

## Small and rural schools set to benefit from £2.5m funding – Kirsty Williams

Local authorities have been applying for the funding after the Education Secretary Kirsty Williams revealed the support package in November last year to encourage innovation and support greater school to school working.

This includes using digital technology to combat the issue of professional isolation, providing administrative support in schools where the head teacher has significant teaching commitment, supporting collaboration and federation of schools, and where opportunities exist and there is local demand, using school facilities for community purposes.

Amongst the local authorities to receive funding are Anglesey, which will receive £138,000 to federate some of its schools, and Pembrokeshire, which has been awarded £158,000 to fund a Small School Innovation Project for a network of 15 small and rural schools.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Small and rural schools play an important role in our national mission to raise standards and extend opportunities for all our young people.

“We are taking action and providing new funding to help small and rural schools deal with the unique challenges they face, such as small pupil numbers and issues in recruiting head teachers and staff.

“This financial support will benefit pupils, teachers, and the wider community. I want to see rural schools working more formally together and across the country, forming federations and looking into the possibility of sharing buildings with other services to ensure school buildings remain viable.”

WLGA Spokesperson for Education, Councillor Debbie Wilcox (Newport) said:

“This funding is great news for small and rural schools. As a former teacher of many years myself, I know how having the best possible learning environment can enhance education and overall experiences. Local education authorities have been working hard to ensure schools are responding to modern challenges and are fully-equipped to provide the best education environment for teachers, pupils and staff, and this investment will help to continue that important work.”

WLGA Deputy Spokesperson for Education, Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn (Ceredigion) said:

“Small and rural schools face unique challenges, especially in terms of recruitment and smaller pupil numbers. But they’re more than just schools in the communities that they serve. They are important assets to the community as school buildings and resources are widely used for an array of community purposes. This funding will contribute to ensure that learners and communities alike can continue to reap the benefits of these schools, and also to strengthen the support for Welsh language education provision in our rural communities.”

The Education Secretary also announced plans to consult on strengthening the School Organisation Code in respect of a presumption against the closure of rural schools. For the first time ever there will be a designation of rural schools for that purpose. A 14 week consultation ended on 30 September and responses are currently being analysed.

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## [European politicians in Wales to talk Brexit](#)

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford will also attend the talks with more than 20 local and regional representatives from Scotland, France, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands at a conference titled ‘European co-operation beyond Brexit’.

The Welsh Government is organising the event at City Hall with the Conference for Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), a European network which has members from 160 regions from across the EU and beyond.

At the event the First Minister and European regional leaders will formally sign the ‘Cardiff Declaration’ which calls for continued strong relationships and co-operation between the UK and nations and regions across Europe post-Brexit.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“Bringing together representatives from across the regions of Europe and signing the ‘Cardiff Declaration’ demonstrates our intention to collaborate with our European partners. Wales remains open, outward facing and international in outlook and Brexit will not change that.

“While we have been consistently clear that we are not trying to undo Brexit, we have a range of shared interests, from trade to protecting the rights of UK and EU citizens, which must be prioritised in the negotiations.

“This event and our joint declaration demonstrate that while Brexit has an impact on all European countries and regions, it must not become a stumbling block to our established strong relations that benefit us all.”

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## Rise in new affordable homes welcomed

Last year the Welsh Government announced a commitment to deliver an extra 20,000 affordable homes by 2021, including supporting the construction of more than 6,000 homes through the Help to Buy – Wales scheme.

In 2016-17, local authorities reported 2,547 additional affordable housing units had been delivered across Wales, an increase of 6 per cent on the previous year. These figures exclude homes delivered via Help to Buy-Wales. 1,864 homes were delivered through Help to Buy during 2016-17 which, when added to the affordable homes stats released today, highlight the significant progress toward our 20,000 target in the first year.

Rebecca Evans said:

“Ensuring that people have a safe, warm and secure home is one of our key priorities. I am committed to increasing the housing supply in Wales and have an ambitious target of building 20,000 affordable homes during this term of government. I am therefore pleased to welcome today’s significant progress.”

Welsh Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) continued to make the largest contribution to additional affordable housing in Wales, delivering 93 per cent of all additional affordable housing provision over the past year (2,378 units).

The Minister added:

“I am grateful to social landlords for the important role they play. I am proud of the positive and constructive relationship we have with the RSL sector in Wales and our joint commitment to work together for the benefit of tenants.”

The number of affordable housing units delivered with capital grant funding increased by 3 per cent during 2016-17 to 1,810 units, whilst the number delivered without capital grant funding was up by 16 per cent to 737 units.

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## **Water protocol to protect consumers – and devolution settlement**

The UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs currently has intervention powers which mean he or she can repeal Assembly legislation or intervene in the exercise of devolved functions which he or she believes risks having a serious adverse impact on water resources, water supply or water quality in England. Welsh Government Ministers do not have reciprocal powers.

The protocol, which is being laid jointly before the UK Parliament and National Assembly for Wales, paves the way for the repeal of these outdated intervention powers next year.

The protocol reaffirms the close working between the Welsh and UK Governments on essential matters of water resources, water supply and water quality. It also dictates no action or inaction of either administration should have any serious adverse impact on either Wales or England respectively.

Speaking ahead of the laying of the protocol, the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“The introduction of this protocol addresses an existing imbalance in the devolution settlement that could, in theory, result in UK Government Ministers intervening in matters that are the responsibility of the Welsh Government.

“I am pleased with the constructive and positive way in which both administrations have approached the drafting and implementation of an agreement which, importantly, means water consumers on both sides of the border are safeguarded”.

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## **Winter resilience is coming with extra**

# beds, Choose Well and My Winter Health Plan

Mr Gething outlined a number of positive actions aimed at easing the pressures on hospitals including an increase in available bed capacity and the strengthening of emergency ambulatory care services to enable patients with specific conditions to be treated without needing to stay in hospital overnight.

The positive steps were announced as NHS Wales Chief Executive Dr Andrew Goodall called on people to Choose Well and make the right decisions of where to get advice and treatment if they are unwell to help ease pressure on GPs and hospital emergency departments.

Dr Goodall also launched a new initiative, My Winter Health Plan, aimed at helping people with long-term physical or mental health conditions provide vital information for visiting health professionals to allow more people to be seen and treated at home and avoid unnecessary trips to A&E.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“Winter is always a challenging time for our health and social care services and hard-working staff here in Wales, as it is across the UK.

“A wide range of positive actions are planned to further improve local and national resilience, including an increase in available bed capacity both in hospital and in the community to mitigate against the anticipated rise in the number of patients with multiple conditions who require admission to hospital over winter.

“As last year, we will see the strengthening of emergency ambulatory care services to enable patients with specific conditions to be treated without needing to stay in hospital overnight wherever possible.

“Other actions taken to improve resilience this winter include strengthening seven-day working; increasing senior decision-making at the hospital front door; extending working hours; additional support for out-of-hours services and care homes; improved use of social workers in hospitals and greater use of pharmacy support.

NHS Wales Chief Executive Dr Andrew Goodall said:

“Making the right choice of which services and treatments will save you time and make sure you and your family get the right care quickly. I know NHS staff will be working hard this winter. Choose well to help them help you.”

Dr Goodall said 10,000 My Winter Health Plans, which also contain winter health and care tips, are also being distributed by health boards, local authorities and a number of key organisations including Age Cymru.

He said:

“The aim of My Winter Health Plan is to provide people with chronic conditions, or their carers, with a form that they can display on their fridge or in an easy to see part of their home. If they then receive a home visit in an emergency from a health and care professional, family member or neighbour, that person will have useful key information to help them make a more informed decision on what action to take. It is anticipated that this will help avoid unnecessary journeys to hospital.”

Dr Goodall reminded people that everybody can help ease winter pressures by using the wide range of health and care professionals in communities for advice and treatment when they are unwell.

“Community pharmacists can advise you and your family on minor ailments, coughs or colds. They can offer expert advice, over-the-counter medicines and prescriptions and, if needed, advise whether you need to see your GP,” said Dr Goodall.

“By making this vital choice you can often be seen and treated more quickly, saving you time and freeing up GPs and hospital A&E departments for those who really need them.

“For persistent symptoms, infections or if your child has a fever, go and see your GP.

“If it isn’t a life-threatening emergency but you aren’t sure where to go, contact NHS Direct Wales on 0845 46 47 or go to [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk) for the Symptom Checker.

“A&E is for people who are very sick or badly injured and unless this is the case you will get the right care quicker by choosing well. Even if the A&E is closer, it is not the best place to go to for most health problems.

“There is lots we can all do, like ensuring prescriptions are ordered in advance. Friends and relatives of older people can help by checking in on them and making sure they are keeping their homes warm – 18-21C – to prevent any existing health problems getting worse.”