

## Carl Sargeant welcomes Help to Buy success

The majority of homes purchased through Help to Buy Wales were to first time buyers, accounting for 75 per cent of total completions.

Communities and Children's Secretary Carl Sargeant has welcomed the figures, saying the Welsh Government's ambitious housing programme is about providing people with affordable, safe, warm and secure homes in sustainable communities.

Carl Sargeant said:

"I am pleased that our Help to Buy Wales investment has given many first time buyers the help they need to get their foot on the property ladder.

"The scheme has also helped provide the Welsh housing market with essential momentum and created valuable jobs.

"Last year we announced we would invest up to £290m in a second phase of the scheme to support the construction of more than 6,000 homes which will be part of our target of an additional 20,000 homes during this term of government. This reflects the success of the scheme in providing a route into more affordable home ownership, especially for first-time buyers. It has played a huge role in generating confidence within the housing sector and supporting private housing development."

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## Avian Influenza Prevention Zone to end on 30 April

The Cabinet Secretary has taken this decision based on an updated veterinary risk assessment conducted by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). However, the temporary suspension on gatherings of some species of birds will remain as additional evidence is considered.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"Last December I declared the whole of Wales an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone in response to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

H5N8 outbreaks being reported across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. This was a precautionary measure to minimise the risk of poultry and other captive birds being infected by wild birds.

“We have been closely monitoring this situation and APHA has been preparing updated outbreak risk assessments. The most recent evidence-based veterinary risk assessment concluded there remains a Low – Medium risk of resident wild waterfowl being infected with H5N8. Meanwhile, the exposure assessment risk for poultry farms is Low, but heightened, and will depend on the biosecurity measures on each farm. This level is consistent with November 2016, when disease was present across Europe in sporadic outbreaks and occasional wild bird findings were being reported.

“Therefore, I am pleased to announce, following the expiry of the current Avian Influenza Prevention Zone on 30 April, this will not be replaced. Whilst I am sure this is welcome news it is important to remember avian influenza remains a constant and real threat to our poultry and other captive birds.”

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop added:

“I would like to stress the need for all keepers of poultry and other domestic captive birds to remain alert for signs of the disease and to contact their private veterinarians if they have any concerns. If anyone suspects disease they should contact the Animal and Plant Health Agency immediately.

“It is essential all keepers maintain effective biosecurity practices, such as considering and updating self assessment forms, cleansing and disinfecting all clothing, equipment and vehicles (using approved disinfectants) and implementing effective pest control measures to minimise the opportunities of contact between their birds and wild birds and wild life.

“We can all play a part in supporting the ongoing surveillance by reporting any findings of dead wild birds to the GB helpline on 03459 335577. In particular, any wild ducks, wild geese, swans, gulls or birds of prey and where more than five birds of any species are found dead in the same location. We must also ensure we all comply and respect the biosecurity measures put in place by poultry or other captive bird keepers.

“I would also like to take this opportunity to remind all poultry keepers with 50 birds or more they must register their flocks on the Poultry Register and strongly encourage all poultry keepers, including those with fewer than 50 birds, to register. This will ensure they can be contacted immediately, via email or text update, in an avian disease outbreak enabling them to protect their flock at the earliest opportunity.

“If poultry or other captive birds are being let outside after a prolonged period of being housed I would recommend keepers consult their private veterinarian on the health impacts.”

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## Summit to ensure Welsh-medium textbooks

The special event will address concerns about the supply and creation of Welsh-medium and English-medium text books for the new created in Wales qualifications and the new curriculum that is currently being developed.

It will bring together representatives from the Welsh Government, WJEC, Qualifications Wales, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, educational consortia, CYDAG and others to look at the issue of providing the right text books and materials for Wales’ education system.

The summit will look at:

- The current situation for Welsh-medium resources.
- Identify the challenges and issues for the future for both Welsh and English textbooks to meet the needs of reformed curriculum and qualifications.
- Provide an opportunity to propose ideas for the way forward.

Kirsty Williams said:

“We are in the midst of massive change in Welsh education as we develop new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

“I have been concerned when told of the lack of availability of Welsh textbooks. I do not expect children who do their exams through the medium of Welsh to be disadvantaged in any way. We have worked with WJEC to look at this issue and there are now new practices which have helped to reduce the difference in timescales between the availability of textbooks in English and Welsh.

“However, I am clear that these are merely temporary solutions for the current reform of qualifications. I am not happy with the current situation. This event brings together the people who can make a difference and help come up with long-term solutions.”

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## Overnight visitor figures show a strong picture for Welsh tourism

The Economy Secretary was responding to the latest Wales Tourism Accommodation Occupancy statistics, which show that room occupancy for guest houses and bed and breakfasts in Wales between March 2016 and February 2017 stood at 40%, a 2 percentage point increase on the previous 12 months.

Meanwhile occupancy rates for self catering units increased by 4 percentage points in the same period to 55%, while hostel bed space increased by 3 percentage points to 51%.

At 67% the occupancy rate for hotel rooms was the highest of all but down slightly on the figures for the previous 12 months.

Ken Skates said:

“These latest occupancy statistics show a strong picture for tourism in Wales, and continue to reflect the success we have experienced over the last two years.

“Figures for the first 9 months of 2016 show a substantial increase of 12% in the number of overseas visitors coming to Wales and a 9% increase in the amount they spend while they are here. We have also seen a significant increase in the number of day visitors coming to Wales.

“In what is an extremely competitive market place, tourism in Wales is in a strong position. We’ve had two record breaking years and our aim is to sustain growth – being aware that global events and competition will mean that not every year will be a record breaking one. The overall picture – taking into account tourism day visits, international visitors as well GB overnights visits – indicates that Wales saw an increase of almost 16% in overall tourism volumes during the three quarters of 2016, which includes the important summer peak.”

“We are working hard to sustain these levels of success in 2017 through continued investment in marketing and product development. Our Year of Legends 2017 has also got off to a great start with Wales being named as one of the top must-visit destinations globally from the likes of Lonely Planet Trip Advisor, Wanderlust and Rough Guides.”

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## Welsh seafood producers to cast their nets far and wide at global showcase

The event, which takes place in Brussels between 25th and 27th April, provides an ideal platform to showcase high-quality Welsh seafood and gives Welsh producers a valuable opportunity to engage with over 30,000 buyers and suppliers from over 150 countries.

The important work of the Welsh Seafood Cluster will also be highlighted at Seafood Expo Global 2017. The cluster brings together fishermen, fishmongers and aquaculture businesses that have an ambition to grow and is dedicated to adding value to fish and shellfish caught or farmed on Welsh shores.

Joining Rebecca Evans at the event will be Welsh Seafood Cluster businesses the Lobster Pot, Extra Mussels, Bangor Mussel Producers, WM Shellfish and South Quay Shellfish.

Looking forward to her attendance at Seafood Expo Global 2017, the Minister said:

“We all know Wales has a wide range of world class food and drink producers who are really making their mark on the world stage. Our seafood is a hugely important part of our food and drink offer.

“The seafood industry makes a significant contribution to the Welsh economy. The latest figures show Aquaculture is worth £17.2M and the shellfish caught off the Welsh coast is worth £10.6M. The Seafood Cluster continues to grow in strength and ambition and I am sure it will play an important part in increasing the value of the sector even further.

“Following the UK’s vote to leave the European Union it is more important than ever we continue to have a presence at trade events like Seafood Expo. By engaging with buyers and suppliers from around the world, our producers have the opportunity to cast their nets far and wide as they try and attract potential new customers and access new markets.

“We are already more than half way towards achieving our target to grow the Food and Drink industry in Wales by 30% to £7 billion by the year 2020. I hope attending events like this can provide an international platform to showcase the very best Wales has to offer, as well as raise the profile of our brand.”