

A Digital Vision for the Valleys

The two schemes were put forward as part of a digital vision for the Valleys at the latest taskforce meeting in the Dulais Valley earlier this week.

One of the priorities in Our Valleys, Our Future, the delivery plan for the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys, is to develop a digital vision for the Valleys, by working with communities, to identify how technology can be used to deliver better outcomes for people living and working there.

Some of the proposals being considered are;

- An Uber-style app for patients who need to travel to hospital for appointments and treatment, which would bring together all providers of community transport;
- A community WiFi scheme, encouraging existing community hubs to open up their WiFi to local people;
- Investigating better use of the online data mapping tool Lle.

At the latest taskforce meeting, held at the Dove Workshop in Banwen, members approved plans for pilot schemes for each of these proposals.

Leader of the House and Chief Whip Julie James, who is also the Welsh Government lead on digital infrastructure and inclusion, said:

“Wales has always punched above its weight on the world stage in terms of digital innovation and the South Wales region in particular has a high concentration of successful digital companies, as well as university expertise in the sector. The taskforce has a really important role to play in ensuring these successes benefit Valleys communities.

“I look forward to seeing how the schemes we’ve agreed to pilot in the Valleys – which have been developed in response to local feedback – can improve the lives of people living and working here, as well as the economic prosperity of the area.”

Ann Beynon, who leads the delivery of digital elements of Our Valleys, Our Future, added:

“We are supremely aware of the rapid advancement of digital technology across the globe and how it is transforming the ways in which we live, work and socialise.

“Our challenge is to apply that to our own lived experience and to channel it to drive tangible benefits.

“South Wales has a vibrant digital sector which is growing in strength. It is supported by digital skills and training plans developed by the Learning and Skills Council working with local employers and training providers and by significant government investment in digital infrastructure.

“We are determined to tap into the wealth of knowledge available to us and to exploit that investment as we develop the vision for a future digital Valleys.”

[Don't be a Bystander: new campaign launches](#)

Leader of the House and Chief Whip Julie James will meet survivors to talk about their experiences and how the actions of those people around them can make a difference.

Julie James said:

“We want to encourage everyone to act, to do something, however small or simple when they are worried that someone they know is, or may be experiencing violence, abuse or sexual violence.

“Just the very act of asking someone “are you ok?” can have a huge impact.

“We do not advocate stepping in and intervening in a potentially dangerous situation or where people could get hurt – please call the police in this situation.

“We want to create a culture where people feel empowered to help prevent violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and to make Wales the safest place to be a woman.”

The campaign film encourages everyone to support someone they are worried about and signposts them to the Live Fear Free helpline and website. The campaign also includes a short film which explains what happens when you call the helpline as a concerned person.

Mary* is a survivor of domestic abuse; her colleagues had noticed her behaviour change and one sat her down to say “that’s one bruise too many”. Mary’s neighbours had suspicions and became involved when her daughter went to them for help.

They brought Mary into their home and she accepted their offer to ring the police. Only then did she realise that a number of her neighbours had suspected something was wrong. Her partner was arrested that night and her life changed.

Mary said:

“Suddenly I didn’t feel alone. People asked “are you ok?” and “how can we help?” and I felt that I could answer. I’m not sure I would have felt safe enough to answer before but hope that I would have at some point.

“I know I had been relieved when my colleague had asked, even though I didn’t feel able to speak to them about what was happening.

“What I would say to people who suspect things are not right with a family member, friend, colleague or neighbour, is trust your instinct, ask them if they’re ok and keep asking, it may not be the right time for them to speak to you when you ask that first time, but your words could be the glimmer of hope that leads to a life being saved.”

Sarah* grew up in Nigeria, where Female Genital Mutilation is common in her community. The traditional beliefs and practices were so instilled that it was something that every girl endured. Crucially, Sarah did not know that the practice was called FGM.

When her midwife asked her if she had been subjected to it, she said:

“I was confused and got upset and angry, it wasn’t what I was expecting, in our culture women who are not cut are seen as unclean. I tried to walk away and as I did I was asked by the receptionist, “are you ok?”. Thankfully she helped me to calm down as I realised that I wanted to talk to my midwife. Even though it must have been difficult for her too, she was understanding and helped me.”

She brought her daughter to Wales so that she would not be cut after she came to realise what had been done to her. She said:

“I wish the people who helped me could see the impact on mine and my family’s lives, I wish they could see the confidence they have given me. I would like them to see how happy I am day to day, my children are not going to go through this, I am a survivor.”

Find out how to support someone today to live fear free. Visit

www.livefearfree.gov.wales or call 0808 8010800 for 24 hour confidential advice and support.

Welfare reforms ‘punish the most vulnerable’

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) recently published its findings on the potential cumulative impact of proposed and implemented UK Government tax and welfare reforms on people sharing different protected characteristics.

The report analyses policy changes made between May 2010 and January 2018, which will have been implemented by the financial year 2021-22. It finds nearly half of all households in Wales will lose out from the reforms, and that the largest impact will be felt by people on the lowest incomes.

There is also a disproportionately negative impact on the incomes of several protected groups, including disabled people, certain ethnic groups, and women.

Specifically, the report finds that across Great Britain:

- households with at least one disabled adult and a disabled child will lose over £6,500 a year, over 13% of their annual income;
- lone parents will lose an average of £5,250 a year, almost one-fifth of their annual income;
- women will lose approximately £400 per year on average, while men will only lose £30.

In a joint letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with the Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies, Rebecca Evans and Julie James, who has Cabinet responsibility for Equalities, have called on the UK Government to reconsider its tax and welfare reform policies, because of the negative financial impacts they will have on the most disadvantaged.

Julie James said:

“It cannot be right for the incomes of protected groups to be impacted in such a disproportionate way.

“We have demanded urgent action in relation to these harmful changes. It is essential that considerable work is now carried out to ensure that equality considerations are fully incorporated into all decision-making by HM Treasury, and more broadly across the UK Government. It is completely unacceptable for the UK Government to

continue to ignore the impacts of these reforms on equality of opportunity.”

Rebecca Evans said:

“I have been pressing these issues with my UK counterparts for many months now and have made it perfectly clear on a number of occasions that these reforms will result in profound hardship for many of our most vulnerable citizens. I echo the concerns of the EHRC who are calling on the UK Government to reconsider their policies and review the level of welfare benefits to ensure they provide an adequate standard of living for those in receipt.”

These negative impacts are for the most part a result of changes to the benefit system, in particular the freeze in working-age benefit rates, changes to disability benefits and reductions in Universal Credit rates.

Welsh Government support following snow storms

The extreme weather conditions resulted in additional capital and revenue costs for local authorities. Today’s announcement will see funding directed to offset a major part of these costs including those incurred for highway authorities’ gritting and snow clearance operations and salt purchasing.

Whilst local authorities are responsible for planning for significant weather events and are expected to budget accordingly, the Welsh Government is providing additional investment in recognition of the significant costs incurred.

Economy and Transport Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“As much of the country was blanketed with snow recently, authority staff and contractors worked tirelessly in supporting the travelling public and ensuring our road network remained open as much as possible. Their professionalism and commitment was evident as ever and I would like to thank them once again for their efforts.

“The extreme weather did have an impact however and with that came inevitable financial consequences. I am pleased therefore the funding I am announcing today will be a boost in helping offset the considerable costs incurred by local authorities as a result of the

conditions.”

Councillor Andrew Morgan (Rhondda Cynon Taf), WLGA Spokesperson for Transport, the Environment and Sustainability said:

“I welcome this funding by Welsh Government in recognition of the significant costs incurred by authorities in responding to the recent extreme weather event. Although all councils will have planned well in advance for such a weather event, the sheer intensity of the weather meant that additional costs were unavoidable.”

“I am incredibly proud of the response efforts of councils across Wales, with council staff going above and beyond to help residents in their communities. Our staff members’ efforts highlighted public service at its finest, and demonstrated the true value of local government.”

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