

First residents throw open their doors in £42m Land for Housing scheme

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans AM met residents of Newbourne Place, built thanks to £2.9 million of Welsh Government funding, and learned more about their new homes.

Thirty flats, including three which are wheelchair adapted, have been constructed on the site of a former adult training centre in Barry. Newydd Housing Association received a £585,000 Welsh Government Land for Housing loan to buy the site, and £2.34m Welsh Government Social Housing Grant funding, which supported work to develop and build the flats.

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans AM said:

“We are committed to creating 20,000 affordable homes during the course of this government, and we are investing to support housing associations to build homes and help to meet this target.

“These are the first homes completed as part of the £42m Land for Housing loan; housing associations can borrow money from the Welsh Government to buy land. When the loan is repaid, the money goes back into more loans to fund more housing.

“It’s so important that everyone in Wales has access to safe, affordable housing so they can achieve their full potential.”

Paul Roberts, Chief Executive at Newydd added:

“We were delighted to welcome the Minister to Newbourne Place. We are very proud of the scheme, it provides affordable homes for the community. As well as meeting housing need, we have been able to provide smaller, adapted homes. As a social landlord, we will be providing additional opportunities for local residents in areas such as financial inclusion, health and wellbeing, as well as digital inclusion support.

“This scheme utilised funding through the Land for Housing scheme and we are delighted to announce that we have secured a second phase of funding to provide more high quality affordable homes to our local communities.”

Sandra Rehman, a Newydd tenant and member of the tenant scrutiny group commented:

“I waited nearly three and half years to move to a suitable property after being diagnosed with osteoarthritis. The flat that I now live in was well worth the wait and I would like to compliment Newydd, as it’s a beautifully designed adapted ground floor flat and I couldn’t have asked for better. Everybody deserves a home like this one and Newydd are one of the best landlords because of the way they listen to tenants.”

Minimum unit price for alcohol to be ‘major part’ of efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm – Vaughan Gething

Ahead of an Assembly debate on the Welsh Government’s Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill, which was introduced to the National Assembly last October, the Health Secretary has announced extra investment in substance misuse services.

Assembly Members will decide later today whether the Bill should pass its first legislative stage, and proceed on to stage 2 – which involves detailed consideration by Assembly committees. If passed by the Assembly later this year, the current intention is that a minimum unit price would be introduced 12 months following the Bill’s Royal Assent.

The Welsh Government invests almost £50m a year to support people with substance misuse issues. Almost half of this funding goes directly to the seven Area Planning Boards which commission substance misuse services for their region.

In response to calls made for additional resources to be allocated for substance misuse services, the Health Secretary has confirmed the ring-fenced substance misuse funding for health boards will be increased by nearly £1m, to over £18m from 2018-19.

Speaking ahead of the debate, Vaughan Gething said:

“Wales, like so many other western countries, has a problem with cheap, strong, readily-available alcohol.

“Minimum unit pricing is not a silver bullet, but it will be a major new and important tool in our approach to reducing alcohol consumption. By introducing a minimum price, we can make a difference – as we have done with the smoking ban, which demonstrated our determination to create a different future for the

people of Wales.

“I’ve been very clear, that it will not work in isolation. Alcohol policy in Wales requires a variety of approaches, which taken together, can generate change. That’s why we are supporting people throughout Wales to develop a healthier relationship with alcohol, through our Substance Misuse Strategy, and end the sad spectre of people dying from drink.

“We know there is a significant amount of evidence from around the world, showing there is a very clear relationship between the price of alcohol and alcohol consumption. Our ground-breaking legislation helps address that.

“There have long been calls for Wales to change its relationship with alcohol. I expect this Bill will make a fundamental contribution to reducing hazardous and harmful drinking and ultimately, will help to save lives.”

Welsh Government launch first Organ Donation pack for secondary Schools.

The pack, which was first tested with pupils there, will help inform key stage 3 and 4 students about organ donation, encouraging them to discuss the subject with their friends and families.

The lesson guide is the result of collaboration between the Welsh Government and NHS Blood and Transplant, and contains a lesson plan, activities, short case study films and guidance for teachers.

The pack aims to encourage pupils to:

- Describe how organ donation saves and improves lives;
- Explain some of the reasons why people decide to become organ and tissue donors;
- Understand why it is important to join the NHS Organ Donor Register;
- Understand how to talk to people about organ and tissue donation;
- Understand what options about donating they must consider under the system in Wales;
- Understand the decision to donate is their own, and the importance of sharing that decision.

In 2015 Wales was the first country in the UK to move to a soft opt-out system of consent to organ donation. The latest statistics reveal a 72% consent rate and approximately 24.3 donors per million population, putting

Wales at the top of the list in the UK.

Statistics also show that 39% of the Welsh population have registered to opt-in to donate their organs following their death. However, if individuals don't tell their family of their decision to donate, the family may not honour that decision and over-ride the organ donor registration or not support deemed consent.

In 2016-17 data published by NHS Blood and Transplant showed there were 21 cases in Wales where families either overrode their relatives' decisions to donate organs, or didn't support the deemed consent.

With an average of 3.1 organs retrieved per donor in Wales in 2016-17, this could have resulted in as many as 65 additional transplants.

The Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton said:

“Encouraging an open and honest discussion about organ donation is key to increasing the number of people who consent to donating their organs, and more importantly, that families understand and respect their loved one's wishes.

“It's important that children and young people are given as much information as possible, in a sensitive and engaging way, so they can make an informed decision about organ donation and encouraging their families to have the chat at home.

To make sure the pack worked in practice, it was piloted at Penyrheol Comprehensive school by PSE Coordinator Hayley Steel before being rolled out. She said:

“Having the chance to test something as important as the school pack on organ donation was a huge honour. It's been good to see the feedback from our session help shape the pack to what it is today.

“The pupils responded so well to the activities; we shouldn't forget that young people have the capacity to understand and discuss these huge life questions. I believe it will benefit other schools across Wales, helping to break away from some of the stigma that surrounds discussing organ donation.”

Nadine Marshall, whose son Conner tragically died following an attack in 2015, features in one of the case study films. Nadine said:

“I think it's really important young people are listened to and given the opportunity to talk about organ donation at school and college. It's also important people talk to their loved ones about it so families are aware of their decision, should they find themselves in that incredibly difficult situation.

“Conner was only 16 when he made his decision to be an organ donor and I am grateful we had talked about it and were aware of how strongly he felt about being a donor.

“He has given an incredible gift and we were able to do what Conner would have wanted by supporting his decision.”

Minister welcomes good news on Welsh passports

Early this year, the Minister wrote to the Minister of State for Immigration Caroline Nokes MP seeking assurances that the UK Government will continue to use the Welsh language in new passports that will be issued following the UK's departure from the European Union and reminding the Home Office of its obligations to the Welsh Language under the 1993 Welsh Language Act.

Following this correspondence, the Minister has received a letter confirming the Home Office intends to continue to provide the same Welsh provision as is currently available.

The Minister has also welcomed news that online applications for passports in Welsh will soon be available.

She said:

“The Welsh Language content that is currently included in passports was the result of discussions between the Welsh Government, the Home Office, and the European Union over a decade ago.

“Since then, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 has given the Welsh Language official status. It is essential therefore that the Welsh Language is considered from the outset when the design and content of new passports are considered.

“I am therefore delighted to receive assurances from the Minister of State, Caroline Nokes that not only will there be no change to the Welsh that is available on passports issued after Brexit but that the Passport Office is increasing its Welsh Language services and online applications will be available in Welsh in future.”

Kirsty Williams cuts the turf at the new site for Brecon High

The new state-of-the art campus is due to open in September 2019 and is being funded by nearly £22 million investment from the Welsh Government and Powys County Council.

Once complete the new facility will boast excellent teaching and learning resources and has a proposed capacity for 750 pupils, with 600 places for 11-16 year old and 150 places for post-16.

In addition to the Education Secretary, the turf cutting ceremony was attended by the Leader of Powys County Council, Councillor Rosemarie Harris, Cabinet Member for Schools, Councillor Myfanwy Alexander, a range of staff and pupils from Brecon High and representatives from BAM UK Construction, which is carrying out the works.

Speaking at the event Kirsty Williams said:

“It is great to see progress being made on this new state-of-the art facility, which is benefitting from around £10 million Welsh Government funding via our 21st Century Schools Programme.

“Our national mission is to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence. Our 21st Century Schools and Education Programme plays a key part in this and is the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s.

“The design of this new facility will create a 21st Century learning environment and includes learning spaces that can be easily and quickly adapted, which will also help the school to be able to meet the changing and evolving needs of its pupils and staff.”

The Cabinet Member for Schools, Councillor Myfanwy Alexander said:

“This is a major step forward in the process of giving Brecon the High School its learners deserve. All of us who have been fortunate enough to see the plans for the new building will appreciate that as well as providing excellent facilities for teaching and learning, it will be an enhancement to the built environment of the area.’”