

Supporting People budget protected

The Supporting People programme provides housing-related support to help vulnerable people to keep their homes and live as independently as possible. £124.4m will be allocated amongst the twenty two local authorities in Wales.

The Cabinet Secretary made the announcement ahead of making the opening address at the Cymorth Cymru Conference in Cardiff where he told delegates:

“I am very proud that Wales continues to have a ring-fenced Supporting People programme and that we have protected this funding for another year. The support work undertaken by teams funded through Supporting People helps some of the most vulnerable people in Wales to remain in their own homes.

“But as I have said on many occasions, that doesn’t mean things should just stay the same. In a time of shrinking budgets it is essential we work together to make grant programmes more efficient and effective and where possible protect front line services. We must challenge the way in which we do things and ask questions

“I would like to thank all those housing support workers who make a real difference to the lives of people in need and at risk of homelessness”.

Welsh Government confirms commitment to £1bn of innovative investment in infrastructure

At an event today, Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford, Health Secretary Vaughan Gething and Education Secretary Kirsty Williams launched the MIM to potential partners and provide an update about the three schemes being taken forward.

The new MIM has been carefully designed by the Welsh Government over the last 18 months to finance major capital projects while promoting the public interest and protecting the public purse.

Three major capital projects will be delivered through the model – completing the dualling of the A465 from Dowlais Top to Hirwaun; the new Velindre Cancer Centre and a significant tranche of the next phase of the 21st century schools and education programme.

At today's event at Penarth Learning Community, partners from the finance and construction sectors will hear about the model and the three capital schemes, including the assurance provisions and development timelines.

Professor Drakeford said:

"Over the last 18 months, we've worked closely with the Office for National Statistics and experts at the European Investment Bank to carefully design and secure our new Mutual Investment Model. It has been designed to promote and protect public interests, while also providing the right mix of incentives to private partners.

"I am pleased we've had such an interest in today's event from potential private partners. It is a clear sign that the market is interested in working alongside the public sector on these three important schemes.

"We are continuing to face unprecedented challenges to public finances so it is vitally important that we unlock all opportunities to boost infrastructure investment. This new public-private partnership model will deliver a £1bn capital infrastructure investment boost for crucial transport, health and education schemes."

£57m link road to give Cardiff "major boost" ahead of UEFA Champions League final

In a visit to see the progress on the £57m Eastern Bay link road project, the Economy Secretary stressed the impact such projects can have on the local and wider economy, particularly in a city like Cardiff that regularly hosts major events.

Ken Skates said:

"It's great to see the Eastern Bay link road project nearing completion. The new road will provide both Cardiff and Cardiff Bay with a major boost by greatly improving access, connections and journey times.

"And, of course, in the short term it will contribute to the success of the largest global sporting event of 2017 – the UEFA

Champions League final, hosted here in Cardiff.

“The Welsh Government’s record in attracting major events to Wales is something I am extremely proud of. We already have a strong reputation as a world class host and we will continue to work to build on that, through June’s Champions League final and next year’s Volvo Ocean Race, amongst others.

“These are events which will see hundreds of thousands of extra visitors coming to Wales and to Cardiff in particular and it’s imperative that our infrastructure matches our ambition. The link road will be open to buses and coaches for the duration of the Champions League final weekend – providing quick and easy access to and from Cardiff Bay, and will be open to all vehicles shortly after the event.

“This summer we look forward to attracting visitors from all over the world and I’m delighted that we will be able to do so with this major link road in place.”

City of Cardiff Council Leader Cllr Phil Bale said:

“I am delighted that the Eastern Bay Link Road will be open to coaches and buses in time for the Champions League Final in June.

“With many thousands of football fans heading to Cardiff by coach for the game, the new link road will play a major part in helping to ease the flow of traffic around the city during what is sure to be one of the greatest sporting events the capital has ever hosted.”

[Carl Sargeant outlines progress of Childcare Offer for Wales](#)

The Cabinet Secretary made the announcement while visiting the Markham Community Playgroup.

During the visit, Carl Sargeant also gave further detail on the precise areas within those local authorities where the offer will be available. In addition to Caerphilly, the local authorities that will test the offer are Anglesey and Gwynedd (working jointly), Blaenau Gwent, Flintshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Swansea.

The Welsh Government will spend £10 million in 2017-18 to take forward the development of the offer. The vast majority of the funding will be allocated to the local authorities to pay for government-funded childcare during early implementation.

Carl Sargeant said:

“I have been pleased with the enthusiasm and flexibility shown by these early implementer local authorities to date and impressed with their local knowledge and understanding of the childcare sector. Having considered the numbers of children to be included in the offer within the initial six local authorities, I have been able to invite Caerphilly as an additional early implementer from September.

“These local authorities have engaged with parents and providers, as have we through our #TalkChildcare campaign. The messages the early implementers are hearing are very similar to the ones I am hearing around cost, access, flexibility, choice, and the logistical challenge of trying to balance childcare and work.

“I have been clear from the start that our childcare offer must work for parents: they must have choice and flexibility. It must work for providers so they can maintain quality and help foster our children’s development in safe and successful environments. I have now agreed that the seven local authorities involved will test different things in different places.”

Projects offering 30 hours of free early education and childcare per week to 3 and 4 year olds will be taken forward from September 2017, in the following local authorities:

- **Anglesey and Gwynedd** will work together to test the offer. Anglesey will test the Offer in the areas of: Menai Bridge, Llandegfan, Llanfairpwll, Beaumaris and Llangoed; the villages of Niwbwrch, Dwyran, Brynsiencyn, Llangaffo, Llanddaniel and Llanedwen; and the town of Llangefni and Talwrn. Gwynedd will test the offer in: the well-being area of Bangor which includes Bethesda; the well-being area of Porthmadog which also includes Criccieth, Penrhyndeudraeth, Harlech and Garndolbenmaen; the well-being area of Ffestiniog which includes areas down to Trawsfynydd; and the well-being area of Dolgellau which includes the area around Barmouth, Corris, Dinas Mawddwy, Dyffryn Ardudwy and Llanbedr. From January 2018, the well-being area of Caernarfon which includes Bethel, Cwm y Glo, Bontnewydd, Deiniolen, Llanberis, Groeslon, Llanllyfni, Clynnog, Llanrug, Llanwnda, Penisarwaen, Penygroes, Talysarn and Waunfawr will also be testing the offer.
- **Blaenau Gwent** will implement the offer across the whole local authority from September 2017.
- **Caerphilly** will test the offer in the Mid-Valleys East region which incorporates urban areas such as Blackwood, Newbridge and Crumlin as

well as a number of smaller communities.

- **Flintshire** will test the offer in specified areas of Buckley, Bagillt and Broughton.
- **Rhondda Cynon Taf** will test four school catchment areas spread across the three valleys and one Welsh-medium catchment area to ensure an even spread across the authority. These are Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun, Bryncelynnog, Ferndale and Mountain Ash school catchments.
- **Swansea** will test the offer in wards spread across the city including Dunvant, Penclawdd, Llangyfelach, West Cross, Morryston, Pontarddulais and Gorseinon.

Council tax payers in Wales continue to pay less than England

The Welsh Government release shows that average Band D council tax for Wales in 2017-18 stands at £1,420, £171 less than the average Band D in England, which stands at £1,591.

The average band D council tax rise in Wales is also lower than the figure for England based on estimates published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The average increase in England in 2017-18 is 4.0% and the increase in Wales is 3.3%.

Through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS), the Welsh Government has also maintained its support to almost 300,000 households who need assistance in meeting their council tax bills. Of these approximately 220,000 pay no council tax at all.

Welcoming today's figures, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government Mark Drakeford said:

"Councils here are facing some real financial challenges but these latest figures show we are protecting local government from the worst of the cuts handed down by Westminster and, in doing so, protecting the taxpayer; a situation that has not been replicated on the other side of the border.

"In 2017-18, we are increasing funding for local government by £10 million compared to 2016-17. Under the funding floor we introduced in the Local Government Settlement, no council will have to manage on less than 99.5% of the cash provided to them last year, and most will have more.

"While our Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) is playing a key role in tackling poverty in Wales we're currently looking at how we

can make the system fairer for those who less able to contribute.
We'll make a further announcement on our plans during the course of
this Assembly term."