

“Loneliness and social isolation is a growing threat to public health: We must tackle it together”– Huw Irranca-Davies

The Welsh Government is today launching a national conversation on what can be done to combat loneliness and social isolation in Wales.

The National Survey for Wales 2016-17 found that 17% of the population of Wales, around 440,000 people, reported being lonely, while younger people were more likely to be lonely than older people: 20% of 16-24 year olds were lonely, compared with 10% of those aged 75 or over.

Loneliness and social isolation can result in a number of physical and psychological problems including premature death, sleep problems, high blood pressure, poor quality of life, increased risk of heart attack and stroke, depression and suicide. Research demonstrates that loneliness has an effect on mortality that is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

The economic consequences of loneliness and isolation can also be significant. The Eden Project found the cost of social isolation and disconnected communities in Wales could reach £2.6bn a year.

The Welsh Government’s Programme for Government, Taking Wales Forward includes a commitment to develop a nationwide and cross-government strategy to address these issues. The strategy will cover people of all ages and all backgrounds.

The Welsh Government’s proposed approach to tackling the issues is to focus on intervening early to prevent chronic loneliness, given its wider effects on health and well-being, and resultant pressure on NHS and social care services. However, there is also a need to ensure that support is available for those who are, or who become, chronically lonely.

The Welsh Government has identified some areas where action can make a significant contribution to reducing loneliness and social isolation:

- Early years – Improving an individual’s experiences in childhood will play a significant part in shaping their future, including developing strong and positive relationships later in life;
- Housing – Ensuring people live in safe and secure neighbourhoods, in the right accommodation;
- Social Care – Providing compassionate, dignified care plays a critical role in ensuring people can be healthy and remain independent for longer;
- Mental Health – Ensuring people maintain good mental health is crucial in maintaining good health, well-being and independence, with access to

- appropriate support services when necessary;
- Skills and employability – Ensuring people have the right skills to secure decent, sustainable employment opportunities.

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

“Loneliness and social isolation are growing problems not just here in Wales but across the UK and beyond – and with 1 in every 5 people now experiencing loneliness and/or social isolation. More of us now understand these can affect anyone, at any age, for a wide variety of reasons. They can, and do, have a significant impact on people’s physical and mental health. It risks becoming a major public health crisis unless we act now, and work together to tackle the problem.

“As a government, we are committed to securing the best possible health, well-being and quality of life for all people in Wales. Preventing people from becoming lonely and isolated must be a national priority for us, because it will not only improve people’s lives, but it will also help reduce demand for health and social services in the future.

“However, neither the Welsh Government nor one agency on its own can combat these issues. As a government, we need to be able to foster the right environment and create the right conditions for others to design and deliver solutions that best meet their needs.

“I am keen to hear from people living in all parts of Wales as part of this consultation process. Working together, we can ensure our communities and the social fabric that binds them together, are as resilient as they can be.”

[New marine litter project launched](#)

Keep Wales Tidy will lead the project, together with the Marine Conservation Society and environmental consultants Eunomia.

The project will deliver actions from the Clean Seas Partnership Marine Litter Action Plan. The action plan is designed to help tackle marine litter and maintain or achieve Good Environmental Status in our sea waters by 2020 under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

The project will seek to build a coordinated approach to tackling marine litter, by working with marine litter action groups, local authorities and

higher education institutions. It will also encourage further research into marine litter.

The project has received funding of £50,000 through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, which is funded by the European Union and the Welsh Government.

Environment Minister, Hannah Blythyn, said:

“The need to tackle marine litter, especially plastic, has become part of our collective consciousness through documentaries such as BBC’s Blue Planet.

“I’m happy to support this project, which will help co-ordinate our efforts in Wales and contribute towards finding solutions to the growing threat litter poses to aquatic life.”

Jemma Bere, Policy and Research Manager for Keep Wales Tidy, added:

“We are delighted to be working in partnership with the Marine Conservation Society and Eunomia Consulting on this important research project. With the support of Welsh Government and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, we hope to gain a better understanding of the sources and types of litter in our environment, as well as the key challenges to tackling this global crisis at a local level.

“We are looking forward to connecting with a range of organisations and marine litter action groups across the UK and beyond to identify the most effective solutions.”

Minister for Environment praises ‘buzz in the air’ during St Davids Bee Friendly visit

Speaking during her visit to St Davids, the Minister said the Caru Gwenyn/Bee Friendly initiative had benefitted not only the environment but local residents and businesses too.

She added the project, which is believed to be the first co-ordinated national scheme of its kind, has at its heart making Wales a pollinator-friendly country.

Dr Beynon's Bug Farm, a visitor attraction and research centre, instigated and co-ordinated the project that led to St Davids becoming accredited as Bee Friendly.

The Bee Friendly scheme works by encouraging schools, businesses and communities to help combat the decline of insect pollinators. They can do this by providing food and habitat for pollinators, avoiding the use of pesticides and promoting actions that help pollinators.

One of the key parts of the project has been the St Davids Pollinator Trail.

The innovative project, pioneered by Dr Beynon's Bug Farm and supported by The Tourism Product Innovation Fund and Biodiversity Solutions, is an interactive trail linking tourism sites across the St Davids Peninsula.

The educational trail links art, science and conservation, hoping to inspire visitors to get involved at home too.

Many local residents, businesses, heritage sites, the St Davids City Council and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority have all welcomed the bee friendly status and are committed to supporting the project.

Hannah Blythyn said:

"I've enjoyed every minute of my visit to the St Davids Pollinator Trail and there has been a real buzz in the air about the work being carried out here.

"This scheme has already had a massive impact on the local area and been widely welcomed by businesses and residents alike. Projects like these show how much we care about the environment in Wales and how changing attitudes are making a real difference to how we interact with what is around us.

"Wales is leading the way in raising awareness of the importance of these pollinators and our role in protecting them.

"We are committed to supporting innovative projects and welcome this landmark work that shows Wales is a pollinator-friendly country."

Porthcawl – developing an iconic waterfront destination

EU funding of £1.5 million is being invested in the development through the

Welsh Government's Tourism Attractor Destination programme, led by Visit Wales, which aims to create 13 must see destinations across Wales.

The development will include a multi-purpose watersports and café-restaurant facility at Rest Bay with a centre for watersports for use by clubs, associations and private sector operators. The funding will also go towards refurbishment of an existing facility at Porthcawl Harbour to provide improved facilities for boat users and an extension of an existing kiosk/refreshment space. There will also be development of a 4km cycle route that will connect the bays in Porthcawl and provide a shared use scheme for cyclists and pedestrians; connecting up the key developments within the destination.

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Lord Elis Thomas, said:

“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. In order to be a leading coastal destination we need to ensure that we have exemplary facilities and services for residents and visitors. This development will give people compelling reasons to visit the area and will benefit both visitors and locals with improved connections between these exciting developments around Porthcawl.”

Councillor Charles Smith, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Development and chair of the Bridgend Coastal Partnership, said:

“We are delighted to be part of the Tourism Attractor Destination programme and are looking forward to the creation of an all-new iconic visitor attraction in Porthcawl.

Our coastline and beaches have a long history of attracting residents and visitors, and the new centre at Rest Bay will tap into the growing popularity of sea-based sport and leisure activities to create a uniquely-placed watersport destination.

Together with the refurbishment of the marina building and other regeneration projects that are taking place throughout the town, the Tourism Attractor Destination programme is supporting the council's overall efforts to transform Porthcawl into a thriving 21st century coastal resort.”

In total, the Tourism Attractor Destination programme has been approved with £27.7m ERDF towards a total project cost of £61.8m that will see thirteen strategic infrastructure projects realised up to 2021.

£5.3 million EU funding to up-skill Wales' advanced manufacturing sector

The EU funding will support more than 800 people through the Up-skilling for Industry 4.0 project and International Innovation Masters scheme led by the University of Wales Trinity St David.

The £3.7 million Up-skilling for Industry 4.0 project, which is supported by £2.3 million of EU funding, will provide accredited qualifications to around 430 employees in Welsh industry, particularly within the advanced manufacturing sector.

It will support participants to understand and engage with rapid technological change and help drive business growth.

The £4.3 million International Innovation Masters scheme, which is backed by £3m of EU funding, will provide post-graduate training to around 390 employees from across Wales's manufacturing sector. The training will help professionals understand the importance of innovation in a dynamic international context.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“Innovation has become increasingly vital for business competitiveness and Wales must continue to respond to technological change and adapt its processes to compete successfully on a global scale.

“I am pleased that EU funds are being invested to help up-skill our advanced manufacturing workforce to meet these technological challenges and opportunities head on.

“This investment will help people to pursue successful, rewarding careers and drive forward business innovation, growth and jobs.”

Professor Medwin Hughes, vice chancellor of University of Wales Trinity St David, added:

“The university has a strong track-record of working with employers in the manufacturing sector to up-skill and train their workforce for today's rapidly changing global environment.

“We play a key role in securing the sustainability of Wales's manufacturing industry by providing a pipeline of industry-ready graduates and by sharing our expertise in order to challenge

concepts and discover new ways of working to our mutual benefit.

“Today’s funding announcement will help us to develop our work with the manufacturing sector in Wales so that it is ready to harness the opportunities that such technological advancements as Industry 4.0 can provide for competitive advantage.”