

Clarity on Brexit – Finance Ministers voice disappointment following quadrilateral meeting

Following today's Finance Ministers Quadrilateral in Edinburgh the devolved administrations have voiced their disappointment at the UK Government's lack of assurances that there will be meaningful engagement over the approach it proposes to take on Brexit. The Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Ministers also underlined the economic and public finance challenges this lack of clarity presents.

The meeting was attended by Scotland's Finance Secretary Derek Mackay, Chief Secretary to the Treasury David Gauke, the Welsh Government's Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford and Stormont Finance Minister Máirtín Ó Muilleoir.

Welsh Government Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

"Our White Paper, Securing Wales' Future, which was discussed at the recent JMC (EN) provides a comprehensive, credible plan for the negotiations as the UK prepares to exit from the EU. It focuses on Wales' priorities but in a way which would work for the whole of the UK.

"We have always been clear that a hard Brexit would be highly damaging to the Welsh and UK economy. That is why we have repeatedly called for full and unfettered access to the single market in our negotiations with the UK Government. Our economy is closely integrated into the single market and our success in attracting foreign investment owes much to this access.

"The fact of Brexit is not in doubt but we need to ensure a good outcome for Wales. We will continue our discussions with the UK Government through the JMC (EN) but we need to see these discussions intensify over the next few weeks as the triggering of Article 50 approaches. We need a clear signal from the UK Government that the views of the devolved administrations are taken into account so we secure a future post Brexit that works for Wales and works for the rest of the UK."

Scotland's Finance Secretary Mr Mackay said:

"While I am disappointed about this lack of progress with the UK Government, we will continue to work with the Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments as it is essential for the devolved administrations to be at the heart of any decision making. We need clarity from the UK Government as we have the right to have our say

on how devolved budgets and our economy will be affected by a hard Brexit. I asked again today that the UK Government give serious consideration to the proposals the Scottish Government has put forward in response to the outcome of the EU referendum and responds constructively, in the interests of the people of Scotland.

“We have been clear, keeping Scotland in the European single market is absolutely essential for Scottish jobs, investment and long-term economic wellbeing.”

Stormont Finance Minister Máirtín Ó Muilleoir said:

“ I have previously been on record saying that there is a lack of understanding of the calamitous effects that Brexit would have on our local economy and there has been no appreciation of the need for a special status for the North within the EU. Nothing I have heard today changes that.”

[New approach to building resilient communities announced](#)

The approach is focused on employment, early years and empowerment, and will involve phasing out the Communities First programme.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“We have listened very carefully to thousands of people who have been involved in Communities First, either as employees or participants. While it is clear that Communities First was successful in its impact on many individuals, it has not had an impact on overall poverty levels in these communities, which remain stubbornly high.

“We are clear, as a Government, that we must now transition into a new phase in our fight against poverty in Wales. Our support for those who need it most will not end with this programme. Indeed, our aim is to intensify our efforts to give people the tools they need to have a more equal share of this nation’s prosperity. At the centre of this must be the promise of good, secure work.

“A new approach is needed which deals with the root causes of poverty.. We will take forward a cross-government, all-Wales

approach focused on helping people into work, giving children the best start in life, and ensuring people's voices are heard in the design of local services."

Funding at 70% of current levels will be provided to the Communities First programme until March 2018. A legacy fund of £6m a year, to enable some of the programme's most effective projects to continue, will be introduced in April 2018.

In addition, the Community Facilities Programme will receive an extra £4m a year from 2017/18, with priority given to Communities First areas, to help protect valuable community assets such as community centres.

A new £12m a year grant to support those who are furthest from the labour market will also be launched. This will build on the success to date of the Communities for Work, Lift and PaCE programmes and will feed into the wider Welsh Government Employability Plan led by the Minister for Skills.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"In total, including these and other ongoing projects, we will continue to put over £25m annually directly into deprived communities. This figure cannot be viewed in isolation. Across the Welsh Government, there is increasing investment in a range of initiatives which are crucial to preventing and alleviating poverty. These include increasing our investment in apprenticeships to over £126m and investing over £93million through the Pupil Deprivation Grant in 2017-18 to help close the attainment gap of disadvantaged children. In addition we are establishing the Valleys taskforce and creating the North and South Wales metros."

Investment in Flying Start and Families First, both of which provide practical support to thousands of families and their children across the country, will continue, while the development of Children's Zones and the establishment of a new Adverse Childhood Experiences hub have already been announced. Support for the Streetgames programme which engages young people in positive activities, and for Citizen's Advice, will continue.

The Cabinet Secretary added:

"Investing in our children is an investment for the long term. It is the most sustainable means of building a more prosperous future.

"I have been encouraged by the very positive response to the development of Children's Zones and the establishment of an "ACEs Hub", to help organisations, communities and individuals across Wales tackle Adverse Childhood Experiences, which can have such a

devastating impact on children's life chances.

"These initiatives, together with our continued investment in our successful Flying Start and Families First programmes, will ensure there is comprehensive support for children as they grow up.

"Building resilient communities is the work of Welsh Government as a whole. We are committed to prosperity for all, a strong economy that creates sustainable, quality employment opportunities accessible to all.

"Together we can build the resilient, safe, strong communities that we all want. And we will continue to engage with communities and stakeholders as we move forward.

"Change is never easy. But we cannot ignore the combination of new and deep-rooted challenges we face. We must have the courage to find fresh ways to respond. That is what I and all of my government colleagues are determined to do."

[Minister in Merthyr to #TalkValleys](#)

The Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys is holding a series of public meetings across the region to seek the views of communities about priorities for their local areas.

Alun Davies last night hosted the second town hall style public meeting of the taskforce at Merthyr's Red House, the arts and creative industries centre in the Old Town Hall.

Speaking following the meeting he said:

"We can feel that understanding and awareness of the work of the taskforce is growing and the engagement sessions we've held to date have been invaluable in helping to shape our priorities.

"It is vital however we continue to work with and listen to communities throughout the lifetime of the taskforce.

"From the discussions we've had with the public so far, some key themes have emerged. These include the importance of linking businesses with local schools to give young people the confidence and skills they need to enter into the world of work and the importance of linking infrastructure like industrial sites,

schools, colleges and transport initiatives together, ensuring true connectivity for the valleys.

“I would urge anyone who feels passionately about where they live to engage with the work of the taskforce and have their say. We’re here to listen and your views will help shape our shared vision for the valleys.”

The taskforce was set up by the Welsh Government in July and aims to build on work previously undertaken across the South Wales Valleys in a more coordinated and targeted way to meet the needs of valley communities.

To learn more about the work of the taskforce or to sign up to attend one of the public meetings, please visit the [Facebook](#) page.

£104 million to heat Wales’ most vulnerable households

The Welsh Government [Warm Homes programme](#), which includes Nest and Arbed, provides funding for home energy efficiency improvements to low income households and those living in deprived communities across Wales.

The £104 million funding includes £32 million of the additional £40 million funding announced in the Final Budget last month. The remaining £8 million will be invested in other green growth initiatives.

The Welsh Government funding will also lever in around £24million of European funding, in addition to Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, announced the funding during a visit to Trowbridge to see how households have benefited from previous Arbed funding.

Cardiff County Council were recently successful in receiving further Arbed grant funding and take up has been extremely positive, with over 75% of residents signing up for a survey within two weeks of applications opening.

There are now over 300 homes in the area involved in the Arbed scheme, with a further 100 planned over the next few months.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“During the winter months how to keep warm while also meeting high energy bills is a very real concern for many low income households across Wales. I am therefore delighted we are committing

£104million to our Warm Homes programme over the next four years.

“The Warm Homes Programme aims to make improvements to homes, such as boiler and heating upgrades and applying loft insulation, to increase energy efficiency, reduce household bills and in turn reduce energy use and climate change.

“There is also an emphasis on using the local supply chain to make these changes, creating jobs, developing skills and boosting the local economy.”

Mr and Mrs Foley, who received external wall insulation in Phase 2 of the Trowbridge energy efficiency scheme, said

“Not only does our home look lovely, but we have made over £200 worth of energy savings in just 6 months! The energy advice we have been given has been so helpful. Simple tips for everyday life. We are so grateful for the scheme.”

[T9 bus service grows as Cardiff Airport goes from strength to strength](#)

Quarterly figures up to September 2016 show an average of over 13,200 passengers a month used the service in the last year, with month on month growth every month since June 2014.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Cardiff Airport is one of the fastest growing airports in the UK and continues to go from strength to strength. I’ve been clear that a reliable, frequent bus service linking the airport to Cardiff and beyond is key if the airport is to reach its full potential and it’s encouraging to see that popularity of the T9 service has risen alongside the growth of the airport.

“The service, of course, serves a dual purpose, not only providing passengers from Wales and the South West with public access to the airport but also providing a vital public transport link to visitors. The airport continues to work hard to increase destinations, routes and possibilities on offer and I look forward to the T9 continuing to form part of this offering and building on these positive passenger trends.”

Debra Barber, CEO at Cardiff Airport added:

“An express bus service is vital for a capital city airport and we are hugely encouraged by the growth of the T9 and keen for opportunities to link the airport to west Wales to be explored.

“As an airport we have huge ambitions for growth and improved surface access, including bus, road and rail links is critical in helping us achieve this.”