

Environment Minister announces ambitious plans to improve air quality

Environment Minister, Hannah Blythyn today emphasised the Welsh Government's determination to take a lead on tackling air pollution by announcing four measures aimed at improving air quality in Wales.

Tuesday 05 December 2017

The Minister told Assembly Members she is taking action through an ambitious cross-Government programme of work.

This will include the publication of a Clean Air Plan for Wales in 2018 which will include:

- a Clean Air Zone Framework to ensure the consistent and effective implementation of Clean Air Zones by Local Authorities, wherever they are needed. The framework will ensure businesses and members of the public have a clear expectation of what a zone is and how they will be affected,
- improvements to Local Authority reporting on air quality issues in their areas and their plans to deal with them,
- the establishment of a National Air Quality Assessment and Monitoring Centre for Wales, to advise local and national government on the extent of poor air quality and the effectiveness of current and future actions. This will provide a continuous focus on achieving compliance with legal limits in specific hotspots whilst reducing exposure to pollution more widely,
- a re-launch of the Welsh Government's Air Quality in Wales website with improved air quality forecasting capability, new sections for schools and health advice.

Hannah Blythyn said:

"Air quality in Wales is much cleaner than in previous decades. We must take further action now, though, because our understanding of the health effects of air pollution has greatly increased, it remains the biggest environmental risk to public health.

"Poor air quality is often considered to be just an environmental issue but it also has a significant impact on our natural resources and economy. We must tackle poor air quality from all possible angles.

"The actions that I have set out today demonstrate our determination for Wales to be a leader in delivering innovative and effective solutions to tackle air pollution, achieving clean air for all".

The Minister also called on the UK Government to back up its commitment of phasing out new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040 with a concrete set of milestones to be achieved ahead of that date:

“This is a necessary and positive step, but 2040 is a long way off. I would, therefore, welcome Assembly Members’ support in calling on the UK Government to work closely with us to develop clear timescales for a progressive transition to zero emission road transport”.

[December 2017](#)

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[Cabinet Secretary for Education announces new appointments to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales](#)

Kirsty Williams announced that the first of the new members, Sir Keith Burnett, Helen Marshall, Sarah John and James Davies, joined the Council on 1 December. The other new members, Lesley Davies, Aqil Ahmed, Christine Ennew and Robert Humphreys, will take up their roles early in 2018 as current members stand down.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“I am very pleased to announce these new appointments to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, which are an important step in our proposals to reform the Post Compulsory Education and Training sector.

“We have taken the opportunity to refresh the current membership so it is better able to support HEFCW and the sector as we progress

our plans to establish the new Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales.

“I was impressed with the quality of candidates and delighted that the exercise attracted such a strong and diverse field of candidates. It reassures our view that the reforms we are pursuing in Wales is the right approach for Wales and people want to be a part of it.

“I am delighted that we were able to appoint such high calibre candidates from the fields of HE, FE, industry, business and work-based learning – individuals who are highly regarded in their fields and who I know will make a valuable contribution to, and positive impact on, the work of the Council as we move forward.

“I look forward to working with the new members over the next few years and welcome their contribution to our work.”

Successful summer for Wales' tourism industry

The Tourism Industry Barometer shows that 42% of businesses surveyed have had more visitors than last year, while 39% reported a similar level. Food venues are doing particularly well with more than half (54%) feeding more people in 2017 than they did last year. In addition 50% of attractions and activity operators are seeing more visitors with 46% of those reporting an increase saying their own marketing has lifted their numbers. The survey also showed that businesses report more UK visitors – 39% of operators have noticed more British people enjoying their holidays and short breaks in Wales.

Following a strong year, expectations are running high for 2018. About half of respondents expect more visitors next year, and a further 45% expect the same level.

During a visit to the National Botanic Garden, the Tourism Minister, Dafydd Elis-Thomas, heard how, in line with these figures, the Garden has also had a very successful year – seeing almost a 25% increase in their visitors in 2017.

The Tourism Minister said:

“I'm delighted to take on the Tourism portfolio at a time when indications are very positive for 2017. In coming to the role I do

not underestimate the extremely competitive market place we operate in but tourism in Wales is in a strong position, and these figures give a positive snapshot of how the industry has been performing.

It's great news that the Garden has also had a great year and hearing of the plans for future growth is further testimony to the confidence of the industry."

Director of the National Botanic Garden, Huw Francis, said:

"If the present is anything to go by, the future of the National Botanic Garden looks very bright. The team here have been working very hard at broadening the Garden's appeal and new developments are proving a big hit with local people and tourists alike."

"With help from Welsh Government, we've invested in a new play park, a hay bale maze, water zorbing and a brand new tropical Butterfly House, the development of which created a huge amount of interest.

"This year, we've teamed up with award-winning Pembrokeshire Falconry to create the British Bird of Prey Centre which has helped with the further increase in footfall with daily flying displays of amazing native birds of prey. And there's more to come. The target is for 10% year-on-year increases in visitors over the next five years."

[Welsh Government publishes new Framework for Action to support those educated other than at school](#)

The new [Education Other than at School \(EOTAS\) Framework for Action](#) is the culmination of two years of hard work by the EOTAS Task and Finish Group and marks the start of the biggest reform of Pupil Referral Units and EOTAS provision in Wales.

Chaired by former Estyn Chief Inspector, Ann Keane, the EOTAS Task and Finish Group was established in September 2015 with the purpose of developing practical solutions to the recommendations of a number of reports which highlighted where current EOTAS provision in Wales could be strengthened. The group included representation from the Welsh Government, local authorities, schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRU), Estyn and the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

The new Framework is a long term plan, consisting of 34 actions across six key areas, although some of the actions will be implemented in the short to medium term.

The key areas it seeks to improve are Leadership, Accountability, Resources, Structures, Learner Wellbeing, and Outcomes.

Launching the Framework and extending her thanks to everyone involved with its production, Kirsty Williams said:

“We are committed to creating an inclusive education system for all learners in Wales, ensuring that everyone is able to receive the best level of support for their needs.

“I am extremely grateful to everyone involved with the Task and Finish Group for all their hard work in helping us to develop this plan and extend my support to the EOTAS Delivery Group who will now be charged with its successful delivery. The actions contained in this Framework reflect extensive engagement with the sector which has been, and continues to be, the best advocate for learners accessing EOTAS provision.

“We have deliberately adopted a phased approach to the proposals outlined in the plan, not only to ensure that they are implemented in a considered and timely manner, but also because the Framework has to complement wider education sector transformation. I am firmly of the view that EOTAS provision must form an integral part of our inclusive continuum of education; it should not be a ‘bolt-on’.”

[Experience of older workers vital to Welsh children’s retailer](#)

Headquartered in Newport, JoJo is a multi-channel retailer offering maternity and children’s wear and gifts and toys. From the 800 plus employees at JoJo, 117 are over the age of 50, and 32 are 60-plus. They work in all aspects of the business, from head office and management to retail, and the company supports flexible and part-time working to accommodate its older employees.

New data shows that the number of workers in Wales aged over 50 has risen by almost a quarter – 24.8% – between 2006 and 2016, while the number of younger workers has fallen – 16-24-year-olds by 10.1%, and 25-49-year-olds by 3% – over the same period. By 2022, one in three people of working age will be over fifty. Therefore, investing in skills throughout an employee’s working

Life has never been more important.

Christine Presley, 63, has been working at JoJo for 15 years. Originally from North London, Christine worked in a variety of accounting and customer service roles before joining JoJo in 2002. Working in the company's HR department, Christine uses skills and experience gained over a lifetime to inform her role.

Christine said:

"After leaving education I worked in a variety of accounting roles in London and South Wales. In 1994, when I was in my 40s, I fancied a change and took on my first customer service role with One 2 One (now T-Mobile) where I worked for eight years.

"When our boys had grown up, my husband and I decided to move to Wales to be closer to family. In 2002, we bought a house in Cwmbran and my years of customer service experience helped me to get a job at JoJo. Over the 15 years I've been here I've seen the company grow from one shop to over 80 and have moved from customer services into the human resources department.

"I draw on experience from all my previous roles in my work at JoJo, but I think the most important skill to have in HR is the ability to listen, which is something I mostly learned from my customer service positions. I think that being older helps with that as well, I'm more patient now than I was when I was younger. I sometimes think about cutting back my hours and I might do in the next couple of years, JoJo's flexible working policy means it will be easy for me to cut down when I choose to. As for giving up work completely – I don't have any plans to do that just yet."

The 'People Don't Have A 'Best Before' Date' campaign points out the critical importance of older workers to businesses. It is the latest initiative under the Welsh Government's Age of Investment drive to ensure Wales has the skills it needs to compete in the global marketplace, both now and in the future.

The Welsh Government has teamed up with Business in the Community (BiTC) Cymru, Learning and Work Institute, the Older People's Commissioner, Chwarae Teg and Federation for Small Businesses (FSB) for the campaign, which seeks to challenge stereotypes of older workers and demonstrate their value in the workplace.

Amy Bailey, HR Manager at JoJo Maman Bébé, said:

"We have a large number of employees who are over the age of 50. They work in all aspects and levels of the business, from part-time retail positions to management and roles in head office and are vital to ensuring the smooth running of the company. We're always open to offering flexible and part-time hours, with our older

employees working anything from six hours a week to full-time, and we've noticed a trend towards employees like Christine choosing this option over retirement.

"We've definitely seen an increase in the number of older people we employ – in 2016 we took on 16 employees who are over the age of 50 and this year we employed a further 21. When we recruit for a position we're simply looking for the best person for the job, and the skills and experience of older workers are incredibly valuable to us in all areas of the business."

Commenting on the campaign, and why it's more important than ever for businesses to support and value their older workers, Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan, said:

"By 2022, around one in three people of working age in Wales will be aged over fifty and the number of young people entering the labour market may not be enough to fill all of the vacancies.

"The valuable skills and experience older workers possess, which are often gained over a lifetime in employment, are not always easy to replace. This campaign is designed to highlight to all businesses in Wales, but especially SMEs where skills gaps can have more of an impact, that older workers are vital to business growth and success, and consequently to the Welsh economy as a whole.

"We hope it will raise awareness of the issue to employers in Wales, and offer advice and guidance on how they can support an all-age workforce and invest in the growth and development of their employees throughout their working lives."

For employers looking for more information on how they can invest in the skills of their older workers, the Welsh Government's [Skills Gateway for Business](#) (external link) has a range of advice and guidance.