

£215,000 to improve adoption services

The funding was announced at the start of National Adoption Week, which aims to raise awareness of adoption and in particular the need to find adopters for sibling groups.

£90,000 from the Children and Communities budget in 2018/19 will fund recruitment campaigns which will focus on finding families for those who find it harder to find adoptive homes such as sibling groups and older children awaiting adoption and continue the development of a national support framework for adoptive families.

Recurring funding of £125,000 from the Social Services budget will be used to recruit, train and provide materials for “life journey champions” to support children through their adoption and to recruit a national implementation champion who will work to ensure that the new adoption support framework is implemented consistently across the country.

Children and Communities Secretary Carl Sargeant said:

“Adoption provides vulnerable children with a loving family and with the stability and security that all children deserve. I am delighted to provide the National Adoption Service with this funding to help strengthen adoption services to improve the life chances of these children.”

Minister for Social Services, Rebecca Evans, said:

“Ensuring adopted children and their families get the support they need to adjust to their new lives is vitally important. This funding, which will support life journey champions and ensure that the new adoption support framework is delivered consistently across Wales, will help to make a positive difference to the lives of adopted children and their families.”

Welcoming today’s announcement, Suzanne Griffiths, director of operations for the National Adoption Service for Wales, said:

“This year’s Adoption Week celebrates brothers and sisters, and this new funding is very timely for that campaign.

“With 62% of children currently waiting for families being part of a sibling group of 2 or more, it has never been more important to recruit adopters able to keep brothers and sisters together.

“Alongside that grant, the recurring funding will enable us to

continue to improve adoption support services across Wales and ensure that every child in Wales placed for adoption will have good quality life journey work.

“This new funding will enable us to fundamentally review and strengthen important aspects of the adoption journey.”

Changes to early entry exams announced – Kirsty Williams

An independent review by Qualifications Wales has found:

- The continued widespread use of early and multiple entry at GCSE poses risks to students and to the system, which are not easily justified.
- The practice encourages a “teaching the test” approach at the cost of wider subject knowledge.
- More than £3.3m was spent by schools on early entry in the last academic year.

Qualifications Wales concluded that they are “concerned about the extensive and growing use of early and multiple entry.”

In response the Education Secretary has announced that, from summer 2019, only a pupil’s first entry to a GCSE examination will count in their school’s performance measures. The current policy allows schools to count the best grade from multiple sittings.

Kirsty Williams said:

“The changes I am announcing today, based on Qualification Wales’ findings, will ensure that the interests of pupils are always put first.

“I am concerned that pupils who had the potential to get an A*, A or a B at the end of a two year course end up having to settle for a C. Too often this is because they take their exam early and are not re-entered again. I want every child to reach their full potential in school. Early entry must only be for the minority of pupils who will benefit.

“GCSEs are designed to be sat after two years of teaching, not one. These changes will ensure our young people access a broad and balanced curriculum, and focus in on what’s best for our children and young people.”

JMC crucial opportunity to re-set relationship with Devolved Administrations – Mark Drakeford

The Finance Secretary will look to use the reconvening of the Committee as a chance to engage constructively in the development of the UK negotiating position for leaving the EU.

Ahead of the meeting, the Finance Secretary said:

“Brexit has far-reaching implications for all parts of the UK – that is why we need to build a wide-based consensus. Today’s meeting is an opportunity to re-set the approach and actively involve the devolved administrations in the development of the negotiating position for leaving the EU.

“We have been clear that we are willing to work constructively together so we get the best deal for all parts of the UK. Earlier this summer, I wrote jointly with the Scottish Government to David Davis, setting out a number of ways we can make these committee meetings work better so that the JMC can meet its original remit.

“We have set out our vision for a post Brexit Wales in our White Paper Securing Wales future – we want to use today’s meeting to ensure Wales’ interests are prioritised.

“With a crucial decision due this week by the European Council on the next phase of talks, it is imperative that the UK Government involves and works with us to build a broad consensus on how Britain will look post-Brexit.”

New rules to ensure rented homes are fit for human habitation

Section 91 of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 places an obligation on a landlord to ensure the property they rent is fit for human habitation at the start of and during the length of the new occupation contract. The regulations set out the considerations a landlord must make in determining

whether a property is fit for human habitation. These include damp and mould growth, noise, sanitation and drainage.

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- the presence of a working smoke alarm
- the presence of a working carbon monoxide alarm
- the requirement for electrical safety testing, at least every five years.

Communities and Children's Secretary, Carl Sargeant said:

"Quality homes are crucial to people's well-being. We all know poor living conditions affect a person's physical and mental health. Poor housing conditions such as overcrowding, damp, and cold have been linked to respiratory diseases as well as illnesses such as eczema and hypothermia.

"Housing should go beyond putting a roof over people's heads. Everyone should be entitled to live in an environment that is as safe and healthy as possible. There is a need for us to address poor housing conditions, alongside our ambition to raise standards generally.

"The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 replaces various, complex pieces of existing legislation with one clear legal framework. This includes the landlord's duty, within the Act, to ensure a dwelling is fit for human habitation."

[Microbeads ban in Wales – Consultation to go live on Monday](#)

Following a previous UK-wide consultation, which revealed overwhelming support for a ban, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs agreed to implement such a move in Wales, through Welsh secondary legislation.

The twelve-week consultation proposes a commencement date for the ban of 30th June 2018. The Welsh Government will work with the Welsh Local Government Association with a view to using Trading Standards as the relevant

enforcement authority.

Lesley Griffiths said:

“Litter is a major issue for our seas. I am pleased we, along with the rest of the UK, are taking positive action to reduce the amount of plastic which ends up in our oceans.

“Although we do not believe the use of microbeads is widespread among manufacturers in Wales, the purpose of this consultation, in addition to raising awareness of the issue, is to ensure the legislation does not disadvantage Welsh businesses in any way.

“The proposed commencement date of 30th June is, I believe, sensible as it provides businesses long enough to prepare for a ban and it gives us a realistic timescale to draft and introduce legislation which is fit for purpose and future-proof.

“We are extremely proud Wales has the third best recycling rate in the world. We still have some way to go, though, before we achieve our ultimate aim of becoming a zero waste country.

“This ban is part of a package of measures we are considering to reduce waste and tackle the damage created by plastic pollution. We are also examining the possibility of implementing an Extended Producer Responsibility scheme, where producers take responsibility for the waste they produce, and a tax on disposable plastic is one of four new tax proposals we have identified as being worthy of further consideration.

“All of these measures have the potential to make a positive contribution to protect the marine environment. It is timely we plan to introduce a microbeads ban in 2018; which is Wales’ Year of the Sea.”

The consultation on a ban on the manufacture and sale of cosmetics and personal care products containing plastic microbeads will be available on the [Welsh Government’s website](#) from Monday 16th October 2017.