

Autism services in Wales improving

In 2016, the Welsh Government published a new Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan, backed by a £13m investment in new Integrated Autism services across Wales.

The first annual report on the delivery of the Action Plan is being published today, and sets out what has been achieved during the last year.

Achievements include:

- Improving services – The establishment of a National Integrated Autism service is creating consistent support for autistic people across Wales. Services are already operating in Cardiff and Vale, Cwm Taf, Gwent and Powys, it will be launched in North Wales next week and will be operational in Western Bay and West Wales later this year.
- Improving waiting times for assessment – Since 2015 the Welsh Government has invested an additional £2m a year in children’s neurodevelopmental services. In November 2017, a new 26 week waiting time standard from referral to first assessment appointment was introduced, which is now being piloted.
- Raising awareness – The extension of the Learning with Autism programme. In addition to the primary schools scheme, the secondary school and early years schemes have been launched and are being rolled out. 80 schools have now completed the primary school programme, with nearly 13,000 children becoming autism super heroes. The Can You See me campaign is also being delivered, aimed at improving awareness of autism in local communities. The campaign film and resources are being rolled out in partnership with local parents, carers and businesses across Wales.

Health and Social Services Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“I’m pleased with the real progress we’ve made this year to improve services for people with autism. We are raising awareness of autism across services, improving access to assessment and diagnosis and putting in place additional specialist support in every region.

“Although we are making good progress we know there is still much more to do and we continue to look carefully at the issues which autistic people say matter most to them to inform future action.”

To further support service improvement, Ministers intend to highlight the needs of autistic people across statutory services by introducing a Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services, which is being developed in partnership with autistic people. It will provide clarity on the support autistic people can expect to receive and will provide guidance on how services can adapt their practice to meet the individual needs of autistic people.

The Health Secretary added:

“Over this Assembly term we want to focus all our efforts on delivering the ASD Strategic Action Plan, embedding the new integrated service, and delivering on all our other commitments.

“We are already delivering much needed improvements in autism services and I am convinced that costly and resource intensive legislation will not bring any additional benefits for autistic people. It must be much better to invest time and money in ensuring we deliver on our firm commitments and to ensure there is a focus on continuous improvement as the new services we are putting in place become established.

“The calls for improvement in autism services are not falling on deaf ears, we are taking action to achieve the outcomes everyone wants to see. We will continue to listen and I will keep an open mind on the need for autism specific legislation in the future, if it becomes clear through evaluation that the improvements we all want to see can only be delivered by taking this route.”

Major landmark reached as 100 projects completed through the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme

Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams, announced today that the programme has reached a major milestone with the completion of the 100th project in Band A, the first wave of investment.

The Education Secretary was speaking at the inaugural Education Buildings Wales conference which is being held at Cardiff University.

With a further 63 schemes under construction or approved to proceed, Band A is already on target to significantly surpass its target of 150 schools and colleges to be rebuilt or refurbished.

This represents an investment of £1.4 billion in education infrastructure across Wales and has encompassed a wide variety of schemes catering for the different needs of all learners and communities.

Kirsty Williams said:

“From impressive new college campuses in Cardiff and Aberdare to

brand new schools accommodating pupils aged 3-16 in Llandysul and Holywell, our 21st Century Schools and Education Programme continues to deliver for learners across the length and breadth of Wales.

“The Programme represents the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s. Investing alongside local authorities and further education colleges, we have been able to create buildings that meet the needs of learners, teachers and the wider community and offer the kind of facilities that are truly befitting of the 21st Century.

“But we’re not stopping there. Band B of the Programme will begin in April 2019 and will be even more ambitious, investing a further £2.3 billion.

“We will continue to make sure that we have the right size schools and colleges, in the right location; well-designed, safe and energy-efficient buildings that provide enough places to deliver Welsh and English medium education and that represent good value for money.

“I am proud to celebrate this achievement and look forward to the good news continuing as we move into the second phase of the Programme.”

Welsh Government funded childcare offer expanded

When rolled out across Wales by September 2020, the offer will provide 30 hours of Welsh Government-funded early education and childcare to working parents of 3 and 4 year olds for 48 weeks of the year.

The Minister is today announcing the offer is being extended to cover the following local authority areas from September 2018:

- Cardiff – phased introduction
- Newport – phased introduction
- Torfaen – the entire county
- Neath Port Talbot – phased introduction
- Ceredigion – the entire county
- Conwy – phased introduction
- Wrexham – phased introduction

The offer is currently available in Anglesey, Gwynedd, Caerphilly,

Flintshire, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Swansea and Blaenau Gwent.

Today's announcement means the number of authorities delivering the offer will double by this September, demonstrating progress and real momentum. The offer is expected to be delivered in at least some parts of most local authorities in Wales by September 2019.

Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"Our ground-breaking childcare offer is making a real difference to parents right across Wales, reducing the strain on family income and helping ensure childcare is not a barrier to them taking up employment or increasing their hours.

"I'm delighted to confirm the offer is being rolled out to seven more local authorities across Wales, as we continue the work to roll out the offer across the entire country by September 2020."

[Health Secretary welcomes reduction in child tooth decay](#)

The Welsh Oral Health Information Unit (Cardiff University) report, published in partnership with Public Health Wales, shows that the percentage of children experiencing obvious tooth decay has dropped significantly from 45% in 2004/05 to 30 % in 2016/17.

The Welsh Government launched the Designed to Smile campaign in 2008/09 to improve children's oral health and has been piloting a preventive approach to care in dental practices across Wales.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

"I am very pleased to see the progress being made in reducing tooth decay in children. It is obvious the Welsh Government's investment in Designed to Smile and access to preventive dental services is having a real impact across Wales.

However there is no room for complacency. We have revamped our prevention programme to include more help for very young children and their parents and we are also stepping up prevention for older adults."

The Chief Dental Officer for Wales, Colette Bridgman added:

“Dental decay is unpleasant, can be painful to experience, it is costly to treat and yet is largely preventable. Research has shown that dental decay often starts early and therefore early prevention will have the most impact. The evidence is now clear that sustained investment in prevention in services and targeted population programmes can reduce dental decay.

It is important that every young child in Wales is supervised to brush their teeth with family fluoride toothpaste at bedtime, and on one other occasion every day. Having nothing sweet to eat or drink in the last hour before bedtime will also help to protect teeth from decay.”

Newtown Bypass progress on track

Contractors are now more than two years into construction and the project is on programme to be completed in early 2019. As part of the development, the bridge across the Dolfor Valley was recently built which allows the remaining earthwork operations to take place.

The Bypass to the south of Newtown will be approximately 6.5km long and extends from the A489 Llanidloes Road near Glandulas Holiday Park (West of Newtown) to the A483 Pool Road (East of Newtown).

The scheme will improve safety by allowing large high sided heavy goods and agricultural vehicles to travel through the area away from residential areas as well as reducing traffic congestion on nearby roads.

During the visit, the First Minister met with the workforce including apprentices working on the bypass. £10.3 million has been spent on employing people from Wales which includes apprentices.

Small and Medium sized enterprises in Wales have also benefited from £11.5 million spend as a result of the bypass development.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“I’ve been really pleased to see the progress being made on the Newtown Bypass. This is a significant development which will improve safety, relieve traffic congestion and ensure better access to jobs and services, delivering a real boost to the local economy.

“A strong emphasis has been placed on providing local employment and training opportunities and there are currently 16 apprentices and graduate trainees working on the bypass which is really good news.

“We have also worked closely with Powys County Council to develop Active Travel provisions which have been included as part of the scheme.

“The Newtown bypass is a great example of the Welsh Government’s commitment to invest in our transport infrastructure, help industry grow and deliver for communities in Mid Wales.”