

£2.7m of EU funds to grow social businesses in Wales

Since 2017 the Social Business Growth Fund has provided social businesses in Wales with a mix of grant funds and repayable finance which has helped them to increase their turnover, boost their impact within Welsh communities and create new and sustainable jobs.

The Economy Secretary's announcement includes an additional £1.7m of EU funding which builds on a previous EU investment of £1m. It will extend the delivery of the Social Business Growth Fund scheme to 2020.

It also includes an additional £1m that will be allocated to a new Community Asset Development Fund. This will enable social businesses to support the provision of local services such as libraries, post offices and community centres and will help to increase the resilience and vibrancy of local communities in Wales.

Speaking at the Social Business Wales Awards ceremony in Cardiff, the Economy Secretary said:

"I'm delighted to announce EU funding of £1.7m for an extension to Wales Council for Voluntary Action's Social Business Growth Fund and a further £1m of EU funding for a new Community Asset Development Fund.

"Building on the current success of the Social Business Growth Fund, these funds will support social businesses to take on or expand community assets, helping to boost the resilience and wellbeing of towns and villages across Wales in line with our Well-being of Future Generations Act."

The Social Business Growth Fund and the Community Asset Development Fund are led by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

100% rates relief for childcare providers in Wales

Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford and Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies today announced the Welsh Government will provide all registered childcare properties with 100% rates relief.

The scheme will provide an estimated £7.5m of additional support to childcare providers over three years. Its impact will be reviewed.

Enhancing childcare provision across Wales is a major priority for the Welsh Government.

Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford said:

“Earlier this year we increased the amount of rates relief we provide for registered childcare providers across Wales. We know a significant number of businesses are already benefiting but we want to do more.

“Today’s announcement means that from April 2019, the childcare sector in Wales will be exempt from paying rates. This will help childcare providers become more established, supporting the sector to operate and grow.

“This will help to create new childcare jobs and help to create new and maintain existing childcare places across Wales.”

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“The childcare sector has told us that a total exemption from non-domestic rates would make a real difference to their business confidence. We’ve listened and taken action.

“In addition to the significant investment we’re making in childcare, and the support we’re providing the sector to grow, today’s announcement shows our commitment to developing a top-class childcare sector in Wales.

“By providing enhanced support for the childcare sector, we will further improve access to childcare places, supporting working families across Wales and make it easier for people to take up and retain jobs.”

The Welsh Government’s programme for government, Taking Wales Forward, commits Ministers to providing 30 hours of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of three and four year olds, 48 weeks of the year. The offer is currently available in half of local authorities and will be available across the whole of Wales by 2020.

The childcare sector generates an estimated £1.2bn for the Welsh economy. In recognition of the sector’s economic role and in supporting the delivery of the childcare offer, Ministers are prioritising investment to support growth across the sector. This investment is being developed as bespoke business and skills assistance.

The Welsh Government's 10-year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce plan, which was published in December 2017, aims to professionalise the sector and recognises its key economic enabler role by supporting parents and carers to access and remain in employment.

The Welsh Government introduced a new permanent small business rates relief (SBRR) scheme to support small businesses with their non-domestic rates bills in 2018; this included increasing the relief available for registered childcare providers.

The new exemption for childcare premises, reducing rates bills for childcare providers to zero, builds on the permanent SBRR scheme.

[Further £3m support for fisheries, environment and food industry to prepare for Brexit](#)

Over £1.2million will help support research into future fisheries management. Leaving the European Union has the potential to significantly change fisheries management in the UK with issues around access to waters, sharing of quotas and tariff and non-tariff barriers. This project will help identify potential new Welsh fisheries and opportunities.

An initial £700,000 will develop sustainable brand values which will differentiate Welsh food products in a changing market.

Natural Resources Wales will receive £700,000 to assist with the provision of transitional Permitting and Licencing arrangements.

A further £550,000 will help meet the EU's stringent rules on wood packaging materials entering the EU from third countries and £96,000 will support the possible need for Export Health Certification to export produce of animal origin from Wales to the EU, if the UK should leave the single market.

The £50 million EU Transition Fund was announced in January 2018 and is already providing direct financial support to sectors across Wales to plan and prepare for the significant changes of Brexit.

Earlier this week, First Minister Carwyn Jones announced multi million pound support for Advanced Manufacturing through the EU Transition Fund to help some of our largest companies up-skill and prepare for a post-Brexit world

The Cabinet Secretary will outline the details of the five new projects at her Brexit Roundtable group later today.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“It is just over six months until the UK leaves the European Union and the risk of a ‘no deal’ looms large. A ‘no deal’ departure from the EU would have a catastrophic impact on our economy and jobs. The publication of the latest set of technical notes only further highlights the possibility of a world of new burdens, red tape, disruption and uncertainty.

“That is why it is so crucial that our industries put themselves in the best position and prepare for a post-Brexit world. We have said from day one that it is our role as a government to do all we can to help sectors prepare and adapt to these challenges.

“I am therefore pleased to announce today that five new projects will receive £3.2 million through our EU Transition Fund – it is a big step forward in supporting our industries to get ready for what’s ahead. In total, we’ve invested £6m through the fund for projects relating to my portfolio, providing crucial support at this critical time.

“We know that leaving the EU will be particularly difficult for the fishing and food industry. The funding they will receive through this fund will help ensure them maximise any emerging opportunities, ensure their competitiveness in changing markets and enable them to thrive in a post-Brexit world.”

[Thousands of children already benefiting from Welsh Government-funded childcare offer](#)

The Welsh Government is committed to providing 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds, for up to 48 weeks of the year. The 30 hours is made up of the existing minimum of 10 hours of Foundation Phase and up to 20 hours of childcare with a registered provider.

The childcare offer is currently being roll-out across Wales, and is available in at least some areas in half of Wales’ 22 local authorities. It will be available across the country by 2020.

During the offer’s first year:

- 3,395 children have taken up places in settings offering the childcare offer;
- More than 574 providers are taking part in the offer.

During a visit to Buds to Blossoms Day Nursery in Ebbw Vale, Blaenau Gwent, the Minister also confirmed that following positive discussions with local authorities and using robust modelling, he is increasing the pace of expansion over the coming months and into 2019, having listened to working parents who wanted the Offer rolled sooner.

Since the introduction of the childcare offer at the nursery, the number of childcare workers employed there has increased from 8 to 26 – split over two sites.

By the beginning of 2019, every local authority in North Wales will be delivering the offer to eligible parents. The Vale of Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Bridgend, Monmouthshire, Swansea and Neath Port Talbot are proposing to deliver the offer across their local authorities during 2019.

Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Caerphilly and Ceredigion are already providing the offer across their areas to eligible parents. Newport will be delivering the Offer across their entire authority from October and Cardiff will begin once all the IT application systems are fully functioning and tested.

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Since taking up post as Minister for Children in November 2017, I’ve seen for myself how well-received our ground-breaking childcare offer is among families right across the country.

“I’m delighted so many children and their families have benefited from the childcare offer during the first year. It’s allowing parents to either take-up or return to work – which is not only good for the Welsh economy, but it’s also reducing strain on family incomes.

“But that’s not all – our offer is helping to create high quality childcare jobs in communities across Wales, delivering on the Welsh Government’s pledge to help create better jobs, closer to people’s homes.”

Housing adaptation system needs to be consistent and fair – Rebecca Evans

At present the system for delivering housing adaptations in Wales is complex, which reflects the range of different funding sources and organisations involved in care and support arrangements.

The [consultation](#) sets out a range of standards that service providers of housing adaptations should work towards to make their delivery more consistent and fair throughout Wales. This includes setting expectations on communication and the quality of the service provided. The standards also include expected timeframes and provide clarity on what eligibility checks are required for each level of home adaptation.

The consultation also aims to set clear definitions of Small, Medium and Large Housing Adaptation. For example small adaptations may require minor modifications and minimal maintenance, such as hand rails or additional plug sockets. Large adaptations could include building an extension or relocating a kitchen.

The service standards will be applied to all housing adaptations and relevant to:

- Local Authorities
- Care and Repair Agencies
- Registered Social Landlords
- Housing Associations
- Occupational Therapists
- Healthcare and Social Service Professionals

Rebecca Evans said:

“We want to ensure that the system of providing housing adaptations is more straightforward and that people who request adaptations can expect a consistent standard of service.

“Housing adaptations bring essential benefits to individuals and their families’ mental and physical wellbeing, as well as helping to reduce pressure on frontline services. I want to create a housing adaptation system in Wales that is consistent and fair and easy to navigate for people who need extra support to stay in their homes.

“I am keen that we continue to work with the sector to create service levels that apply regardless geography or type of accommodation. However, I want to ensure that we give flexibility to service providers to determine the best way to use their resources to meet these standards.

“We have worked closely with the WLGA, Care and Repair Cymru, the Older People’s Commissioner, Tai Pawb and many other organisations in the sector to create these standards.

“I hope to hear many more views from people who have experience of the system to help us make these standards as effective as possible.”