

Ken Skates takes action to support Tesco workers

Tesco recently announced plans to close its Customer Contact Centre in Llanishen, with the potential loss of 1100 jobs.

The new Taskforce, which Ken Skates is keen to see established at the earliest possible opportunity, will see the key players gathered around one table to pool their knowledge and resources and ensure that as many of the 1100 people currently working at the centre are provided with the very best support should they need to find alternative employment.

The Economy Secretary said:

“I’ve been very clear about my deep disappointment over the proposed closure of this award winning Customer Contact Centre in Cardiff and also about the way this news was broken to staff.

Wales has a well-established support infrastructure in place for workers who are affected by redundancy and at times like this when one organisation is proposing to cut a high number of jobs, it is really helpful to get all the key players around one table so we can discuss the best and innovative ways of supporting affected workers.

This is a tried and tested approach as demonstrated by the success of a similar taskforce to support employees affected by the closure of the Murco site in Pembrokeshire and will ensure close partnership working with agencies, including Jobcentre plus and Careers Wales, Cardiff Council and our flagship ReAct 3 programme.

We are talking here about a highly employable, award winning workforce who I’m sure many companies in the area would be very keen to employ. I’m determined to do everything I can, working alongside our partners, to ensure that the impact of the potential closure on our workers and wider economy is kept to an absolute minimum.”

First Minister and UEFA President say

thank you to Cardiff for the enormous success of the Champions League Final

In a letter to the First Minister, Aleksander Čeferin praised event organisers for delivering “nothing short of excellence” and a “remarkable and professional series of football events”.

Mr Čeferin also thanked Cardiff for its warm welcome describing the capital as a small city which “welcomed with open arms many thousands of football fans in an outstanding spirit of cooperation, protection and pure enjoyment.”

The momentous Champions League Finals and the 4 day festival in Cardiff Bay brought thousands of fans to Wales’ capital city and – despite a significant security operation throughout the city and added pressure on Wales’ transport network – disruption was kept to a minimum.

The First Minister has thanked the Football Association for Wales, UEFA, Cardiff Council, South Wales Police and all the emergency services for their hard work and success in delivering the events.

First Minister said:

“One month ago today, Cardiff hosted the greatest sporting event of the year. The eyes of the world were on Wales, and we delivered.

“The Champions League Final was a culmination of months of hard work and planning to ensure our visitors were kept safe, well looked after and given a fantastic Welsh welcome.

“I would also like to thank fans for their good behaviour during their time in Cardiff. It was wonderful to see thousands of French, Spanish and Italian fans enjoying themselves in our capital city and I hope they go back home with fond memories of Wales, and return again in the future.

“The challenges that came with being the smallest city ever to host such an event should not be underestimated and it makes me very proud to see what Cardiff achieved. There will be millions of people across the globe who will have sat up and taken notice of Wales as a place to visit, work and do business. We are determined to build on this great success.”

£3.7 million to improve community facilities in deprived areas of Wales

Thirteen projects will share the funding during 2017/18 from the Welsh Government's Community Facilities programme.

The programme provides capital grants of up to £500,000, to develop and improve facilities for communities, aimed at tackling poverty and its effects.

The 13 projects to receive funding all provide access to services and activities which increase opportunity and help prevent or alleviate poverty, such as sporting facilities, hostel accommodation for homeless young people and library facilities. Seven of the projects are in Communities First areas.

Announcing the funding on a visit to the ASK Centre in Rhyl a previous beneficiary of the scheme, Cabinet Secretary Carl Sargeant said:

“This funding is not simply about improving buildings. In applying for these grants community organisations have had to demonstrate how the facilities they offer provide vital community services which help prevent or tackle poverty. For example, activities for Communities First or Families First; operating a food bank, hosting advice services or saving a service which would otherwise be lost to the community such as a shop or library.

“Previous funding under this scheme has had a beneficial impact upon Welsh communities and the day to day lives of local people. While this is the last round of awards under the current funding arrangements a revised scheme will reopen this summer.”

New code sets out presumption against rural school closures

The Welsh Government is changing the School Organisation Code that guides decisions about schools.

The Education Secretary has launched a consultation on the changes, which include:

- Proposers having to consider whether a rural school will be closed by referring to a 'rural school' list

- Proposals to close a rural school must identify clear and specific reasons for closure, set out the alternatives that have been identified, with an assessment of these including likely education benefits, impact on the community and the likely effect on travelling arrangements and explain why the closure is the most appropriate course of action.
- Federation to be considered as an alternative in all cases.
- Consideration of alternatives to be a two-stage process with the proposer having to consider other alternatives that emerge during the consultation process.
- Any consultations on closures to be published on a school day and the local community made aware.
- The code will be revised to better reflect that addressing surplus places does not necessarily mean closing schools and alternatives to closure should be considered.

Kirsty Williams has also announced that the Welsh Government will establish the first ever designation of rural schools and develop a list of rural schools for the purposes of the presumption against closure of rural schools.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Rural schools face unique issues and I want to ensure that pupils that attend them have the same opportunities as children in other areas.

“These proposals strengthen the School Organisation Code to make sure that councils and other proposers do everything they can to keep a rural school open before deciding to consult on closure.

“Talking and engaging with the local community is vital. If there is a consultation to close a school, all options and suggestions that emerge from this must be considered before a decision is made. This might include federation with other schools or increasing the community use of school buildings to make the school more viable.

“Rural schools are at the heart of community life. I therefore want to make sure these schools get a fair hearing when their future is being considered. These plans will play a key part in our national mission to raise standards and offer opportunities to all our young people.”

Last year Kirsty Williams announced a new £2.5m a year small and rural schools grant to encourage innovation and support school to school working. Councils submitted their proposals to the Welsh Government at the end of May and these are currently being assessed.

€1.5m EU investment helps Welsh company fight global infections

The investment will see IMSPEX Diagnostics Ltd, which is based in Abercynon, team up with leading manufacturers and clinical trial specialists in Germany and Ireland and with the University of Warwick and South Wales-based RedKnight Consultancy Ltd.

The €2.4m project aims to develop a rapid, non-invasive device called BreathSpec, which can diagnose bacterial or viral infections through ultra-high sensitivity breath analysis and will help combat the global challenge of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

The funding has been secured through the European Union's largest research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020, which supports breakthroughs in science and technology and the development of world-class products and services.

Welcoming the news, Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

"I'm delighted IMSPEX has secured this funding, which will enable research and innovation with such exciting potential to take place in Wales over the coming years.

"Through Horizon 2020, Welsh businesses and universities are benefiting from significant investment and opportunities to collaborate with leading organisations across Europe.

"It is vital ongoing access to this programme – and its successors – is retained as part of any new relationship between the UK and EU in the future."

The BreathSpec device will help alleviate the growing problem of anti-microbial resistance by helping to minimise the misuse and overuse of antibiotics through the improved diagnosis of infections.

Santi Dominguez, chief executive of IMSPEX Diagnostics Ltd, said:

"We are very excited by this funding, which will enable our organisation to collaborate with a first-class team and address the major social challenge of anti-microbial resistance with our new device.

"We have a vision of providing primary healthcare with a reliable, fast and simple solution for identifying bacterial or viral infection, optimising patient care and minimising antibiotic consumption.

“As a result of this project, we hope to be able to assist GPs and healthcare providers on a global scale. I congratulate the whole consortium on the success of this bid and would also like to thank the Welsh Government for its support with the bid preparation.”

The investment in IMSPEX follows the publication of new data, which shows Welsh businesses and universities have won €76m of Horizon 2020 funding for research and innovation projects since the EU programme was launched nearly three years ago.

Professor Drakeford added:

“The Welsh Government financially backed IMSPEX’s application for Horizon 2020 funds and we will continue to support Welsh businesses and universities to access this important research and innovation programme and collaborate with leading organisations across Europe and beyond.”

To help increase Wales’ research and innovation opportunities through Horizon 2020 funding, the Welsh Government offers financial support for bid writing and travel costs to Welsh organisations interested in developing Horizon 2020 projects.

For more information about Horizon 2020 and the Welsh Government’s SCoRE Cymru fund email horizon2020@wales.gsi.gov.uk .