

100% business rate relief to continue to flow for community hydro projects

The continuation of the grant scheme will enable eligible projects to retain the maximum possible benefit for their local area enabling them to re-invest into their local community.

The scheme was originally launched in February 2018 to mitigate the impact of new valuations for non-domestic rates which came into force on 1 April 2017. The new valuations will apply until 2021.

Almost 50 hydropower projects were supported last year, including seven community owned projects. Up to £308,000 is available towards the continuation of the grant scheme in 2019-20 which also includes support to cap the increase in business rates for non-community owned hydropower projects (to 10% or £1,000 where there was no previous liability).

The scheme is application based and hydro projects will be able to apply for a grant towards their 2019-20 rates liability. Community energy groups can also access a range of support and funding through the Welsh Government Energy Service.

The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“I am very pleased to announce the continuation of this grant scheme of support for hydropower projects. The grant scheme provided valuable support for almost 50 hydro projects last year.

“Renewable energy is a key part of our vision for a more sustainable future for Wales. Community owned energy projects provide significant local benefit to the communities they are located in and have been identified in the National Strategy, Prosperity for All, as a sector which should be supported.”

One of the community projects supported through the scheme last year was the Ynni Ogwen Community Hydropower Project based in Bethesda in Gwynedd. It is a social venture under the ownership of three Community Councils – Bethesda, Llandygai and Llanllechid. The turbines used in the project capture the power from the flow of the Ogwen River and the energy generated goes directly into the National Grid.

Dr Paul Rowlinson- Founder Director of the Ynni Ogwen project said:

“The Welsh Government’s support for community hydro schemes towards the cost of business rates has been a great help to us, saving us £14,000 over our first two years and ensuring that the hard work of our volunteers in setting up the scheme has borne fruit. I am very pleased that this support will continue after 1st April. This will give us great confidence as we consider whether we can proceed with our second scheme next year.”

Gideon Carpenter, Senior Hydropower Adviser at Natural Resources Wales, said:

“We’ve been responding to a large increase in applications for small hydropower schemes in recent years.

“In 2010 there were 57 licences for existing schemes in Wales but since then we have issued another 301 licences – many for community schemes – and are in the process of reviewing another 20.

“Well designed and operated schemes are a great example of how we can harness the natural resources available to us for the benefit of local communities while making sure we protect the river environment.”

“We are committed to working with the hydropower sector to help the right development in the right place, contributing to meeting Wales’ targets for renewable energy while protecting the river environment.”

Lesley Griffiths added:

“Last year we set ambitious targets for energy generation in Wales, including targets around community and local ownership, to ensure we capture the benefits for Wales from the transition to a low carbon energy system.

“I also set an expectation for all new renewable energy projects to include at least an element of local ownership from 2020. This will help retain wealth and provide real benefit to communities.”

Applications will be accepted from early April. Further details will be made available on the WG website in due course.

Next Stop: Cardiff Parkway

The station, which would be part of the wider South Wales Metro, will offer a turn-up-and-go service around 8 minutes away from Cardiff or Newport, with the proximity of the park and ride facility to the M4 motorway also resulting in a reduction the number of car journeys into our city centres. As part of the new partnership, the Welsh government will become a shareholder and investor in South Wales Infrastructure Limited, a joint venture with Investec and the Roberts, with Welsh Government and Investec providing equal funding for the next phase of the development.

The objective is to submit a planning application around summer time this year, with construction work then expected to begin in 2020. The ambition is for the station to be served by trains to Swansea, the Cardiff Capital Region, London, Bristol and Birmingham.

Economy and Transport Minister, Ken Skates said:

“This is an exciting project which we at Welsh Government are very pleased to be a part of. It’s an excellent example of Government and the private sector coming together to look at how best we can deliver better rail infrastructure whilst also creating high quality jobs. As well as the obvious day to day benefits for commuters, this will also help to manage congestion and reduce air and noise pollution in central Cardiff whilst dramatically improving access by public transport for those in St Mellons area. It will also serve as an important facility for the increasing number of major events being attracted to our capital city and the surrounding area. It really is a development of huge potential.”

Nigel Roberts, Chairman of South Wales Infrastructure Limited said:

“We are delighted to be working closely with Welsh Government on this transformational project alongside Investec who have shown such confidence in this major investment into Wales that will have such a positive impact for the capital region. Public Transport only works when you make it the transport of choice and we will make this a great customer experience. We acknowledge the enthusiasm for the project from Network Rail and all of the wider stakeholders.”

David van der Walt, CEO, Investec added:

“We are convinced that the development will become a key hub in the regional economy and an important piece of the civic fabric. This endorsement of the strategic significance of the scheme by our new

partner is a great boost for the project team to raise the tempo and help the company realise its vision and deliver its benefits without delay. Investec welcomes Welsh government to the joint venture.”

Welsh project to support schools in Uganda to overcome stigma around sexual reproductive health

Teams4U a Welsh based organisation has been awarded the Wales for Africa Multi Year Grant to facilitate the project and will use a peer-to-peer training approach, building on previous work in the area.

Teachers and nurses from Wales will visit the schools twice a term to develop lesson plans and model teaching methods. Parents will also be involved and meetings will be held with Parent Teacher Associations.

Establishing a sexual health curriculum will help to challenge stigma concerning menstruation and increase education on menstrual health (MHM) and sexual reproductive health (SRH) and create better links between schools and their local health clinics. It will also help to combat school absenteeism related to menstrual health. Promoting access to health services, the project aims to benefit approximately 18,000 children.

The project is timely as the Ugandan government developed the first Sexual Education Framework in May 2018. Teams 4U volunteers will conduct a 2-day seminar for 100 teachers from the participating schools on the Ugandan Sexual Education Framework and how to apply this to the classroom and school curriculum.

In Wales, Teams4U will facilitate a new part time role to work with Welsh schools, colleges and Universities to develop school links and contribute expertise and volunteering time to the project. Targets include engaging with at least 20 primary schools, contributing to the global citizenship education of an estimated 600 pupils in North Wales.

The grant scheme, administrated by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), enables community groups and organisations throughout Wales to access funding for small-scale Wales-Africa projects that have a positive impact in Africa and at home in Wales.

Eluned Morgan, the Minister for International Relations and Welsh Language, said:

“Our Wales for Africa grants programme transforms the lives of tens of thousands of people from across this beautiful and diverse continent every year. It’s estimated this Teams 4U grant will benefit 18,000 children – a tremendous number of soon-to-be adults who will be more informed, better educated and healthier thanks to Welsh Government funding.

“It’s important we recognise the mutual benefits from supporting projects abroad and I encourage groups and organisations from across the country to bid for funding so they too can benefit the lives of people here and in Africa – Welsh support, past and future, truly makes a difference.”

The next Wales for Africa main grants for applications between £5,000 and £15,000 will open in Spring 2019.

[First Minister: Take no deal off the table](#)

The First Minister will today say that the Prime Minister must show flexibility to break the deadlock in Parliament instead of presenting a “tweaked” version of a deal which has already been completely rejected by MPs.

Mark Drakeford will warn that while the UK government refuses to take ‘no deal’ off the table, the UK faces an uncomfortably high-risk of a no deal Brexit by default.

In response to these unprecedented circumstances, today’s government business in the National Assembly has been amended to make way for a series of emergency statements on the impact of a no deal outcome on Wales and the work that is underway to prepare for this.

Ministers will outline the real risks of a no deal Brexit on health, the economy, transport and farming which include:

- concerns about the future supply of radioisotope, which is essential for diagnostic and therapeutic use by our NHS
- the risk of severe disruption to freight transport, with knock-on effects for businesses and consumers
- tariffs and non-tariff barriers on exports to the EU which would damage our manufacturing and agriculture sectors, with sales of processed foods attracting tariffs of around 15% and other products exceeding 50%, with red meat attracting particularly high tariffs, if we move to WTO rules.

Speaking ahead of this afternoon's statement in the Senedd, the First Minister said:

"Last week the Prime Minister's Brexit deal was defeated, and the scale of that defeat provided the clearest proof yet that her deal is dead. Yet the Prime Minister continues stubbornly to push ahead with only a tweaked version of her failed deal.

"No UK government should be capable of consciously allowing a catastrophic no deal outcome, and the Prime Minister must take this option off the table and extend Article 50. This would allow time for the UK government to change direction and commit to re-entering negotiations with the EU to secure a Brexit that protects jobs and the economy."

[Further work on case for investment in North Wales rail infrastructure](#)

The supplementary work which has been commissioned by the Welsh Government follows the publication of The Case for Investment by Professor Mark Barry which identified a vision and objectives for improvements to the North Wales Main Line and the Wrexham-Merseyside line following extensive engagement with stakeholders.

The interventions would widen access to employment across North Wales, Cheshire and Liverpool by improving rail services and enhancing rail connectivity from North Wales to international gateways at Manchester and Liverpool airports.

The next step is further development, refinement and assessment of the packages identified in the Case for Investment such as the modernisation of the North Wales Main Line from Holyhead to Crewe including line speed improvements, integration with HS2 at Crewe, increased frequencies, and park & ride and bus integration at several stations along the Wrexham-Merseyside borderlands line.

This will complement the work being done by the UK Government, who are responsible for funding and delivering rail enhancements in Wales, to develop enhancements across Wales following the cancellation of electrification to Swansea.

Ken Skates said:

"Development and delivery of an ambitious and equitable programme

of rail infrastructure improvements in North Wales needs to happen at pace and this is a matter I have previously made very clear to the Secretary of State.

“Today’s announcement is another important step in the right direction and a good example of the action the Welsh Government is taking. The further development of cases for rail enhancements in North Wales will include identifying requirements, timescales, scope and costs for future outline business case developments and I am pleased that Transport for Wales will be carrying out this stage of work.

“North Wales’ connectivity with economic hubs across the border is becoming more and more important and this will only increase following Brexit.

“Reducing journey times, ensuring better access to airports and improving rail network resilience in North Wales to accommodate future demand are just some of the issues which will be considered as part of the next stage of work.

“We are determined to see a real step change in our rail infrastructure which is deliverable for the benefit of passengers. I urge the UK Government to get on board with our aspirations.”