

## Mark Drakeford in Brussels for annual St David's Day reception and Brexit talks with MEPs from across Europe

Professor Drakeford will begin his visit by addressing the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, the 2nd largest group in the European Parliament about Wales' priorities for Brexit. He will then speak to a group of MEPs from the European People's Party, the largest group in the European Parliament before joining the Welsh cyber trade mission to Belgium. This will bring a number of Welsh cyber companies to Brussels to speak with their Belgian counterparts.

The Cabinet Secretary will use this opportunity to outline the strength of Wales' cyber cluster and introduce Sir Julian King, Commissioner for the Security Union, who will outline the Commission's recent proposals on cyber-security.

The Finance Secretary will then host the annual St David's Day reception on the evening of the 28th February. This will be an opportunity to showcase Welsh produce and promote our world-class products, activities, events and experiences. The evening will have a seafood theme, based on Visit Wales' 'Year of the Sea'.

With Brexit on the horizon, the visit shows that Wales continues to work with the nations and regions of Europe and the Finance Secretary will also hold talks with Minister-President of Flanders and Flemish Minister for Foreign Policy Geert Bourgeois as well as meeting other MEPs.

Mark Drakeford said:

"The cyber security trade mission is a great example of the international collaborations and partnerships that Wales values so greatly, both in the EU and further afield. We have been clear that once the UK leaves the European Union, that does not mean that we are leaving Europe, and our relationships with international partners are more important than ever. I will make this clear to members of the European Parliament at our meetings in Brussels.

"Of course Brexit presents many challenges to this sector – and indeed the whole economy – not least the uncertainty about future participation in EU collaborative research funding, which has, in the past, helped to support research and innovation in Wales, including for cyber security.

"We will continue to work constructively with the UK government to ensure that they are negotiating for a Brexit that meets Wales' needs."

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## Two new doors to home ownership open in Wales

[Your Home in Wales](#), our new website, will provide people with information on the Rent to Own – Wales and Shared Ownership – Wales schemes and help them to decide which of the two schemes can help them get on the housing ladder.

Rent to Own – Wales will help those who can afford monthly payments but do not able to save enough for a mortgage deposit. Shared Ownership – Wales will help those who have access to a small deposit and are able to get a mortgage on a proportion of the value of the property.

The schemes are not just available to first time buyers but eligibility criteria apply, including a requirement for applicants to have a combined annual household income of £60,000 or less.

Minister for Housing and Regeneration Rebecca Evans will visit a show home at Kennard Point in Crumlin, a development by Pobl Group, where homes will be available for both schemes.

Rebecca Evans said:

“Help to Buy Wales has successfully supported many people in Wales who have a 5% deposit to buy their own home. However, we know there are many hard-working people who find it hard to save a deposit. We are committed to supporting people to take that difficult first step into buying their own home in Wales.

“The Welsh Government is investing £70m in Rent to Own and Shared Ownership, as part of our commitment to building 20,000 affordable homes by 2021.

“There are currently a small number of properties available to buy through Rent to Own – Wales and Shared Ownership – Wales, and we are working with housing associations throughout Wales to ensure that more will be available soon.

“If you are interested in buying using either of these schemes then please visit the Your Home in Wales website to see where there are homes available or you can sign up to receive emails when properties become available in your area.

“These schemes will help people to get on the property ladder today; instead of spending years saving for a deposit they will spend those years living in their home.”

Hayley Macnamara, Policy and Programmes Manager at Community Housing Cymru said:

“We welcome Welsh Government’s significant grant investment to help housing associations develop Rent to Own and Shared Ownership properties. By assisting people who are struggling to save for a deposit, it helps those on low budgets leave the private rental market and buy their own homes. Crucially, it also generates an income stream that can be reinvested into the social housing sector.

“As a sector we are committed to meeting the target to build 20,000 affordable homes by 2021, and are working closely with the Welsh Government to develop effective models such as Rent to Own that will help us achieve our vision to make good housing a basic right for all.”

Kathryn Edwards, Pobl Group’s Managing Director, Homes and Communities said:

“We are delighted the Welsh Government has chosen Kennard Point to announce their significant grant investment.

“Shared ownership is already a very popular, affordable way of getting onto the property ladder. This additional £70m funding, coupled with the introduction of Rent to Own means people in Wales now have a greater choice of how and when they buy and don’t have to give up on their aspirations of owning their own home.”

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## **Dutch fintech Company expands its R&D operations in Cardiff**

As a leading software development company, Backbase has offices in Europe, the US and Asia. It is the market leader in omni-channel banking software and offers a secure platform that empowers banks and other financial institutions to accelerate their digital transformation.

With over 100 large financial companies including HSBC, Barclays and Metrobank using its platform across 25 countries, Backbase is recognised globally and continues to garner awards and accolades. The company was recently recognised by Forrester’s industry analysts as a leader in Digital Banking Engagement Platforms.

Backbase hopes that the growth of its Cardiff office will support its aim to

be at the forefront of digital banking innovation.

The company chose Wales as the base for its Research and Development facility because of Cardiff's growing reputation as a hub for fintech, the quality of local skills supply and the support offered by the Welsh Government.

Backbase opened its R&D facility in Cardiff last year creating 24 highly skilled jobs. It is now expanding to create a further 50 new jobs which will be instrumental in targeting the growing Wealth Management sector.

The new team will deliver core software development, software testing and support for clients with the research and development accrued ultimately powering the commercial banking of multiple large financial institutions around the world.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

I am delighted that Backbase will now be adding a further 50 recruits to its Cardiff workforce following a package of Welsh Government support.

Cardiff's reputation as a thriving fintech hub grows stronger by the month and we remain committed to working with companies in the sector to provide the skills and support they need in order to grow and expand their businesses.

Chris Whitcombe CTO of Backbase Wales said:

The partnership with the Welsh Government was instrumental in bringing Backbase to Wales, not just in terms of making it easy but the relationships they have been able to introduce us to. The tremendous pool of talent in the fintech sector and the better work life balance available were also factors in our decision to invest in Wales.

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## **"Cross border rail plans can't leave Wales on the platform" – Ken Skates**

Responding to the UK Government's consultation on the current Great Western rail franchise, Ken Skates also pressed the need for faster journey times, more services, better access to Heathrow and delivery of UK Government promises on infrastructure investment.

The full consultation response sets out Welsh priorities and how any new arrangements must work in the best interests of Wales and dovetail with Transport for Wales:

- South Wales Services – Journey times between major South Wales stations and London and Bristol Temple Meads must improve at peak times. There are several changes to the current operation that could facilitate this, including removal of station calls in England which are not frequently travelled to / from by people in Wales. Services must also call at future Cardiff Parkway and Llanwern stations.
- Infrastructure investment – To support improved direct services between Pembroke Dock and London on the brand new InterCity Express trains, investment announced in July 2017 must be delivered as a priority. A Business Case for the redevelopment of Cardiff Central station has already been submitted and there can be no de-scoping of electrification works in Cardiff. Delivery of the long awaited scheme to provide western access into Heathrow Airport is also essential to Wales.
- Meeting customers' needs – In order to reflect the significant effects that service disruption has on passengers' perceptions of an effective railway, the next franchise should take all possible steps to improve the management of both planned and unplanned disruption. We also expect those delivering services in Wales to treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

Ken Skates added:

“Any new arrangements must work in the best interests of Welsh passengers and in tandem with Transport for Wales. There is now an overwhelming case for applying the model developed for cross-border services under the next Wales and Borders franchise to the procurement and management of services currently operated by Great Western.

“We developed detailed agreements for how cross-border services could be delivered in a way which takes full account of both Welsh and UK Government roles and accountabilities. Wales' connectivity with Britain's economic hubs and international gateways in the south-east of England are going to become even more important to Wales' prosperity post-Brexit.

“HS2 will of course not be serving Wales directly and will result in many towns and cities in north England being closer in journey time to the south-east of England. There is a real danger it could reduce the competitiveness of locations in South Wales for inward investment.

“Now is the time for Welsh Government and Transport for Wales to have the role we need to ensure that services are designed and delivered in a way which will take full account of Wales' interests and would, I believe, result in real competition and genuine choice for passengers in England.”

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# Draft Welsh Language Standards for the health sector laid

These regulations will apply to Local Health Boards, National Health Service Trusts in Wales, Community Health Councils, and the Board of Community Health Councils in Wales, who will have to proactively offer services through the medium of Welsh.

The standards will require health boards to plan their work to improve their offer including more clinical services through the medium of Welsh. They will build on the foundations laid by Mwy na Geiriau..., the Welsh Government's strategic framework for Welsh language services in health, social services and social care which has helped to improve Welsh language services in the sector.

The Minister said:

“It is really important that we increase the responsibility on health boards to provide more services through the medium of Welsh in future. This is particularly important when it comes to elderly patients and very young children who find it more comfortable to communicate in their mother tongue at a time of acute stress.

“We do however have to balance this against the fact that some of the bodies in this sector operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year offering a range of services from routine treatments to open heart surgery, accident and emergency treatment and end-of-life care.

“Mainstreaming Welsh language services into this sector is a huge challenge which will take time. I am confident that the pragmatic approach we have taken in these draft regulations acknowledges these difficulties whilst still moving the process of securing more opportunities for Welsh speakers to engage with the health sector in Welsh going forward.”

In addition to making sure that GP surgeries run by health boards will have to comply with the new standards, discussions will also start with contractor representative bodies to agree Welsh language obligations through their contractual arrangements/terms of service.

The Minister laid the regulations following a visit to Cardiff University's medical school, where she saw a lecture being delivered to 300 students through the medium of Welsh, with simultaneous translation for non Welsh speakers and met first language Welsh speaking students who are studying through their mother tongue.

She said:

“My visit to Cardiff’s medical school was an inspiration. While many of the students were not Welsh speakers, having a lecture delivered through the medium of Welsh demonstrated to them that Welsh is a living language that is part of every day life in Wales and is relevant in all situations. I hope for those who are Welsh speakers it provided them with the confidence to use their Welsh in their future careers.

“If the health sector is to fulfil its obligations under the Welsh language standards encouraging Welsh speakers to use their Welsh in their careers and others to learn Welsh will be vitally important. Initiatives such as the ‘Welsh Language Scholarship and Education Network’ at Cardiff University and the work of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and the National Centre for Learning Welsh provide opportunities to empower students and staff to use their Welsh in a clinical environment as part of the NHS’ current and future workforce.”