

Joint statement from First Ministers of Wales and Scotland in reaction to the EU (Withdrawal) Bill

“This week began with the Prime Minister calling for a constructive and collaborative approach from those outside Whitehall to help get Brexit right. Today’s publication of The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill is the first test as to whether the UK government is serious about such an approach. It is a test it has failed utterly.

“We have repeatedly tried to engage with the UK government on these matters, and have put forward constructive proposals about how we can deliver an outcome which will protect the interests of all the nations in the UK, safeguard our economies and respect devolution.

“Regrettably, the bill does not do this. Instead, it is a naked power-grab, an attack on the founding principles of devolution and could destabilise our economies.

“Our 2 governments – and the UK government – agree we need a functioning set of laws across the UK after withdrawal from the EU. We also recognise that common frameworks to replace EU laws across the UK may be needed in some areas. But the way to achieve these aims is through negotiation and agreement, not imposition. It must be done in a way which respects the hard-won devolution settlements.

“The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill does not return powers from the EU to the devolved administrations, as promised. It returns them solely to the UK government and Parliament, and imposes new restrictions on the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales.

“On that basis, the Scottish and Welsh Governments cannot recommend that legislative consent is given to the bill as it currently stands.

“The bill lifts from the UK government and Parliament the requirement to comply with EU law, but does the opposite for the devolved legislatures: it imposes a new set of strict restrictions. These new restrictions make no sense in the context of the UK leaving the EU.

“We have explained these points to the UK government and have set out what we consider to be a constructive way forward in the spirit of co-operation, based on the involvement of, and respect for,

devolved institutions.

“Unfortunately, the conversation has been entirely one-sided. We remain open to these discussions, and look forward to coming to an agreed solution between the governments of these islands.”

First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, responds to the EU (Withdrawal) Bill

First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, said:

“Only this week, the Prime Minister pledged to listen to others about the challenges posed by EU withdrawal, calling for unity for the good of the country. Yet, today’s announcement flies firmly in face of her promises.

“I have been clear since the day of the EU referendum result – the UK is leaving the EU and we will work with the UK government to deliver a sensible Brexit and support a bill which provides clarity and certainty for businesses.

“We have repeatedly tried to engage with the UK government and have put forward constructive proposals about how we can deliver a Brexit which honours the result of the referendum, safeguards the economy and respects devolution.

“Regrettably, our attempts to work with the UK government have been flatly ignored. Instead of mature and constructive engagement, the UK government has shown astounding ignorance in the publication of this bill, which is an insult to the devolved nations.

“The UK should be entering Brexit negotiations from a position of unity so we have the best possible chance of securing a good deal with the interests of all parts of the UK at its heart. Instead, the government appears determined to provoke a constitutional conflict we do not need.

“If the bill is not amended, there is no prospect of my government recommending the National Assembly should give legislative consent to it. We will instead investigate ways in which we can use our existing legislative powers to help defend devolution. We will also work closely with the other devolved administrations; indeed, the Scottish First Minister and I will issue a joint statement today, in which we will make clear that we cannot support the bill in its

current form.”

Taskforce to support Tesco workers meets for first time

Tesco announced last month that it planned to close its Customer Contact Centre in Llanishen, Cardiff with the potential loss of 1100 jobs.

In response, Economy Secretary, Ken Skates pledged to establish a Taskforce to ensure that workers affected by this news could access the very best support.

And today the Economy Secretary chaired the very first meeting of the Taskforce and was joined by the Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James, representatives of Careers Wales, the Welsh Contact Centre Forum, DWP, Public Health Wales, Trade Unions and Welsh Government officials to discuss the practical support that could be given to workers to mitigate the impact of this decision.

Ken Skates said:

“News of Tesco’s proposal to close its Llanishen contact centre has come as a devastating blow and our priority now must be to support those workers affected.

“I am confident that the establishment of a Taskforce – which is a tried and tested approach and was hugely helpful in assisting workers affected by the Murco closure in Pembrokeshire – will enable us to pool our resources and provide first class support to the 1100 Tesco staff who face losing their jobs.

“I am pleased to welcome a range of partners to today’s meeting. Collectively we will do all we can to support affected worker to find new employment, to retrain and upskill, and to access any health and well being support they need. This will include reaching out to local employers and examining how we can assist them with their recruitment.

“Let’s not forget these are highly skilled and award winning workers. This Taskforce is committed to working collectively to ensure that the impact of Tesco’s decision on those workers’ lives is kept to an absolute minimum.”

At the meeting, Taskforce delegates agreed to establish four work streams to

help provide targeted and effective support.

The Training and Skills work stream will look at the skills needs of staff facing redundancy and will include representatives from USDAW, Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus.

The Business Support work stream will look at the skills and recruitment needs of employers and consider support that can be given to encourage them to employ displaced Tesco employees. This work stream will include representation from Business Wales, the Welsh Contact Centre Forum and Welsh Government officials.

The Health work stream will gather and share information on the personal support available to workers and their families and ensure that such support is accessible. It will include representatives from Public Health Wales and USDAW.

Finally the Research work stream will look at the key risks and trends in the call centre sector including the impact of technological developments . It will be co-ordinated by the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services.

Welsh food & drink exports up by almost 20%

This compares to a 9.5% increase for the UK as a whole over the same period.

Provisional data for the year ending December 2016 shows the value of food and drinks exports from Wales rose to £337.3million, a 19.8% rise on the same period in the previous year.

While the EU still remains the largest importer of Welsh food and drink, accounting for 72.4% of exports, there have been major increases in exports to the Middle East and North Africa.

The top Welsh food and drink export for the year was meat and meat preparations, accounting for almost 22% of all food and drink exports.

The latest data follows a push by the Welsh Government to raise Wales' global profile. This includes support for Welsh food and drink producers to take part in a number of trade visits during 2016 and 2017 to key markets including Ireland, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Canada and the United Arab Emirates, with further visits planned for the remainder of the year to Germany, the USA and France.

It also follows the recent TasteWales event, organised by the Welsh

Government, which brought together Welsh food and drink producers, global buyers and food industry professionals in the largest ever showcase of Welsh food and drink.

Welcoming the figures, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“We are extremely proud of our high-quality food and drink and recognise the enormous value it brings to our economy. These figures are further testament to the reputation our food and drink is gaining around the world.

“I am delighted we are continuing to support the sector to expand its reach to new markets. Following our successful TasteWales event some of our producers are pursuing interest from buyers from all over the world.

“There are undoubtedly challenging times ahead. The EU remains our biggest export destination by quite a stretch. It is further proof of the threat a hard Brexit poses to our economy, which is why we continue to push the UK Government to priorities full and unfettered access to the single market and to avoid any new barriers which impede Welsh food and drink businesses from operating effectively.

“However, the increase in exports to markets outside of the EU is encouraging and with the quality of products we can boast in Wales I am confident we can continue to make excellent progress in new markets.”

Minister sets out Valleys taskforce priorities

Speaking a year after the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys was launched, the Minister said the taskforce’s plan – Our Valleys, Our Future – will be published on July 20.

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

The taskforce has spent the year taking evidence and listening to people living and working in the Valleys – these #TalkValleys conversations have

helped to shape the taskforce's priorities for the future and Our Valleys, Our Future.

The upcoming plan will build upon infrastructure investments already announced for South Wales, including the Metro, affordable housing and M4 relief road.

In a statement in the Senedd today the Minister set out some of the taskforce's priorities, ahead of the plan's publication next week;

- 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;
- Creating new strategic hubs in six areas across the Valleys, including the new automotive technology business park for Ebbw Vale, announced by Ken Skates last month;
- Exploring 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.

Mr Davies said:

"We are launching Our Valleys, Our Future at a time of unprecedented infrastructure investment in South Wales – the South Wales Metro, the two city deals, our commitment to invest in affordable housing and the M4 relief road all offer opportunities for people living in the Valleys. These are opportunities which we must, and will, maximise.

"I am determined the taskforce will make a positive difference to Valleys communities and we must now work together to turn this vision into action. This is the beginning of a longer-term journey, which is being shaped by people working and living in the Valleys.

"I am excited to be part of this work in this region, which is so close to my heart, where I was born and brought up. I am hopeful that together we can make transformational, long-lasting change through this approach."