

OECD to lead new project to support regional economic development in Wales

The Paris-based experts will use their extensive international experience of regional economic development to provide rigorous challenge and advice to the Welsh Government as it implements its new Economic Action Plan and develops new plans for Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit.

As world leaders in their field, the OECD's input will help ensure that Wales' future regional economic development model embeds international best practice.

The internationally-renowned body has provided advice to Welsh Government before, when in 2014 it produced a major report to help improve schools in Wales. In subsequent years it has also supported Welsh Government work on schools reform.

This new project will see international experts visit Wales and discuss regional economic challenges and opportunities with partners. This in turn will help the Welsh Government to develop a new toolkit for action as well as clear international benchmarks to monitor performance.

Minister for Economy and Transport Ken Skates said:

“Our new Economic Action Plan is a major public policy reform and I want to ensure we receive the very best advice and strongest international challenge to help us achieve our economic ambitions.

“The changes we have outlined through the Economic Action Plan to boost regional economies across Wales are profound, as is our ambition for stronger regional partnership working in Wales to boost inclusive and sustainable growth. There is no-one better to help us deliver this than the OECD.

“We have asked the OECD to advise us on ways to strengthen regional economic governance, build capacity, and support more joined up economic policy making, including through developing a practical toolkit for both us and our partners to use to support those changes.

“We must ensure Wales remains competitive and that we benchmark ourselves against the best and learn from great ideas and new innovation across the world.”

Minister for Brexit Jeremy Miles said:

“EU regional investment has helped improve our economy, but Wales needs further investment to address the structural economic challenges we continue to face. We continue to press the UK Government for the £370m annually we receive for our European Structural and Investment funds in Wales in keeping with promises made during the referendum campaign that Wales would not be worse off and for regional economic development in Wales to remain with the Welsh Government after we leave the EU.

“Our project with the OECD will play an important part in Wales’ development of the right policy and structures for a successor regional investment approach to replace EU regional funds, closely aligned to our Economic Action Plan. We are not looking to simply replicate the EU model in Wales, and are committed to creating a new, made in Wales approach that reflects international best practice, builds on Wales’ distinctive legislative and policy landscape, and delivers for our people, businesses and communities.

“This partnership with the OECD will help strengthen that work and give confidence to our partners that new and dynamic partnerships can be formed to innovate and link policies in fresh and imaginative ways.”

Funding for projects supporting people out of homelessness

The funding is part of the £30m being invested this year and next year to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

The investment includes:

- £240,000 to extend the Conwy and Denbighshire Housing First pilot for the 2019-20 year;
- Over £52,000 for Rhondda Cynon Taf council to extend their successful Housing First project supporting ex-offenders;
- £68,000 for the Salvation Army to run a Housing First project in Merthyr Tydfil;
- Over £548,000 for two projects to work closely in Cardiff. Funding will be used to continue a Housing First pilot run by the Salvation Army and for Cardiff Council to establish a new Housing First pilot, meeting demand locally.

Housing First is designed to support people who need significant levels of help to move away from homelessness. People receiving support are offered a place to live and then offered tailored, long term support to help enable

them to manage a tenancy independently.

Julie James, Minister for Housing and Local Government said:

“Housing First can help people who are homeless and who often have complex needs including severe mental illness or mental health problems, problems with drug and alcohol abuse, poor physical health and a lack of a wider support network.

“Housing First is not the right approach for everyone who is homeless – there is still a need for supported housing and temporary accommodation, but it can play an important role in supporting people, particularly those who have been sleeping rough for a long time, to be able to sustain a tenancy.”

Housing First is designed to provide flexible support for as long as it is required. It focuses on what the individual needs to recover and be able to sustain a tenancy themselves.

Housing First Projects are designed to ensure that the individual has choice and control – they are actively encouraged to engage with support services such as mental health or substance abuse, but they are not required to do so in return for support.

She added:

“The cost, in terms of health, emergency services and police budgets, of supporting people while they are on the streets far outweighs the cost of addressing their homelessness. We aim to support the most vulnerable people in Wales, and Housing First is a sound investment that can save money, as well as lives, in the long term.”

First Minister's Christmas message

2018 has given us much to celebrate – from the events to mark the 70th anniversary of our NHS, to Geraint Thomas' extraordinary Tour de France win. I'm also proud of the role we played in the poignant ceremonies in Wales, France and Belgium to commemorate 100 years since the end of the First World War.

It is unavoidable to look back over the course of the last year without reflecting on the UK government's failure to secure an acceptable withdrawal deal to leave the European Union.

With less than 100 days until the UK leaves the EU, we are heading into the new year with a no deal scenario – which would have a particularly severe impact on Wales – firmly on the table and with Parliament and the UK government at deadlock.

Against this background of uncertainty, the Welsh Government will continue to do everything we can to protect Welsh jobs, support our economy and safeguard public services through these difficult times.

It's important we all recognise the role we can play in unifying our country and avoid further divisions – whether this is in our communities, or even within our own family.

The festive period is a time for family, friends and goodwill. My thoughts are with those who are less fortunate, from the too many who will sleep rough this Christmas to those across the world who face danger daily due to ongoing conflict.

I want to extend a sincere thank you to our dedicated health, social care, emergency service staff and volunteers who give up their Christmas to keep our services running. Your commitment and hard-work is truly admirable.

As my first month as First Minister draws to a close, I remain conscious of the opportunities and the responsibility which comes with this position. I look forward to working with my new Cabinet to deliver for the people of Wales.

I hope you all have a very happy Christmas – Nadolig Llawen i chi i gyd!

[Rediscover Wales in 2019](#)

2018 was a celebration of Wales' coastline and routes to the sea and during Year of the Sea Wales successfully hosted the Volvo Ocean Race for the first time; became the world's first refill nation; and a celebration of Welsh language and Culture was held at the Eisteddfod in Cardiff Bay. A variety of events were also held across Wales from the Gower Beach Sculpture Festival to the creation of a giant 20-metre long sea-faring monster from Cardigan and the Keep Wales Tidy All Wales Beach Clean. 2018 was also a year for immersive coastal theatrical productions with National Theatre Wales' The Tide Whisperer and Marc Rees's Now the Hero/Nawr yr Arwr.

Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

“I’d like to thank the industry for their support during the Year of the Sea as well as during the previous themed years. By coming together and working in partnership Wales has a strong voice – in a very competitive marketplace. We know that our themed year campaigns are generating over £350m a year in the economy and that the 2018 television advert, featuring Luke Evans, was positively received by our target audiences.

“And now we will embark on our Year of Discovery. In 2019 we want to encourage our visitors to discover Wales anew, to discover new parts of Wales and to try out enriching outdoor, adventure and cultural experiences across the country.

“Wales is full of hidden corners; as well as world-famous attractions. And so the challenge is set to visit places you have never been before; or to try something for the very first time. Go coastering or zip-lining; tick off more of Wales’s 600 castles from your must-see list; or to visit one of our galleries or museums to learn something new about our past. Sain Ffagan’s new £30 million redevelopment is a great place to start.”

And as well as encouraging the people of Wales to discover new corners of our landscape, we’re also encouraging international visitors to explore more of our country. [The Wales Way](#) (external link) – a trio of national touring routes with loops and detours of discovery www.thewalesway.com – was launched last year to help them on their way.

A multi-media international campaign on the theme of discovery will run throughout 2019, with activity planned in Wales, across the rest of UK, Ireland and international markets. The campaign will be on digital, television, on on-demand platforms, and in key travel hubs from January here in Wales – with the main marketing push across the rest of the UK taking place in March around the key holiday booking times.

Further events and activities are planned throughout the year – with more details to be announced early in 2019. The Deputy Minister will kick-start Year of Discovery 2019 with visits to west Wales on January 7th.

[New pelvic health co-ordinators for Wales](#)

The coordinators will work with a national pathway manager to implement improvements to pelvic health across Wales.

The work is led by the Women’s Health Implementation Group (WHIG), set-up by

the Welsh Government who have provided £1m a year for its work. The group have decided that the first year's funding will be spent on establishing a number of key posts to deliver some of the recommendations of the vaginal mesh and tape review.

Health Minister, Vaughan Gething, said:

“The WHIG has listened to concerns from the Mesh Survivors Group and has decided to appoint a national pathway manager to deliver the recommendations of the vaginal mesh and tape review. This will lead to the creation of a network of Pelvic Health and Well-being Coordinators within each health board. They will have a clinical background from an appropriate discipline, e.g. physiotherapy or pain management and will work with the national lead to deliver the required changes to local services.

“The group is also taking advice from patients and clinicians on how to achieve the consistent provision of translabial scans where they are appropriate across Wales.

“The group will now consider the recommendations from the report into endometriosis services in Wales produced by the Endometriosis Task and Finish Group.”

The WHIG, chaired by Tracy Myhill, CEO of Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board, was established in May 2018 to oversee specific areas of women's health requiring urgent attention and improvement.