

Economy Secretary visits businesses in mid Wales to discuss local challenges and opportunities

The visits are part of the Economy Secretary's ongoing commitment to empowering and strengthening Wales' regions, so the fruits of prosperity are spread much more evenly across Wales.

It is an approach that is set out clearly in the Welsh Government's Economic Action Plan, which was launched in December.

The Economy Secretary has appointed three Chief Regional Officers , one for Mid and South West Wales, one for South East Wales and one for North Wales as part of his work to empower Welsh regions.

The role of the Chief Regional Officers is to engage with and listen to partners within their region and represent their views and interests back to the Welsh Government.

As part of the day of visits the Economy Secretary and the Chief Regional Officer for Mid and South West Wales, Rhodri Griffiths, went to global healthcare company, PCI Pharma who employ around 360 people in Hay-on-Wye.

They also visited Cellpath, a company that specialises in the manufacture and supply of products and services to the Cellular Pathology sector and employs 85 staff at its base in Newtown, and Wynnstay in Llansantffraid, an agricultural produce supplier that employs 400 people in mid Wales.

The Economy Secretary also attended a roundtable meeting in Newtown with local businesses who are keen to expand in the area but have concerns around whether their needs can be met by the existing supply of commercial properties.

Ken Skates said:

"I am committed to empowering Wales regions and to building on their individual strengths in order to secure maximum economic growth for Wales.

"My Economic Action Plan, recognises that each region of Wales has its own opportunities and challenges and that a one size fits all approach to Economic development will not go far enough to drive the regional economic growth that Wales needs.

"I have appointed three Chief Regional Officers to provide a regional voice in Government. They will listen to and involve local partners in decision making and feedback local intelligence that will help to tailor our work. Visits and meetings like the ones we

have enjoyed today will be absolutely key to making this approach a success.

“One consistent theme that has come out of today’s visits is the concern locally about the supply of good quality commercial property. This is a pressing issue, and one that we have identified in the Economic Plan Action. We will now be working with local authorities, the Mid Wales Manufacturing Group and the Growing Mid Wales Partnership, to address this in order to ensure that we can maximise the economic potential of this area of Wales.”

As part of the ongoing delivery of the Economic Action Plan the Economy Secretary and Chief Regional Officer will be visiting other businesses in Mid and South West Wales in the coming months.

“Loneliness and isolation in rural Wales is a ticking time bomb” – Huw Irranca-Davies

Tackling loneliness and isolation is a national priority for the Welsh Government. According to the 2016-17 National Survey for Wales, around 17% of the population of Wales, or around 440,000 people, report being lonely.

People living in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to loneliness and isolation. Farming communities by their nature often are isolated from each other and from mainstream public services. Nearly 20% of the Welsh population live in communities of less than 1,500 people.

During the visit, the Minister will discuss with a range of farming and rural organisations what the Welsh Government can do to help tackle loneliness and isolation in farming and rural communities across Wales, as part of its forthcoming strategy on the issue, which will be published for consultation later this year.

Speaking ahead of his visit, Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Loneliness and isolation is a growing issue in communities’ right across Wales. It affects everyone – be it a young person or an older person, a farmer or a doctor, a single person or a married couple, and can potentially lead to a range of serious health and social care problems.

“We want to help secure the best possible quality of life for people in all parts of Wales, including in our farming and rural communities. This is why the Welsh Government has made tackling loneliness and isolation a national priority.

“I’m at the Royal Welsh Show today to hear directly from people who live and work in rural Wales about their experiences, and to learn what we as a government can do to tackle what I consider to be a ticking time bomb.”

Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths added:

“The farming lifestyle of working long hours every day of every week, very often alone, means any opportunity for interaction with others is often greatly reduced. Added pressures such as running a business, animal disease and the uncertainties Brexit presents, can often lead to increased feelings of loneliness and hopelessness.

“Failing to deal with mental health issues can often lead to further issues. There is a wide range of support available to farmers and rural communities and I urge anyone suffering to not suffer alone and access the help available.”

Contact details for organisations able to provide support are available in the Welsh Government summer, winter and spring updates; Gwlad E-news bulletin and the Farming Connect Technical Publication.

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[Future support for farmers post-Brexit](#)

to be talk of the Show

Following the publication of the Welsh Government's consultation on its new Land Management programme in the weeks running up to the Show, the Cabinet Secretary wants to engage in a dialogue to help shape the 'made in Wales' approach.

Over the coming days, the Cabinet Secretary will undertake over forty events at the Royal Welsh Show, hearing the views of farmers, representatives from the food and forestry industries, Unions and partner organisations about the proposals.

The new Land Management Programme will consist of two large and flexible schemes – the Economic Resilience Scheme and the Public Goods Scheme.

Welsh Government officials will hold drop in sessions at the stand providing an opportunity for farmers and the public to come along to find out more about the consultation and give their views.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"This year's Show is without doubt the most important for a very long time. It will be the last Show before we leave the European Union and one of the last major opportunities for me to engage with farmers and partner organisations on a mass scale ahead of it.

"I want to use this year's Show to speak to as many people as possible and have a national conversation about the consultation I launched two weeks ago on our proposals to support farmers and land managers after Brexit.

"Brexit means we will all have to do things in a different way. Put simply, maintaining the status quo is not an option.

"The way we manage our land matters especially if we are to produce outcomes of importance to everyone in Wales. The current CAP does not help us achieve these outcomes and is not designed to realise the full value of our land.

"We now have the opportunity to put in place 'made in Wales' support systems to deliver wide- ranging benefits. Our proposals will keep farmers farming and position them to thrive in a post-Brexit world.

"Now is the time to forge a new consensus on the role of farmers in Wales. This is a 16 week meaningful consultation which will inform our plans. I want to hear the views of individual farmers and land managers across Wales and would encourage everyone to have their say over the coming months."

At the Hybu Cig Cymru (HCC) breakfast today, the Cabinet Secretary will announce £9.2m of funding from the Rural Development Programme to support HCC's Strategic Initiative the 'Red Meat Development Programme'.

To complement this work in the red meat sector the Cabinet Secretary will also announce £6.5m of funding to deliver two projects to increase the profitability and resilience of the Welsh dairy sector.

On Tuesday at the Show, the Cabinet Secretary will meet the UK Government's Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and call for urgent clarification on future farm funding for Wales.

Cabinet Secretary added:

"During the referendum campaign, we were promised Wales would not lose a penny as a result of leaving the EU. Two years on, unfortunately we still have no clarity on this.

"I will again be raising this with Michael Gove when I meet with him at the Show on Tuesday. The UK Government must urgently confirm Wales will maintain its current share of funding. This is only fair and will provide much needed reassurance for the industry."

[Signs positive for Better Jobs scheme](#)

Better Jobs Closer to Home aims to create opportunities and sustainable jobs by utilising the spending power of public procurement. This is achieved through the use of innovative commercial approaches and, through the use of reserved contracts, using that lever to create jobs in areas of high employment need.

Four Better Jobs Pilots are currently being tested across the South Wales Valleys area and, if successful, similar interventions could then be replicated in other parts of Wales.

Julie James was in Ebbw Vale yesterday to visit EBO Quality Signs, one of the pilot projects. EBO are a social enterprise that employs local people with disabilities, and the Leader of the House was keen to see what progress had been made so far, and what the future may hold for success of the programme.

She said:

"EBO is already an excellent enterprise in its own right, which we felt was well suited to this special kind of intervention. Our team

have worked with EBO to increase the hours of work by brokering discussions between the unit and supply chains across Wales to place further orders with them.

“I was delighted to visit and see the operation up close and hear more about the new orders coming in. I was especially pleased to learn more about the immediate benefits of working with our team and which intervention in particular they believe would work elsewhere in Wales.”

Jonathon Bell, Director at EBO said:

“We were delighted that the Leader of the House was able to find time to visit our site at Ebbw Vale this week and see the manufacturing operation.”

EBO Signs produces traffic and commercial signage such as highway signs, street nameplates, safety signs and hoarding boards.

Extra demand for their products has already resulted in orders placed with the factory with two local authority main contractors, and the Assembly Commission. Transport for Wales has also stipulated the use of this factory for their signage requirements, and meetings are currently underway with Keolis/Amey for opportunities during the mobilisation stage of the new train operator contract.

The four pilot programmes are being led by the Valleys Taskforce, of which Julie James is a member, and are contained within the recently published delivery plan *Our Valleys, Our Future*.