

Bumper £2.3bn building fund for schools and colleges

The money will allow the flagship 21st Century Schools and Education Programme – a major, long-term and strategic capital investment programme – to continue for a second wave of investment.

Band A of the Programme will conclude in 2019 after a £1.4bn spend over five-years. This second wave of investment, Band B, will comprise two funding streams; one using traditional capital, and one using revenue funding, via a new form of Public Private Partnership called the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).

Local Authorities and Further Education Institutions have proposed £2.3bn of projects, which meet the investment objectives of Band B of the Programme including:

- addressing growth in demand for Welsh medium education
- reductions of surplus capacity and inefficiency in the system
- expansion of schools and colleges in areas of increased demand for educational services
- address condition of educational assets
- making assets available for community use where demand exists.

The Welsh Government is committed to supporting all of these projects, subject to approval of business cases.

Speaking at the opening of Ysgol Cybi, a new 540 place Welsh medium primary school in Holyhead delivered by £9.7m of Band A funding, Kirsty Williams said:

“I am committed to raising standards, reducing the attainment gap and delivering an education system from the ground up that is a source of national pride and confidence. The 21st Century Schools and Education Programme is one of the means to achieve this ambition and represents the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s.

“The first wave of funding provided through the Programme will see investment of more than £1.4 billion over the five year period ending 2019, supporting the rebuild and refurbishment of more than 150 schools and colleges across the Wales.

“This is why I am delighted to announce a second wave of investment for the Programme, which will begin in April 2019.

“We will work closely with our partners to agree the pace of delivery and put in place investment plans that are affordable and meet our shared ambition to create sustainable learning

environments that meet the needs of our communities.”

Announcements on individual Band B projects will be made in conjunction with local authorities in due course.

Statement by the First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones: Carl Sargeant

First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones said:

“This is an awful situation for everyone. I want to talk about Carl and his family today.

“We’re all very shocked by what happened this week. There is great hurt, anger and bewilderment.

“Carl was my friend. In all the years that I knew him I never had a cross word with him. For 14 years we worked together. He was a great Chief Whip and a Minister who served his country with distinction.

“I cannot conceive of what Bernie and the family must be going through.

“There are a lot of inaccuracies in the press and many of you have questions to ask about what happened last week. Everybody is grieving and it is not appropriate for me to get into the precise detail. These are matters for the future – things that will need to be properly disclosed through what should be a coroner’s inquest.

“As there will in all probability be an inquest, I and my team will, of course, be cooperating fully with any questions that are raised there.

“The family deserve to have their questions answered and if that isn’t possible through the inquest then I will endeavour to make that happen through other means.

“There is a legal process to go through and I am obviously acting within that. I welcome any scrutiny of my actions in the future and it is appropriate for that to be done independently.

“I quite properly did all that I could to make sure that everything was being done by the book. I had no alternative but to take the action that I did and I hope that people will understand that.

“Carl was a true force of nature – he drove through more legislation than any other minister. Not just through force of argument, but through force of personality.

“Wales has lost a person of great warmth, ability and charisma. These are the darkest days any of us can remember in this institution – but they are darkest of all for the family, and we must respect their right to grieve in peace at this time.”

Carl Sargeant

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“Carl was a friend as well as a colleague and I am shocked and deeply saddened by his death. He made a big contribution to Welsh public life and fought tirelessly for those he represented both as a Minister and as a local Assembly Member.

“He will be a great loss both to our party and to the Senedd. My heartfelt sympathies are with his family at this difficult time.”

Welsh transport network ready for Winter

The winter of 2009/10 saw stocks at some local authorities reach crisis point, and Economy Secretary Ken Skates is keen to ensure Wales is fully prepared over the coming months, whatever the weather.

Mr Skates said:

“I’ve been on record more than once commending the excellent work that goes into keeping our roads as safe as possible 24/7, 365 days a year, with the winter period often the most challenging for all concerned.

“Whether it be at a local or national level, it’s vital for communities and economies across Wales to have the confidence to

continue to go about their business safely and with minimal possible disruption. There are a number of measures in place to make this a reality.

“Replenishment of salt stocks throughout Wales has been undertaken to provide a total stock holding of 216,000t. Arrangements are in place to replenish these stocks as the need arises, with further salt reserves held by Welsh Government if needed.

“Thirteen new front line salt spreaders are available for use on the motorway and nearby trunk roads in advance of the winter season to further increase winter resilience, with all plant and equipment serviced to ensure everything is ready to go.

“Road side weather stations have also been serviced, with additional weather stations installed at beneficial locations for this winter season to ensure the most accurate weather and road condition information is available.

“This is all in addition to the usual patrols of trunk road before and after adverse weather to ensure drainage systems are working and our agreement with bus operators and others to notify Traveline Cymru immediately of any disruptions so that the public are notified at the earliest possible opportunity.”

On rail preparation for winter, the Economy Secretary said:

“Last year saw too many trains cancelled because of leaves on the track – something I felt National Rail and Arriva could have worked together better to prevent. While rail infrastructure is non-devolved I have asked my officials to press Network Rail on maximising their use of the specialist Railhead Treatment Trains and to press Arriva Trains Wales on their rolling stock and train-crew availability.

“I understand that Network Rail in consultation with Arriva have already undertaken additional vegetation clearance to minimise the effects of leaf fall, while Arriva have confirmed they have put in place additional measures to ensure the maximum number of trains are available during the winter. I am hopeful that these measures will be successful in reducing disruption over the coming months.”

Ysgol Eirias pupils share their views on ideas for new Welsh taxes with Finance Secretary

The shortlist has been drawn up following feedback from the public about ideas for a new tax after the Finance Secretary said he would test the Wales Act 2014 powers, which allows Wales to propose new tax ideas in devolved areas.

Further work is being carried out on all four ideas – one will be proposed to the UK Government in the New Year to test the Wales Act mechanism.

During the visit to Ysgol Eirias, the Finance Secretary watched a short film made by year 10 pupils about why they believe a plastic tax is needed in Wales. He also discussed the other three tax ideas with them.

The Cabinet Secretary also took the opportunity to launch a two week social media campaign, including an anonymous poll, on the shortlist of new tax ideas.

Professor Drakeford said:

“The power to propose new taxes is an important one, which we can use to deliver improvements for our communities. In July, we started a national debate asking people to put forward ideas for potential new Welsh taxes and received a good response.

“In the draft Budget, I announced a shortlist of four ideas for further work. I was pleased to visit Ysgol Eirias today to watch a film prepared by pupils about why they believe a new Welsh disposable plastic tax is needed and to discuss the other ideas we are considering with them.

“The film was very engaging and we had an interesting debate about how taxes change behaviour for the benefit of communities across Wales. I’d like to thank them for the time they took in preparing the film and for their welcome.

“Today, I also launched the Welsh Treasury’s social media campaign, including an anonymous poll, about the shortlist of four tax ideas. We have taken an open and balanced approach to our tax policy and want to build on this.

“We want to hear the views of as many people as possible and I urge people and stakeholders across Wales to get involved, share their views and help us shape future Welsh taxes.”

Tim Williams, the year 10 form teacher and teacher of religious studies at Ysgol Eirias said:

“As a school, we have placed a great emphasis on teaching our young people to try to live more sustainable lifestyles. The form class, 10W, also felt that it is important to try to reduce the amount of single-use plastic items littering our streets and getting into the oceans.

“When Mr Drakeford invited proposals on new ideas for Wales, the form realised there was a great opportunity here for Wales to be a world leader in sustainable living; that hopefully other countries will copy too.

“What an honour for us also to be part of the debate about the first new Welsh taxes created in Wales since the Middle Ages.”

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