

Minister visits Finland on early years' fact-finding mission

As part of its five year programme for government, the Welsh Government is committed to transforming the early years' system in Wales to ensure it delivers the right support for all children.

During a two-day visit, the Minister visited a number of different projects that promote alternative approaches to families, the early years and social care.

The visits included:

- The Family Centre in the city of Vantaa. The centre co-ordinates the public health, social and educational services intended for children and families into a network that also includes the services offered by NGOs, parishes and voluntary stakeholders as well as specialised services;
- Kasvuntuki, a service aimed at Early Intervention and brokering knowledge to support children. The service promotes Early Intervention as a resource for professionals to use evidence-based interventions to support children and families;
- Tuomarila Family Support Centre in the city of Espoo. The centre offers family support and rehabilitation services, development work of child welfare and child protection, and services for families with children are aimed at detecting potential problems at an early stage and providing high quality treatment. The centre focuses on prevention and supporting families to find themselves their own resources to cope with the daily issues.

The Minister also met officials from the country's Ministry for Education & Culture and Ministry for Social Affairs & Health, the Itla Children's Foundation and the Central Union for Child Welfare.

Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"As the Minister in the Welsh Government responsible for children, the early years and social care, I want to ensure we provide the very best services that meet the needs of people across Wales. I was very pleased to visit Finland this week to learn more about Finland's approach to early years and social care.

"As a government, we are committed to ensuring all children from all backgrounds in all parts of Wales have the best start in life. This is why I'm leading work to transform our early years' system to ensure it delivers the right support for all children, particularly those from deprived backgrounds. Ensuring our children are given that best start in life is the best means of breaking the poverty cycle, and raising the aspiration and attainment for

everyone.

“We will now consider whether we can transfer some of the best-practice approaches I saw being used in Finland, to Wales.”

Superfast boost for North Wales tractor company

Leader of the House with responsibility for digital Julie James visited Mona Tractors' depot in Llanystumdwy to find out more about the impact superfast broadband has made on the business.

The company adopted superfast broadband in late 2016 and now benefits from download speeds of around 70 Mbps, compared with one or two Mbps previously.

The Llanystumdwy depot has access to superfast broadband as result of the Welsh Government's Superfast Cymru programme which has brought faster internet speeds to areas which would otherwise not receive them.

Benefits for Mona Tractors have included helping improve the efficiency of its operations by using cloud-based technologies. It has also helped ensure customer satisfaction, through improvements to the speed and reliability of the connection.

It has allowed the company to make full use of an advanced process control system, which integrates sales, promotion, HR and finance processes into one central platform, which can also be accessed remotely by employees.

The company also use mobile broadband technology, known as MiFi devices, to ensure remote access while out visiting clients. These are increasingly gaining superfast 4G capacity, further speeding up the process.

Julie James said:

“It's been great to see the difference access to superfast broadband has made to this long-established business in North Wales. There would have been no access at all to superfast broadband in Gwynedd without the intervention of our Superfast Cymru programme as commercial companies had no plans for a rollout in the area, but now the depot here in Llanystumdwy benefits from a high speed and reliable connection.

“Almost 733,000 premises across Wales can access superfast broadband as a result of the programme. Having access to superfast

and ultrafast broadband is becoming increasingly important for businesses, which is why we have invested in the infrastructure which can deliver it.

“While the vast majority of premises across the country can now access superfast broadband, we are now looking at how to deliver faster broadband speeds to those areas which are yet to receive it.”

Susan Jones, Director Mona Tractor Company said:

“Superfast broadband not only helps us run the businesses, it’s essential for us to do business. Before we had superfast broadband we had speeds of between one or two Mbps, but now it’s around 70. This is has made a huge difference for us and our customers as we can provide a faster more reliable service.”

More than 58,400 premises in Gwynedd can access superfast broadband following the Superfast Cymru programme.

[Minimum price for alcohol Bill becomes Law](#)

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 is part of the Welsh Government’s wider efforts to reduce excessive drinking, recognising the impacts it can have on people’s health and well-being.

The new law will address longstanding and specific health concerns around the effects of excess alcohol consumption, which is estimated to lead to nearly 55,000 alcohol-related hospital admissions a year, costing the Welsh NHS over £150m annually. In 2016, there were 504 alcohol-related deaths in Wales.

The legislation supports the Welsh Government’s comprehensive strategy to tackle hazardous and harmful drinking by tackling the availability and affordability of cheap, strong alcohol.

The Bill was approved by the National Assembly for Wales in June.

A Bill receives Royal Assent when Letters Patent under the Welsh Seal signed with Her Majesty’s own hand signifying Her Assent are notified to the Clerk of the Assembly. The Bill then becomes an Act of the Assembly.

The Ceremony where the First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones applied the Welsh Seal to the Letters Patent was attended by the Health Secretary, Vaughan

Gething.

First Minister, Carwyn Jones said:

“This legislation takes a sensible, targeted approach to a very real and evident problem in Wales today, by tackling the availability and affordability of cheap, strong alcohol.

“In Wales, we have a proud tradition of taking action to protect the health of the public. This new law is part of our wider efforts to improve and protect the health of the population of Wales.”

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“I’m delighted our landmark legislation to tackle the availability of cheap, strong alcohol in Wales has now become law.

“Last year alone, there were over 500 alcohol-related deaths and nearly 55,000 alcohol-related hospital admissions in Wales, with the direct health care costs attributable to alcohol amounting to an estimated £159m.

“This legislation provides us with an opportunity for a step change. It gives us a chance to do more to address alcohol-related harms. And ultimately, it gives us a chance to do more to try to save lives.”

The new law will allow Welsh Ministers to introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol supplied in Wales. It will make it an offence for alcohol to be supplied below a minimum price made up of that minimum unit price, the strength of the alcohol and its volume, specifically targeting cheap, strong alcohol.

The legislation will target and aim to reduce the amount of alcohol being consumed by hazardous and harmful drinkers, whilst minimising impacts on moderate drinkers.

The level of the minimum unit price for this purpose will be specified in regulations made by the Welsh Ministers, following a consultation which will be launched this autumn.

The new minimum pricing regime is currently expected to come into force during the summer of 2019.

Cabinet Secretary for Finance visits Eisteddfod to talk about the impact of Brexit and funding challenges for public services

He will speak about the impact of Brexit on children, young people and their families in his annual Eisteddfod address at an event sponsored by Children in Wales, the national umbrella body for organisations and individuals who work with children, young people and their families in Wales.

The speech follows a period of intense debate, throughout the UK, about the type of Brexit deal the UK Government can negotiate with the EU before leaving in March 2019.

Professor Drakeford said:

‘Wherever we have the opportunity, we are arguing for a Brexit which protects Welsh jobs, Welsh businesses and Welsh public services.

“I believe the impact of Brexit is already being felt in people’s everyday lives.

“The price of Brexit internationally is reflected in the continuing devaluation of the pound. That is how investors around the world take into account our declining economic prospects. That devaluation works its way into inflation and higher prices at the till for families in Wales.

“If families are trying to manage on welfare benefits which have been frozen, then the very conditions which created Brexit in the first place – the sense of being cut off from the mainstream and being abandoned to bear the burden of austerity alone – are being intensified.”

Professor Drakeford will later talk about the funding challenges facing public services in the eighth year of austerity and budget cuts from the UK Government.

He will say: “The additional tax and borrowing powers devolved to Wales go some way to enable us to continue funding our essential public services and mitigate the consequences of a continuing programme of austerity from the UK Government, which shows little sign of ending, despite the damage it has done to public services and the wider UK economy.

“A number of difficult choices lay ahead. The Welsh Government is committed to leading that work, in partnership with local authorities, the third sector and others, to make sure that we deliver the funding and policies for the benefit of the people of Wales, for the services they rely on and for the communities where they live.”

The Finance Secretary will be speaking on Wednesday, 8 August 2018 from 1.30pm at the WCVA Building at Baltic House, Cardiff Bay and from 3.30pm on the Welsh Government stage in the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff Bay.

[TrawsCymru passenger numbers travelling in the right direction](#)

The First Minister announced funding for a trial of free weekend travel on the Traws Cymru bus network in March 2017. Data covering July 2017 to March 2018 shows the scheme has generated an additional 133,391 passengers on weekends across the TrawsCymru network or an increase of 65.49%, compared to the equivalent period in 2016-17.

TrawsCymru is the Welsh Government funded, long-distance bus network for Wales comprising a number of routes, the latest of which connected Aberystwyth with Carmarthen and Port Talbot before continuing on to Cardiff.

Before the end of 2017, Ken Skates announced additional funding to local authorities to enable them to introduce a package of improvements to the TrawsCymru bus and coach connections linking Aberystwyth with Carmarthen, Swansea and Cardiff.

Following feedback from passengers, the service introduced a modern wheelchair accessible high floor coach on the daily Aberystwyth to Cardiff long distance service, which provides a more comfortable journey for longer distance passengers, complemented by the introduction of a shorter route which offers quicker ‘end to end’ journey times.

The service operates a more comfortable long distance coach equipped with coach style seating, on board toilet and free WiFi.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“The trial of free weekend travel on the Traws Cymru bus network has certainly shown some excellent early results. Passenger numbers are up and we are getting more people using buses on the network across Wales.

“This is great because it encourages more people into the habit of using buses, helping us support other routes across Wales.

“When you look, for example, at the benefit of the investment we’ve made to strengthen services between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen, Swansea and Cardiff the numbers tell a very clear story – more people are using the services and that’s good for the communities and the economies along those routes.

“We listened to passengers and introduced coaches onto this key route, and we significantly reduced journey times. Along with the additional stop in Port Talbot, this long-standing service added more value to already vital public transport links to and from rural Wales, giving passengers extra choice on this key strategic route.

“Our improvements seem to have made the difference for our passengers. This has easily exceeded projected passenger growth figures of 20% on TrawsCymru weekend services, which were predicted at the start of the trial.

“These figures across Wales are encouraging and I hope we see further improvements in the future.”