

Funding for local government announced

Local authorities in Wales will receive £4.2bn in core revenue funding and non-domestic rates next year to spend on delivering key services. This includes £2.5m of floor funding to ensure that no authority has to manage with a reduction of more than 1.0%.

In recognition of the important role local authorities play in delivering core social services and the preventative approach at the heart of delivery, this settlement contains a further £20m to help ease those pressures.

We have also provided funding for additional costs arising from changes by the UK Government to teachers' pay, as well as funding for our proposals for new eligibility criteria for free school meals in light of the continued rollout of Universal Credit by the UK Government.

In addition, we are providing £60m capital funding over three years for a local authority road refurbishment scheme to help repair the damage caused by a series of hard winters and this summer's heatwave and access to the £78m local transport fund.

Alun Davies said:

“Last week we set out the context for this year's local government settlement – the uncertainty surrounding the arrangements for leaving the EU, the forthcoming UK Autumn Budget and the UK Government's planned Spending Review in 2019, as well as the continuing constraints on public spending. All of these factors form the backdrop for local authorities' own budget-setting processes for the coming financial year.

“After the announcement of the final Budget last year, authorities were facing the prospect of a 1.0% reduction in core funding for 2019-20, equivalent to a £43m reduction in cash terms.

“We have worked hard, across government, to offer local government the best settlement possible in this ninth year of austerity. We have made further allocations to the local government settlement to mitigate most of the reduction local government had been expecting. As a result, the £43m cut has been reduced to less than £13m, including floor funding, which equates to a reduction of 0.3% on a like-for-like basis compared to the current year.

“The draft Budget last week also included a series of additional grants for local government, including £30m for social care and £15m for education and the restoration of other funding streams where cuts had previously been announced.

“While we have worked hard to offer local government the best settlement possible, we recognise this settlement is a real terms

cut in core funding, at a time when authorities face real pressures from an increase in demand from an ageing population; pay awards and other inflationary pressures.

“As we have made clear in discussions with our colleagues in local government, we recognise the pressures they are facing and will continue to do all we can to shield them from the worst effects of austerity.

“The UK Government will publish its Budget on 29 October. In the event of additional funding being made available to Wales, local government will be a key priority for that funding.”

[Benchmarking project to help red meat sector prepare for Brexit gets underway](#)

The [Red Meat Benchmarking project](#) (external link), supported through the Welsh Government’s EU Transition Fund, will support 2,000 farmers to better understand the technical and financial performance of their business and ensure their competitiveness in a changing market.

The project is managed by Hybu Cig Cymru enabling farmers to input their business data from today. The project will remain open for two months, closing on 10 December.

Eligible producers across Wales are being encouraged to participate on a first come first served basis by completing the online questionnaire on the financial and physical performance of their business from the 2016-7 or 2017-8 financial years.

In return, participating farmers will receive a bespoke assessment of their business and productivity which will include anonymous comparisons with similar businesses within the sector. Participating farmers will also receive a compensatory payment of £1,000 for the time and effort of taking part.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“It is now less than six months before the UK leaves the European Union and the prospect of a no deal looms large. The need to prepare for a post-Brexit world has never been more essential.

“As a Government, we have always said we will do all we can to

support our agricultural sector to help them prepare and adapt to the challenges and opportunities Brexit presents. Earlier this year I announced a £2.15m new red meat benchmarking project to help beef and sheep farmers do just that.

“Building on the successful work of our Dairy Conditional project, the system will support two thousand beef and sheep farmers benchmark their financial and technical performance and identify areas of their business which could be improved.

“From today beef and sheep farmers can input their data and in return receive a bespoke assessment report on their business. This system will remain open for two months and I urge all eligible producers to find out more and take part in the project.

“This is crucial investment for the sector at this difficult and challenging time. It will enable beef and sheep farmers to maintain their competitiveness in changing markets, maximise any emerging opportunities and ensure they are able to thrive in a post-Brexit world.”

Hybu Cig Cymru’s Industry Development Manager, John Richards said:

“This is a red meat producer’s opportunity to step back, assess the financial status of their business and take a really good look at how it’s performing. With Brexit just around the corner, it is crucially important that our businesses are financially fit. Now’s the time for our sector to raise its game and contribute towards the bigger picture.

“There will be direct benefits for farmers who take time to participate in the project; they will be equipped with knowledge and information to make informed changes to their businesses, leading to improved productivity and efficiency. This could result in more confident and competitive businesses in the future.”

[Countdown to journey for improved rail services for Welsh passengers](#)

Some of the improvements, which will bring about a transformation in rail travel for people and communities the length and breadth of Wales and its borders, will be immediate, including a new customer website and app, new branding appearing across the network and enhanced Welsh language service

provision – while other will be introduced as soon as possible.

These include plans to spend £194m on station improvements, including the building of five new stations, and the deep cleaning of stations from this December.

Ken Skates said:

“Our plans go beyond a traditional transport project – they have to become the spark for wider economic renewal. They have to help individuals, businesses and communities who need a reliable, integrated transport system to help them find a new job, support their business to expand, and bring new investment to their town.

The Metro project is not only about dealing with today’s transport problems, but how we provide opportunities for the future –and not just in transport terms, but the impact that the Metro infrastructure will have on economic possibilities for people throughout south Wales.”

Other major benefits of the new Wales and Borders rail contract include:

- An additional 600 staff will be recruited to deliver the service in a range of roles and 450 new apprenticeships (30 every year) will also be created over the life of the contract.
- £1.9 billion will be invested in improving passengers’ travel experience, including an £800 million investment in trains, boosting overall service capacity by 65 per cent.
- By 2023 95 per cent of journeys will be on a 148 brand new trains, half of which will be assembled in Wales.
- The Central Metro will be operated by 100 per cent electric traction, with the electricity sourced from 100 per cent renewable sources, 50 per cent of which will be sourced in Wales.
- By the end of 2023, passengers will be able to take advantage of an additional 285 services each weekday across Wales (a 29 per cent increase). This will include improvements to the Ebbw Vale and Wrexham – Bidston lines as well as the Cambrian and Heart of Wales lines.
- From December 2022 there will be a 28 per cent increase in Sunday mileage, creating a true seven-day-a-week service.

Smart ticketing will ensure that fares are more flexible and cheaper off-peak fares will be introduced including fare reductions in North Wales and at approximately 50 per cent of stations in the valleys.

Part of the new contract includes the delivery of the next phase of the £738million South Wales Metro project, and the first £119m of that was announced by First Minister Carwyn Jones at the end of last week.

Speaking at the 'Metro and Me' conference for business leaders today (Monday 8th October), Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford brought delegates up to speed on developments, saying:

"Our plans go beyond a traditional transport project. The Metro will deliver against a range of our policy objectives by creating a network that will serve communities, accessible to all and operating seven days a week.

It will increase social mobility and widen access, connecting people and communities to employment opportunities, and education, health and leisure facilities."

[PaCE helps 1000th parent into employment](#)

"I can't thank the programme enough, it has given me the confidence needed to reach my goals", Firefighter, Adele.

"I can finally provide my children with a life they deserve", Morgan, mum of two.

"I couldn't be prouder of what I've done for my daughter and I", Chanelle, self-employed painter.

These are the comments of some of the 1000 parents who have been helped back to work by the Parents, Childcare and Employment programme (PaCE).

Supported by the European Social Fund and operated in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, the scheme plays a key part in the Welsh Government's Employability Plan and aims to provide support for economically inactive parents to overcome childcare barriers, enabling them to prepare for and access employment opportunities.

The scheme has helped parents like Adele, a young mum with a small baby. She wanted to do something to make a difference and enrolled onto a fire safety course where she was introduced to the PaCE Programme. Her advisor helped her gain the qualifications needed to become a firefighter. She now works for the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

Morgan is another lone parent helped by PaCE. After a spell of unemployment she sought help from a PaCE advisor who helped her secure childcare for her two children and training to get back into the workplace. She also received practical advice on interview techniques and drafting a CV. As a result, she found work within two miles of her home which enabled her to maintain a work-life balance. She eventually gained a promotion, and her employer, Al-Met, is allowing her one day release a week to complete a fully funded Level 3 Diploma in Accounting.

Chanelle was an unemployed single parent who previously worked as a delivery driver. She needed a job with more flexibility and wanted to set up her own painting and decorating business. The PaCE programme helped her to achieve this by providing support to get on to a college course, win a start-up grant and obtain advice on how to get a loan for a company vehicle. She now runs The Lady Paint and Decor Co. which won gold in the Crown New Entrant painting competition last year.

The Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning said,

“This is a great achievement and I thank everyone for their hard work in supporting these 1000 parents back into work. Our Employability Plan outlines our commitment to removing the barriers which prevent people from working and ensuring individuals are trained, educated and prepared for the world of work.

“Adele, Morgan and Chanelle are examples of the PaCE scheme successfully delivering on that commitment through helping parents seek affordable childcare, find appropriate training opportunities and secure jobs with flexible working hours to help them into sustainable employment. I’m pleased to see this scheme is having such an impact and enabling parents to access work so that they too can contribute to our society.”

PaCE advisors have been working closely with the Childcare Offer for Wales to ensure parents can secure childcare once they are in sustainable employment. The Childcare Offer is currently being tested in a number of local authorities and will be made available to all eligible parents from September 2020.

Over £260,000 to support ten more Business Improvement Districts

Once the BID is agreed via a legal ballot, each business contributes financially via a levy, which is then used to fund the agreed activities set

out in their business plan. These could include marketing, promotion and events, car parking, tackling anti-social behaviour, improving access to towns, or work to make the area more vibrant and viable.

The towns receiving funding as part of the current programme are:

- Brecon
- Llangollen
- Newtown
- Barry
- Port Talbot
- Treorchy
- Aberdare
- Mold

Funding is also being provided to Newport for an ICT and digital-focused BID and to Ebbw Vale for a BID focused on industry linked to the Enterprise Zone. Sector BIDs across the UK are increasing in number, and Welsh Government is keen to ensure they are encouraged in Wales.

Rebecca Evans said:

“We are seeing BIDs make a real difference to town centres across Wales, but setting them up takes time, effort and support, which is why we provide Welsh Government funding to get them off the ground.

“We are committed to creating lasting economic change in the South Wales Valleys through our Valleys Taskforce, and I hope the BID proposals in Aberdare, Treorchy, Port Talbot and Ebbw Vale, will play a significant role in this.

“BIDs can help to revitalise our town centres and promote regeneration. We have seen existing BIDs delivering increased street cleaning initiatives, tackling antisocial behaviour, reducing crime, offering bespoke business training courses and hosting numerous events and festivals.”

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Collectively, the eight BIDs created in the last programme have generated over £5m private investment to support their chosen activities. This is a significant return on our investment, helping drive local economic development and supporting our Welsh high streets.

“I am particularly pleased to see two innovative proposals come forward. The proposal from Ebbw Vale aligns with the broader work of the Enterprise Zone in that area and complements other initiatives, including the £100m Tech Valleys Initiative.

“In Newport I am keen to see how a BID focused on the ICT and digital sectors can help support our more regionally focussed approach to economic development.”