

NHS Wales responds to extreme weather and severe winter pressures

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“Despite experiencing one of the busiest winters on record, in the vast majority of cases, NHS Wales has delivered timely, professional care to patients.

“It has been the second busiest January to March for attendance at emergency departments on record, including very high levels of flu and elderly admissions. The extreme weather in early March also made it extremely difficult for our NHS to operate, which has clearly had an effect on waiting times in emergency departments across Wales.

“Once again I would like to thank health and social services staff for their outstanding commitment in delivering care during a very challenging period. We have invested an additional £20m over the winter to help health boards and social care cope with the extra pressure. Despite continued unscheduled care pressures, health boards were still able to make progress with scheduled care during this busy time.

“There were improvements in waiting times for treatment in February compared to the previous month. Those waiting less than 26 weeks improved by 1.7% over the month, and the number waiting over 36 weeks decreased by 17%.

“The number of people waiting more than 14 weeks for specified therapy services fell by 44% over the month and to the lowest since August 2011. The number of people waiting more than 14 weeks for diagnostics decreased by around a third and is the lowest since Nov 2010.

“February also saw improvements in cancer treatment and child and adolescent mental health services waiting times.

“Our continued investment in social services is clearly having an effect, and the numbers for delayed transfers of care in March remain historically low, the eighth lowest monthly figure since 2004, despite all the system pressures.

“The Ambulance service again met their target for red calls for the 30th consecutive month since the new model was introduced despite continuing increasing demand and busiest March on record. The average daily number of red calls in March was higher than in February, and the fourth consecutive month that the daily average has been over 70.

“I am pleased NHS Wales has continued to deliver professional emergency and scheduled health care throughout this extremely busy period. Resilience planning put in place by health boards and local authorities has helped deliver this and we are working with them year round to improve that planning for the future.

“However, we recognise some patients have been waiting longer than is acceptable and we have been clear with health boards about our expectations around performance, and will work with them to evaluate measures taken this winter.”

Cabinet Secretary announces £25.9m in Local Transport Grants

The money will go towards programmes to improve safety, reduce congestion, create economic growth and promote active travel.

Local authorities were invited to submit applications for their priority schemes. A total of 190 applications were received.

The Local Transport Fund of £6.15 million will allow 18 schemes across 13 local authorities to continue work on multi-year projects. A further £5 million has been provided to fund local authorities to progress active travel scheme development.

The Local Transport Network Fund of £4 million will allow 4 existing schemes to continue with 9 new schemes to start across 13 Local Authorities.

Nearly £4 million in Road Safety Capital Grant will fund 18 schemes contributing to road casualty reduction in 11 local authorities.

The £5 million Safe Routes in Communities Grant is focused on 26 schemes that improve walking and cycling routes to schools in 18 local authorities.

In addition, funding of £1.75 million will be made available to all local authorities for road safety education and training programmes for, in particular, high risk and vulnerable groups, such as children, young people, older drivers and motorcyclists.

The funding will allow the development of many projects such as the Abercynon train station, which is being expanded to include a new Park and Ride facility that aims to encourage residents away from private transport, cutting the number of cars in use and improving air quality in towns and cities.

In the North, significant funding is being invested in the Kinmel Bay Bus

Priority Scheme which will alleviate congestion arising at the signalised crossroads of the A548 Foryd Road with St Asaph Avenue.

Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport Ken Skates said:

“The grants are a substantial investment to support local economic growth, improve road safety, enhance public transport facilities and provide more and better routes that enable people in Wales to walk and cycle and to do so safely.

“I commend the range of schemes I’ve been able to announce today, and the high quality of applications we received across these grants.”

View the [full list of successful schemes here](#).

New Doctor Who game scoops prestigious gaming award

Doctor Who Infinity is the latest offering from Tiny Rebel Games. This new game follows on the success of the company’s prior and wildly successful Doctor Who Legacy game which has been played by over 2.5 million people since its launch in 2013.

Doctor Who Infinity, which releases this spring, is a new platform for interactive storytelling in the Doctor Who extended universe. It brings together a roster of well-known Doctor Who writers and comic book artists, along with the voices of actors from the hit television series, including Michelle Gomez and Ingrid Oliver. The game enables Doctor Who fans to play through a series of brand new, original stories featuring a variety of Doctors and companions from both classic and modern Doctor Who. The game will have its initial launch for PC and Mac digitally on Steam, followed later by availability on major mobile devices.

The Welsh Government has actively supported Tiny Rebel Games in developing and marketing the latest game, providing more than £300,000 funding, alongside a co-investment by Double Eleven Limited, and taking the company to Games Development Conference in San Francisco as part of the Welsh Government trade mission. Whilst at the event, the game won the UK game of the show award, from UKIE – the UK Interactive Entertainment industry body.

The Doctor Who brand is licensed to Tiny Rebel Games by BBC Studios.

Ken Skates said:

“A huge well done to Tiny Rebel Games for their excellent work on Doctor Who Infinity and for winning the prestigious UK industry Game of the Show award at GDC.

“The Welsh Government is proud to have worked closely with Tiny Rebel Games in supporting the development, marketing and distribution of the game, and we were delighted to include them as part of our recent trade mission to San Francisco.

“This prestigious award, the success of Doctor Who Legacy and the positive press that Doctor Who Infinity has received on social media and from reviewers from GamesSpot, DigitalSpy, Tom’s Guide and ComicBook all bode well and will I’m sure serve as a springboard for the Game’s success when it officially launches next month.”

“We cannot allow damaging UK Government policies to plunge 50,000 more Welsh children into poverty” – Huw Irranca-Davies

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) recently published its findings on the potential cumulative impact of implemented and proposed 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.

The report also shows:

- relative child poverty in Wales will increase substantially – by 50,000 children (or 8 percentage points) by 2021/22 as a result of the tax and welfare reforms analysed
- large families will be particularly hard hit by the reforms with those families that have three or more children losing around £5,600 a year
- the child poverty rate for those in lone parent households in Great Britain is forecast to increase from 37% to over 62%, with lone parents

losing an average of £5,250 a year, almost one-fifth of their annual income.

In a joint letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies, Leader of the House with responsibility for equalities, Julie James and Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Rebecca Evans, 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.

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“The Welsh Government’s efforts to tackle child poverty and improve the lives of low income families are being damaged by the UK Government’s package of tax and welfare reforms – in particular by changes to the benefit system such as the freeze in working-age benefit rates, changes to disability benefits and reductions in Universal Credit rates.

“It is entirely unacceptable in a civilised nation to ignore the impacts of these reforms on equality of opportunity. It cannot be right, proper or moral for the incomes of protected groups to be impacted in such a disproportionate way.

“As a government, we cannot and will not be silent as the UK Government’s damaging tax and welfare reforms threaten to plunge 50,000 more Welsh children into poverty and increase levels of deprivation for our most vulnerable families.

“We have called on the UK Government to take urgent action in relation to these policies, which will result in profound hardship. It is essential that these policies are revisited as a matter of priority and rigorous equality impact assessments are undertaken in order to safeguard the well-being of those who are most vulnerable.”

[Access to EU market vital for Flintshire jobs – Ken Skates](#)

Figures show 24 percent of the workforce in Flintshire are in the production sector, mainly in manufacturing, producing goods sold around the world.

In 2017, 60 percent of identifiable Welsh goods exports went to the EU and the Welsh Government doesn’t want any new barriers after Brexit that could

disrupt this job supporting trade.

The Welsh Government's Brexit trade paper outlines how the Welsh economy is best protected by retaining full access to the European Single Market and membership of a customs union.

Analysis shows the severe impact a hard Brexit would have on Welsh jobs and the economy. If the UK were to move to World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules, the Welsh economy could shrink by 8% – 10%, which would be the equivalent of between £1,500 and £2,000 per person in Wales.

The trade paper outlines how the Welsh economy would be disproportionately impacted by a hard Brexit and identifies that the sectors most at risk from tariffs are automotive, chemicals, steel and electrical engineering, while the aerospace industry is most at risk from non-tariff barriers. These are sectors which are amongst the most productive in Wales and provide a large number of highly-skilled, well-paid jobs.

Ken Skates said:

“Our access to EU markets are vital for jobs in Flintshire. Figures show 24 percent of the workers in the area are in the production sector, creating goods and products we sell across the globe.

“Our biggest market is the EU, with around 60% of identifiable Welsh goods exports going to the EU, worth £16.4 billion each year. Any deal with the EU after Brexit must protect this and that is why we need continued full and unfettered access to the Single Market and participation in a customs union. This is about safeguarding jobs and investment. Wales is currently attracting record levels of inward investment, which is largely due to our access to the EU's 500 million customers.

“These hard facts show what is at risk if the UK Government fails to get the right deal for the UK or we crash out of the EU without one. We have out forward proposals for a sensible Brexit, based on evidence and analysis, that would protect jobs and the Welsh economy.”