

Minister in Merthyr to #TalkValleys

The Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys is holding a series of public meetings across the region to seek the views of communities about priorities for their local areas.

Alun Davies last night hosted the second town hall style public meeting of the taskforce at Merthyr's Red House, the arts and creative industries centre in the Old Town Hall.

Speaking following the meeting he said:

"We can feel that understanding and awareness of the work of the taskforce is growing and the engagement sessions we've held to date have been invaluable in helping to shape our priorities.

"It is vital however we continue to work with and listen to communities throughout the lifetime of the taskforce.

"From the discussions we've had with the public so far, some key themes have emerged. These include the importance of linking businesses with local schools to give young people the confidence and skills they need to enter into the world of work and the importance of linking infrastructure like industrial sites, schools, colleges and transport initiatives together, ensuring true connectivity for the valleys.

"I would urge anyone who feels passionately about where they live to engage with the work of the taskforce and have their say. We're here to listen and your views will help shape our shared vision for the valleys."

The taskforce was set up by the Welsh Government in July and aims to build on work previously undertaken across the South Wales Valleys in a more coordinated and targeted way to meet the needs of valley communities.

To learn more about the work of the taskforce or to sign up to attend one of the public meetings, please visit the [Facebook](#) page.

£104 million to heat Wales' most

vulnerable households

The Welsh Government [Warm Homes programme](#), which includes Nest and Arbed, provides funding for home energy efficiency improvements to low income households and those living in deprived communities across Wales.

The £104 million funding includes £32 million of the additional £40 million funding announced in the Final Budget last month. The remaining £8 million will be invested in other green growth initiatives.

The Welsh Government funding will also lever in around £24million of European funding, in addition to Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, announced the funding during a visit to Trowbridge to see how households have benefited from previous Arbed funding.

Cardiff County Council were recently successful in receiving further Arbed grant funding and take up has been extremely positive, with over 75% of residents signing up for a survey within two weeks of applications opening.

There are now over 300 homes in the area involved in the Arbed scheme, with a further 100 planned over the next few months.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“During the winter months how to keep warm while also meeting high energy bills is a very real concern for many low income households across Wales. I am therefore delighted we are committing £104million to our Warm Homes programme over the next four years.

“The Warm Homes Programme aims to make improvements to homes, such as boiler and heating upgrades and applying loft insulation, to increase energy efficiency, reduce household bills and in turn reduce energy use and climate change.

“There is also an emphasis on using the local supply chain to make these changes, creating jobs, developing skills and boosting the local economy.”

Mr and Mrs Foley, who received external wall insulation in Phase 2 of the Trowbridge energy efficiency scheme, said

“Not only does our home look lovely, but we have made over £200 worth of energy savings in just 6 months! The energy advice we have been given has been so helpful. Simple tips for everyday life. We are so grateful for the scheme.”

T9 bus service grows as Cardiff Airport goes from strength to strength

Quarterly figures up to September 2016 show an average of over 13,200 passengers a month used the service in the last year, with month on month growth every month since June 2014.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Cardiff Airport is one of the fastest growing airports in the UK and continues to go from strength to strength. I’ve been clear that a reliable, frequent bus service linking the airport to Cardiff and beyond is key if the airport is to reach its full potential and it’s encouraging to see that popularity of the T9 service has risen alongside the growth of the airport.

“The service, of course, serves a dual purpose, not only providing passengers from Wales and the South West with public access to the airport but also providing a vital public transport link to visitors. The airport continues to work hard to increase destinations, routes and possibilities on offer and I look forward to the T9 continuing to form part of this offering and building on these positive passenger trends.”

Debra Barber, CEO at Cardiff Airport added:

“An express bus service is vital for a capital city airport and we are hugely encouraged by the growth of the T9 and keen for opportunities to link the airport to west Wales to be explored.

“As an airport we have huge ambitions for growth and improved surface access, including bus, road and rail links is critical in helping us achieve this.”

Cabinet Secretary announces a new

Avian Influenza Prevention Zone

Lesley Griffiths has also confirmed there will be some important changes to the measures that will apply within the new all-Wales Prevention Zone.

The current Prevention Zone requires all keepers of poultry and other captive birds to keep their birds indoors or take all appropriate steps to keep them separate from wild birds, and to enhance biosecurity. This follows a number of confirmed cases of Avian Flu across the UK, including in a backyard flock of chicken and ducks near Pontyberem, Carmarthenshire.

Expert advice suggests it is unlikely the current level of risk will change before the current Prevention Zone is scheduled to end on 28 February. In view of this, and following consultation with industry and veterinary representatives, the Cabinet Secretary has decided to put in place a new Prevention Zone, that will take effect from midnight on 28 February.

The new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone requires all keepers to complete a self assessment of biosecurity measures on their premises. The objective being to keep domestic flocks totally separate from wild birds by continuing to keep birds housed or using other measures, which may include permitting controlled access to outside areas, subject to the introduction of additional risk mitigation measures.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“My decision to put in place a new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone until 30 April is based on sound expert and industry advice.

“The risk of infection from wild birds is unlikely to decrease in the coming weeks. The changes I am announcing today are proportionate and place the onus on the keeper to select the best option for their circumstances to protect their birds. They must, however, ensure compliance with the additional risk mitigation measures”.

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop added:

“Keepers of poultry and other captive birds must remain vigilant for signs of disease. Avian Influenza is a notifiable disease, and any suspicion should be reported immediately to the Animal and Plant Health Agency. Keepers should practice the highest levels of biosecurity if they are to minimise the risk of infection.

“I continue to strongly encourage all poultry keepers, even those with fewer than 50 birds, to provide their details to the Poultry Register. This will ensure they can be contacted immediately, via email or text update, in an avian disease outbreak enabling them to

protect their flock at the earliest opportunity”.

Innovation and commitment to quality – making Bluestone a success

The final phase saw the addition of 64 new luxury holiday lodges, a development which was supported by funding from the Welsh Government and has created 115 jobs in the local area. The holiday village's total number of 5* lodges, cottages and studio apartments is now more than 300 and the resort welcomes 140,000 staying guests per year plus a further 120,000 day visitors to Blue Lagoon Waterpark.

The development was supported by £1.5 million of Tourism Investment Support Scheme funding through Visit Wales, the ambitious expansion programme took 18 months to complete at a cost of £8.5 million.

Bluestone is now one of Wales top 10 biggest private sector employers, and employs 700 people.

The development comes against the backdrop of sustained growth for the 5* resort, which is set over 500 acres of national park near Narberth in Pembrokeshire. During a visit led by Chief Executive William McNamara, The Economy Secretary had a flavour of future plans which include the development of the nearby Black Pool Mill and a Skydome for the resort.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, said:

“I’d like to congratulate the team at Bluestone for the excellent, high quality product which they’ve developed – and which is proving so popular with new and returning guests, this is clearly evident by their high occupancy rates. I’m delighted that the Welsh Government has been able to play a part in laying the foundations and supporting the growth of this business – which is such an important employer in rural Wales. I wish the team every success with their innovative ideas for future development of the resort.”

Bluestone Chief Executive, William McNamara, said:

“Pembrokeshire does tourism for a living and we’re incredibly proud of the way in which Bluestone has cemented itself as a unique jewel in the crown of the Welsh tourism offering.

“Clearly, with a thriving industry, there are huge opportunities

for the sector and for us as a business. Our research shows that 50% of our guests have never previously visited Pembrokeshire so there's a real opportunity here to demonstrate our unique offering to new audiences.

"I'm pleased to have the opportunity to showcase all that has been achieved at Bluestone to date and to share with the Cabinet Secretary our ambitious vision for the future."

The 115 jobs at Bluestone are in addition to the 696 new and 787 safeguarded jobs that were announced by the Welsh Government last week following direct support.