

First Minister starts New Year with no-deal Brexit warning

In December, Mark Drakeford made clear his opposition to the prospect of a no-deal Brexit when he met Theresa May at Downing Street, claiming it would have 'seismic repercussions' for Wales.

With just 10 weeks to go until the UK leaves the EU, the First Minister confirmed the Welsh Government has further intensified its work on no-deal contingency planning as it becomes increasingly apparent the UK government has failed to negotiate an acceptable deal.

Mark Drakeford said:

"It is deplorable that 2019 opens with an unmistakable crisis over Brexit.

"We have been brought here by a UK government which has prioritised a vain attempt to hold the Conservative Party together above the national interest. The UK government has never attempted to build a cross-party consensus for its strategy and has never seriously tried to agree an approach to the negotiations with the devolved administrations. As a result, we are only 81 days away from crashing out of the EU without a deal.

"Such an outcome would be hugely damaging. Claims of a 'managed no-deal' need to be dismissed for the nonsense they are. Leaving without a deal would be hugely damaging and must be avoided.

"Our white paper, Securing Wales' Future, details a basis for a sane and rational approach to EU withdrawal. We cannot agree with an outcome which results in tariffs or other barriers which will make it harder for Welsh business to export, stoke inflation by increasing the costs of imports and, most seriously of all, disrupt the integrated pan-European supply chains that so many of our major employers rely on to thrive, and in some cases, survive.

"Under a no-deal Brexit the viability of the NHS and other public services will be severely compromised and our key economic sectors – agriculture and food production, hospitality, as well as highly skilled sectors and universities – are equally imperilled by a self-defeating migration policy.

"Many businesses have been making contingency plans for a long time. For those who haven't, now is the time to do so and our Brexit portal is the starting point for businesses who need to find out more. Likewise, every public body in Wales; local authorities, universities, health boards and others will be making preparations for a no-deal.

“However, make no mistake, it would be impossible to fully alleviate the effects of no-deal. It is simply not a viable option and must be avoided.

“Since the referendum we have found the UK government too opaque, too slow, and too secretive. Now is the time for full transparency and co-operation and the Welsh Government as a willing partner.”

£5m to help eradicate sheep scab

Sheep scab is one of the most contagious disease of sheep in Wales and has been identified as a disease priority by the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group.

The funding is available to deliver an industry led project to tackle the disease in Wales. The announcement follows an industry proposal to eradicate sheep scab from Wales.

Further details of the project will be announced in the forthcoming months following ongoing discussions with industry representatives.

Announcing the funding, the Minister said:

“Sheep scab has significant economic consequences for sheep producers and animal welfare issues for sheep. It is one of the most contagious disease of sheep in Wales and eradicating it is a priority for us and the industry.

“I’m pleased to be able to announce £5m Rural Development Programme funding will be used to help support the industry tackle the disease. Eradicating the disease has the potential to deliver significant lasting economic benefits for the sector at a particularly challenging time as we prepare to leave the European Union.”

Sustainable drainage regulations come

into force

The mandatory regulations introduced by the Welsh Government will help reduce flood risk and improve water quality.

The regulations will also help to ensure that environmental standards are maintained and improved in a post-Brexit world, with the issue of flooding addressed in an environmentally friendly way through sustainable methods.

Further benefits from the regulations include improving the surrounding wildlife and biodiversity and helping to reduce pollution on new housing developments through the use of effectively designed and constructed SuDS.

SuDS work by making use of landscape and natural vegetation to control the flow of surface water and reduce the risk of flooding. Designs can include ponds, permeable paving and swales, which slow down the discharge of surface water more than conventional piped drainage.

Surface runoff water can also be a major source of pollution, both directly and from overwhelmed sewers discharging into rivers. SuDS are designed to reduce surface water runoff and improve water quality while being more resilient and longer lasting than conventional drainage.

Around 163,000 properties in Wales are at risk of surface water flooding and employing sustainable drainage systems is estimated to reduce flood damage by up to 30%.

Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

“Flooding can have a devastating impact on home owners and it is important that every effort is made to protect houses and limit the damage caused by surface water flooding.

“Last year saw several instances of severe flooding in Wales highlighting the importance of introducing measures to combat the challenges faced by climate change.

“We hope that these regulations will have a positive impact for future generations and help ensure Wales maintains its high environmental standards post-Brexit.”

Welsh Government pitch in with extra £5m for sports facilities

Money will be allocated to Sport Wales so it can move quickly and contribute to projects across the country that are shovel ready right now. Funding will be allocated to ensure a good geographical spread across Wales, across sports and support collaborative, multi-sport projects wherever possible.

The capital investment will seek to support the “Vision for Sport in Wales” with a focus on collaborative projects that:

- Improve and protect key existing sports facilities that support the needs of local communities.
- Invest in new and different places that meet the needs of local communities.
- Create a more resilient, sustainable sport sector.

This new funding is in addition to the £5 million announced in the summer for the new Healthy and Active Fund – a partnership between Sport Wales, Public Health Wales and the Welsh Government.

The new £5 million investment for sports facilities in Wales demonstrates a firm commitment to boost delivery on facilities that support an active Wales. It is also the first phase of investment following recommendations that emerged from the review of sport facilities undertaken earlier this year.

Minister for Culture and Sport Lord Elis-Thomas said:

“Whether it’s the hall you do classes in or the pitch you play on, having the right facilities in place has a big impact on a person’s experience – and likelihood of them participating on a regular basis.

There is a clear need to increase the spread of top-class facilities across the country, but we must also consider how these would benefit local communities, as well as elite athletes.

Geraint Thomas OBE’s Tour de France win cannot be understated and this is having a strong impact throughout Wales – we’ve already seen bike sales jump and the BBC Sport Personality of the year accolade will cause a further ripple effect – so we stand ready with Sport Wales to act quickly to build upon the momentum that has been gained and promote a cycling, and wider sporting, legacy.”

Sarah Powell, Sport Wales CEO, added:

“We have several existing applications from key partners that could

benefit from this exciting announcement and we will look to progress with these as a priority. Several 3G and ATP pitch projects across Wales (as part of the existing and successful collaboration scheme) will benefit immediately as will some cycling projects.

“Then, in early 2019, we will develop the criteria and application process for the remainder of the fund. Sport has an incredible ability to deliver wide ranging benefits to our society and we are delighted that the Welsh Government and the Minister have given us the opportunity to invest collaboratively in the development of facilities to further this work.”

[New year, new beginnings for iconic Rhyl building](#)

Julie James said:

“The Queen’s Buildings make up a significant part of the town centre, and the site offers a fantastic opportunity to revitalise the town centre, creating new opportunities to attract businesses and investment to the town.

“This site dominates Rhyl town centre, and I am keen for this investment to breathe new life into the centre of town, so that once again people are attracted back to spend money and time here.

“I know that Denbighshire Council is keen to develop the site, to create space for new retail units, renovate the car parking space and to build an exciting new event space for the public. I look forward to seeing the development take shape and come to benefit the town.”

This latest announcement builds on the work currently underway by the Council and its partners in redeveloping the waterfront area, which includes the new SC2 visitor attraction, and through the Rhyl town centre masterplan.

Cllr Hugh Evans OBE, leader of Denbighshire County Council, said:

“I welcome this funding from the Welsh Government which will contribute to the on-going regeneration of Rhyl by bringing partially derelict properties in the town centre back into use.

“It will provide opportunities for new jobs and business growth, as well as stimulating the private sector to undertake further investment in the town. “This project will form a significant project in the overall masterplan for Rhyl and will complement the works going on in Rhyl including private sector investment, in new hotels and restaurants.”