

First Minister's Christmas message

2018 has given us much to celebrate – from the events to mark the 70th anniversary of our NHS, to Geraint Thomas' extraordinary Tour de France win. I'm also proud of the role we played in the poignant ceremonies in Wales, France and Belgium to commemorate 100 years since the end of the First World War.

It is unavoidable to look back over the course of the last year without reflecting on the UK government's failure to secure an acceptable withdrawal deal to leave the European Union.

With less than 100 days until the UK leaves the EU, we are heading into the new year with a no deal scenario – which would have a particularly severe impact on Wales – firmly on the table and with Parliament and the UK government at deadlock.

Against this background of uncertainty, the Welsh Government will continue to do everything we can to protect Welsh jobs, support our economy and safeguard public services through these difficult times.

It's important we all recognise the role we can play in unifying our country and avoid further divisions – whether this is in our communities, or even within our own family.

The festive period is a time for family, friends and goodwill. My thoughts are with those who are less fortunate, from the too many who will sleep rough this Christmas to those across the world who face danger daily due to ongoing conflict.

I want to extend a sincere thank you to our dedicated health, social care, emergency service staff and volunteers who give up their Christmas to keep our services running. Your commitment and hard-work is truly admirable.

As my first month as First Minister draws to a close, I remain conscious of the opportunities and the responsibility which comes with this position. I look forward to working with my new Cabinet to deliver for the people of Wales.

I hope you all have a very happy Christmas – Nadolig Llawen i chi i gyd!

Rediscover Wales in 2019

2018 was a celebration of Wales' coastline and routes to the sea and during Year of the Sea Wales successfully hosted the Volvo Ocean Race for the first

time; became the world's first refill nation; and a celebration of Welsh language and Culture was held at the Eisteddfod in Cardiff Bay. A variety of events were also held across Wales from the Gower Beach Sculpture Festival to the creation of a giant 20-metre long sea-faring monster from Cardigan and the Keep Wales Tidy All Wales Beach Clean. 2018 was also a year for immersive coastal theatrical productions with National Theatre Wales' The Tide Whisperer and Marc Rees's Now the Hero/Nawr yr Arwr.

Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

"I'd like to thank the industry for their support during the Year of the Sea as well as during the previous themed years. By coming together and working in partnership Wales has a strong voice – in a very competitive marketplace. We know that our themed year campaigns are generating over £350m a year in the economy and that the 2018 television advert, featuring Luke Evans, was positively received by our target audiences.

"And now we will embark on our Year of Discovery. In 2019 we want to encourage our visitors to discover Wales anew, to discover new parts of Wales and to try out enriching outdoor, adventure and cultural experiences across the country.

"Wales is full of hidden corners; as well as world-famous attractions. And so the challenge is set to visit places you have never been before; or to try something for the very first time. Go coastering or zip-lining; tick off more of Wales's 600 castles from your must-see list; or to visit one of our galleries or museums to learn something new about our past. Sain Ffagan's new £30 million redevelopment is a great place to start."

And as well as encouraging the people of Wales to discover new corners of our landscape, we're also encouraging international visitors to explore more of our country. [The Wales Way](#) (external link) – a trio of national touring routes with loops and detours of discovery www.thewalesway.com – was launched last year to help them on their way.

A multi-media international campaign on the theme of discovery will run throughout 2019, with activity planned in Wales, across the rest of UK, Ireland and international markets. The campaign will be on digital, television, on on-demand platforms, and in key travel hubs from January here in Wales – with the main marketing push across the rest of the UK taking place in March around the key holiday booking times.

Further events and activities are planned throughout the year – with more details to be announced early in 2019. The Deputy Minister will kick-start Year of Discovery 2019 with visits to west Wales on January 7th.

[New pelvic health co-ordinators for Wales](#)

The coordinators will work with a national pathway manager to implement improvements to pelvic health across Wales.

The work is led by the Women's Health Implementation Group (WHIG), set-up by the Welsh Government who have provided £1m a year for its work. The group have decided that the first year's funding will be spent on establishing a number of key posts to deliver some of the recommendations of the vaginal mesh and tape review.

Health Minister, Vaughan Gething, said:

"The WHIG has listened to concerns from the Mesh Survivors Group and has decided to appoint a national pathway manager to deliver the recommendations of the vaginal mesh and tape review. This will lead to the creation of a network of Pelvic Health and Well-being Coordinators within each health board. They will have a clinical background from an appropriate discipline, e.g. physiotherapy or pain management and will work with the national lead to deliver the required changes to local services.

"The group is also taking advice from patients and clinicians on how to achieve the consistent provision of translabial scans where they are appropriate across Wales.

"The group will now consider the recommendations from the report into endometriosis services in Wales produced by the Endometriosis Task and Finish Group."

The WHIG, chaired by Tracy Myhill, CEO of Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board, was established in May 2018 to oversee specific areas of women's health requiring urgent attention and improvement.

[New Chair of Transport for Wales announced](#)

Announcing the appointment, Ken Skates said:

“I wanted a leader of outstanding merit to oversee the transformation of our transport network, while holding the executive team at Transport for Wales (TfW) to account and ensuring it makes best use of public money and acts in the public interest.

“TfW’s Board will represent the communities it serves whilst expertly scrutinising and supporting the work of the company. It will ensure decisions are taken in the interest of the passengers and users of the transport networks it manages on our behalf.

“I want the most capable and committed talents to support our vision which sees Transport for Wales enabling a fully integrated transport network, with customers at its core

“I believe that in Scott Waddington I have secured someone of the highest calibre to build on the strong foundations which have already been set for Transport for Wales. With his long and successful career steering an iconic Welsh brand, and his previous commitment to public and collective service through his work with government and industry bodies Scott’s credentials are well matched to the needs of Transport for Wales.

“Scott’s excellent record in delivering customer services makes him the right choice for Transport for Wales as it begins to change the perception and experience of public transport in Wales.”

Mr Waddington recently stood down from his highly successful position of Chief Executive of the privately owned Welsh brewer and pub company, SA Brain.

Born and educated in Swansea, he completed an Economics and Accounting degree at Reading University. Joining SA Brains in 2001, he oversaw an increase in investment in the pub estate and an expansion of the drinks distribution business through acquisition across Wales. In 2011, Brains acquired the Coffee#1 chain of high street coffee stores which it has now expanded to nearly 100 stores through new locations across Wales and the West of England. During his time at Brains, it has grown to over 200 pubs and employs over 2500 people.

Chair of the CBI for Wales during 2010 and 2011, Scott was also Wales Commissioner to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills for five years from April 2012 and chaired the Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB). Currently Chair of the Cardiff Business Club, Scott has also sat on various hospitality industry bodies including the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) and the Independent Family Brewers of Britain (IFBB).

In his role as Chair for Transport for Wales, Scott will be responsible for leadership of the board and ensuring its effectiveness in all aspects of its role. He will be the link between the TfW Board and the Welsh Government, and will be responsible for setting the board’s agenda.

Transport Minister Ken Skates said:

“I congratulate Scott on his successful application and I’m delighted to welcome him to the post of Chair for Transport for Wales. He brings with him a wealth of experience and I have no doubt he will work to ensure that the needs of customers are central to everything which Transport for Wales does.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank the unsuccessful applicants who took the time to put themselves forward and invest the time and effort to apply and be considered. The competition was rigorous, and the calibre of candidates was strong. We are fortunate to be able to reach out to such talent in Wales.”

[Wales warns a ‘no deal’ Brexit would be a disaster](#)

Mark Drakeford will tell the Prime Minister she has a moral obligation to prevent the UK crashing out of the EU, which would have seismic repercussions for the whole of the Welsh economy and threaten jobs and businesses throughout Wales.

Wales’ new First Minister and new Brexit Minister Jeremy Miles are today attending a meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee in London, chaired by the Prime Minister.

Speaking ahead of the meeting, the First Minister said:

“A no deal Brexit would be a catastrophic failure on behalf of the UK Government. However, it is becoming clear the chaotic shambles around the Prime Minister’s deal on the table is moving us towards a position that will cause significant disruption, risking jobs and people’s livelihoods.

“We have been preparing for a no deal outcome as it has become increasingly apparent the UK Government was failing to negotiate an acceptable deal. We will be further intensifying our work to develop contingency plans.

“At my first Cabinet earlier this week, I asked all my Ministers to step up engagement with our partners in Wales as we move into the New Year. This will further shape our plans to prepare as much as we possibly can for a no deal outcome, including identifying areas for new investment to support preparation work.

"We cannot prepare Wales in isolation. We have been clear the UK Government must work with us if we are to secure the best possible deal for the whole of the UK."

Jeremy Miles added:

"It is impossible to defend the current state of the UK Government's Brexit negotiations. This is not what anyone voted for. I want to reassure people in Wales that we continue to put their interests front and centre at all times in our discussions with the UK Government.

"The time has come for the Prime Minister to accept she must change her approach and deliver the best possible outcome for all parts of the UK, instead of continuing to push ahead with a deal that wilfully ignores reality."