

£20m to build homes fit for the future

The programme, which will initially be funded by £20m over the next two years, will contribute to the 20,000 affordable homes target the Welsh Government aims to provide over this term of government. The innovative homes, which will help to significantly reduce or eliminate fuel bills, will inform the Welsh Government about the type of homes it should support in the future.

The Cabinet Secretary made the announcement at the Innovative Housing Design Conference at the Cardiff City Stadium, jointly hosted by the Welsh Government, The Welsh Local Government Association and Community Housing Cymru.

He said:

“The housing sector in Wales is facing many challenges. We know we need to build more homes, quickly. We know the homes we build have to be cheaper to heat, more environmentally friendly and more capable of responding to the demographic challenges ahead.

“I’m looking for new ideas, new ways of doing things, both in terms of what we build and how we build them. We need to start looking at more innovation, at homes that can be built faster as panels in factories or whole units delivered to site on lorries. We need to look at what homes are made from and what else they offer in terms of fuel bills, carbon emissions, jobs.

“Building homes delivers important benefits beyond simply putting a roof over people’s heads. Alongside the well-documented health and education benefits that good quality housing provides for children and families, building homes of all tenures has a significant positive impact on the Welsh economy and on our communities. We can use the Welsh supply chain to unlock massive opportunities for growth and innovation in housing.

To qualify for support under the programme, homes must:

- be deliverable quickly
- be affordable and meet housing need
- create jobs and training opportunities, supporting Welsh businesses wherever possible
- significantly reduce or erase fuel bills and carbon emissions
- be healthy and comfortable to live in, reflecting the needs of the occupant
- be certified for quality.

“My ambition is to start changing the type of homes built in Wales.

Homes that are capable of being delivered at speed and cost and recycled, not just reused, if needs change. Homes that help to meet the challenges of climate change, fuel poverty and changing demographics with the huge pressures that puts on our health and social care budgets.”

Community Housing Cymru’s (CHC) Chief Executive Stuart Ropke said:

“CHC welcomes this latest investment by Welsh Government into innovative solutions for the housing crisis in Wales. Housing solutions need to be adaptable and flexible so that the sector can continue to provide a wide range of options for more people, and funding from this programme to turn aspiration into delivery will be key to this. The sector is up for the challenges set out in the Housing Supply Pact announced last December and we will continue to work with Welsh Government and WLGA to meet the 20,000 target.”

The WLGA’s spokesperson for housing, Councillor Dyfed Edwards, said:

“Local authorities have a full role to play in enabling and delivering the homes we need across Wales, and it is important that with this increased focus and investment in housing we do not miss the opportunity to explore new models of housing that deliver more efficient and affordable homes.”

Mark Drakeford meets European Investment Bank to discuss infrastructure investment opportunities in Wales

The Welsh Government has worked closely with the EIB to identify financing options for priority Welsh schemes; including investment in sections five and six of the A465, the redevelopment of Velindre Cancer Centre; band B of the 21st Century Schools and Education programme and the Housing Finance Grant 2 (HFG2).

Professor Drakeford and EIB Vice President Jonathan Taylor will explore options for investment through the Investment Plan for Europe (IPE), including the €315bn European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI). The Finance Secretary will also discuss the Welsh Government’s future

relationship with the EIB when the UK leaves the European Union.

During his visit to Wales, Mr Taylor will meet Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children Carl Sargeant to discuss the potential for investment in social and affordable housing.

The HFG2 programme will play a key role in delivering the Welsh Government's target of 20,000 new affordable homes this Assembly term.

And the Finance Secretary, Health Secretary Vaughan Gething and Mr Taylor will visit Velindre NHS Trust to see the plans for the new Velindre Cancer Centre – the centre is at the heart of a £230m scheme to transform the delivery of cancer care services across South Wales and is one of the schemes identified by the EIB as a investment priority in Wales.

The EIB is an active investor in the Welsh economy and has invested almost £2bn over the last 20 years in a range of public and private sector projects, including water, aviation, the motor industry and housing stock.

Professor Drakeford said:

“I’m pleased to welcome Jonathan Taylor to Cardiff to discuss the progress made with these schemes, which are being developed across Wales. It is also an opportunity to discuss the Welsh Government’s view about what our future relationship with the bank should look like once the UK leaves the EU.

“We are facing unprecedented challenges in terms of public finances so it is vitally important that we unlock all opportunities to boost investment in Welsh infrastructure. As a government we are focused on attracting investment from the EIB for our £2.5bn innovative finance schemes, including projects for affordable housing, transport, health and green growth.

“Wales already benefits significantly from our long relationship with the EIB and we want to see this continue post-Brexit. Our White Paper, Securing the Future, sets out a credible plan for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, and calls for the UK to continue as a subscribing partner of the bank.”

Jonathan Taylor, European Investment Bank Vice President said:

“The European Investment Bank has a strong track record supporting long-term investment across Wales that has included transformational education, water, energy, transport and social housing schemes.

“Close cooperation with the Welsh government and business partners across Wales is crucial to maximise the impact of EIB engagement.”

Steve Ham, Chief Executive of Velindre NHS Trust said:

“We are delighted to be able to welcome both Cabinet Secretaries and Jonathan Taylor to the Trust.

“The visit will provide an excellent opportunity to highlight the progress we have made, in conjunction with our Health Board colleagues, in developing plans for Non Surgical Cancer Services across South East Wales, and the key role the new Cancer Centre will play in the future delivery of our services.”

Carl Sargeant announces £4.4 million for advice services

£2.2 million will support the delivery of services which can offer direct advice relating to welfare benefits, housing, debt, money management and discrimination.

A further £2.2 million will be awarded to Citizens Advice Cymru to deliver the Better Advice, Better Lives Scheme. The scheme encourages benefit take-up for families with disabled children, for those living in deprived areas whose health is likely to be affected by poverty, and for council tax and housing benefits.

Carl Sargeant said:

“Advice services are an important part of our efforts to tackle poverty. They provide practical support to people who are struggling financially or need help regarding their benefits or housing. I am pleased to guarantee this funding for the next financial year. During the first half of 2016-17 advice organisations responded to over 33,150 requests for information and advice which illustrates how beneficial these services are.

“I am also pleased to secure funding for Citizens Advice Cymru to deliver the Better Advice, Better Lives Scheme for 2017-18. A key feature of the project is that it is referral based and delivered in community settings which means it reaches disadvantaged groups and people who are less likely to seek advice themselves. Since the start of this project in 2012, the scheme has helped over 171,000 people.”

Plans for £20m investment to help those with Additional Learning Needs announced

The Welsh Government wants to improve results and aspirations of those who need extra support in the education system. £10m of the funding is part of the additional £100 million extra investment over the Assembly term to improve school standards.

The new funding will be supplemented by an investment directed from existing budgets – expected to be a further £10m over the remaining Assembly term. While this is subject to confirmation of budgets at the next spending review, protecting this funding will be a priority.

In December the Welsh Government revealed proposals for an ambitious law to create a bold new approach to supporting learners with additional learning needs (ALN). If passed, the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Bill will completely overhaul the system for supporting pupils with ALN, affecting every classroom in Wales.

The £20 million of planned investment will support ALN learners in a range of ways over the next five years, including helping the education sector transfer to new system set out in the Bill, encouraging organisations to work closely together, developing the workforce and raising awareness of ALN.

Last year just 23% of learners with ALN achieved five good GCSE's including Maths and Welsh or English compared to 59% of all pupils and Ministers want to improve on this.

Alun Davies said:

“Our aim is to raise standards and extend opportunities for all our young people. Children and young people with additional learning needs make up almost a quarter of our school population; we cannot raise standards without targeting resources and improvement activities towards this group of learners.

“This £20m funding package builds on investments we have already made in transforming additional learning needs provision in Wales.

“This funding will help develop the skills of frontline staff to better support ALN learners. It is essential that all staff including early years professionals, teachers, FE lecturers and support staff are all aware of the new approach.

“Our ambition is for classroom teachers and FE lecturers will have the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of all learners. We want to ensure the new system is introduced in a way which ensures learners with additional learning needs are able to access the benefits of the new system as quickly as possible, balanced against the need to ensure services and professionals are ready to deliver it.”

Welsh Government support helps safeguard 280 jobs at Celsa two steel sites in Cardiff

Celsa Manufacturing (UK) is the UK’s largest manufacturer of steel reinforcement products with 100% of its output produced from recycled scrap. Across its two main sites at East Moors Road and Tremorfa in Cardiff, it directly employs 600 people, together with 194 full time contractors while its activities in Wales support around 3000 supply chain jobs

The investment will help safeguard the future of around 280 jobs including employees, contract workers and supply chain personnel.

Four projects – with a total capital expenditure of £3.6m – are being supported through the Welsh Government’s Environmental Protection Scheme to reduce CO2 emissions, cut energy consumption and costs, improve efficiencies and boost performance.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“The Welsh Government is committed to supporting the steel industry in Wales and I am pleased we are able to respond to the unprecedented pressures facing this key sector. Steel processing is an energy intensive operation and the high cost of energy is a major factor affecting the whole of the UK steel industry. This investment will help reduce energy consumption and cut costs.

“Our Environmental Protection Scheme provides one of the few ways of supporting large companies like Celsa with high energy usage to become more efficient. This not only delivers significant environmental benefits but also provides direct and indirect economic benefits for the Welsh economy.

“Celsa is a Welsh Government Anchor Company, a significant employer in the Cardiff area and a major contributor to the Welsh economy

and this investment will ensure the business continues to be sustainable while operating under difficult market conditions. This investment will help reduce energy consumption and cut costs to help build a viable future for steel in Wales.”

Luis Sanz CEO and Managing Director of CELSA Steel UK said:

“As a major energy intensive user, CELSA is always looking for ways of reducing its environmental impact, improving its energy efficiency and cutting cost. We are continually researching new technologies which help in all these areas and it is extremely helpful that the Welsh Government has a scheme which encourages the adoption of and investment in those new technologies. Even though we have already done much to cut CO₂ emissions it is essential that we further reduce our consumptions and environmental impact at a time when the cost of electricity for industrial users in the UK is giving us a competitive disadvantage.

“There has been excellent collaboration between CELSA and Welsh Government to make these investments happen and secure a more stable platform for the future growth of our business. This will benefit the company, our employees, the local and national community.”

The four carbon reduction projects have the potential to deliver 67,026 MWh energy savings and cut CO₂ emissions by 12,074 tonnes annually, which is over and above the EU standards the company already complies with.