

Mark Drakeford welcomes Mike Russell MSP to Wales for Brexit discussions

The two ministers will discuss how both countries will continue to work together to get the best Brexit deal for Wales and Scotland as the UK negotiates to leave the European Union.

During the meetings, the Finance Secretary will highlight the importance of EU funds to Wales and the rest of the UK and the need to ensure the devolved administrations do not lose out as a result of Brexit.

The Welsh Government's European Advisory Group, which brings together individuals with experience and expertise of European issues from across civic society and political sectors, will meet in Cardiff later today. Mr Russell will attend the meeting and will also visit the EU funded Swansea University new Bay campus.

Professor Drakeford said:

“ I'm pleased to welcome Mike Russell to Wales to discuss how we can continue to work together to get the best Brexit deal for Wales and Scotland. It is also an opportunity to show first hand how EU funding has benefitted people, businesses and communities across Wales.

“The new Swansea University Bay campus, which Mike Russell will visit today, demonstrates the difference EU funds have made to our higher education sector – creating state-of-the-art facilities for students and providing a real boost to the local economy.

“That is why we have always been clear that we must get the best Brexit deal for Wales and ensure we don't lose a penny as a result of leaving the European Union.”

Tourism industry gears up for busy half term

The Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, said:

“The tourism Industry in Wales is in very good shape. And the fact

that we saw record breaking spend from overseas visitors last year and crossed the million visitors for the first time in 8 years is excellent news. We fully recognise how competitive the market is and the challenges facing the industry. Our future vision – especially in light of the EU Referendum result – is to do more again to build on this sense of confidence and to internationalise our reputation and approach.”

The ONS International Passenger Survey for 2016 shows that trips to Wales are up nearly 11% compared to 2015, while spend on trips to Wales is up by over 8%. The number of international visits to Wales in 2016 was 1.074 million, and the associated spend was a record £444 million.

The first of Wales’ themed years was a great success – Visit Wales’ marketing activity for 2016 generated an additional £370 million for the Welsh economy – which is an 18% increase on 2015. This is based on those definitely influenced by Visit Wales marketing before taking a trip to Wales. The Economy Secretary recently announced the continuation of the themed years with a new ‘Year of Discovery’ in 2019 which will build on the three themes of adventure, culture and great outdoors.

The Economy Secretary, continued:

“Although most of our performance indicators look good and feedback from the industry is positive, overnight GB figures are showing a fall in 2016 compared with the record year of 2015, in line with reductions for Britain as a whole. However, the overall picture for Wales – taking into account tourism day visits, international visitors as well GB overnights visits – suggests that Wales will see a substantial increase in overall tourism volumes compared with 2015 the total of visits across all three categories was 16% up over the first nine months – which builds on the previous two record-breaking years.

“Campaign work now continues to convert interest and opportunities arising from the weak pound into bookings for the summer. A boost to the Visit Wales budget means that there is £26.3m available to invest in marketing and product development this year this increase has enabled us to pull together a more ambitious programme than ever before for 2017.”

Innovative projects are key to future success. £2 million had been approved for a total of 38 projects across Wales under the Tourism Product Innovation Fund and Regional Tourism Engagement Fund. This funding will enable the private and public sectors to develop innovative projects that will stimulate demand and improve the visitor offer through supporting the Year of Legends campaign while also looking forward to the Year of the Sea.

The number of overnight trips made to Wales from Great Britain in the 12 months ending November 2016 was 9.56 million. The number of visits made to Wales from Great Britain in the first 11 months of 2016 was 8.62 million, 9.3% down compared to the first 11 months of 2015.

New incidence of TB down 35% in IAA

The IAA was established in North Pembrokeshire in 2010 as an area where increased measures would be applied to tackle all sources of bovine TB. These included stricter cattle controls, improved biosecurity, badger vaccination and testing of all goats and camelids. This is an approach which has never been tried before in the UK.

Today's report suggests the methods being applied in the area are working, with the disease situation in the IAA improving faster than in a nearby comparison area, where incidence fell by 23% over the same period.

The proportion of herds under restriction for bovine TB in the IAA has also fallen to 14.3%, compared with 22.3% in 2010.

Welcoming the report, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“We've made significant progress since we began our TB eradication programme in 2008 and over 95% of herds in Wales are now TB free. While some will attribute this to herd numbers falling in recent years, it is important to note the proportion of these herds with TB has also reduced by 26% since 2008.

“Today's report is encouraging and shows, over time, all the measures used in the IAA have had a positive impact on the disease. This is further evidence our approach to reducing the incidence of TB is working, with numbers of new incidents now at their lowest in 12 years.”

The report also reinforces the fact a recent increase in the number of cattle slaughtered across Wales because of bovine TB does not reflect a worsening situation. Instead, the rise is largely due to an increase in the use of the more sensitive gamma interferon blood test and more severe interpretation of the skin test. The increase is largely confined to the areas which carry out the most gamma testing.

The Cabinet Secretary added:

“Late last year I launched a consultation on the next steps in our

TB eradication programme. Many of the responses to this consultation agreed we need to take a more regional response, which will build on the progress we have already made and accelerate our advance towards a TB free Wales. I shall be making a statement on the future of our TB eradication programme next month.”

Quarantine Units to come into force on 12 June

The introduction of Quarantine Units (QU) will enable keepers to choose between using an approved QU to manage livestock movements or continuing to adhere to the Six Day Standstill (6DSS) on their whole holding. The new arrangements simplify the standstill regime and allow greater flexibility for livestock keepers, while maintaining movement control to prevent the spread of disease.

Lesley Griffiths said:

“I am pleased to announce Quarantine Units will come into force on 12 June. Each individual livestock keeper will now have more flexibility and be able to decide which approach – QUs or Six Day Standstill best meets their requirements. Ahead of their implementation, I would advise livestock owners to familiarise themselves with the Quarantine Units operational rules and requirements.

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop added:

“The alternative arrangements to the Six Day Standstill were developed at the request of, and in close collaboration with the industry. They have been worked through systematically, and collaboratively, with the support of Independent Veterinary Risk Assessments. I am confident this additional flexibility addresses and resolves issues raised by the industry around the Six Day Standstill whilst not increasing the risk of disease spread”.

The cost of certification for 18 months, including VAT, is £172.80 for one QU or £244.80 for two.

Wales increases recycling lead

Welsh Local Authorities recycled on average 63% of waste for the 12 months up to December 2016, compared with 59% over the same period from the previous year.

Altogether, 19 of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales increased their recycling rate by at least one percentage point, compared with October to December 2015. When grouped together rural authorities continue to have the highest recycling rate, with an average of 65% of waste recycled in the 12 months to the end of December 2016.

The latest figures follow a report released by Resource Magazine earlier this year, which ranked Wales third in the world for recycling.

Wales is now recycling double the amount it did a decade ago and continues to be used as an example of good practice for the rest of the UK.

Welcoming the latest statistics, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“Today’s statistics are encouraging evidence we are meeting the ambition set in our Programme for Government to further our lead over other nations in recycling and minimise landfill.

“The latest report shows we are still exceeding our statutory 58% recycling target and remain well on track to meet our 70% target by 2025. This achievement has not been easy, but we have made some significant changes and I would like to thank householders and Local Authorities for embracing these and making a real commitment to recycling.

“While this success is to be applauded, there are still challenges ahead. Half of all the rubbish collected from the kerbsides of households is easily recyclable material, with a quarter being food waste. It’s important we continue to work together to make sure this material is recycled so we can reduce the impact on the environment and reduce costs for Local Authorities.”