

£60m programme to develop new childcare settings across Wales

Ministers are committed to providing 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds, for up to 48 weeks of the year. The 30 hours will be made up of the existing minimum of 10 hours of Foundation Phase and up to 20 hours of childcare with a registered provider.

The Childcare Offer is currently being roll-out across Wales, and will be available across the country by 2020.

The £60m grant programme, which will be spread over three years (2018-2021), will be focussed primarily on supporting the co-location of existing Foundation Phase provision with the new Childcare Offer provision on a single site, wherever possible.

This will involve either establishing new childcare settings or refurbish existing ones to ensure they meet the required standard that would be expecting of a setting delivering the Welsh Government's Childcare Offer.

The programme will ensure the Childcare Offer is available to parents across Wales by ensuring there is sufficient childcare in the right areas, with a specific focus on developing new provision in areas that currently lack childcare services, in particular rural and disadvantaged areas.

The funding will also support the childcare sector in other ways, including:

- Supporting the growth and sustainability of the childcare sector across Wales, helping to create high-quality jobs in the sector;
- Improving the physical quality of childcare settings;
- Supporting the expansion of Welsh medium provision, in line with the Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050' strategy; and
- Supporting SEN and ALN provision.
- Local authorities have been invited to bid for the funding.

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"I'm really pleased to announce a significant £60m Welsh Government investment in new childcare settings across Wales, which will ensure parents across the country are able to access high quality, government-funded childcare places. This will not only ensure their children are given the very best start in life, but it will go a long way to help reducing the strain on family income and helping ensure childcare is not a barrier to them taking up employment or increasing their hours.

"This investment will help ensure the 30 hours offer is as clear and easy as possible for working parents to understand and children

to access. As part of this, we need to enable parents, wherever possible, to be able to drop off their children and pick them up from the same site and access a seamless 30 hours of childcare, although wrap around provision will continue to be an important part of the answer for some children and parents.”

The investment will help deliver the Welsh Government’s commitment to introducing Community Learning Centres which provide extended services with childcare, parenting support, family learning and community access to facilities built around the school day.

Economy Secretary in Rhymney to explore local opportunities and challenges

The visits are part of his 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, launched in December.

As part of his commitment to empowering Wales’ regions, the Economy Secretary has appointed three Chief Regional Officers , one for South East Wales, one for North Wales and one for Mid and South West Wales, who will engage with and listen to partners within their region and represent their views and interests within the Welsh Government.

The Economy Secretary and the Chief Regional Officer for South East Wales, David Rosser, visited Rhymney Print Services, and Surevend Catering, two micro businesses on the Lawns Industrial Estate which Caerphilly Council is keen to develop further.

They also visited Philtronics in Hirwaun, part of the supply chain for the South East Wales semiconductor cluster, and attended a roundtable with companies and entrepreneurs to explore how digital technology can support care and retail in the area, which have been identified by the Welsh

Government as foundation sectors.

Ken Skates said:

“I am absolutely committed to empowering Wales regions and 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 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, and in the case of South East Wales, support work to deliver the priorities of Our Valleys, Our Future to create thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs in the Valleys. Visits and meeting like the ones we have enjoyed today will be absolutely key to this approach.”

Later in the day, the Economy Secretary visited section two of the A465 to see progress on the scheme which is now nearly three-quarters complete.

The scheme includes 2km of cycleway and six pedestrian and cycle-bridges to support the Welsh commitments to Active Travel.

There are also impressive structures, including a concrete arch bridge at Gilwern which is the largest of its type in the world, and the gateway bridge at Brynmawr which involved bringing one of the largest cranes operating in the UK to site to lift it in place.

The Economy Secretary said:

“The scheme is delivering a range of benefits around local employment, education and training. Importantly, and in line with the priorities set out in Our Valleys, Our Future we want people who use this new road to see it not as a bypass, but as a destination to thriving communities and a growing local economy.”

[Housing and Regeneration Minister visits Anglesey homelessness project](#)

Housing First is an innovative approach which has been proven to work, providing those who need it with accommodation and then offering them the support they need to be able to sustain a tenancy themselves.

Rebecca Evans met service users and staff at The Wallich in Llangefni and talked to them about how the project, which has been running for five years, is working.

Rebecca Evans said:

“It’s particularly impressive that 78% of people supported by the project have successfully secured and maintained accommodation, and although this project is small in scale, it is helping to improve peoples’ lives and is having a big impact.

“Last month the First Minister asked me to chair a new Ministerial group to support our work tackling youth homelessness, and to oversee the development of Housing First in Wales. We will carefully evaluate how Housing First is working as part of this work, including the Anglesey project.

“I am keen to see what lessons can be learned from this inspiring team, and what we can share with other pilot projects as we work with councils to spread best practice and develop Housing First approaches across Wales.”

Lindsay Cordery-Bruce, Chief Executive of The Wallich said:

“We were delighted to welcome the Minister to visit our team and our service users on Anglesey.

“We have learnt a lot from being the pioneers for Housing First in Wales and we look forward to sharing our best practice with the Ministerial group.

“The Wallich strive to design innovative projects to benefit vulnerable people using the latest and best evidence we have available to us. Our experience in Housing First has laid the foundations for working in implementing Psychologically Informed Environments across our projects.

“It is really encouraging to see the commitment from the Minister to allow this innovation to influence policy.”

[Adventure hub to celebrate the best of Valleys natural resources and heritage](#)

This week, Tourism Minister, Lord Elis-Thomas visited Pontymoile canal basin, Pontypool to meet with project partners and see the plans for the area.

The Joint project between Caerphilly County Borough Council; Torfaen County Borough Council and Glandwr Cymru – Canal and River Trust in Wales, is part of a wider Welsh Government EU funded Tourism Attractor Destination programme, led by Visit Wales, which aims to create 11 must see destinations across Wales. The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle project aims to develop outdoor recreation, tourism and leisure activity along the Monmouthshire & Brecon canal in Torfaen and Caerphilly and connecting upland area of Mynydd Maen.

Through investment in infrastructure and adjacent visitor hubs, the project will help develop the economic potential of the canal as a prime location to visit, live and work generating investment and employment for local communities. Visitors will be encouraged to take up adventure sports by making the most of the natural upland landscape and rich heritage that exists between Torfaen and Risca.

The main elements of the project are as follows:

- the construction of a Visitor Activity Centre at Pontymoile canal basin in Pontypool,
- infrastructure to enhance access to a new canal basin development at South Sebastopol,
- restoration of the canal in Cwmbran and along the canal corridor.
- increasing the navigable length of canal to form a working heritage attraction,
- providing additional visitor accommodation (glamping) and adventure hub at Cwmcarn Forest. This will link with new car parking and improved walking and cycling routes from the canal into the wider landscape.

The Valleys Taskforce has also this week published a first-year progress

report, detailing the breadth of the work over the last 12 months. The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal is a key project that will deliver on the commitment within Our Valleys, Our Future to increase tourism in the South Wales Valleys.

Tourism Minister, Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

“Projects such this one are at the heart of our ambition to help Valleys communities celebrate and make the most of their natural resources and heritage. Our aim through the Tourism Attractor Destination programme is to focus efforts and investment on key projects in each region so we have a real impact on Wales’ profile in this globally competitive market. This development will give people compelling reasons to visit the area and I look forward to plans which I have seen coming to fruition.”

Councillor Fiona Cross, executive member for the environment at Torfaen council, said:

“In Torfaen we can offer a huge variety of adventure sports, from hiking, mountain biking, fell running and even paragliding in the hills of Blaenavon, to water sports on the canal and Llandegfedd reservoir in Pontypool. We also have our own ski slope and some of the best cycling routes in south Wales.

“This project will allow us to connect visitor facilities across Torfaen and Caerphilly using the canal and Mynydd Maen as a focus for water sports, walking, cycling and in some places horse riding between the various locations. The improvements it will allow us to make along the canal will also help support new local businesses and create local jobs.”

Cllr Sean Morgan, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Caerphilly County Borough Council with responsibility for economy and tourism said:

“I am delighted that the Mon & Brec Canal Adventure Triangle has been awarded EU funding, as this investment will encourage more visitors to explore the fantastic natural landscape that the area has to offer, as well as the superb facilities on offer at Cwmcarn Forest. The funding will enable a number of projects including the building of additional glamping pods and an adventure hub at Cwmcarn Forest. The new hub will provide a fantastic opportunity for informal recreation which includes an exciting new zip wire facility”.

Richard Thomas, Glandŵr Cymru regional director, says:

“The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal is one of the most beautiful canals anywhere in the world. It’s full of activity, wildlife and offers a completely different pace of life. We’re delighted that it’s been awarded this funding. The adventure hub will bring further interest to the canal, meaning more people can enjoy it and get the health and well-being benefits from its unique environment.”

[£3m investment for Wales’ growing geospatial and space technology sector](#)

Aberystwyth University, in collaboration with QinetiQ, will lead the Geographical Data and Earth Observation for Monitoring (GEOM) programme, which uses state-of-the-art earth observation satellites.

The initiative will help Welsh companies exploit satellite and drone technology to capture vital information for use by sectors, including agriculture, energy, security, environment, transport and infrastructure. This will enable them to develop market-ready products and services.

The programme is being backed by £1.9m of EU funding through the Welsh Government.

Professor Drakeford said:

“This is another great example of how the Welsh Government is investing EU funds to position Wales as a competitive and outward-facing nation.

“Driving innovation through world-class research and expertise in our universities alongside businesses will secure investment and employability in this fast-growing sector.

“Wales has benefited hugely from EU funding over the years and this once again highlights the importance of securing replacement funding for Wales once the UK leaves the EU.”

Aberystwyth University will work with up to 25 companies, which are already using satellite and drone technologies, to help address challenges affecting the different sectors. These include using drones to precisely map hazards such as overhanging trees or over steepened embankment slopes along railways lines. This type of information would be dangerous and expensive if collected on the ground.

Peter Bunting, from Aberystwyth University, said:

“With the advent of mobile technologies, apps and smart systems linking with geospatial data derived from space systems, these technologies are playing an ever-increasing role in our economy and day-to-day life.

“This rapidly-growing area is just beginning to realise the potential for extracting spatial intelligence from drone technology. The GEOM programme ensures Welsh companies are at the forefront of this exciting and growing area, enabling job creation and the development of new products and services.”