view of the expected impact of:

1. The Welsh Revenue Authority (Powers to Investigate Criminal Offences) Regulations 2018; and
2. The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (References to Welsh Revenue Authority Financial Investigators) Order 2018

I am satisfied that the benefits justify the likely costs.

Mark Drakeford AM  
Cabinet Secretary for Finance

21 February 2018

## 1. Description

- 1.1 Part 9 of the Tax Collection and Management (Wales) Act 2016 (“TCMA”) amended the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (“the 1984 Act”), the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 (“the 2001 Act”) and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (“the 2002 Act”) to allow the Welsh Ministers, by regulation and order, to confer powers on the Welsh Revenue Authority (“WRA”) to investigate devolved tax crime.

### **The Welsh Revenue Authority (Powers to Investigate Criminal Offences) Regulations 2018.**

- 1.2 These Regulations provide that the following provisions contained in the 1984 Act apply to WRA when it investigates devolved tax crime:
- a power to apply for and obtain a warrant from a justice of the peace to authorise entry and search of premises (section 8 of the 1984 Act);
  - a power to obtain access to “excluded material” or “special procedure material” (defined Part 2 of the 1984 Act), subject to obtaining a warrant from a judge in accordance with the procedure in Schedule 1 to the 1984 Act (section 9 of the 1984 Act);
  - a power to seize relevant items found during the course of a search (section 19);
  - the extension of seizure powers to require information contained in an electronic format to be produced during the course of a search (section 20);
  - a power which enables WRA to copy information which has been seized during the course of a search (section 21);
  - a power to retain anything seized during the course of a search (section 22).
- 1.3 In addition to these powers, the Regulations apply appropriate safeguards and governance on their potential use. These include safeguards in relation to execution of searches and the seizure of items found during the course of a search (sections 15 and 16), and accompanying rights for the owners of property seized during the course of a search (section 21). WRA will also be under a duty to notify in writing a person interviewed in relation to an offence when a decision is taken not to proceed (section 60B). More generally, WRA must have regard to the relevant statutory codes of practice issued under sections 66 and 67 of the 1984 Act when investigating criminal offences.
- 1.4 These Regulations will also apply provisions in Part 2 of the 2001 Act to investigations conducted by WRA, which, among other things, provide for additional powers of seizure during the course of a search. As with the 1984 Act, various safeguards are also applied to the use of those powers. For example, section 52 of the 2001 Act imposes a requirement on WRA when relying on the powers of seizure provided by sections 50 or 51 to provide the owner of the property with a written notice setting down various details, including what has been seized, the grounds of seizure and the scope to apply to a judge for the return of the seized

items. Section 59 of the 2001 Act gives any person with an interest in property seized using these powers the right to apply to the court for it to be returned, subject to certain conditions being met.

- 1.5 Regulation 3 provides that further to the provisions listed in the Schedule to the Regulations, any applicable safeguards, and procedural elements in the 1984 Act will also apply. Consequently, any terms defined by other provisions in the 1984 Act will also apply to WRA when the provisions listed in the Schedule are applied to WRA investigations.
- 1.6 Regulation 3(3) substitutes references to police officers, constables and the police with references to WRA.
- 1.7 Regulation 4 allows a person exercising a function conferred on WRA by the Regulations to use reasonable force if that person considers it necessary in the exercise of that function. This could range from guiding a person to stand aside by placing a hand on their arm through to stopping a person by restraining them to prevent violence or injury against another person or officer, for example.
- 1.8 Regulation 5 makes provision for WRA to search any person found on the premises which is the subject of a search in reliance of a warrant issued under the 1984 Act. However, WRA may only search a person where there is reasonable cause to believe the person is in possession of something which is likely to be of “substantial value” to the investigation. This may be concealing/hiding something which may be relevant to the investigation, whether by itself, such as a relevant document in a briefcase, or something which when considered alongside other material could be of value, such as a mobile phone with passwords for electronic files or a key in a persons pocket which would open a filing cabinet on the premises.
- 1.9 Regulation 6 modifies section 16 of the 1984 Act, which makes provision in relation to the authorisation required before multiple premises warrants can be executed on a second or subsequent occasion, and where an all premises warrant can be executed in respect of property not specified in the warrant. The modification made by regulation 6 has the effect of substituting the requirement of obtaining a police inspector’s approval with a requirement that approval may only be provided by a person exercising WRA functions of at least civil service Grade 7 (or equivalent).
- 1.10 Regulation 7 modifies section 77 of the 1984 Act, which makes provision in relation to the treatment of confessions made by a person with a learning disability. Where such a confession is received as evidence in criminal proceedings, section 77 of the 1984 Act requires the court to exercise caution before relying on that evidence where (among other things) it has not been made in the presence of an “independent person”. The modification made by regulation 7 ensures that a person

exercising a function conferred on WRA by these Regulations is not regarded as an “independent person”.

1.11 Regulation 8 specifies that the functions conferred by these Regulations may only be exercised by a person with written authorisation from WRA to conduct relevant investigations.

1.12 These Regulations will come into force on 1 April 2018.

### **The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (References to Welsh Revenue Authority Financial Investigators) Order 2018**

1.13 The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (References to Welsh Revenue Authority Financial Investigators) Order 2018 (“the Order”) enables accredited financial investigators who are members of staff of the WRA to exercise the following powers under the 2002 Act:

- apply for a restraint order under Part 2;
- seize property to which a restraint order applies;
- search for, seize, detain and apply for the forfeiture of cash under Chapter 3, Part 5 (recovery of cash in summary proceedings); and
- apply for orders and warrants in relation to confiscation, money laundering and detained cash investigations under Part 8, including an application to the courts for an order requiring a financial institution to provide customer information in relation to a specified person.

1.14 The types of investigations referred to in relation to Part 8 can be described as follows:

- **Confiscation** – A confiscation investigation is an investigation into whether a person has benefited from his criminal conduct or to the extent or whereabouts of his benefit from his criminal conduct, following criminal prosecution.
- **Detained Cash** – A detained cash investigation is an investigation for the purposes of Chapter 3 of Part 5 of the 2002 Act into the derivation of cash detained under that chapter or a part of such cash, or whether cash detained under that chapter is intended by any person to be used in unlawful conduct.
- **Money laundering** – A Money laundering investigation is an investigation into whether a person has committed a money laundering offence. This could occur where for example, there is a reasonable suspicion that a person has converted criminal property.

1.15 In addition, the Order applies appropriate safeguards and governance on the potential use of these powers, including the requirement that certain powers can only be exercised after obtaining senior officer approval.

1.16 Article 3 of the Order provides that a reference to an accredited financial investigator in a provision of the 2002 Act specified in Part 1 of the Schedule to the Order, is a reference to an accredited financial investigator who is a member of staff of WRA.

1.17 Article 4 of the Order provides that a reference to an accredited financial investigator in a provision of the 2002 Act specified in Part 2 of the Schedule, is a reference to an accredited financial investigator who is a member of staff of WRA and is at or above grade 7 or equivalent.

1.18 This Order comes into force on 1 April 2018.

## **2. Matters of special interest to the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee**

2.1 This Explanatory Memorandum covers two Statutory Instruments; The Welsh Revenue Authority (Powers to Investigate Criminal Offences) Regulations 2018, which is subject to the affirmative procedure and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (References to Welsh Revenue Authority Financial Investigators) Order 2018, which is subject to the negative procedure.

2.2 These Statutory Instruments are interlinked and it is beneficial to interpret the impacts of each Statutory Instrument jointly to explain the wider legislative context. Thus, an Explanatory Memorandum incorporating a Regulatory Impact Assessment has been prepared to describe both Statutory Instruments.

## **3. Legislative background**

3.1 The Welsh Revenue Authority (Powers to Investigate Criminal Offences) Regulations 2018 are made under section 114ZA of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and section 67A into the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001.

3.2 Section 114ZA of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 was inserted by section 185(1) TCMA and section 67A of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 was inserted by section 185(2) TCMA.

3.3 In accordance with section 114ZA(4) of the 1984 Act and section 67A(4) of the 2001 Act, the regulations must be laid before and approved by the National Assembly for Wales (the affirmative procedure).

3.4 The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (References to Welsh Revenue Authority Financial investigators) Order 2018 is made pursuant to section 453(1A) and (2) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. This Order is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

3.5 Section 453(1A) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 was inserted by section 186 TCMA.

#### **4. Purpose & intended effect of the legislation**

- 4.1 The Tax Collection and Management (Wales) Act 2016 creates three criminal offences: wrongful disclosure of protected taxpayer information under section 20; concealing or destroying documents following an information notice under section 114 and concealing or destroying documents following notification under section 115. In addition to these offences there are a number of other criminal offences relevant to devolved taxes, including fraud (under the Fraud Act 2006); the common law offence of cheating the public revenue; and facilitating tax evasion (under the Criminal Finances Act 2017).
- 4.2 WRA's functions include promoting compliance with the law relating to devolved taxes (section 12 TCMA). This means that WRA has a role to play in tackling criminal behaviour that impacts on the devolved taxes. The purpose of the Regulations and the Order are to confer relevant investigatory powers on WRA so that it can lawfully and effectively tackle criminal behaviour, exercising powers as a law enforcement agency, by acquiring evidence to enable the prosecution of criminal offences.
- 4.3 Criminal behaviour in this context can be wide ranging, covering both devolved taxes, and could include deliberately providing false information to WRA (e.g. lying in a tax return); deliberately failing to comply with the requirements of the law (e.g. not weighing waste before it is sent to landfill or misstating the value of a land transaction); or deliberately destroying documents or other information that may be needed to establish a person's true tax position. The criminal intent in each of these circumstances is to make a financial gain or to seek to reduce the amount of money that should be paid to the public revenue.
- 4.4 These criminal investigation powers are additional to the civil investigatory powers conferred on WRA under the devolved tax legislation (Tax Collection and Management (Wales) Act 2016, Land Transaction Tax and Anti-avoidance of Devolved Taxes (Wales) Act 2017 and Land Disposals Tax (Wales) Act 2017), which are primarily intended to allow WRA to identify and collect the correct amount of tax due (by obtaining information and inspecting premises, and where appropriate, imposing financial penalties). In some cases, it may be appropriate for individuals to face criminal sanctions for their behaviour, including fines and custodial sentences and these powers facilitate that.
- 4.5 It may also be considered appropriate to recover the money and assets a person acquires as a result of that criminal behaviour. The 2002 Act enables an accredited financial investigator to look into the financial position of individuals under investigation to identify, trace and freeze the proceeds of crime with a view to asking the courts to make a confiscation order following prosecution.

- 4.6 The Regulations and Order seek to put WRA in a similar position to HMRC in terms of criminal investigation powers, although the powers conferred on WRA by these statutory instruments are narrower than those conferred on HMRC. This reflects the narrower scope of the functions which WRA is able to exercise, for example WRA has no customs functions. WRA will not, for example, have the power to arrest or detain a person, or the powers to stop and search a person or vehicles without a warrant from a justice of the peace.
- 4.7 There is a real possibility of criminal offences in relation to Welsh devolved taxes in the future. The OECD report on Fighting Tax Crime recognises that “criminal law plays an important role... it enhances the general preventive effect that criminal law enforcement can have and reduces non compliance.”<sup>1</sup> Enabling the WRA to investigate devolved tax offences, as HMRC does for LfT and SDLT, with a consistent set of criminal investigation powers will help to ensure Wales is not seen as a soft target for those who may be seeking to evade taxes. Public knowledge that there are the appropriate criminal powers in place will allow WRA to prioritise criminal enforcement in appropriate cases and, therefore, act as a deterrent for those contemplating breaking the law. However, as previously noted, the civil powers conferred on WRA will be used in the majority of compliance cases.
- 4.8 The Regulations and Order are intended to provide WRA with proportionate criminal investigation powers to tackle and deter devolved tax crime. In exercising the powers conferred by these statutory instruments, WRA will be subject to the supervision of the courts and will be required to comply with or have regard to all relevant safeguards in the same way as the exercise of these powers by other law enforcement agencies such as the police and HMRC. In particular, a person will only be authorised by WRA to exercise these powers where that person has the requisite experience, training and understanding of the relevant legal framework and it is anticipated that these staff will carry specific identification similar to a warrant card. In addition, use of the powers will need to have regard to the relevant PACE codes of practice and, where specified, be approved at an appropriate level within WRA by a senior, authorised officer with the requisite experience, training, accreditation and understanding of the relevant legal framework.
- 4.9 In relation to the POCA order, accredited financial investigators must be trained, accredited and monitored by the National Crime Agency and the use of these investigatory powers must be by order or warrant from the court. Evidence and information obtained through the use of these powers must be retained and stored in a safe and secure way and used only for the purpose for which it was obtained, as is the case for all protected taxpayer information.

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<sup>1</sup> Fighting Tax Crime: The Ten Global Principles OECD 2017, p.14 - <http://www.oecd.org/tax/crime/fighting-tax-crime-the-ten-global-principles.pdf>

## **PART 2 – REGULATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

### **1. Options**

#### **Option 1: Do Nothing**

1.1 Under this option, the Regulations and Order would not be introduced.

#### **Option 2: Introduce the regulations**

1.2 Under this option, the Regulations and Order as described in Part 1 of this Explanatory Memorandum would be introduced. This is the preferred option.

### **2. Costs & benefits**

#### **Option 1: Do Nothing**

2.1 If these Regulations and Order were not introduced, the WRA would be unable to use the investigative powers in the 1984 Act, the 2001 Act and the 2002 Act to investigate criminality and reclaim the proceeds of that crime for the public purse in relation to the devolved Welsh taxes. In this option, powers to investigate criminality in the devolved Welsh taxes would fall to the police forces in Wales.

2.2 It would be possible for the police in Wales to lead on all elements of investigation of devolved tax offences. However, this would be an additional responsibility for police in Wales and any police action would be dependent on their consideration of a range of other priorities. The Home Office are responsible for policing across England and Wales, (though the Welsh Government partially funds the police and, along with Welsh local authorities, have a strong and close relationship with the Welsh police).

#### **Option 2: Introduce the Regulations and Order**

2.3 The Welsh Government's preferred option is that the WRA investigate tax crime themselves. Financial profit is the driver for almost all serious and organised crime, and other lower-level acquisitive crime. It is difficult to estimate the cost of tax crime in relation to the two devolved taxes, however, HMRC estimate that there is a 10% tax gap for landfill tax and a 1% tax gap for stamp duty land tax<sup>2</sup>. This suggests that the potential lost revenue to the WRA for LDT could be in the region of £2.6 million and for LTT in the region of £2.5 million – although only part of this

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<sup>2</sup> Measuring the Tax Gap 2017, HMRC The tax gap is the difference between the amount of tax that should, in theory, be collected by HMRC, and what is actually collected.



would be due to tax crime.<sup>3</sup>As tax rules diverge across the UK following the devolution of tax powers to Wales and Scotland, it is imperative that tax crime is tackled consistently and in the best interests of compliant taxpayers and businesses, so no part of the UK is a safe haven for those who evade tax. It will be important that any organisation responsible for investigating devolved tax offences works closely with HMRC and Revenue Scotland to share information and ensure effective enforcement.

- 2.4 It is clear that the application of the 1984 Act, the 2001 Act and the 2002 Act will have resource implications for WRA and the Welsh Government and there is a shared commitment to ensuring that appropriate resources are made available.
- 2.5 Much of the governance and compliance work required to enable the lawful exercise of these powers will be case-specific – the powers under consideration are permissive: WRA would not be required to use them, but would have the option to do so in appropriate circumstances.
- 2.6 This means that the immediate impact of the Regulations and the Order could be relatively limited, for example, to allow staff to receive appropriate training and accreditation. It is anticipated that the initial resource requirements stemming from WRA access to criminal powers can be accommodated within the existing WRA budget allocation of £6m for 2018/19 and 2019/20.
- 2.7 The exercise of the powers in particular cases could imply further cost, for example, relating to the storage of evidence and the appropriate equipment for staff. The ongoing resource will depend on the extent and nature of the case-work that WRA may wish to take forward and the priority attached to it. The costs associated will be dependant upon the nature, volume and extent of criminality uncovered once WRA becomes operational and has access to protected taxpayer information.
- 2.8 However, it may be anticipated that some of those costs may overlap with WRA's civil enforcement powers under TCMA, to inspect premises and to take samples and remove documents during an inspection.
- 2.9 The Office of Budget Responsibility considers the cost and benefits associated with compliance work subject to “high levels of uncertainty since they target specific subsets of taxpayers who are already actively changing their behaviour to lower their tax liabilities. As a result, there is usually relatively high behavioural uncertainty. Similarly, since the measures are directed at uncollected tax, there is usually less reliable data available to inform the costing.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Based on information from HMRC Measuring the Tax Gap 2017 and Welsh Government tax forecasts

<sup>4</sup> Office of Budget Responsibility – “Working Paper No.11: Evaluation of HMRC anti-avoidance and operational measures, September 2017” [http://budgetresponsibility.org.uk/docs/dlm\\_uploads/WP-No.11-Evaluation-of-HMRC-anti-avoidance-and-operational-measures.pdf](http://budgetresponsibility.org.uk/docs/dlm_uploads/WP-No.11-Evaluation-of-HMRC-anti-avoidance-and-operational-measures.pdf)

- 2.10 However, the benefit of investment in tackling tax crime are seen as not only recovering lost tax, but also in encouraging wider compliance as the risk of being caught outweighs the potential benefit. In addition, OECD states that “the investment is worthwhile, with some jurisdictions being able to calculate the return on investment from the criminal tax investigation teams and reporting recovery of funds well in excess of the expenditure, ranging from 150% to 1500% return on investment.”<sup>5</sup>
- 2.11 The Regulations and Order are not expected to impose costs on business, other than those that may become subject to an investigation from potential criminal activity.
- 2.12 The Regulations and Order are considered as a way of levelling the playing field for legitimate businesses in Wales. The Regulations and Order are designed to tackle tax crime and we anticipate this to be most prevalent in landfill disposals tax, which will have the potential to impact on wider waste crime which can have serious environmental impacts. However, the motive for tax crime is economic and is aimed at the acquisition of financial benefit. As with any crime, waste crime has a cost to the wider economy, taking business away from legitimate, permitted waste operators, who therefore lose income and the ability to invest in their businesses and the wider local economy. However, the profits come largely at the expense of the taxpayer. The Environmental Services Association estimates “each pound spent on enforcement is likely to yield a return of as much as £5.60. Of this £3.20 would be received directly by government in taxes, with the rest benefitting legitimate waste sector businesses and wider society.”<sup>6</sup>
- 2.13 Overall, the benefits of this option are:
- By creating an effective deterrent to criminal behaviour, it has the potential to reduce tax lost as a result of criminal activity;
  - There is the potential to reclaim revenue lost to the public purses as a result of criminal behaviour;
  - It has the potential to create a fairer environment for waste businesses and other tax payers in Wales; and
  - Consultation responses from other law enforcement agencies, including the police, National Crime Agency and NRW were supportive of the proposals.

### **3. Consultation**

- 3.1 On 10 July, the Welsh Government published a consultation on WRA access to criminal powers to tackle tax crime, which closed on 2 October. In total, the Welsh Government received 17 responses from a

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<sup>5</sup> Fighting Tax Crime – The Ten Global Principles: OECD 2017-  
<http://www.oecd.org/tax/crime/fighting-tax-crime-the-ten-global-principles.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Environmental Services Association Education Trust- Waste Crime: Tackling Britain’s Dirty Secret:  
[http://www.esauk.org/esa\\_reports/ESAET\\_Waste\\_Crime\\_Tackling\\_Britains\\_Dirty\\_Secret\\_LIVE.pdf](http://www.esauk.org/esa_reports/ESAET_Waste_Crime_Tackling_Britains_Dirty_Secret_LIVE.pdf)

range of stakeholders from various sectors, all from within Wales.

3.2 A full Welsh Government response to the consultation can be viewed here: <https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/welsh-revenue-authority-powers-tackle-tax-crime>

3.3 Following the consultation, engagement has taken place with the Home Office, HMRC, CPS, NRW, National Crime Agency and the Police as well as other WRA stakeholders. Their views have been taken into account when developing these Regulations and Order.

#### **4. Post implementation review**

4.1 The Finance Committee in its Stage 1 Report on the TCMA stated: “the Minister should consider reviewing these powers once the taxes have been established and in operation for a number of years.”<sup>7</sup>

4.2 It is anticipated that TCMA will be reviewed within three to five years. The Land Transaction Tax and Anti-avoidance of Devolved Taxes (Wales) Act 2017 will be reviewed by May 2023 and the Landfill Disposals Tax (Wales) Act 2017 will follow the same timeline. The impact of the powers conferred by the Regulations and Order will be considered as part of the wider review programme.

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<sup>7</sup>National Assembly for Wales, Finance Committee, Tax Collection and Management (Wales) Bill Stage 1 Committee Report, November 2015. Paragraph 241.  
<http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10451/cr-ld10451-e.pdf>