

£4m to boost skills at Tata Steel

This investment will enable Tata Steel to deliver a number of distinct training projects to strengthen the core skills of their employees and help them develop new advanced manufacturing and engineering techniques across the business. These are designed to improve efficiency and increase productivity to help Tata Steel meet the growing demands of the highly competitive global steel industry.

The First Minister said:

“We continue to work very closely with Tata Steel to support their plans to develop its business and become more innovative, productive and efficient.

“Tata Steel has made a substantial commitment to roll out a wide-ranging programme of ring-fenced training projects across all sites in Wales. The investment I am announcing today demonstrates our absolute commitment to the company in supporting this ambitious agenda.”

Tata Steel has identified a number of key business priorities that include aspiring to be the world steel industry benchmark for value creation and corporate citizenship, sustain their skills-base through recruitment, retention and training of their apprentices, trainees and employees and to continue to contribute positively to the Welsh and wider economy.

In response to the announcement, a spokesperson for Tata Steel said:

“We are delighted the Welsh Government has again recognised the importance of supporting the training and continued upskilling of the workforce.

“More than 80% of all our employees in Wales have directly benefitted from training in areas such as health & safety, business and maintenance excellence as well as a host of other areas thanks to Welsh Government funding.

“This allows us to ensure our employees can do more which in turn means they can better support the whole economy of Wales.”

Environment Minister confirms no changes to Designated Landscapes

Speaking to AMs today, the Minister confirmed the designated landscapes review process, which has been ongoing since 2013, will draw to a close with the publication of a policy statement in the coming months.

In May 2017, the Future Landscapes Working Group, chaired by Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas, published a review of Wales' National Parks and Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (AONBs).

The Group was established to explore the recommendations of the Marsden Report into the future of Wales' designated landscapes, which provided 69 wide-ranging recommendations.

During a plenary debate last June, the future protection of Wales' designated landscapes under the current Welsh Government was called into question. Today the Minister sought to reassure all concerned parties the Welsh Government will not be changing the purposes of National Parks or AONBs.

In an Oral Statement in the National Assembly, Hannah Blythyn said:

“Designated landscapes have been in a state of review since a draft policy statement was consulted on in 2013.

“Today I want to settle some of the key questions on the Government's position and to give this Assembly the opportunity to get a sense of my priorities before I publish a policy statement in the coming months which will bring the review process to a close.

“I welcome the thorough and thought provoking reviews and reports of Professor Marsden and his panel and Lord Elis-Thomas and the Future Landscapes Working Group.

“The process of review has ingrained a new way of working between Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and stakeholders where they now share a much greater understanding of the national priorities which they can help to address by working together.

“My priority over the coming months will be to work with the Park Authorities and AONB partnerships on our contemporary Welsh approach to ecosystems and landscapes, while recognising the enduring value of their original purpose.

“I am committed to ensuring Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks are valued for their natural beauty by our people, communities and country and our designated landscapes deliver rich ecosystems, vibrant and resilient communities and opportunities for outdoor recreation for all of the people of Wales.”

Valleys road improvements must bring wider benefits

The meeting also discussed the ambitious plans published by the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys, which is chaired by Alun Davies.

He said:

“The A465 – the Heads of the Valleys road – is one of the key east-west strategic links in Wales. Part of the Trans-European Road Network, it is an international gateway for our economy in South Wales.

“When the dualling is complete, there will be a continuous dual carriageway from the M4 along the A465 to the midlands and beyond.

“We are working to make the most of the opportunities from this, building on the Valleys Taskforce’s ambitious plans, including a commitment to close the employment gap between the South Wales Valleys and the rest of Wales.

“This means ensuring projects like this include employment and training opportunities for the local community and that Welsh companies can compete for sub-contracts. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy Ken Skates has also been clear through the new Economic Action Plan that he wants to see more public investment with a social purpose of this kind in the Welsh economy over the next few years.”

Dr Victoria Winckler, director of the Bevan Foundation, added:

“We have fantastic resources in our Valleys communities, which is why we must work together to ensure big infrastructure projects like the Heads of the Valleys dualling make the most of procurement, of our people and our spectacular surroundings to bring benefits to our communities.

“We are delighted to be working with the Welsh Government and the Industrial Communities Alliance to make sure the most is made of the A465. As a route, it is at least as significant to the people living in the Heads of the Valleys sub-region as the South Wales Metro. In dramatically shortening journey times both within the Heads of the Valleys area and the rest of Wales and the UK, it has the potential to transform the region.”

Mr Davies continued,

“This is a part of Wales which is full of opportunities, rich in culture, people and natural resources and in hope and ambition. As we work to bring about lasting social and economic prosperity for all our Valleys communities, it’s vital we make the most of all the opportunities at hand.”

[First residents throw open their doors in £42m Land for Housing scheme](#)

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans AM met residents of Newbourne Place, built thanks to £2.9 million of Welsh Government funding, and learned more about their new homes.

Thirty flats, including three which are wheelchair adapted, have been constructed on the site of a former adult training centre in Barry. Newydd Housing Association received a £585,000 Welsh Government Land for Housing loan to buy the site, and £2.34m Welsh Government Social Housing Grant funding, which supported work to develop and build the flats.

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans AM said:

“We are committed to creating 20,000 affordable homes during the course of this government, and we are investing to support housing associations to build homes and help to meet this target.

“These are the first homes completed as part of the £42m Land for Housing loan; housing associations can borrow money from the Welsh Government to buy land. When the loan is repaid, the money goes back into more loans to fund more housing.

“It’s so important that everyone in Wales has access to safe, affordable housing so they can achieve their full potential.”

Paul Roberts, Chief Executive at Newydd added:

“We were delighted to welcome the Minister to Newbourne Place. We are very proud of the scheme, it provides affordable homes for the community. As well as meeting housing need, we have been able to provide smaller, adapted homes. As a social landlord, we will be providing additional opportunities for local residents in areas

such as financial inclusion, health and wellbeing, as well as digital inclusion support.

“This scheme utilised funding through the Land for Housing scheme and we are delighted to announce that we have secured a second phase of funding to provide more high quality affordable homes to our local communities.”

Sandra Rehman, a Newydd tenant and member of the tenant scrutiny group commented:

“I waited nearly three and half years to move to a suitable property after being diagnosed with osteoarthritis. The flat that I now live in was well worth the wait and I would like to compliment Newydd, as it’s a beautifully designed adapted ground floor flat and I couldn’t have asked for better. Everybody deserves a home like this one and Newydd are one of the best landlords because of the way they listen to tenants.”

Minimum unit price for alcohol to be ‘major part’ of efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm – Vaughan Gething

Ahead of an Assembly debate on the Welsh Government’s Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill, which was introduced to the National Assembly last October, the Health Secretary has announced extra investment in substance misuse services.

Assembly Members will decide later today whether the Bill should pass its first legislative stage, and proceed on to stage 2 – which involves detailed consideration by Assembly committees. If passed by the Assembly later this year, the current intention is that a minimum unit price would be introduced 12 months following the Bill’s Royal Assent.

The Welsh Government invests almost £50m a year to support people with substance misuse issues. Almost half of this funding goes directly to the seven Area Planning Boards which commission substance misuse services for their region.

In response to calls made for additional resources to be allocated for substance misuse services, the Health Secretary has confirmed the ring-fenced substance misuse funding for health boards will be increased by nearly £1m,

to over £18m from 2018-19.

Speaking ahead of the debate, Vaughan Gething said:

“Wales, like so many other western countries, has a problem with cheap, strong, readily-available alcohol.

“Minimum unit pricing is not a silver bullet, but it will be a major new and important tool in our approach to reducing alcohol consumption. By introducing a minimum price, we can make a difference – as we have done with the smoking ban, which demonstrated our determination to create a different future for the people of Wales.

“I’ve been very clear, that it will not work in isolation. Alcohol policy in Wales requires a variety of approaches, which taken together, can generate change. That’s why we are supporting people throughout Wales to develop a healthier relationship with alcohol, through our Substance Misuse Strategy, and end the sad spectre of people dying from drink.

“We know there is a significant amount of evidence from around the world, showing there is a very clear relationship between the price of alcohol and alcohol consumption. Our ground-breaking legislation helps address that.

“There have long been calls for Wales to change its relationship with alcohol. I expect this Bill will make a fundamental contribution to reducing hazardous and harmful drinking and ultimately, will help to save lives.”