

Centenary Trees project to commemorate end of First World War

Natural Resources Wales' Centenary Trees project will feature creative tree planting to commemorate those who died during the War.

The project will also mark the centenary of the Forestry Commission, whose Welsh arm became part of NRW in 2013. A product of the 1919 Forestry Act, the Commission was created to replenish the nation's timber, which was at an all-time low following the War.

The project aims to reach every community in Wales, including working with young people to rebuild their relationship with trees and emphasise the important role trees play in our lives. Planting is expected to begin in 2019 and will take between three and five years to complete.

The Welsh Government will be marking the centenary of the end of the First World War through its [Cymru'n Cofio Wales Remembers 1914-1918 programme](#) (external link).

Hannah Blythyn said:

"This year we mark the centenary of the end of the First World War, which tragically cost the lives of more than 40,000 Welsh soldiers.

"One of the other outcomes of the War was the impact on our tree population, which fell dramatically because of the need for timber for the War effort.

"In Wales, trees benefit our economy through our timber trade and provide recreational activities that are good for our health and well-being. They help reduce the risk of flooding, improve water quality, lock up carbon from the atmosphere and are home to much of our wildlife.

"Trees are also vital to human life, providing us with the oxygen we need to breathe. It is therefore fitting we mark the centenary of the First World War, which caused so much death and destruction, by planting many more new trees, which will help sustain life for generations to come."

Clare Pillman, Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales, said:

"Rebuilding the forests after the war took an army of people, many of whom returned from the war with the skills and knowledge of the land.

“The sacrifice of so many who did not return is something we should never forget. This is why we want to engage with the people of Wales so that future generations can benefit from a lasting act of thanksgiving and remembrance.

“Trees have a special place in the lives of communities now, just as they did in 1918, and will in 2118. NRW is looking to support communities across Wales to explore their relationship with trees and the benefits they bring now and in the future.”

Grant funding doubled for Wales' most disadvantaged pupils

Following on from last month's Draft Budget, Education Secretary Kirsty Williams has announced that funding for Pupil Development Grant (PDG) – Access will be doubled from £1.7m in 2018-19 to £3.5 million in 2019-20.

The PDG-Access fund offers parents up to £125 and also covers equipment for activities within the curriculum, such as design and technology.

Parents can also access funding for equipment for out of school hours trips, including outdoor learning.

Looked-after children and learners eligible for free school meals can receive funding if they are entering reception class in primary school, year 7 in secondary school or aged 4 or 11 in special schools, special needs resource bases or pupil referral units.

The £3.5m boost for PDG-Access brings overall funding for the Pupil Development Grant to £97m in 2019-20.

Described as “invaluable” by schools, the PDG gives greater support to learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and Looked After Children (LAC). It is intended to overcome additional barriers that prevent learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving their full potential.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Breaking the cycle of disadvantage and poverty is critical to the long term well-being and success of our children and central to our National Mission for Education.

“Figures released this week show that at Key Stage 2 and 3 the attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers is the narrowest we have seen in 10 years.

“This should be welcomed but we now have to make sure that we keep finding new ways of overcoming barriers to learning.

“That’s why we have doubled financial support to learners in the Foundation Phase and extended the PDG to cover early years learners, those in pupil referral units and learners who are educated other than at school.

“With the additional money we’re investing in PDG-Access, even more pupils will be able to access opportunities, either in or outside of school. I encourage parents to take full advantage of this and to keep applying to their local council for funding.”

Finding new ways of helping parents with the cost of school uniforms will be one of the issues addressed by a consultation to be published later this month.

“We need the power of procurement to achieve prosperity for all” Finance Secretary tells Procurex Wales

Addressing an audience of professionals, he will talk about the need for smarter and more creative procurement to support the government’s prevention and prosperity policy agendas and to maximise the way public money is invested and spent in the future.

He will also speak about the impact the UK’s forthcoming exit from the EU will have on procurement and the wider Welsh economy.

The Finance Secretary will say:

“There was a time when procurement was just a process – an under-appreciated backroom function delivering on value for money and good governance within organisations.

“While these are as important as ever, what is better understood now is the power of procurement to deliver policy in Wales and contribute towards a more prosperous Wales.

“This type of procurement means there is a need to further develop the skills and capacity of procurement professionals in Wales. The new programme I announced in September will ensure we provide more profile and visibility for the profession – having the best people who understand the bigger picture and make the best procurement

decisions for Wales' wellbeing."

One of the big issues which will test the power of procurement is Wales' preparation for Brexit. Leaving the EU poses a number of challenges to Wales' economy, public services and procurement processes, but the Cabinet Secretary will tell Procurex that Brexit is an opportunity to build on the good work already underway in Wales.

Professor Drakeford will say:

"While preparing for Brexit is understandably at the forefront of our minds, it's important we don't lose sight of the opportunities which could arise from the Brexit ashes.

"This is an opportunity to simplify regulations, through the development of a procurement framework; stimulate the Welsh economy with more businesses winning more Welsh public sector contracts and devolve more competencies to Wales."

And he will add:

"We need to think of procurement as a vehicle's engine. The vehicle won't go anywhere without an engine. The engine won't work without fuel. But a fine-tuned and powerful engine will take the vehicle further and more efficiently than one which is poorly serviced.

"If we are to achieve prosperity for all in Wales, we need the power of procurement under the bonnet."

Finance Secretary backs Cardiff's ambition to be the first 'Living Wage City' in the UK

This event is the latest to promote Living Wage Week in Wales following the increase in the rate of pay by 25p from £8.75 to £9 per hour.

Of the 174 Living Wage employers in Wales, 80 are based in Cardiff and last year, Cardiff Council was named the Living Wage for Wales Champion for 2017-18 by the Living Wage Foundation. This was in recognition of its 'outstanding contribution to the development of the Living Wage in Wales, above and beyond the requirements of accreditation.

Professor Drakeford said:

“I welcome Cardiff Council’s commitment to becoming a Living Wage City – a commitment to ensuring workers throughout the city live a life of dignity, supporting them to pay off debts and meet the pressures of rising bills.

“Since becoming one of the first organisations in the UK to become a Living Wage employer in 2015, Cardiff Council is leading by example with more than 2,000 full and part-time staff benefitting from a pay rise, mainly women working as breakfast club supervisors, cleaners, domestics, kitchen assistants and midday supervisors.”

The Finance Secretary will discuss with stakeholders ways of promoting the Living Wage by encouraging companies to sign up to the Welsh Government’s Code of Practice on Ethical Employment in Supply Chains – proof of an organisation’s commitment to working towards the Living Wage.

He added:

“The code of practice will encourage organisations to take seriously their commitment to “consider” the Living Wage, and identify what steps can be taken to increase the wages of both employed and contracted staff over time. I support any mechanism developed to help publicise progress in this respect.”

The event will take place at Cardiff Castle where the Cabinet Secretary for Finance will join Partnerships and Operations Manager at Living Wage Foundation, Graham Griffiths, council members and staff and various ‘Living Wage employers’ based in Cardiff.

Gwent project receives £13.4m to develop new models of health and social care

Led by the Gwent Regional Partnership Board, the project is the latest to receive financial support from a £100m Welsh Government fund to develop new ways to deliver health and social care services that can eventually be rolled out across Wales.

Mr Gething, made the announcement during a visit to Serennu Children’s Centre

in High Cross, where he saw examples of health and social care services being delivered in tandem, to support children with complex needs including ASD.

He explained the funding, provided over two years, will help accelerate projects like these which support key actions from the Welsh Government's long term plan for health and social care, A Healthier Wales.

The Gwent project has two parts. It will develop new services focused on promoting well-being and preventing illness at a community level to reduce the burden on hospital and will improve the integration between health and social services to ensure a seamless experience for patients.

The transformation work will redraw the landscape across Child and adolescent mental health services to deliver improved access to better services, closer to home. It will establish a 24/7 hospital discharge scheme, which will mean that people are able to get home faster, with the right package of care in place. It will also implement a place based model of care in Caerphilly, as an initial pilot, which will mean that people can access a range of new services within their community rather than being reliant on GP services.

Mr Gething said:

“Our health and social care services are facing increasing demand and if we are to ensure they are fit for the future we need to look at new ways of delivering them.

This will require better integration of health and social services to reduce reliance on hospitals and deliver care closer to home. The Transformation Fund will be used to fund a small number of projects which have the most impact in developing and delivering new models of care. They will have the potential to scale up and be used to improve service delivery across Wales.

Phil Robson, Chair of the Regional Partnership Board said:

“This additional funding will provide much needed resources across Gwent to move our transformation plans forward at substantial pace. We are working as a partnership, across health local government and the third sector, to deliver a very ambitious plan and we are pleased that the Minister has confidence in us as a region to deliver.”