

[Update on independent adviser on the ministerial code](#)

A spokesperson for the Permanent Secretary said:

“On November 23rd, the First Minister referred himself for advice under the Ministerial Code in relation to answers given to Assembly Members in 2014 and 2017. James Hamilton, who is an independent adviser to the Scottish Government on Ministerial Code issues, agreed to carry this out, and has already commenced his work.

“The terms of reference set by the First Minister to Mr Hamilton are for him to provide advice on: the allegation that I breached the Ministerial Code in relation to answers I gave to questions on 11th November 2014 and 14th November 2017.

“The Ministerial Code does not prescribe the scope, format, or conduct of the process, and it is for Mr Hamilton to determine how to act on the matter which has been referred. A secretariat has been made available to Mr Hamilton, with appropriate safeguards to ensure due separation from the First Minister’s office and the rest of the Welsh Government in relation to this process and any material submitted.

“Anyone wishing to contact Mr Hamilton’s secretariat with material relevant to the terms of reference can do so via referralinvestigation@wales-uk.com. Material related to the process will be stored independently of other Welsh Government internal systems.

“Mr Hamilton’s findings will be made public following the conclusion of his work.”

[Ambitious new plan to develop Wales’ childcare workforce](#)

Childcare is one of the biggest challenges facing working families. During this Assembly term, the Welsh Government will provide 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds for up to 48 weeks a year.

The Childcare, Play and Early Years workforce plan sets out the Welsh Government's vision for delivering this commitment, by developing and professionalising the childcare and play workforce and attracting the right people into the sector, ensuring they have the right skills and qualifications, and supporting new and existing business to grow.

To support childcare providers to grow and operate sustainably, the Welsh Government will prioritise support for the care sector, as outlined in the Economic Action Plan launched earlier this week, by supporting new and existing business to increase the number of childcare places on offer across Wales.

Currently, around 23,300 people work with our youngest children in childcare settings and Foundation Phase settings across Wales.

The plan's three key priorities are:

- **Prioritising support to invest in building capacity and capability across the sector**, this includes working with CWLWM and Business Wales to provide business support services to childcare businesses; provide enhanced Small Business Rate Relief for the childcare sector from April 2018 which increases relief from £12,000 to £20,500; and £100,000 over the next 3 years to support those providers participating in the early implementer pilots and those seeking to expand or start-up their business.
- **Attracting high quality recruits** by developing a recruitment framework to promote a career in childcare and play.
- **Raising standards and skills** by offering a structured training and development route based on a new suite of qualifications for the sector from September 2019, and by developing a career pathway for child-minders and home carers and working with Welsh Universities to embed competency into Early Years and Childhood degrees.

Launching the new plan, the Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"The provision of affordable, accessible, quality early years provision, available at the times parents need it, plays an essential role in boosting the economy, helping parents to return to work and creating further employment opportunities within the childcare sector itself.

"Those who care for our youngest children play a vital role in helping us give our children a flying start in life. High-quality early education and childcare produces greater long-term benefits for our children and strongly influences their future life chances.

"Where the workforce is equipped with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to provide high-quality childcare and play, the effects on children can be profound, with particular benefits for children

from disadvantaged backgrounds, or children who are disabled or have additional learning needs.

“The plan I’m unveiling today recognises the challenges the current economic climate presents to the sector and sets out clear and tangible actions to prioritise support to build the capability and capacity of the childcare workforce and the sector to drive our ambitions forward. It also sets out a longer term vision which is ambitious, but also essential if we want to enhance the quality of care we offer our children and to fully realise the potential of this committed sector and its workforce.”

[Have your say on plans for a Third Menai Crossing](#)

The consultation which begins today and lasts until Friday, 9 March will look at four options for increasing capacity and improving network resilience across the Menai Strait with the aim of a preferred route being announced in summer 2018.

The options are:-

Red Option:

- New bridge directly to the west of Britannia Bridge
- Improvements at A55 Junction 8A

Pink Option:

- Extension of Britannia Bridge / new bridge immediately east of existing bridge to provide extra traffic lanes
- Improvements at A55 Junction 8A

Orange Option:

- New bridge directly to the east of Britannia Bridge
- Improvements at A55 Junction 8A

Purple Option:

- New bridge to the east of Britannia Bridge
- Improvements at A55 Junctions 8 and 8A

All Options contain facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the Menai Strait either on the new bridge or the existing Britannia Bridge.

The £3 million design and development stage of the third crossing is part of the two-year budget agreed by the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

Economy and Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I am absolutely committed to the development of a third Menai crossing which will bring many benefits to the area including addressing congestion on the existing Britannia Bridge and ensuring our road network is ready for major projects such as Wylfa Newydd.

“The Welsh Government is investing £600 million in transport infrastructure improvements across North Wales over the coming years to ensure the region has the modern and high quality transport system it needs to develop its potential for economic growth.

“The third Menai crossing is an imperative part of our plans to improve capacity, reliability and journey times as well as strengthen the network’s resilience. We are aiming to start construction by the end of 2020.

“This is a significant development for the area and I encourage everyone with an interest to contribute to this consultation. These views will form an important part of the preferred route decision process.”

People are also welcome to attend the Public Consultation Exhibitions which are also being held at the Memorial Hall in Llanfairpwll on 16 and 17 January and Ty Menai in Park Menai Business Park on 23 & 24 January between 10am-8pm.

Further details of the proposals, public exhibitions and how to share your views can be found at:

<https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/a55-3rd-menai-crossing>

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[New areas to pilot Welsh Government's free childcare offer](#)

When rolled out across Wales, the offer will provide 30 hours of early education and childcare to working parents of 3 and 4 year olds for 48 weeks of the year.

In September this year, the Welsh Government began piloting the offer in Anglesey, Gwynedd, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Flintshire, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Swansea. The offer is available in specific areas of these local authorities, and across the whole of Blaenau Gwent, enabling the government to test a range of aspects and issues impacting delivery and take-up.

As part of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2018/19, the funding to support the childcare offer increases to £25m in 2018-19, and to £45m in 2019-20. This increase in funding will allow the Welsh Government to expand and test aspects of the delivery of the offer in some additional local authorities from September 2018 onwards.

Learning from the pilot local authority areas is important in helping to fine-tune policies and systems to make sure the offer works for parents and providers alike and preparing local authorities prior to a wider roll-out.

[In addition, earlier today, the Minister set out the Welsh Government's plans to develop and grow the childcare sector to help deliver the childcare offer.](#)

Announcing the expansion, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"In September 2017, we began delivery of our groundbreaking and ambitious Childcare Offer in seven early implementer local authorities across Wales, ready for full roll-out across Wales by the end of this Assembly term.

"I'm really pleased with the strong interest the offer has received from parents so far. Parents are already telling us it's making a difference to their lives, reducing the strain on family income and helping ensure childcare is not a barrier to them taking up employment or increasing their hours.

"I'm delighted to announce that I've given the go-ahead for the

pilots to be expanded into new areas across Wales.”

The Minister added:

“I am very grateful to the early implementer local authorities for their hard work to date. They have worked with us to develop and deliver the policy, including the eligibility criteria for parents, the application process, and the payment methods for childcare providers.

“I would also like to thank the childcare sector for their support including the positive way they have worked with us to ensure there is a good awareness of the childcare offer and the feedback on their experience so far of delivering the offer. The second phase of our successful #TalkChildcare campaign is about engaging further with childcare providers, through online questionnaires, focus groups and direct consultation.

“I look forward to continued joint working as we expand and deliver this offer to parents and children across Wales.”

The Welsh Government has confirmed the offer is now being expanded to include the following areas:

From December 2017

- **Flintshire:** Wards of Connah’s Quay South, Connah’s Quay, Wepre, Fllint Castle, Flint Coleshill, Flint Oakenholt, Flint Trelawny, Holywell East, Holywell West, Saltney Mold;
- **Gwynedd:** The well-being area of Caernarfon. Includes following wards; Bethel, Bontnewydd, Cadnant, Clwt y Bont, Cwm y Glo, Deiniolen, Groeslon, Llanberis, Llandwrog, Llanllyfni , Llanrug, Llanwnda, Menai (Caernarfon), Peblig (Caernarfon), Penisa’r waun, Pen-y-groes, Seiont , Talysarn, Waunfawr, Clynnog.

From January 2018

- **Anglesey:** Valley 2, Trearddur 1 and 2, Llanfihangel Esceifiog, Brynteg, Llanbedrgoch, Pentraeth, Amlwch rural, Bodorgan, Llanfair yn Neubwll 1 and 2, Aberffraw and Rhosneigr 1, Parc ar Mynydd, Llaneilian, Moelfre, Llanfaethlu, Mechell;
- **Gwynedd:** Well-being area of Penllyn, which includes Bala, Llandderfel, and Llanuwchllyn;
- **Caerphilly:** Wellbeing Area of Caerphilly Basin wards: Aber Valley; Bedwas; Trethomas; Machen; Llanbradach; Morgan Jones; Penyrheol; St James; and St Martins; Lower Islwyn, wards: Abercarn; Crosskeys; Risca East; Risca West; and Ynysddu;
- **Rhondda Cynon Taf:** Wards of Ynyshir and Pontyclun;

- **Flintshire:** Wards of Hope, Caergwrle and Higher Kinnerton;
- **Swansea:** The wards of Gowerton; Penllergaer; Llansamlet; Penderry; Kingsbridge; Upper Loughor; Lower Loughor; Penyrheol; and Cockett (Subject to any call-in of the Cabinet decision)

Currently the offer is being piloted in:

- **Anglesey** is testing in 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** is testing 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
- **Caerphilly** is testing 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** is testing the offer in Buckley, Bagillt and Broughton, and within areas of Aston, Connahs Quay (Central and Golftyn), Garden City, Greenfield, Higher Shotton, Holywell (Central), Mancot, Queensferry and Sandycroft.
- **Rhondda Cynon Taf** is currently testing the offer in 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** is testing the offer in wards spread across the city including Duvant, Penclawdd, Llangyfelach, West Cross, Morryston, Pontarddulais and Gorseinon.