

Progress on plans to improve NHS dental services in Wales

Mr Gething said his target for the expansion of the contract reform programme had been exceeded and in addition 73 applications had been received for support from a new £1.5m innovation fund to develop services.

He said:

“We are escalating the roll-out across Wales of the reform of dental contracts to deliver a better service for NHS patients and improve oral health. The new system aims to make better use of skills in dental practice teams, better understanding of individual patient need and more emphasis on prevention.”

Initially 22 dental practices, across Wales, took part in the first stage of the reforms, which included new personalised plans to help patients make better choices to improve and maintain oral health themselves.

The Health Secretary added:

“Early evaluation of the first stage has been positive and we are now increasing the number of practices taking part. In July I asked health boards and the dental profession to support expansion of the reform programme at pace and for a minimum of 10% of dental practices to be taking part by October.

I am pleased to say that ambition has been achieved and indeed exceeded, with a total of 53 practices – one in eight of all practices in Wales – now actively participating. I now expect a minimum of 20% of dental practices to be taking part in each area from April 2019.

We have also received 73 applications for funding from the £1.5m innovation fund to test new ways of working in dental practices, improve skills and recruit more dental care professionals.

There is still unequal disease experience and unequal access to dental care across Wales. These reforms aim to tackle those inequalities and empower people to maintain and protect their own oral health.”

Over 95% of Basic Payments 2018 paid to farm businesses

This means over £213m has been paid into bank accounts of more than 14,700 Welsh farm businesses during the first week.

In response to the exceptionally hot and dry weather during the summer, the Cabinet Secretary introduced a BPS loan scheme to help farm businesses manage their cash flow and plan their finances, whilst their BPS claims were being processed.

The BPS loan, which closed for applications on 30 November, has seen an additional £23.1m paid to over 1,200 farm businesses this year.

Rural Payments Wales has also received cross border data from their counterparts in England, allowing the Welsh Government to process 2018 BPS claims to over 75% of Welsh cross border farms.

The BPS 2018 payment window opened on 3 December, and will run until 30 June 2019.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“I am pleased to confirm over 95% of farm businesses have been paid either their BPS payments or loan applications during the first payment week.

“The BPS loan, which I introduced in response to the hot and dry summer, has provided certainty to farmers whilst their BPS claims were processed and helped 1,200 farm businesses manage their cash flow and plan their finances.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone, including the industry, who have worked with my officials to introduce the BPS loan scheme and contributed to an excellent payment performance once again this year.

“This year, we have also seen a significant improvement with cross border farm payments compared to previous years. My officials are continuing to press the Rural Payments Agency in England for the remaining data and are working hard on processing the remaining BPS claims as soon as possible.

“I expect all but the most complex cases to be completed before the payment window closes next June.”

Housing conditions steadily improving in Wales

The Welsh Housing Conditions Survey 2017-18 collected information about the condition and energy efficiency of all types of occupied housing in Wales. The survey also revealed steady improvements in energy efficiency and safety in housing.

Energy efficiency and environmental performance is measured by the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP). Overall the average SAP rating across all housing tenures in Wales increased by 11 SAP points between 2008 – 2017-18 to 61, which is equivalent to an Energy Performance Certificate Band D. The private rented sector in Wales showed the biggest increase, with a rise of 13 SAP points.

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“It’s really encouraging to see that since the last survey, housing conditions have improved across all tenures in Wales. Housing is one of the Welsh Government’s strategic priorities; we want everyone to live in a home that meets their needs and supports a healthy, successful and prosperous life.

“The links between poor housing and poor health are well documented. We are investing £1.7bn in housing because it is an investment to tackle fuel poverty and to improve people’s health and wellbeing.

“This survey demonstrates clear improvements in the quality of homes in Wales. Across all tenures of housing there has been a reduction in the percentage of homes with structural defects and serious health and safety hazards and an improvement in energy efficiency.

“However, I want to ensure that we use this survey to effectively target resources to improve housing in Wales. We are currently examining options to help to reduce carbon emissions across existing Welsh homes and to build better housing for the future. Whilst this survey shows improvements, I am clear that there is more to do to reach our ambitious carbon reduction targets and to tackle fuel poverty.”

Work will continue on the Housing Conditions Evidence Programme to maximise the use of existing data and to consider options for a future Housing Conditions Survey.

International research leader to manage Wales' first Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility

The Welsh Government is investing £20m to develop the first phase of the facility, on Broughton in order to increase productivity, commercialisation, innovation and skills development across a range of sectors including Aerospace and Automotive.

The aim is to take business support to the next level in order to encourage and increase productive collaboration between industry, academic partners and entrepreneurs. It is predicted that the first phase of the new research facility could drive up Welsh GVA (gross value added) by as much as £4bn over 20 years.

Construction of the building located just off Chester Road is being led by Galliford Try and is now well underway. And with the AMRC now confirmed as the organisation that will operate the facility, and Airbus confirmed as the first tenant, it is set to get off to a strong start when doors officially open in 2019.

Economy Secretary Ken Sates said:

“The news that the AMRC will be managing Wales' first Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility on Deeside really is cause for celebration.

“The AMRC has a 15 year record of delivery and has long demonstrated that it has leading industry capability in the delivery of research, manufacturing support and partnership services.

“It has built up incredibly strong relationships with a range of partnerships, from global corporates through to local SMEs and supply chains, and it will play a vital role in developing sustainable, long term leading innovation and skills. This can only be good news for the future of advanced manufacturing here in Wales and for the regional and wider Welsh economy.”

The Economy Secretary also thanked the Deeside Enterprise Zone for their work in driving through the new facility which is key to the Board's strategic plan for the area.

Professor Keith Ridgway, Executive Dean of the AMRC, said:

“We share the Welsh Government’s bold ambition to enhance North Wales’ reputation for manufacturing excellence, creating secure, high-value jobs and wealth for the whole of Wales by acting as a magnet for inward investment.

“The new facility will bring the research and innovation talents and experience of the University of Sheffield AMRC to a new venture in a region rich in manufacturing history and opportunity.

“Our goal is to make the facility an open access research hub that will drive significant improvements in productivity, performance and quality not just in the aerospace sector but across the broader advanced manufacturing sector in North Wales, including nuclear, automotive, energy and food and drink.

“Airbus is a longstanding partner of the AMRC in a key sector of the economy. By building on the research relationships we have with we will ensure the company remains at the forefront of aerospace development, supporting skills in the area and upskilling its manufacturing supply chain partners.

“We will also be working closely with other universities in Wales to maximise our impact, drawing on their research expertise to develop new projects that benefit the Welsh economy and the reputation not just of the University of Sheffield but of universities in Wales, showing how partnerships with industry and government can accelerate big improvements in economic and social wellbeing.”

Paul McKinlay, Airbus Senior Vice President and head of Broughton Plant, said:

“Airbus has a longstanding relationship with the AMRC. We have worked in partnership on many ventures and we’re delighted our relationship will continue to grow in this latest initiative.

“With their strong skills and expertise in fields such as innovation, advanced manufacturing and digitalisation, they are the perfect organisation to manage Wales’ most exciting new facility.”

The Welsh Government is working to develop the second phase of the facility on a separate site in North Wales. In July the Welsh Government declared its intention to work with the Deeside Enterprise Zone Board and the Ministry of Defence, led by the Defence Electronics and Components Agency (DECA), on a proposal that would see a second site situated on MOD land adjacent to the Deeside Industrial Park Interchange.

Outcome of Quarantine Unit review published

The Quarantine Unit (QU) scheme was introduced in September 2017, at the request of the Welsh farming industry. It replaced Isolation Facilities as the optional exemption to the six day standstill rule (6DSS) to allow maximum flexibility of movement whilst safeguarding the biosecurity of Welsh farms.

The six day standstill rule was established following the Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak in 2001, and is important in limiting the spread of the disease.

The Cabinet Secretary committed to conducting a review of the QU scheme to address some of the concerns raised by stakeholders and identify any areas for improvement.

The review has identified nine recommendations for improvement – two of which could be implemented before the end of the year, with the remaining seven to be consideration in the New Year.

Before the end of the year, the review recommends improved communications between the Welsh Government and stakeholders through future events and simplified guidance. In addition, it recommends QU guidance in relation to TB to be revisited and where appropriate clarified.

In the New Year, the review makes seven further recommendations for consideration:

- Explore the possibility of amending the 24 hour reporting rule, allowing farmers to report the activation of a QU within 24 hours, whilst the individual animal movements are completed within three days;
- Explore the possibility of developing a grant scheme for QU certification – this will help farmers meet the initial cost of certification;
- Explore group farm certification and renewal inspections by the certification body;
- Assess whether the certification body can combine QU visits with other visits to further reduce costs;
- Allow greater discretion for QU inspectors when considering compliance with requirements (e.g. the use of natural barriers around QU's);
- Ask the certification body to streamline the renewal inspection process for QU's; and
- Continue to collect animal movement data concerning animal movements from Welsh holdings to agricultural shows.

Cabinet Secretary said:

"We introduced the Quarantine Unit scheme, following consultation and close collaboration with the sector, to provide an alternative for farmers to the six day standstill rule and enable multiple movements to agricultural shows.

"Over the last few months my officials have conducted a review to address some of the issues that have arisen in the first year of the scheme. This has resulted in nine recommendations which I have accepted.

"I hope they go some way to address concerns and I am confident they will help improve the QU system which plays such an important role in minimising the spread of disease. We will continue to review the scheme over the coming years."

Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop, said:

"Our priority remains keeping diseases out of Wales. Prior to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001, standstill periods did not exist and multiple and long distance movements were responsible for the significant spread of disease.

"The six day standstill remains important in ensuring the biosecurity of this country but QUs provide farmers with flexibility whilst reducing the risk of disease spreading."