

Joint statement by the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales

We have repeatedly pressed the UK government to engage fully with us on its preparations for the UK leaving the EU and we will continue to contribute as fully as possible to the work of the European Union Exit and Trade (Preparedness) Committee over the coming weeks.

We are particularly keen to do so to press home the point that all the evidence we have seen to date suggests that the UK is simply not prepared for a 'no deal' Brexit in less than 2 months' time. Our firm view is that such an outcome to the Brexit negotiations would be a catastrophe which would cause significant short-term disruption to the lives of ordinary citizens as well as to businesses and long-term harm to our economy.

And while a longer period to prepare for 'no deal' as proposed by some Conservative MPs might reduce the risk of people in Scotland and Wales being unable to access the medicines that they need or the range of foods they want to buy, it would do nothing to mitigate the longer-term economic damage that such a radical rupture with our EU neighbours would cause. The jobs lost at Shaeffler in Llanelli and the cancelled investment at Nissan in Sunderland are just a foretaste of the future. The CBI has estimated a no deal Brexit could cost the Scottish economy £14 billion a year by 2034.

The House of Commons, National Assembly for Wales and Scottish Parliament have all rejected the Prime Minister's deal. It would make the UK as a whole poorer and would open the door to a "blind Brexit" with years of difficult negotiations on the future relationship and no guarantee a trade deal will even be concluded.

Alarmingly at this late hour, following its defeat, the UK government still appears unable to identify the "alternative arrangements" to the Irish backstop which it says would allow the House of Commons to vote for the deal. In addition the EU remains totally committed to the backstop, which it says will not be re-negotiated.

The point has been reached where there is now no time to waste. We therefore renew our call for the Prime Minister to make clear that she and her government will ensure 'no deal' is taken off the table. This should include putting forward secondary legislation now to remove 29 March 2019 as exit day from the EU (Withdrawal) Act.

The Prime Minister must also request an extension from the EU of the Article 50 deadline. We call on the Prime Minister to request such an extension immediately to put an end to the threat of the UK crashing out of the EU without a deal in only 8 weeks' time.

The EU has made it clear that in terms of negotiations on the future relationship, it would respond favourably if the Prime Minister was to drop

her “red lines”. We therefore further call on the UK government to abandon those red lines, which the EU has repeatedly said, severely restrict the possible outcomes of Brexit.

Funding changes to school building programme will help pressures on local authority budgets – Kirsty Williams

The proposed changes will see the Welsh Government increase its share of the funding through the Mutual Investment Model (MIM) from 75% to 81%. This means local authorities and further education institutions delivering the new buildings using the MIM will only pay 19% towards the annual ongoing costs of the design, construction, funding and maintenance of the new facilities.

This is the final step in a suite of changes to the funding provided by the Welsh Government in the 21st Century Schools and Education programme. When combined, these changes will allow local authorities and further education institutions to make better informed decisions about how they invest in school and college buildings in the longer term.

Minister for Education Kirsty Williams said:

“Our flagship 21st Century Schools and Education programme represents the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s.

“Changing the intervention rate will provide our delivery partners with vital support in these times of austerity and help us to attain our goal of creating sustainable learning environments across Wales, which also cater for the wider needs of our communities.”

Minister for Finance Rebecca Evans said:

“This is a real opportunity to help transform learning environments across Wales. These changes will help to release additional funding in local authorities in these times of austerity.”

Welsh charity funding announced on International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

The funding announcement marks International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation which raises awareness of FGM – a human rights violation and crime.

In Africa, more than three million girls are estimated to be at risk from FGM each year and around 200 million women and girls worldwide are living with the consequences of genital mutilation.

It is estimated 137,000 women and girls in the UK are living with FGM.

On Monday, FGM experts warned the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire show that FGM is increasingly being performed on babies and infants in the UK. The claim comes just days after the UK saw its first conviction for FGM.

Complications from the procedure can be life-altering, including; sepsis, infertility and the need for further surgery to enable childbirth.

The funding from the Welsh Government's Wales for Africa scheme has been awarded to Hayaat Women Trust who work to support and empower less advantaged people in Welsh communities and in Somaliland.

The project aims to amplify the actions of 21 trained young female activists in Somaliland. Through social action they'll work towards a nation-wide anti-FGM campaign advocating for the abandonment and criminalisation of FGM in Somaliland.

In a statement to the Welsh Assembly today (Wednesday 6th) the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt, called on Assembly Members to affirm that Wales will not stand by.

She said:

“Female Genital Mutilation is a form of abuse, inflicted upon children who cannot say no. Justification of FGM needs to be challenged and this can only be done through policy and societal change – which this project will push for.

“It's warming to see local Welsh charities being able to significantly benefit others who are at serious risk of harm, whilst enhancing themselves and our communities in the process.

“Our national strategy for violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence commits the Welsh Government to challenging cultural attitudes which can underpin traditional yet harmful

practices like FGM. We are doing this by working with specialist BME services, and through our communications campaigns.”

Fowzia Ali from Hayaat Women Trust said:

“About 98% women in Somaliland have undergone Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting – one of the highest rates in the world.

“FGM is an extreme form of discrimination against women and girls – an enduring form of gender-based violence fuelled by social norms and misinterpretation of religious teachings.

“The practice puts millions of girls and women at risk of uterine infections and HIV transmission on a mega scale whilst imprisoning its survivors to lifelong psychological trauma, untold suffering and is the main culprit for the staggeringly high maternal and intrapartum mortality rate.

“Our project TuWezeshe Akina Dada: Wales is a youth-led awareness raising campaign amplifying the voices of young women in Wales and many regions of Somaliland against FGM. We’ll work via an Africa-UK young women’s leadership movement which aims to empower a generation of African and African diaspora young women to become effective leaders against sexual and gender based violence.”

Announcing the grant awardees, the Minister for International Relations, Eluned Morgan, said:

“The Wales for Africa programme has gone from strength to strength, especially with small grants like the one we are announcing today, transforming lives.

“I’m proud that through projects like these we can continue to build relationships between Wales and Africa, not only improving lives in Africa, but also bringing benefits to Wales by allowing volunteers to exchange skills and have life-changing experiences.”

The Wales for Africa Small Grants scheme is a flagship initiative enabling organisations across Wales to access funding for projects which contribute to Wales’ delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Organisations to benefit from Wales for Africa grant

The Welsh Government's Wales for Africa Grant Scheme provides funding for community groups and organisations in Wales with links to projects in Africa.

Over 15 organisations in Wales will share the grant funding for projects that will improve health and education, improve livelihoods and tackle the effects of climate change in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Wales for Africa Small Grants scheme is a flagship initiative of the Welsh Government's Wales for Africa programme. The scheme enables organisations in Wales to access funding of up to £5,000 for small-scale projects that contribute to Wales' delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

One project benefiting from a £4,900 grant is Zanzibar Mental Health Shamba who, through education and training, are seeking to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health problems in both Zanzibar and Wales.

Announcing the awarded grant winners, the Minister for International Relations, Eluned Morgan, said:

"The Wales for Africa programme has gone from strength to strength, with small grants, like the one we are announcing today, transforming lives – from reducing infant mortality rates in Uganda to increasing the number of children who stay in school.

"I'm proud that through these projects we continue to build relationships between Wales and Africa, not only improving lives in Africa, but also bringing benefits to Wales by allowing volunteers to exchange skills and have life-changing experiences."

Mike Greenwood, Secretary of the Machynlleth-based group said:

"We're excited to have been awarded this grant. Zanzibar has a very different approach to mental health and whilst there is terrible stigma attached to the condition there, they actually have better recovery rates from severe mental illness than we do. We have a lot to share and learn."

Another project to benefit is Zimbabwe Newport Volunteering Association, who through volunteer work and the creation of youth clubs will help to empower young people of Mufakose to be aware of global issues, whilst promoting sustainable development goals.

The scheme is administered by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action WCVA on behalf of the Welsh Government.

[Agreement to boost transport connectivity in North Wales and North of England](#)

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) broadly sets out the working relationship between the two organisations with the aim of ensuring that each other's work supports and complements transport movements between the North of England and North Wales.

As part of the agreement, a "West and Wales Transport Forum" will be established which will bring together key transport stakeholders on both sides of the border including the Welsh Government, UK Government and Transport for the North to support a co-ordinated approach to the sequencing of strategic transport investments that impact on both regions.

The updated MoU will further cement the current joint working arrangement and drive a shared common vision for a vibrant, sustainable and growing economy.

It also sets out both parties' commitment to engaging and collaborating to ensure that views and objectives are taken into account in the development and delivery of the Welsh Government's Transport Strategy and Transport for the North's Strategic Transport Plan and Investment Programme – which are set to be considered this week.

The MoU will be vital in helping deliver improved outcomes for passengers, freight and all transport users between the North Wales and the North of England as well as furthering transport improvements which will boost economic growth in both regions.

Welsh Government Minister for Economy and Transport and Minister for North Wales, Ken Skates said:

"The Welsh Government has a clear vision of creating a sustainable, efficient and quality integrated transport network which will connect people, communities and businesses to jobs, facilities and services.

"Each and every day thousands of people cross each side of the border for work and leisure purposes meaning investment in one region can affect economic outcomes on the other. It is therefore vital we continue and strengthen our close working relationship

with Transport for the North to realise how strong cross-border transport links can ensure the benefits of improved connectivity are felt jointly in Wales and the North of England.

“The updated Memorandum of Understanding will help us maximise opportunities to provide a boost to the economy and enable both parties to continue a collaborative approach on transport initiatives that are of mutual interest for the benefit of the travelling public.

“It’s also great news the West and Wales Transport Forum will be established which will be vital in bringing key transport partners together with the aim of securing cross-border transport improvements. I’m pleased the Secretary of State for Wales has agreed for the UK Government to be represented on the forum and potential opportunities for investment in rail infrastructure can be discussed first hand.”

Barry White, chief executive of Transport for the North, said:

“Our partners came together to create Transport for the North in order to better understand where the opportunities are across the region, and how best we can use transport to bring them together.

“We know these opportunities aren’t just confined to the North and that a truly integrated transport system doesn’t recognise borders and the people and business that cross them. We want a transport system that is world-leading, coordinated, and puts people first. This aspiration is an integral part of our Strategic Transport Plan – specifically our West & Wales Corridor – which will look to support growth in the Cheshire Science Corridor Enterprise Zones, the Atlantic Gateway, the North Wales Arc, the Port of Liverpool, and the Crewe HS2 Hub among many others.

“That is why I’m delighted to have signed our Memorandum of Understanding with the Welsh Government. The North of England and North Wales in particular have so much potential that we all want to unlock. Doing this will be an integral part of re-balancing the UK’s economy.”

UK Government Minister for Wales Nigel Adams said:

“The UK Government is actively committed to improving cross-border transport services between Wales and England and I look forward to working with this Forum and its members over the coming months. We will engage with all stakeholders and focus on the opportunities and challenges that exist on cross border transport and we will together deliver the maximum impact and benefit for local users and the wider economy.”