

£20m Air Quality Fund among new measures to improve air quality in Wales

Among the measures will be a new £20m fund to reduce emissions and improve the environment in Wales. The Air Quality Fund, which will run until 2021, will support local authorities to comply with nitrogen dioxide limits and improve air quality in their areas.

Speaking during a plenary debate, the Minister announced a consultation will be launched tomorrow on plans for Clean Air Zones, designated areas where action is taken to reduce public and environmental exposure to airborne pollutants.

The proposals include stopping or restricting access for the most polluting vehicles entering a Clean Air Zone, thereby reducing road congestion and emissions within the Clean Air Zones and neighbouring areas.

A consultation will open tomorrow on plans to reduce concentrations of nitrogen dioxide, as part of the wider UK plan to tackle roadside NO₂ concentrations.

The Minister also confirmed immediate measures, including temporary speed limits, will come into force within the next two months to reduce nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels on roads where levels are currently above legal limits. Among the restrictions will be the introduction of 50 mph speed limits over the short length of the exceedance at five locations:

- A494 at Deeside
- A483 at Wrexham
- M4 between Junctions 41 & 42 (Port Talbot)
- M4 between junctions 25 & 26 (Newport)
- A470 between Upper Boat & Pontypridd

The measures are expected to deliver immediate improvements to air quality at the key locations, with 50mph speed limits expected to reduce emissions by up to 18%.

A new Air Quality in Wales website will also be launched, enabling people to check live air quality information for their area. The website will provide local data on current and forecasted air pollution levels, as well as historical data. It will also include educational materials, games and tools for schools and improved health advice.

Minister for Environment Hannah Blythyn said:

“I am delighted to announce a package of measures to improve air quality in Wales, including a £20 million fund to help local

authorities put arrangements in place to reduce air pollution in their areas.

“We will encourage local authorities to introduce Clean Air Zones, where evidence suggests they are needed to reduce harmful emissions, as well as launching a new website which allows people to check the air quality in their area.

“Delivering clean air in Wales is one of my key priorities. I am committed to taking action to reduce air pollution in Wales to support a healthier future for our communities and protect our natural environment.

“I am confident the measures I am announcing today will help support the changes we need to make in Wales to deliver cleaner air.

[Kirsty Williams outlines ‘mixed economy’ education vision](#)

As part of this, she will preview a consultation asking whether sixth form provision should be added to the remit of the new authority for post-16 education and training, which will also include further and higher education.

Setting out the Welsh Government’s commitment to raising standards for all in a non-selective comprehensive system, the Education Secretary will emphasise the benefits of the “mixed economy” of schools, colleges and universities in Wales.

In addition, she will set out the direction of travel on:

- A reformed school accountability system which values the progress of all learners
- Greater freedom for schools on curriculum indicators within performance measures
- Improved measures on post-16 performance across 6th form and FE sector

On the issue of the relationship between sixth forms, FE colleges and the new Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales, the Education Secretary will say:

“I am and always will be a supporter of sixth forms. I also firmly believe in a good mix of provision when it comes to post-16 education and training.

“We need much more consistency when it comes to supporting our learners through this vital stage of their education and on to whichever route they decide is best for them.

“Including sixth forms within the remit of the new authority would not only give us a better picture of how the sector is performing in the round, but would also be instrumental in helping providers to work together, thereby reducing duplication and competition.”

On her commitment to an equitable and excellent system, she will say:

“We don’t write off anyone, or anywhere. We have high expectations, with the right support, at the right time, for all students, schools and settings.

“By believing in a non-selective comprehensive system, I admit that we are setting ourselves a challenge, when compared to other systems. But it is a challenge with a moral conviction. As a small country, we can’t leave anyone behind.

“We may not spend most of our time and energy discussing structures, as happens across the border – but that doesn’t mean we prescribe the same solution for all. A progressive comprehensive system is a system that suits each and every learner’s needs and requirements in their education journey.”

Review of affordable housing supply in Wales announced by Minister

The review will examine whether more can be done to increase the supply of affordable housing in Wales, maximising the resources available, and will be chaired by Lynn Pamment, Cardiff Senior Partner and Government & Public Services Lead at PwC. Lynn has many years’ experience of providing financial advice to public and private sector bodies, including working with housing associations and others in the affordable housing sector.

The review will:

- examine the scope for increasing match funding to build more affordable homes, to maximise the number of homes created by the Welsh Government’s contribution to social housing
- review the arrangements governing partnership working between local authorities and housing associations
- consider the implications of moving to deliver zero carbon homes by

2020, including the role of off-site manufacture and modern methods of construction

- review the standards governing affordable housing and advise on whether they require updating
- make recommendations regarding a sustainable rent policy that will both allow long term affordability for tenants and allow viability of existing and new housing developments.

The review will be expected to issue a report and make recommendations to the Minister by the end of April 2019.

Rebecca Evans said:

“We have made a clear commitment to deliver 20,000 affordable homes during this term of Government and this development in Pontardawe demonstrates how we are delivering on this.

“I want this review to ensure we are getting the best value for money in our investments and policy, including how we plan for a zero carbon future and the way in which the sector operates.

“We know that many more people in Wales want to access affordable housing.

The sector in Wales have called on us to look at our policy, and we want to work closely with all stakeholders involved in housing supply to ensure we are building as many homes as possible.

“Lynn Pamment has a great deal of experience in working with the public and private sector on financing projects, and I look forward to reading the results of her review next year.”

Stuart Ropke, Chief Executive of Community Housing Cymru said:

“Housing associations in Wales have ambitions to build a minimum of 75,000 affordable homes in Wales over the next twenty years – doubling the current delivery rate. In November 2017 we launched ‘Housing Horizons’, our sector vision to make good housing a basic right for all. This far reaching ambition cannot be achieved without a full analysis of Welsh housing policy and how this is put into practice, so we are delighted the Minister has backed our call for a review.

“Through the review we can establish the most effective policy environment to meet our affordable home delivery ambition and build a solid foundation for current and future generations. If we get this review right, it will be a big step towards solving the housing crisis.”

Matt Dicks, Director of the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru said:

“We welcome today’s announcement of a review into housing policy in Wales. It rightly looks at what kind of homes we need in the future and how we can sustain longer-term investment whilst maintaining the affordability of our housing. Over the lifespan of the one-year review we look forward to engaging fully, bringing to life the experiences of housing professionals from across the sector in Wales to provide timely insight and real-life expertise.”

[NHS Bursary to continue in Wales – Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething](#)

The bursary, for eligible student nurses, midwives and allied health professionals, was scrapped in England in 2017.

In Wales, the full bursary package will continue to be available for those who commit in advance to work in Wales for up to two years post qualification.

Of the 2180 students applying for the bursary in 2017/18, only 3% declined to work in Wales post-qualification, meaning the vast majority of students trained in Wales will work in Wales after their studies.

The Health Secretary said:

Health care students are the future of our NHS, which is why, unlike in England, we are continuing to support them during their studies in return for a commitment to work in Wales.

This sends a clear message about how much we value our health care workforce and sets out our commitment to the future of our NHS.

The Health Secretary added:

As well as a commitment to extending the bursary, we’re investing record levels in our NHS workforce. Since 2014, the number of nurse training places commissioned has increased by 68%. We’re also taking positive action to attract more health professionals from the UK and beyond to come to Wales, to train, work and live.

Economy Secretary in Liverpool to meet Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham

Ken Skates was also keen to use his time in Liverpool to learn lessons from the city, as Wales works to achieve its vision of a new, fully integrated transport network across Wales and progress its plans for metro systems in South and North East Wales. This builds on recent meetings with Metro Mayors for Manchester and the South West.

The Economy Secretary said:

“With around one million cross border journeys each month taking place between North East Wales and the North West of England alone there is no doubt that effective cross border travel is essential to economies on both sides of the border. Indeed we know that there is significant potential for job growth in this cross border area.

“This only emphasises the need for improvements to both public transport and the road network, and I have stressed to Steve Rotherham that the Welsh Government is absolutely committed to working with partners in Wales and England to develop an integrated transport system that meets the needs of people on both sides of the border.

“This commitment is reflected in our vision for transport in North Wales and our plans for a North East Wales Metro which includes a strong focus on cross border connectivity. I know that there is already strong engagement with partners on both sides of the border in taking forward this work and I look forward to this progressing over the coming months.

“My meeting with Steve also provided me with an opportunity to learn from Liverpool’s experience in developing its own transport system that has improved the public network in the area, and these discussions will be valuable as we progress and deliver our own plans in Wales. We also had a fruitful discussion on how we could work together to attract new businesses to the cross border area.

“Another issue on which Steve and I had much to discuss was the pressing need to rebalance the UK’s economy, and ensure that UK government investment and wider prosperity is spread much more widely.

“This supercharging of regional economies is a key theme of my recently published Economic Action Plan. It is something I am

absolutely committed to and through working together on the right HS2 connectivity and other issues, I know the potential benefits for both North Wales and North West England could be genuinely transformative.”