

Local Government Settlement to help the vulnerable and protect key public services

The provisional local government settlement also includes a £1.8 million funding floor to ensure no authority has to manage a reduction of more than 1% next year.

This means, that after adjusting for transfers, core funding for local government in 2018-19 will reduce by 0.5% compared to this year.

In order to protect key public services, the 2018-19 settlement allocates an additional £62 million in 2018-19 for schools and £42 million for social services in 2018-19.

This will ensure that the Welsh Government's assumed share of core spending on schools and social services remains at the same level as 2017-18.

General capital funding for 2018-19 will also remain at £143 million.

Other key areas of the 2018-19 settlement include an additional £6 million for homelessness prevention, on top of the £6 million provided in 2017-18.

Alongside the settlement, £600,000 will be provided to support local government in bringing an end to charging for child burials. This builds on positive steps already taken by many councils in Wales and puts in place a fair and consistent approach across the country.

The indicative settlement for 2019-20 shows a reduction of 1.5% reflecting further reductions in the budget available to the Welsh Government. Key public services will continue to be protected.

In 2019-20 the funding provided by the Welsh Government will mean its assumed share of core spending on schools will rise by a further £46 million, with funding continuing to be prioritised within a tighter overall settlement.

The assumed share of core spending on social services will see a further increase in 2019-20 to £73 million reflecting – even within ever-sharper budget constraints – the Welsh Government's recognition of social care as a sector of national strategic importance.

Work also continues in bringing grants into the local government Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and combining some smaller grants. This increases the flexibility for local authorities and reduces the administrative burden associated with grant funding for both authorities and Welsh Government.

The Cabinet Secretary also today published an update on reforming wider local government finance to ensure it meets future needs.

Announcing the provisional settlement, Mark Drakeford said:

“Last year I told local authorities to prepare for the tougher times and harder choices that lay ahead as the flawed and failed policy of austerity continues to hit Wales hard.

“My priority, using a formula we have agreed with local government, is to try and protect councils from the worst of the cuts passed on to us by the UK Government. I think this is reflected in the settlement for 2018-19.

“We have acted to protect funding for key public services such as schools and social care while also recognising the pressures that exist in areas such as homelessness prevention.

“If the Chancellor of the Exchequer follows our advice and does not proceed with cuts in the Autumn Budget then my first priority will be to look again at the cuts we have been forced to make in 2019-20.

“Next year’s settlement might be difficult. We have done all we can to make it manageable. Councils must now use this time to plan ahead and ensure that funding goes to the services and people who need it the most.”

[Women have their say on maternity services in Wales](#)

Funded by the Welsh Government, the survey explores women’s experiences of pregnancy and birth in Wales.

Midwives and women from the local user forums in all the health boards across Wales will meet in Cardiff City Hall to listen to the findings and to debate how services could be enhanced to respond to women’s views.

The survey, which closed in April this year, aimed to evaluate women’s views of antenatal services and how current service provisions can prepare women for labour, birth and parenting. It will also help develop a shared vision for the future of midwifery led services based on the findings.

3,968 women from all over Wales completed the full survey and represented all age groups, ranging from first time mothers, to those who have had several births.

The survey found that women would like;

- To build relationships with knowledgeable, compassionate and kind midwives, to not only make women feel safe but enabling them to trust the information given to them;
- More information about the birthing options available to them, so that they can decide where to give birth, not health professionals;
- Improved access to classes that adequately prepare them for birth;
- To have their choices respected, wherever they give birth.

Chief Nursing Officer for Wales, Professor Jean White said:

“The needs of the mother and family must be at the heart of care provision within maternity services in Wales, to ensure that pregnancy and childbirth is a safe and positive experience, where women feel comfortable and confident in their decisions.

“This survey is a step towards developing and strengthening this important relationship between midwife and mother.”

Vaughan Gething, Cabinet Secretary for Health Well-Being and Sport said:

“Pregnancy and childbirth are very personal experiences; therefore it’s important that women are given the opportunity to feedback on the care and advice they received during that time.

“I’m confident that the results of the ‘Your Birth We Care’ survey announced today will take maternity services in Wales to the next level, ensuring women and families feel empowered to make informed decisions about their antenatal care and birth plans during this time.”

[Cabinet Secretary joins Big Issue sellers on Cardiff streets](#)

The Cabinet Secretary spent an hour selling The Big Issue outside Costa on Queen Street, while Bethan Jenkins AM, who invited him to take part in a selling challenge, sold the magazine outside Burger King.

Vendors buy The Big Issue magazine for £1.25 and sell it for £2.50, making each seller a ‘micro-entrepreneur’ who is working, not begging. Since 1991, the magazine has helped over 92,000 vendors earn £115 million. There are currently around 1500 vendors across the UK, who earned a total of £5.5 million last year. Currently, the magazine is read by an estimated 379,195 people across the UK and circulates 82,294 copies every week.

In the Welsh Government draft budget, published last week, a further £20m was announced to help tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over the next two financial years. This follows the recent announcement of an additional £2.6m to tackle the issue during this financial year.

Mr Sargeant said:

“Selling The Big Issue has been a very interesting and valuable experience. It has given me an insight into some of the challenges the vendors face as well as the kindness of the public. The magazine has offered vendors the opportunity and support to change their lives and get off the streets.

“Homelessness can have a devastating effect on people’s lives. Tackling it is a priority for this government, which is why we have announced a further £20m to tackle the issue over the next two years and why we have protected the budget for Supporting People which plays a very important role in preventing homelessness and helping rough sleepers off the streets.”

[Welsh Government to consult on discounted bus travel for 16-24 year olds](#)

The consultation will encourage and consider views from interested individuals, groups and organisations across Wales and will look at how best to facilitate bus use amongst 16-24 year olds. It will last until the 4 January 2018.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, said:

“It’s absolutely vital that those who stand to gain from a future discounted travel scheme are at the heart of any decision we make.

“When I announced the continuation of My Travel pass scheme in February, I was clear that we’d look to consult widely on what a future offering should look like and I’m delighted to announce that this will be launched on Tuesday.

“I’ve been particularly keen to explore what appetite there is for extending the age of discounted travel up to 24 year olds, potentially allowing us to help more young people make the most of bus travel across Wales.

“Based on the outcome of this consultation, a new scheme for young people will then be introduced in April 2018 – one that best reflects the needs and preferences of our young people and helps further boost bus travel as an option.”

The full details of the Welsh Government’s consultation will be released on Tuesday.

Boost for red meat export plans announced

With the impending departure of the UK from the European Union and the uncertainty over the terms of access to key markets post-2019, the Welsh red meat industry faces significant challenges. Most of the challenges lie in prioritising the maintenance of existing export markets and the development of new ones.

The Cabinet Secretary, who flew out to Cologne to attend the trade exhibition to support our delegation of Welsh food and drink producers, said the funding for HCC is a direct response to these “significant” challenges.

Before leaving she said,

“It has never been more important to raise Wales’ international profile and promote our quality food and drink to the world.

“HCC indicate that only 5% of lamb produced in Wales is consumed in Wales, with up to 40% being exported outside the UK. It is estimated that over 90% of these exports are traded within the European Union single market, and worth over €200m per year.

“The Welsh red meat industry is heavily reliant on global export markets to achieve premium prices. Strong overseas demand uplifts farm gate prices and helps to balance supply and demand thus securing greater returns for the supply chain. This demonstrates the significance of export markets for the Welsh red meat industry.

“This £1.5m funding is a direct response to the significant challenge the industry faces with the uncertainty of future trading arrangements post-Brexit.

“We clearly need to continue to strengthen and future-proof our industry and it is vital that HCC continue to support the industry to maintain key markets in Europe, as well as look further afield.

“I am confident that this investment and the support to be delivered by HCC will help the industry to meet the challenges and opportunities over the next few years.

“International trade events like Anuga are great for our incredible Welsh companies looking to expand their business and provide invaluable exposure to exciting new markets. They are also helping us to achieve our shared vision of sustainably growing overall sales in the industry by 30% to £7bn by 2020.

“Over the past year alone, our food and drink exports have increased by 20%. This is increasing at a faster rate compared to the UK as a whole, which grew 9.5% over the same period.”