

£50m to further improve NHS waiting times in Wales

The investment will be targeted at making improvements to waiting times in elective surgery, diagnostics and therapies over and above those already planned.

Over the last five years, referrals to hospital-based services have increased by around 20% – from 1.07 million in the 12 months ending March 2013 to 1.27 million in the 12 months ending March 2016.

Increases in individual specialities are even higher, with gastroenterology referrals up 37% and orthopaedic referrals up 22% – where the NHS is now able to see and treat more conditions than previously.

But despite the increased demand for treatment, over the last two years, referral to treatment (RTT) and diagnostic waiting times performance has improved markedly.

The number of people waiting more than 36 weeks from referral to treatment has fallen from 28,654 in August 2015 to 12,354 in March 2017 and the number of people waiting more than eight weeks for a diagnostic test has fallen to 4,741, from a high of 28,000.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“The demand on the NHS in Wales, as well as across the other nations in the UK, continues to grow. This places additional pressures on the service to deliver timely care for patients.

“While I expect health boards to plan and deliver sustainable services that meet the needs of their local populations, the £50m investment I’m announcing today will help NHS Wales deal with the extra demand by further reducing waiting times in key areas – such as elective surgery, diagnostics and therapies.”

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“We know that our health service continues to experience increasing demands and pressures. We are providing this additional funding from our reserves so health boards across Wales can go above and beyond the plans they already have in place for this year to drive up performance and offer the best quality service for patients.”

Lesley Griffiths urges dairy farmers to take advantage of EU support

Milk recording is a way to receive impartial information on the productivity, health and fertility of a herd. The information on the performance of each cow helps farm businesses become more efficient, resilient and profitable.

The [Milk Recording Scheme](#) is voluntary but limited to one payment per Customer Reference Number (CRN). Depending on the number of applications received the payment will be at least £750 to farmers who have, or take out, a milk recording contract.

To qualify, farmers must have an existing, or take out a new milk recording contract and carry out individual cow milk recording samples a minimum of four times per year. These can be 'DIY' or assisted.

The EU is providing support for farm business in recognition of recent difficulties affecting dairy markets. In addition to Milk Recording, up to 1,000 Welsh farmers will benefit from separate 'benchmarking' support. Under this voluntary scheme participating farmers will receive £1,800 and a 'benchmark report' showing the strengths and weaknesses of their business.

Lesley Griffiths said:

"The dairy sector plays an important role in supporting our rural communities. As a pro-business Government, we are committed to supporting the long term viability and profitability of the dairy sector.

"We recognise the recent difficulties dairy farmers have experienced and I want Wales' farm businesses to make use of every avenue of support available. The application form for the Milk Recording scheme takes less than five minutes to complete and they can return it to us any time before 19 August."

Welsh Seafood makes waves at 'Food Oscars'

Great Taste, organised by the Guild of Fine Food, is the acknowledged

benchmark for fine food and drink. It has often been described as the 'Oscars' of the food world. This year, Welsh sauces, sea salt and, for the first time ever, Welsh shellfish all made the shortlist of producers who have received 3 stars, 2 stars and 1 star.

Cardigan Bay Seafood led the way, winning three awards, including two stars for their dressed crab and potted crab and a prestigious one star for their mackerel pate.

Anglesey sea salt company Halen Mon also won three awards with two stars for its Pure Sea Salt and a star each for its Vanilla Sea Salt and Umami Sea Salt products, whilst the island's Dylan's restaurant won two single star awards for its Salted Butterscotch Sauce and Thai Sweet Chilli Dipping Sauce.

Meanwhile, Pembrokeshire Beach Food bagged a one star award for its Dulce Sea Herbs range.

All four successful producers are important members of the [Welsh Seafood Cluster](#). Backed by the Welsh Government, the Cluster brings together ambitious Welsh fisheries businesses, enabling them to share best practice, receive expert advice and support to help them create jobs and achieve sustainable growth.

Lesley Griffiths said:

"Wales' seafood is an important part of our Food and Drink offer. We have big plans to grow the sector by 30% by 2020 and our seafood producers will play a key role in helping us achieve this ambitious target.

"It is great news four of our Welsh Seafood Cluster members have been successful at the "Food Oscars". This demonstrates our approach in developing and supporting Clusters is paying dividends. I would like to offer my personal congratulations to the four seafood producers along with all of our other wonderful food and drink products that have been recognised.

"As we try to attract new markets overseas this offers further proof that here in Wales we are forging a reputation for unique food and drink of the very highest quality."

Seafood Cluster manager Caroline Dawson said:

"A huge congratulations to the Seafood Cluster members for their Great Taste Awards, a wonderful achievement. I have been fortunate enough to sample the products and they are certainly award worthy and an inspiration to the industry."

Mandy Walters from Cardigan Bay Fish said:

“Who’d have thought it – a little Cardigan company winning a Great Taste Award, completely overwhelmed and still in shock. After attending a workshop organised through the seafood cluster I tried my luck and entered three products, I defied all odds and came home with three awards. I’m looking forward to seeing the stickers on my products.”

[New measures to support and promote the Welsh Language](#)

The Commissioner has played a crucial role in the implementation of the Welsh Language Standards system to ensure the availability of services in Welsh. The Welsh Government intends to expand and build on the work of the Commissioner to bring promotion and regulation of the Welsh language together to ensure the most efficient structures to achieve our vision of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

The Welsh Government’s White Paper, [‘Striking the right balance: proposals for a Welsh Language Bill’](#), outlines a range of proposals that aim to strike the right balance between promoting the Welsh language and regulating compliance with Welsh language duties.

Suggestions in the White Paper include:

- Establishing a Welsh Language Commission to organise and coordinate work to promote the Welsh language across all parts of Wales.
- Making it clearer to people, public bodies and businesses who they can turn to if they want to develop their use of the Welsh language.
- Giving greater clarity for Welsh speakers as to which services bodies must provide in Welsh, and to work to increase the use of those services.
- Helping bodies develop their capacity to deliver services in Welsh.
- Streamlining the processes involved in making and imposing Welsh Language Standards, and removing the bureaucracy involved in handling complaints of bodies’ non-compliance with Standards to ensure people receive a quick remedy.
- The Welsh Government to be responsible for imposing Standards on bodies through regulations and compliance notices. The Welsh Language Commission to be responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with the Standards.
- Removing the restrictions in the current legislation so Standards could be placed on any body, so long as it is within the Assembly’s power to do so.

Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language Alun Davies said:

“Earlier this year I asked organisations across Wales to give us their views on the current Welsh Language Measure and Standards, the responses show there is general support for the Standards and their positive impact on Welsh language services. It is important that we acknowledge the hard work of the Commissioner and her staff in rolling out the Standards to bodies across Wales.

“However, the responses also highlighted the bureaucracy around the Standards and led us to believe that we have not struck the right balance in our work to promote the Welsh language on the one hand, and regulate Welsh language services on the other.

“These proposals in the White Paper reflect what we were told. We want to refocus our efforts on promotion and make changes to the way the Welsh Language Standards system works to make sure it is as efficient and effective as possible in giving people rights to use Welsh. I believe the Welsh Language Commission will be a powerhouse for achieving both these aims.

“I will be looking to make improvements to the Standards process whilst we agree the future direction of policy and prepare the necessary legislation to enact it. As I set out in my statement of 19 July I remain committed to the roll out of Standards and will be laying Standards regulations for health bodies before the end of the year. The Commissioner will continue to play an instrumental role in delivering this work until any new arrangements are in place.

“Today, in announcing the White Paper, I am beginning a period of public consultation which will run for 12 weeks until the last day of October. I will be holding events in September and October. I hope that the proposals will stimulate an energetic debate to help inform the next steps.

“A little under a month since I published our strategy on reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050, the proposals in this White Paper are another step on the journey to delivering our ambitious vision for the Welsh language.”

New Sport Wales board members appointed

Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans has appointed Pippa Britton as Vice Chair of Sport Wales. She is the current Chair of Disability Sport Wales and a former international athlete.

The Minister has also appointed four new members to the board – Ashok Ahir, Ian Bancroft, Christian Malcolm and Alison Thorne. They will commence their term of office on 1 October 2017 for a three year period.

In addition, the Minister has re-appointed Richard Parks and Samar Wafa as members of the Board. Their three year term of office will begin on 1 September 2017.

The appointments have been made in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

Sport Wales is the national organisation responsible for developing and promoting sport and physical activity in Wales, and is the main adviser on sporting matters to the Welsh Government. It is also responsible for distributing National Lottery funds to both elite and grassroots sport in Wales.

Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans said:

“I’m very pleased to appoint Pippa Britton as the new Vice Chair of Sport Wales, and Ashok Ahir, Ian Bancroft, Christian Malcolm and Alison Thorne as members of the board. I’m also pleased to re-appoint Richard Parks and Samar Wafa as members of the board.

“Together, they bring a wealth of experience of working with under-engaged communities to inspire and increase participation levels, as well as an understanding of the needs of elite athletes. I am grateful to the new members for accepting the invitation to serve on the board. I am also grateful to those out-going members for their service.

“I am confident the board has the expertise and experience required to support me and the staff of Sport Wales in taking forward our ambitions for a more active and successful nation. I look forward to working with them.”

Lawrence Conway, Chair of Sport Wales added:

“I am delighted to welcome our five new Board members. They join Sport Wales at an important time as we take forward the development of our new corporate strategy. The members will strengthen the Board with their wealth of knowledge and experience and provide invaluable insight and perspective to the Board’s deliberations. I would like to thank the outgoing Board members for their commitment and valued contributions in ensuring the success of sport in Wales.”