

Universal Credit “is hitting the most vulnerable in Wales”

Rebecca Evans said:

“Foodbank use in areas where Universal Credit has been rolled out has increased by 30% according to National Audit Office statistics, compared to a 12% increase in non-Universal Credit areas. This is extremely worrying.

“A Universal Credit claimant survey from Esther McVey’s own department shows that four in ten claimants were experiencing financial difficulties, and that 46% of new Universal Credit claimants need help to make their claim online.

“I have asked the Secretary of State to make Universal Support for people who claim Universal Credit available as widely as possible to help those people who are experiencing difficulties in managing their finances, and for those who are struggling with digital access.

“The recent National Audit Office report was clear; local authorities, housing associations and landlords are all seeing an increase in rent arrears since the introduction of Universal Credit.

“This chimes with many concerns raised and reported to me by the housing sector in Wales.

“The National Audit Office highlighted that the system is lacking in ways to identify vulnerable people, which makes it difficult to see how they are getting the right support, from the outset when they apply for Universal Credit. I have asked the Secretary of State to explain how she plans to rectify this.

“People who are more vulnerable can be offered alternative payment arrangements through Universal Credit, but we are seeing real inconsistencies in the way this is offered to claimants; the Department of Work and Pensions’ own claimant survey indicated that as many as 48% of those surveyed had to request this themselves, rather than being offered it proactively.

“I am deeply concerned about the flaws of Universal Credit, and its impact on the most vulnerable people in Wales, and I will continue to press the UK Government on addressing these.”

Wales hosts second Heathrow business summit

It follows MPs giving their overwhelming support for plans for the construction of the new £14bn runway last month which it is estimated will bring 8400 jobs and £8bn of economic growth to Wales.

Business groups and leaders at the summit will hear from Economy Secretary Ken Skates, CEO of South and Mid Wales Chambers of Commerce, Heather Myers, Director of Pro Steel Engineering, Richard Selby and Chief Strategy Officer at Heathrow Airport, Andrew Macmillan about how they can get the very best out of the opportunities ahead.

The event will also provide networking opportunities for supplier and buyers to meet and build contacts and relationships.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“In total it is estimated that the new runway will deliver 8400 new jobs and £8bn in economic growth and I am determined that a significant portion of those benefits will be felt here in Wales.

“As a Welsh Government we are working closely with Heathrow and doing all we can to ensure Wales gets the very best out of the opportunities associated with the new runway.

“This includes exploring airport links between Heathrow and Wales to ensure better connectivity to Wales for tourist and businesses, and working hard to bring one of the Heathrow Logistic Hubs – which will host some of the off-site construction for the runway – to one of the six shortlisted Welsh sites still in the running. This would create hundreds of new jobs and inject millions of pounds into our economy.

“Today’s event, the second of its kind in Wales, is a great opportunity for Welsh SMEs to promote their goods and services to Heathrow and make valuable connections with the Airport’s Supply Chain that will help secure economic benefits here in Wales.

“It is also a great opportunity for companies to link with other SME and explore opportunities for collaborations that could help to drive up the potential economic benefits for all parties, and ensure that the benefits of this major infrastructure project are felt in communities right across Wales.”

A55 improvement scheme gets green light

The £25 million scheme between Junctions 12 and 13 will improve safety on this section of the route as well as reduce the risk of flooding.

Work includes upgrading the 2.2km stretch to present day standards, providing safer accesses onto the A55, an improved drainage system to ensure future resilience to flooding, new footways to improve pedestrian access to the local bus service and new wildlife pipes installed under the A55.

Active travel is an integral part of the scheme and a new walking and cycling route will be constructed parallel with the eastbound carriageway.

Resurfacing of the route with low noise surfacing will be extended past Abergwyngregyn helping to reduce road noise in this area.

The scheme is backed by £14.9m from the European Regional Development Fund.

Ken Skates said:

“The Abergwyngregyn – Tai’r Meibion scheme is yet another demonstration of the Welsh Government taking action to improve transport infrastructure in North Wales. We are investing heavily throughout the region and this project shows our commitment to improving and strengthening the A55.

“The scheme will be vital in ensuring a safer route for local and through traffic, reducing flood risk, building better pedestrian and cycling connections with communities and enhancing biodiversity.

“The next stage is to appoint a contractor with works planned to begin towards the end of this year. This construction phase will also result in local employment and workforce training opportunities providing a real boost to the area’s economy.

“Today’s announcement follows the go-ahead I gave recently for the Caernarfon and Bontnewydd bypass and I am certain both schemes will deliver for businesses and communities in North West Wales whilst improving safety for road users and ensuring we have a modern transport network.”

Enabling work is due to begin in the Autumn including site clearance and widening an existing road, all of which will be done off the A55.

Construction works on the A55 is programmed to begin in Spring 2019 for a

period of 18 months. All four lanes on the A55 will be kept running under a speed restriction between 6am to 7pm in order to minimise any disruption.

New proposals to support Welsh farmers unveiled

The latest Welsh Government Brexit paper, *Brexit and our Land*, proposes two new large and flexible schemes to replace Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Glastir and other parts of the Rural Development Programme.

The programme will consist of the following two schemes:

- The Economic Resilience Scheme will provide targeted investment to land managers and their supply chains. It will provide investment to increase competitiveness and make improvements in resilience and productivity for high-quality food production.
- The Public Goods Scheme will provide a new income stream to land managers delivering public goods from the land. It will enable them to help address challenges such as climate change mitigation, habitat loss, poor air and water quality.

All land managers will have the opportunity to benefit from the new schemes, not just those currently receiving CAP. However, people will need to do things differently in return for this support.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“Welsh land matters. Over 90% of Welsh land is in the hands of our farmers, foresters or other stewards of the landscape. How land is managed matters to us all and our land managers have the potential to produce outcomes of huge importance to Wales.

“Once we leave the EU, our access to markets and how we compete will change so maintaining the status quo is not an option.

Exiting the EU means we have to do things differently and now is the time to prepare. We need to change how we support our farmers and agriculture sector to make them sustainable and able to thrive in a new trading environment. We have the chance to design a ‘Made in Wales’ system that works for Welsh farmers and our communities.

“The Programme marks a significant change. That is why we want to see a phased transition that balances time needed for change with the need to provide timely support.

“Our new programme aims to keep farmers farming on their land and

will enable the sector to thrive in a post-Brexit world.”

No changes will be made to the existing BPS scheme in 2018 and 2019 and all current Glastir contracts will continue to be honoured. From 2020, work will begin to move to the new schemes, including a phased reduction in BPS as new schemes come on-stream. The ambition is to have the new schemes fully in place by 2025 using existing high-performing Rural Payments Wales systems.

The proposals will be subject to extensive consultation until October, working closely with key partners. A white paper setting out detailed proposals will be published next spring and we will publish a Bill before the end of this Assembly session to make provision for the reform. Funding from old schemes will not be withdrawn until new schemes are ready.

Currently, the Common Agricultural Policy provides around £300m a year of support for Welsh land managers. The Brexit and our Land paper reiterates the importance that Wales should not lose a penny from leaving the EU and calls on the UK Government to urgently confirm that Wales will maintain its current share of funding.

[Sustainable packaging company expanding rapidly following Welsh Government support](#)

Transcend Packaging is quickly developing a reputation as a leading innovator in sustainable packaging, specifically for the food service, confectionery, and health and beauty sectors.

It produces a broad range of products, from paper straws through to folding cartons, and has assembled an experienced team of industry specialists who are focused on creating sustainable packaging solutions which meet customer needs while minimizing damage to the environment.

The company has been in talks with the Welsh Government about a package of support for some months and Economy Secretary Ken Skates has now confirmed that Transcend Packaging is set to receive more than £500,000 over three years which will help create around 102 new jobs.

The Welsh Government support is on top of an £11m investment by the company who predicts it will grow its workforce from 20 employees to a target of more than 200 by the end of 2021.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“The Welsh Government is proud to be supporting Transcend Packaging as it works to create an additional 102 jobs in Ystrad Mynach. This supports the priorities outlined in Our Valleys Our Future, to create thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs in the Valleys.

“Not only is the company rapidly becoming a leader in its field, it is also helping one of the biggest global fast food names to slash its use of single use plastic.

“Transcend Packaging’s focus on decarbonisation and innovation is exactly the sort of behaviour we are trying to encourage with our Economic Action Plan and the Welsh Government is proud to be working hard to support such an ethical and forward looking business.”

Lorenzo Angelucci, Managing Director of Transcend Packaging said:

“We founded Transcend Packaging because we aspire to help companies become more sustainable across a broad range of products from paper straws to folding cartons. Our entire Transcend team appreciates the generous support from the Welsh Government and we look forward to providing jobs in Wales for many years to come.”

“By working in partnership with local and regional government, leading companies and the wider public, we are able to provide innovative packaging solutions that help preserve a healthy environment. We believe that British companies can help drive innovation in sustainability and are proud to be the leading producer of eco-friendly paper straws in the United Kingdom. We applaud forward thinking companies like McDonald’s UK and Ireland who have selected Transcend to provide their paper straws which we will begin producing in Wales this summer.”