

Key players gather to progress plans for £100m Automotive Technology Park

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, chaired a meeting with industry figures from TVR, Ford, General Dynamics and IQE as well as representatives of Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone, Blaenau Gwent Council and Cardiff University, in order to develop more detailed proposals for the Automotive Technology Park at Ebbw Vale.

Last month the Economy Secretary announced that the Welsh Government would invest £100m over ten years in an Automotive Technology Park in Blaenau Gwent with the potential to create up to 1500 new full time jobs in one of Wales' most deprived areas.

Today' meeting focussed on opportunities that could create the most new jobs and maximum economic investment in the area.

Speaking after the meeting, Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Our plans to invest £100m in an Automotive Technology Park in Blaenau Gwent have the potential to transform the local economy and create up to 1500 jobs and I am keen to progress them as quickly as possible.

“Today's meeting provided an ideal opportunity to bring key players from industry, local government, academia and the local Enterprise Zone together to agree our direction of travel and set key targets and milestones that will help drive this pivotal project forward.

“It was a very productive meeting that confirmed our collective ambition to shape and deliver a project that can genuinely regenerate the local economy.

“Delivered well the project can not only create r the high quality jobs the area needs but also play a key role in shaping the future of our automotive industry here in Wales.”

The Welsh Government will publish a full business case for the Automotive Technology Park later this year. This will draw upon the specialist advice already received from internal and external experts and reflect the views emerging from today's meeting and from other engagement work with key partners.

Our Valleys, Our Future

These are the three priorities for Our Valleys, Our Future – the high-level action plan by the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys, which will be launched today by Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language Minister Alun Davies.

The Minister will join Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure Ken Skates and other taskforce members to launch the plan at the opening of another exciting Valleys scheme, a newly refurbished play centre with the Fern Partnership, called FuZe.

Our Valleys, Our Future has been developed following feedback from people living and working in the Valleys.

It sets out a range of aims and actions in each of the three priority areas, including:

- closing the employment gap between the South Wales Valleys and the rest of Wales by getting an additional 7,000 people into work by 2021 and creating thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs
- launching three pathfinder projects to look at how services and local delivery can be better joined-up in Llanhilleth, Ferndale and in Glynneath and Banwen
- exploring the development of a Valleys Landscape Park, which has the potential to help local communities use their natural and environmental resources for tourism, energy generation and health and wellbeing purposes.

The Minister will say,

“Our Valleys, Our Future is not simply a plan for the Valleys. It is a plan from the Valleys.

“From the start, I have been clear this taskforce will not be another case of the government deciding what is right for the Valleys. If we are to succeed, local communities and local people must be at the heart of our work.

“FuZe is a fantastic example of this; a community-led project that has changed the community it serves. One of the main aims of the taskforce is to empower communities and we must continue to listen and learn.”

The taskforce was set up a year ago to work with communities and local businesses across the South Wales Valleys to deliver lasting economic change in the region; to create good-quality jobs closer to people’s homes, improve skill levels and bring prosperity to all.

The taskforce will work to maximize job opportunities in the local economy – businesses such as retail, care and the food industry. It will also encourage and provide support for existing and potential entrepreneurs.

It will also explore the concept of a Valleys Landscape Park to help local communities build on their many natural assets, including the potential for community energy generation and tourism.

[Formal dispute resolution process underway over fair share of Barnett consequentialials from UK Government's DUP deal](#)

The Welsh and Scottish Governments have begun the formal dispute resolution process with the UK Government over their right to receive consequential funding as a result of the Prime Minister's deal with the Democratic Unionist Party.

Both governments have made it clear any additional funding for Northern Ireland must respect the established funding principles and rules applied through the operation of the Barnett formula.

Applying the Barnett formula in the normal way, would result in Wales receiving an additional £1.67bn and Scotland receiving an additional £2.9bn.

The Welsh Government's Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford and the Scottish Government's Finance Secretary Derek Mackay have written to the Treasury to invoke the formal dispute resolution process through the Joint Ministerial Committee.

Professor Drakeford said:

"We have been clear with the UK Government that any additional funding for Northern Ireland must respect the established funding principles and rules around the Barnett formula.

"The UK Government has abandoned these well-established arrangements to the detriment of Wales and other parts of the UK.

"The arrangements offered to Northern Ireland have direct read across to areas of devolved responsibility. For this reason, the benefits of the additional spending should be mirrored across all parts of the UK.

“By operating in this way, the UK Government has failed to provide Wales with the resources we need to invest in infrastructure, the NHS and the education system – depriving Wales of an additional £1.67bn.

“At a time when public services in Wales are under pressure as a result of the UK Government’s damaging and ongoing policy of austerity, it is only right that Wales gets its fair share of funding through the established rules of the Barnett formula.

“For all its faults the Barnett formula is supposed to be clear and rules based. It is simply inexcusable that the UK Government is willing to “bypass” those rules. That is why we have begun the formal dispute resolution with the Government so that Wales is treated fairly alongside all nations of the UK.”

Derek Mackay said:

“The Scottish Government fundamentally disagrees with the way in which this additional funding for Northern Ireland has been allocated. We have repeatedly made the point that all areas to which the £1 billion funding package has been allocated are devolved matters and therefore the Barnett Formula should apply.

“Despite this, the UK Government argues that there should be no Barnett consequential from this deal and refuses to acknowledge that Scotland, Wales and England will be short-changed by billions of pounds.

“That cannot be right – and the deal goes against the principles of the UK Treasury’s own statement of funding policy.

“Any suggestion that this funding arrangement is similar to previous funding for city deals in Scotland is wrong and not in any way comparable. City deal funding is conditional on match funding from the devolved administrations’ own budgets and also requires contributions from local authorities and other regional partners. In addition, the UK Government has promised city deals for Northern Ireland on top of this £1 billion of additional expenditure

“It remains my hope that we will be able to reach a satisfactory resolution to this situation which results in a funding allocation across Scotland, Wales and England that is fair and reasonable for all – but in order to reach such a solution we now need to pursue the formal dispute resolution process.”

Children continuing to benefit from Flying Start

The figure exceeded the expected target of 36,000 by 4 per cent.<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" /?>

Flying Start is the Welsh Government's targeted early years programme for families with children under 4 years of age living in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales. It provides free, quality, part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds; an enhanced health visiting service; access to parenting programmes; and support for speech language and communication.

Some of the other key statistics show:

- 88 per cent of offers of childcare in a Flying Start childcare setting were taken up during 2016-17, a small rise from 2015/16 (86 per cent).
- Flying Start health visitors worked with 25% of all children under the age of 4 during 2016-17
- 94 per cent of children aged 3 and living in Flying Start areas were on roll at a maintained school (2016). A small increase from 93 per cent in 2015.
- 82 per cent of children living in Flying Start areas were fully immunised by their 4th birthday (2016-17). A slight decrease from 83 per cent in 2015/16.

Commenting on the figures, Communities and Children's Secretary Carl Sargeant said:

"Giving children the best possible start in life is a top priority for the Welsh Government. Flying Start is a key early intervention programme, helping to improve children's life chances and reducing the need for later remedial action. The programme helps tackle adverse childhood experiences which can have a long-lasting impact on young people throughout their lives."

"Today's figures show that Flying Start continues to provide much needed support to families living in some of the most disadvantaged

communities across Wales.”

Five year milestone – Enterprise Zones in Wales have supported more than 10,000 jobs and attracted £300m plus investment

The figures were announced today in a written statement by Economy Secretary Ken Skates on the progress and future of the Welsh Enterprise Zone Programme which coincides with the publication of the Enterprise Zone key performance indicator annual report for 2016/17.

Key targets for the eight Enterprise Zones in 2016/17 were all either met or exceeded:

- 1,744 jobs were created, safeguarded or assisted ;
- £123.2m of public and private sector investment was secured;
- 159 enterprises were supported by the Welsh Government;
- 7000 m2 of land remediated/made available for development/floor space created or refurbished

The significant five year milestone figures were warmly welcomed by Ken Skates who said:

“Much has been achieved through the efforts of the Enterprise Zones to date and I have been pleased to note progress in each Zone since inception. Each Zone is unique and is at a different stage of development, yet achievements in each Zone have been significant.

“Since its inception to the end of March 2017, the Wales Enterprise Zone programme has contributed to the Welsh economy by supporting more than 10,000 jobs through a competitive package of financial and other incentives including business rates support, tailored

skills support, apprenticeship schemes and bespoke infrastructure projects.”

He said it was important that the Enterprise Zone programme continued to drive improvement in the Welsh economy particularly with the uncertainty caused by the vote to leave the European Union.

Enterprise Zones have much to contribute to the Welsh Government’s commitments, he said, particularly those to create new jobs, reduce business rates bills and create apprenticeships.

Mr Skates emphasised that the Welsh Government remains committed to the eight Enterprise Zones located across Wales and stated:

“I place great importance on a place-based approach which is tailored to local needs and circumstances and I am reviewing the Enterprise Zone offer to ensure that it will continue to deliver against a more regional approach to economic development, for example the recent announcement of a Technology Park for Ebbw Vale signifies this commitment.”