

Economy Secretary sets out changes to governance arrangements for Wales' Enterprise Zones

During his appearance at the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Ken Skates announced the conclusions of his review of the governance of Wales' Enterprise Zones while stressing his commitment to the continuation of all eight of the zones.

Speaking after Committee, Ken Skates said:

I am very proud of the achievements and success of our Enterprise Zones and grateful for the hard work and commitment of the Chairs and Advisory Boards in driving their success.

Collectively our Enterprise Zones supported over 10,700 jobs to the end of the last financial year at a cost per job of less than £6k per job, and whilst the pace of delivery has varied between the Zones, this very much reflects each Zone's economic context and starting position.

All eight Enterprise Zones have made significant progress, and are continuing to deliver value for money by laying the foundation for future prosperity and creating the right environment to support the development of sustainable job opportunities in communities right across Wales, both in the short and longer term.

And this is something that is very much in line with the focus of my recently launched Economic Action Plan, which seeks to empower all our regions in Wales to become more productive.

Projects such as the Advanced Manufacturing Research Institute on Deeside, which will deliver game changing skills and innovation support to business – and Tech Valleys, which will lead the development and delivery of emerging technologies in Ebbw Vale, very much support that commitment to regional empowerment and have emerged from the work of the Boards. They will only add to the Zones' reputation for delivery.

The changes I have outlined today are about streamlining bureaucracy and utilising other governance structures where I believe that represents the most sensible way forward. They have also been made as part of a wider review of advisory architecture across my portfolio.

The views of the Chairs of the Enterprise Zones have been invaluable in shaping my decisions and I am pleased to have their broad support for the changes.

Minister celebrates 5,000 opportunities created by Lift

The Minister attended a special event at Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan in Ebbw Vale, where she met some of those helped by the programme and their mentors. Aneurin Bevan University Health Board has been a major collaborator on the project in the Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly areas and, across its various sites, has provided around 100 opportunities to people on the programme.

Delivered across nine areas in Wales, Lift provided dedicated one-to-one support to people from households where nobody has worked for at least six months who face employment barriers. Mentors worked with people to identify reasons why they are not in work and to provide support to help overcome those issues. Mentors remain in contact with participants for up to twelve months after they start in their new job or training placement to offer ongoing support.

The programme met its target two months early and by the end of the scheme in December 2017 had provided 5,174 training and employment opportunities, including helping 1,099 into work.

While the programme has come to an end, the learning from it will be taken forward in to Communities for Work Plus, a £12m per annum programme which will provide intensive mentoring and support to those furthest from the jobs market from April 2018.

The Minister said:

“It has been a pleasure to celebrate the success of Lift and to meet some of the people supported by the programme. It is particularly pleasing that some have moved on into employment with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and that others are about to do the same.

“I am delighted that Lift has exceeded its target of supporting 5,000 people into job and training opportunities. As I have seen today, the programme has had an incredibly positive impact on people’s lives, giving them the confidence, skills, experience and information they need to succeed.

“This is an excellent example of how we are working across Welsh Government departments and with many partner organisations to support people to gain skills, training and employment. I want to thank our partners in the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board for their vital contribution.”

Welsh Castles lit up to celebrate LGBT History Month

LGBT History month aims to increase the visibility of LGBT people, their history, lives and experiences in our communities. This year's theme is Geography: Mapping the World.

The National Assembly for Wales has also organised for the Senedd in Cardiff Bay to be lit up with the rainbow flag colours.

Leader of the House, Julie James, said:

“As well as celebrating the contribution LGBT people have made to our communities, LGBT History Month provides an opportunity to reflect on the history of discrimination and prejudice LGBT people have faced, and for us to show our commitment to tackle these inequalities.

As this year's theme is Geography: Mapping the World, I'd like to recognise and celebrate with those countries around the world who are advancing equality for LGBT people, like Australia who have recently passed a bill allowing same-sex marriage. But there are also countries where LGBT citizens are not afforded the same rights as the UK and our thoughts are with those communities.”

New Plan to transform dementia care in Wales

Supported by an extra £10m a year, the Dementia Action Plan aims to create new ways of caring, training and increasing the number of support workers, increasing rates of diagnoses and strengthening collaborative working between social care and housing.

At a visit to Ysbyty George Thomas in Treorchy, Mr Gething met with support workers and volunteers who are taking part in new, innovative ways of delivering care for people living with dementia.

The community-led projects include intergenerational work with a local school and Grow Rhondda, a gardening project based at the site.

Since 2015 the Welsh Government has provided additional funding to support improvements in dementia care, including the introduction of dementia support workers, occupational therapy support in older people mental health units, and dementia flexible resource teams working within our district hospitals.

The Health Secretary said the Action Plan would build on this work and bring together health, social services, the voluntary sector and communities to not only deliver support as flexibly as possible but also make Wales a leader in innovative dementia care.

He said:

“I have a clear vision for Wales to be a dementia friendly nation that recognises the rights of people with dementia to feel valued and live as independently as possible in their communities. This plan, developed with those who have lived with dementia and supported by an extra £10m a year, will accelerate achieving that vision.

As the Parliamentary Review made clear we need to look at new ways of delivering health and care services. Today I have seen some excellent examples of new ways of caring for people living with dementia in the community, like working with local schools and gardening projects. I want to see similar successful ideas rolled-out across Wales and this plan will help achieve that.

“It also sets out how we will raise awareness of ways to reduce the risk of dementia, ensure the wider population understands the challenges of living with dementia, improve diagnoses and support the families and carers of those living with dementia.”

County Director for Alzheimer’s Society Cymru, Sue Phelps said:

“For the 45,000 people affected by dementia in Wales and their families, the launch of Welsh Government’s Dementia Action Plan today is pivotal.

“We have campaigned long and hard, through our #45000reasons campaign, for a plan that recognises the rights of people affected by the condition. We hope this initial three year commitment through the Dementia Action Plan will bring about the changes that people with dementia have told us they need, such as; receiving a timely diagnosis and access to support services to enable people to live well with dementia.

“The real work starts now and the implementation of this Plan at a national and local level is key to improving the experiences of people with dementia and their families. This will only work with the continued inclusion and engagement of people who live with the condition, and by building and strengthening our dementia-friendly

nation, where we all play an active role and are united against dementia.”

Progress against delivery of the plan will be overseen by a Dementia Delivery Assurance Implementation Group, and will include people living with dementia and their carers and families. The plan will be subject to a review after three years to ensure the actions remain ambitious and relevant.

“Tackling loneliness and isolation in Wales is a national priority” – Huw Irranca-Davies

The Minister said loneliness and social isolation is one of the most significant issues facing people in Wales, especially people aged over 80; as a result, tackling it is one of his top priorities.

Wales is already leading the way when it comes to improving people’s well-being. Two key laws have been passed in recent years – the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – which require public bodies to consider people’s wider well-being when providing services, to think more about the long-term, to work better with each other and with communities, to look to prevent problems arising or situations worsening and to take a more joined-up approach.

The Welsh Government’s national strategy, Prosperity for All will help direct the energy and resources of the whole public service to develop a coherent, holistic and long-term response to loneliness and isolation in Wales.

A number of initiatives are already in place to help reduce loneliness, including improved mental health support, free bus travel, free swimming for older people and inter-generational support to help older people get online.

In addition, the Welsh Government will:

- Identify areas of work across the government that could be accelerated to tackle the issue
- During 2018, publish for consultation a cross-government strategy on loneliness and isolation with a final strategy published by March 2019
- Commission work to assess the impact of loneliness and isolation on health and well-being and whether people experiencing these issues make increased use of public services.

Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Loneliness and isolation is a public health issue which can affect many different groups of people at a variety of stages of life – but in particular, it’s a major issue for many older people in Wales.

“It can have and does have a significant impact on people’s physical and mental health. As a government, we are committed to securing the best possible health, well-being and quality of life for people in Wales. So preventing people from becoming lonely and isolated must be a national priority for us, because it will not only improve people’s lives, but it will also help reduce demand for health and social services.

“I’m determined to use the energy and resources of the whole public service in Wales to develop a coherent, holistic and long-term response to loneliness and isolation in Wales.”