

Welcome progress in the Valleys

The Our Valleys, Our Future action plan was published a year ago and set three core priorities, based on feedback from people living and working in the Valleys. It outlined an ambitious plan for lasting change across the South Wales Valleys.

A more detailed delivery plan, highlighting more than 60 individual actions in the three priority areas, was published in November 2017.

At the heart of both the action plan and the delivery plan are good-quality jobs and the skills to do them, better public services and my local community.

The taskforce is today publishing a first-year progress report, detailing the breadth of the work over the last 12 months.

Mr Davies, who chairs the taskforce, said:

“A year ago, the taskforce set the challenging target of closing the employment gap between the South Wales Valleys and the rest of Wales. This means helping an extra 7,000 people into fair work and creating thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs in the Valleys.

“In the past 12 months, more than 1,000 economically-inactive people living in Valleys taskforce areas have started work through Welsh Government-led employment programmes. Nearly 1,000 people and small businesses have been helped through advice and business support; and an additional 100 new enterprises have been created within the Valleys taskforce area.

“Local authorities in each of the seven strategic hub areas have made good progress in developing plans bespoke to their local area which have the best opportunities to attract private sector investment and create jobs. The early work on the hubs is highlighting the benefit that a joined-up approach to this type can bring. We have seen this already with the Taff Vale project, which will provide the new headquarters for Transport for Wales and help to revitalise Pontypridd’s high street.

“The Tech Valleys strategic plan has been published, providing strategic direction for investments and programme activity for Ebbw Vale, alongside a £25m commitment between 2018 and 2021.

“Following on the recent announcement on the South Wales Metro, a new rail depot at Taff’s Well will house and service 36 of the new vehicles and eventually be the base for 400 train crew and 35 Metro vehicle maintenance staff. The new Taff’s Well depot will also be home to an integrated control centre for the South Wales Metro employing 52 staff.

“We are also taking forward three digital pilot schemes for the Valleys to improve the way public services are delivered in the region. We are exploring ways to extend public sector broadband networks and create a simple way for members of the public to identify free Wi-Fi hotspots within Valleys communities. We are also looking to create an Uber-style app, which would bring together all providers of community transport, making it easier for people to access transport to health appointments when required. Finally we want to increase the use of the online data mapping tool Lle as a means of promoting the Valleys.

“The Valleys Landscape Park idea is key to the third of the priorities in Our Valleys, Our Future. It is at the heart of our ambition to help Valleys communities celebrate and make the most of their natural resources and heritage.

“We have spent much of the last year working on developing this exciting, dynamic approach, which could connect what we are calling ‘discovery locations’ across the Valleys with walking trails and cycle routes. It is my intention that this will be developed within a defined boundary and supported by a designated land status for the Valleys.”

Yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary and his taskforce colleagues launched a new song for the Valleys at an event in Neath. Sing it Loud, Sing it Proud has been written and performed by local school children in partnership with Welsh language singer and songwriter Kizzy Crawford and is available via Spotify.

Mr Davies added:

“We know just how much the Valleys have to offer – but I want the rest of Wales and the UK; and the world, to learn more about the area’s history; its culture and its breath-taking scenery.

“I would strongly encourage everyone to listen to and download Sing it Loud, Sing it Proud – it’s a great demonstration of just how proud our young people are of their home in the Valleys.”