

Funding to help third sector prepare for Brexit

Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services Alun Davies today announced £150,000 has been made available from the European Transition Fund (ETF) to fund research into how the Brexit process could impact on community services in Wales and help the sector plan for all eventualities.

The research will help community groups ensure any contingency planning and preparations are proportionate, as well as act to reassure both to the sector and to communities that benefit from these services.

Alun Davies, who announced we would be working with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) to deliver the project said,

“Whatever form of Brexit we end up with, leaving the EU will cause disruption. That is why we have been working hard to plan for all possible outcomes.

“As we approach Brexit, third sector bodies will also need to think carefully about how they respond to emerging changes and deliver vital services to our communities. We all want to ensure public services in Wales continue to deliver the highest possible standards to the people of Wales after we leave the EU and this funding can go some way towards that end.”

Ruth Marks, Chief Executive of the WCVA said,

“We’re really pleased to have secured this funding. There are lots of uncertainties around Brexit and the potential implications it presents for Wales’ most vulnerable groups and communities. This funding will help us better understand Wales’ reliance on the third sector to deliver essential community services and how withdrawing from the EU may impact on the services delivered to those communities most in need.”

The Welsh Government has been seeking innovative ways to support partner organisations through the Brexit process, and considering what advice, guidance and financial support we can provide to help them deal with this change.

The ETF was announced in January as part of our Brexit plans to directly help businesses and public services for the significant changes ahead. The ETF will provide a combination of financial support and loan funding, and will

support the provision of technical, commercial, export-related and sectoral-specific advice for businesses and public sector bodies in Wales.

£2.5m boost for student entrepreneurship in Wales

The Youth Entrepreneurship grant will see students benefit from £2.5m of Welsh Government funding over the next three years, enabling Universities and Colleges to accelerate student entrepreneurship and strengthen connections, particularly with partners to support students on the journey to starting a business. It's in addition to the range of support available through Business Wales and Big Ideas Wales for younger entrepreneurs in Wales to engage with higher and further education institutions.

Economy and Transport Secretary Ken Skates explained:

“The Economic Action Plan makes clear our commitment to developing a strong entrepreneurial culture in Wales, working with key partners to develop a connected ecosystem to encourage business start-up and growth.

“Our Colleges and Universities play a vital role as regional and global leaders in research and innovation and to ensure our future generations are provided with the right skills for this changing world. To ensure this happens, it's vital that we look at all ways of working to create the right connections between academia, government, entrepreneurs, our corporates and risk capital groups. We all our part to play in creating a positive environment for entrepreneurship to thrive. This is an approach amplified by the Be The Spark movement and one that resonates with me as I so often hear about the positive impact of collaboration between our Welsh institutions and the business community.

“Through the Economic Action Plan, I have highlighted our ambition to prepare students for entrepreneurship and establish targets for the number of school, college and university leavers starting a business as a call to action. This targeted £2.5 million is a further commitment towards this goal, enabling our institutions to encourage a spirit of enterprise, build the network of entrepreneurship champions to drive connectivity with partners and support learners into the business world.

“This is an exciting time to be an entrepreneur in Wales, and I look forward to seeing our Universities, colleges and students leading the way as we look to develop and support the next wave of

entrepreneurial talent.”

Last year, Jack Thompson, 21 a young entrepreneur studying in Aberystwyth designed a fare splitting app that solves the problem of dividing petrol costs between friends when one person is the ‘designated driver’. Jack credits the support he had to develop his entrepreneurial ambitions. After participating in the University Entrepreneurship Society he attended the Boot camp to business, ran by Big Ideas Wales.

Jack said:

“Boot camp was amazing. I left feeling so inspired and found myself constantly thinking of new business ideas. I’d encourage anyone with even the start of a business idea to get involved, as it will give you the information and tools you need to get your business off the ground.”

“Loneliness and social isolation is a growing threat to public health: We must tackle it together”– Huw Irranca-Davies

The Welsh Government is today launching a national conversation on what can be done to combat loneliness and social isolation in Wales.

The National Survey for Wales 2016-17 found that 17% of the population of Wales, around 440,000 people, reported being lonely, while younger people were more likely to be lonely than older people: 20% of 16-24 year olds were lonely, compared with 10% of those aged 75 or over.

Loneliness and social isolation can result in a number of physical and psychological problems including premature death, sleep problems, high blood pressure, poor quality of life, increased risk of heart attack and stroke, depression and suicide. Research demonstrates that loneliness has an effect on mortality that is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

The economic consequences of loneliness and isolation can also be significant. The Eden Project found the cost of social isolation and disconnected communities in Wales could reach £2.6bn a year.

The Welsh Government’s Programme for Government, Taking Wales Forward includes a commitment to develop a nationwide and cross-government strategy

to address these issues. The strategy will cover people of all ages and all backgrounds.

The Welsh Government's proposed approach to tackling the issues is to focus on intervening early to prevent chronic loneliness, given its wider effects on health and well-being, and resultant pressure on NHS and social care services. However, there is also a need to ensure that support is available for those who are, or who become, chronically lonely.

The Welsh Government has identified some areas where action can make a significant contribution to reducing loneliness and social isolation:

- Early years – Improving an individual's experiences in childhood will play a significant part in shaping their future, including developing strong and positive relationships later in life;
- Housing – Ensuring people live in safe and secure neighbourhoods, in the right accommodation;
- Social Care – Providing compassionate, dignified care plays a critical role in ensuring people can be healthy and remain independent for longer;
- Mental Health – Ensuring people maintain good mental health is crucial in maintaining good health, well-being and independence, with access to appropriate support services when necessary;
- Skills and employability – Ensuring people have the right skills to secure decent, sustainable employment opportunities.

Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Loneliness and social isolation are growing problems not just here in Wales but across the UK and beyond – and with 1 in every 5 people now experiencing loneliness and/or social isolation. More of us now understand these can affect anyone, at any age, for a wide variety of reasons. They can, and do, have a significant impact on people's physical and mental health. It risks becoming a major public health crisis unless we act now, and work together to tackle the problem.

“As a government, we are committed to securing the best possible health, well-being and quality of life for all people in Wales. Preventing people from becoming lonely and isolated must be a national priority for us, because it will not only improve people's lives, but it will also help reduce demand for health and social services in the future.

“However, neither the Welsh Government nor one agency on its own can combat these issues. As a government, we need to be able to foster the right environment and create the right conditions for others to design and deliver solutions that best meet their needs.

“I am keen to hear from people living in all parts of Wales as part

of this consultation process. Working together, we can ensure our communities and the social fabric that binds them together, are as resilient as they can be.”

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New marine litter project launched

Keep Wales Tidy will lead the project, together with the Marine Conservation Society and environmental consultants Eunomia.

The project will deliver actions from the Clean Seas Partnership Marine Litter Action Plan. The action plan is designed to help tackle marine litter and maintain or achieve Good Environmental Status in our sea waters by 2020 under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

The project will seek to build a coordinated approach to tackling marine litter, by working with marine litter action groups, local authorities and higher education institutions. It will also encourage further research into marine litter.

The project has received funding of £50,000 through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, which is funded by the European Union and the Welsh Government.

Environment Minister, Hannah Blythyn, said:

“The need to tackle marine litter, especially plastic, has become part of our collective consciousness through documentaries such as BBC’s Blue Planet.

“I’m happy to support this project, which will help co-ordinate our efforts in Wales and contribute towards finding solutions to the growing threat litter poses to aquatic life.”

Jemma Bere, Policy and Research Manager for Keep Wales Tidy, added:

“We are delighted to be working in partnership with the Marine Conservation Society and Eunomia Consulting on this important research project. With the support of Welsh Government and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, we hope to gain a better understanding of the sources and types of litter in our environment, as well as the key challenges to tackling this global crisis at a local level.

“We are looking forward to connecting with a range of organisations and marine litter action groups across the UK and beyond to identify the most effective solutions.”