

Statement by the Health Secretary on the latest NHS performance stats

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services, Vaughan Gething, said:

“Despite the busiest December on record for our A&E Departments and the busiest ever month for the Welsh Ambulance Service, our NHS has continued to perform under exceptional pressure in delivering emergency and scheduled care. The ambulance target was comfortably achieved in December. Although there was a slight drop in the proportion of patients admitted or discharged within four hours of arrival at A&E, A&E performance for the whole year has improved with 82.5% of patients seen in under four hours up from 81.2% last year.

I want to once again thank our NHS and social care staff for their commitment and hard work in delivering care during this extremely busy period.

“We have worked closely with health boards and partners since last winter to plan for this winter period and invested an additional £60m to help them deliver urgent and emergency care, and ensure planned care activity can continue during this time. During November, the number of patients waiting over 36 weeks stabilised, and while sadly some activity has to be postponed our investment has ensured operations and other procedures have continued through winter. We expect to see reductions in waiting times up to the end of March 2018.

Delayed transfers of care in December were lower than they were the same time last year and for the whole of 2017 the lowest they’ve been since records began. Therapy waiting times have again improved over the month and more people were treated within target times for cancer than in any previous November. Over 90% of urgent cancer patients were seen within the target times, the best performance since February 2014 and the target for non-urgent cancer patients was met.

“We still need to drive up performance in a number of areas but under severe pressure and record levels of demand our NHS has held up and continues to deliver high quality healthcare to patients.”

[Working parents in areas of Gwynedd and Anglesey urged to take up free childcare offer](#)

The Minister visited the Ty Cegin Community Centre in Maesgeirchen, Bangor earlier today, where he met staff working on the Welsh Government's childcare offer, as well as Children First, Flying Start and Families First – all of which support and meet the needs of children and their families in the local area.

The Welsh Government's childcare offer provides working parents of 3 and 4 years old children with 30 hours of free early education and childcare for 48 weeks of the year.

In September 2017, the Welsh Government began piloting the offer in areas across Wales, including in areas of Anglesey and Gwynedd, ready for full roll-out across Wales by September 2020.

Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Providing free childcare is one of the Welsh Government's top commitments to the people of Wales.

“We are now in the process of rolling out our ground-breaking and ambitious childcare offer to areas across Wales – and I'm really pleased areas across Gwynedd and Anglesey are among the first to benefit.

“Working parents across Wales are already telling us it's making a real difference to their lives, reducing the strain on family income and helping ensure childcare is not a barrier to them taking up employment or increasing their hours.

“So I want to encourage more parents across Gwynedd and Anglesey to take up the offer. I also want to thank childcare providers for their enthusiasm and commitment to helping us deliver our ambitious offer.”

[A celebration of Wales at Cardiff](#)

Castle

The castle will host a celebration of Welsh culture, sport and heritage – from harpists and choirs to inspirational youngsters, award winning produce and cutting edge performers – providing the Royal couple with a snap shot of modern Wales.

The Culture, Tourism and Sport Minister will be part of the welcoming party, and was keen to give an insight into what the royal couple can expect:

Lord-Elis Thomas said:

“I’m delighted that Prince Harry and Meghan Markle have chosen to come to Wales as one of their first official visits since their recent engagement.

“We are very fortunate in Wales to have both a thriving cultural tradition and a vibrant, diverse offering. This is something we are all too keen to showcase, share and celebrate with rest the world and to do so in such prestigious company is a real privilege.

“The Welsh croeso is legendary, but our standing as a top class visitor destination, food producer, adventure hot spot, major events host and a lot more besides is also very much on the rise. I hope to see this visit provide a taste of the variety and quality of what’s on offer here in Wales.

“Indeed, our royal Welsh welcome extends well beyond this visit and we’d be only too pleased to highlight the magnificence of other parts of Wales in future.”

£5m EU funding boost for Bangor University

The funding will help create the Centre for Environmental Biotechnology, which will position the University at the cutting edge of research into how natural materials can be utilised within industrial products and processes.

The investment will enable Bangor University to work on major research and development projects with global businesses in sectors including life sciences, pharmaceutical, energy and manufacturing.

The facility will provide state-of-the-art equipment and world-leading

expertise for identifying and isolating enzymes in extremophiles. These are microorganisms that thrive in extreme conditions such as high temperature, salinity, or acidity. The enzymes can then be used to transform industrial processes in key sectors of the economy.

Speaking at an event in North Wales on Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

“Supporting initiatives that further pioneering scientific research is a key aim of the Welsh Government. This investment will create a centre of excellence for ground-breaking research, encouraging inward investment and ensure Wales can take advantage of the economic impact that this rapidly expanding industrial area could bring.

“This is one of many examples of how EU funds are supporting our nation’s economy, supporting growth and jobs, and demonstrates the importance of Wales receiving replacement funding from the UK Government after we leave the EU.”

The Centre for Environmental Biotechnology will also include investment from Bangor University. It will be located on the Deiniol Road site and will form the first part of a planned major redevelopment of the University’s science and engineering area.

Co-leader Professor Peter Golyshin said:

“These enzymes have wide application in many industrial processes such as in the pharmaceutical industry. The project will utilise state-of-the-art analytical equipment which will put North Wales at the forefront of developments in this exciting area of biotechnology.”

Refurbishment work to develop the centre will begin mid February.

Minister praises Newport radio station for Energize’ing people’s lives

Energize Media Community Interest Company (CIC) was established in January 2015 as a social enterprise and is based at the Shaftesbury Community Centre in Newport.

A small group of volunteers came together in 2014 with the aim of offering community radio to a group of vulnerable adults, along with young people and those with other disabilities.

The project took off and established itself when Jeremy and Nigel – two adults with moderate learning disabilities – used their Direct Payments and with the support of the volunteers, pooled them together and gave the project the boost it would need to keep growing.

As a result of the project, one of the founders, Jeremy Kempton, after 50 years of living with his mother has now moved into supported living, having increased his self confidence. His mother believes “the project and work done has given him a new life.”

As a group, they have also established a hugely successful school project which has worked with a number of pupils both in the Centre and in the nearby Newport High School. The integration of everyone in the project and the success with turning the lives round of the young people has seen praise come from across South Wales.

One of the founders, volunteer Simon Harvey said:

“What has been achieved by everyone involved with Energize is unbelievable, with Jeremy and Nigel putting faith in the project and pooling their Direct Payments allowed the door to open to so many more people. Many vulnerable adults and their families have feared using Direct Payments and are not aware of the freedoms they can offer.

“We are now working with the Wales Co-operative Centre to strengthen and expand our work, while fully supporting their vision for more Community Enterprises to take the lead in Social Care provision in Wales.”

Minister for Children & Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“I was really pleased to visit the centre today to meet everyone involved, but it was a real pleasure to hear of the inspirational way in which Jeremy and Nigel came together to help establish it, and the wonderful way it has changed their own lives, and those of so many others, for the better.

“It’s a great example of a successful social value organisation supporting people with learning disabilities and young people to develop skills, in keeping with the principles of our innovative Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

“This project has clearly made a real difference to many people’s

lives. I wish them every success in the future and hope the Project continues to grow from strength to strength.”