

Update on independent adviser on the ministerial code

A spokesperson for the Permanent Secretary said:

“On November 23rd, the First Minister referred himself for advice under the Ministerial Code in relation to answers given to Assembly Members in 2014 and 2017. James Hamilton, who is an independent adviser to the Scottish Government on Ministerial Code issues, agreed to carry this out, and has already commenced his work.

“The terms of reference set by the First Minister to Mr Hamilton are for him to provide advice on: the allegation that I breached the Ministerial Code in relation to answers I gave to questions on 11th November 2014 and 14th November 2017.

“The Ministerial Code does not prescribe the scope, format, or conduct of the process, and it is for Mr Hamilton to determine how to act on the matter which has been referred. A secretariat has been made available to Mr Hamilton, with appropriate safeguards to ensure due separation from the First Minister’s office and the rest of the Welsh Government in relation to this process and any material submitted.

“Anyone wishing to contact Mr Hamilton’s secretariat with material relevant to the terms of reference can do so via referralinvestigation@wales-uk.com. Material related to the process will be stored independently of other Welsh Government internal systems.

“Mr Hamilton’s findings will be made public following the conclusion of his work.”

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Ambitious new plan to develop Wales’ childcare workforce

Childcare is one of the biggest challenges facing working families. During this Assembly term, the Welsh Government will provide 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 a year.

The Childcare, Play and Early Years workforce plan sets out the Welsh Government’s vision for delivering this commitment, by developing and professionalising the childcare and play workforce and attracting the right people into the sector, ensuring they have the right skills and qualifications, and supporting new and existing business to grow.

To support childcare providers to grow and operate sustainably, the Welsh Government will prioritise support for the care sector, as outlined in the Economic Action Plan launched earlier this week, by supporting new and existing business to increase the number of childcare places on offer across Wales.

Currently, around 23,300 people work with our youngest children in childcare settings and Foundation Phase settings across Wales.

The plan's three key priorities are:

- **Prioritising support to invest in building capacity and capability across the sector**, this includes working with CWLWM and Business Wales to provide business support services to childcare businesses; provide enhanced Small Business Rate Relief for the childcare sector from April 2018 which increases relief from £12,000 to £20,500; and £100,000 over the next 3 years to support those providers participating in the early implementer pilots and those seeking to expand or start-up their business.
- **Attracting high quality recruits** by developing a recruitment framework to promote a career in childcare and play.
- **Raising standards and skills** by offering a structured training and development route based on a new suite of qualifications for the sector from September 2019, and by developing a career pathway for child-minders and home carers and working with Welsh Universities to embed competency into Early Years and Childhood degrees.

Launching the new plan, the Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"The provision of affordable, accessible, quality early years provision, available at the times parents need it, plays an essential role in boosting the economy, helping parents to return to work and creating further employment opportunities within the childcare sector itself.

"Those who care for our youngest children play a vital role in helping us give our children a flying start in life. High-quality early education and childcare produces greater long-term benefits for our children and strongly influences their future life chances.

"Where the workforce is equipped with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to provide high-quality childcare and play, the effects on children can be profound, with particular benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, or children who are disabled or have additional learning needs.

"The plan I'm unveiling today recognises the challenges the current economic climate presents to the sector and sets out clear and tangible actions to prioritise support to build the capability and capacity of the childcare workforce and the sector to drive our ambitions forward. It also sets out a longer term vision which is ambitious, but also essential if we want to enhance the quality of care we offer our children and to fully realise the potential of this committed sector and its workforce."

Have your say on plans for a Third Menai Crossing

The consultation which begins today and lasts until Friday, 9 March will look at four options for increasing capacity and improving network resilience across the Menai Strait with the aim of a preferred route being announced in summer 2018.

The options are:-

Red Option:

- New bridge directly to the west of Britannia Bridge
- Improvements at A55 Junction 8A

Pink Option:

- Extension of Britannia Bridge / new bridge immediately east of existing bridge to provide extra traffic lanes
- Improvements at A55 Junction 8A

Orange Option:

- New bridge directly to the east of Britannia Bridge
- Improvements at A55 Junction 8A

Purple Option:

- New bridge to the east of Britannia Bridge
- Improvements at A55 Junctions 8 and 8A

All Options contain facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the Menai Strait either on the new bridge or the existing Britannia Bridge.

The £3 million design and development stage of the third crossing is part of the two-year budget agreed by the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

Economy and Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I am absolutely committed to the development of a third Menai crossing which will bring many benefits to the area including addressing congestion on the existing Britannia Bridge and ensuring our road network is ready for major projects such as Wylfa Newydd.

“The Welsh Government is investing £600 million in transport infrastructure improvements across North Wales over the coming years to ensure the region has the modern and high quality

transport system it needs to develop its potential for economic growth.

“The third Menai crossing is an imperative part of our plans to improve capacity, reliability and journey times as well as strengthen the network’s resilience. We are aiming to start construction by the end of 2020.

“This is a significant development for the area and I encourage everyone with an interest to contribute to this consultation. These views will form an important part of the preferred route decision process.”

People are also welcome to attend the Public Consultation Exhibitions which are also being held at the Memorial Hall in Llanfairpwll on 16 and 17 January and Ty Menai in Park Menai Business Park on 23 & 24 January between 10am-8pm.

Further details of the proposals, public exhibitions and how to share your views can be found at:

<https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/a55-3rd-menai-crossing>

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