

Innovation key for very rural broadband – Deputy Minister

Due to the complexity of reaching some areas, fibre rollout will not be suitable for all the remaining premises. Other solutions include communities coming together with the assistance of the Welsh Government's Access Broadband Cymru vouchers and the use of different and innovative technologies.

The Deputy Minister visited a scheme in Llanddewi Rhydderch, near Abergavenny, which is delivering faster broadband to residents as well as showcasing its potential for other areas. It uses TV white space, which is the unused TV channels available following the switch to digital.

TV white space also has the potential of connecting the "internet of things", making a connected home or work space a reality by offering a broadband signal capable of handling multiple devices.

The scheme, managed by Monmouthshire Council, has benefited from the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

The Deputy Minister also visited Michaelston y Fedw which now has access to some of the fastest broadband speeds in the UK. They achieved this by pulling together and taking advantage of the Welsh Government's broadband voucher schemes to build their own network.

The project, thought to be the first of its kind in Wales, also came top in the European Broadband Awards in 2018.

Lee Waters said:

"We have come a long way in Wales, with over 95 per cent of premises now able to access superfast broadband, compared with under 50 per cent when we began Superfast Cymru. This progress is largely as a result of our intervention as private companies had no plans to rollout the infrastructure in large parts of Wales.

"Despite this progress we want to reach the remaining five per cent. Many of these will be in very rural areas and while we are investing over £22m in a further fibre rollout it will not be possible to reach all of these through this technology alone. We need to look at innovative solutions, as part of a package of measures, which includes fibre, to make a difference in all communities.

"Different technology such as TV white space and other emerging wireless developments will have a greater role in the mix of

delivering faster speeds to those in very rural areas, and the scheme near Abergavenny shows what can be achieved.

“The community of Michaelston y Fedw have also shown how community effort backed by our voucher schemes can make a real difference, with speeds of 900Mbps now enjoyed there.

“There is no one size fits all solution to reach the remaining premises, and in the absence of a planned commercial rollout, we are using and assessing a variety of ways to reach very rural areas.”

The Welsh Government is already investing £22.5m to reach 26,000 of the remaining premises through fibre broadband, as part of a suite of measures. This is in addition to the £200m invested in the Superfast Cymru scheme which has connected more than 733,000 premises in areas where commercial companies had no plans to go.

New Chair to the Board of Community Health Councils announced

There are seven CHCs in Wales. They are independent bodies that represent the interests of people in the health service in their area.

CHCs act as the public voice in letting managers of health services know what people want and how things can be improved.

The Board of CHCs represents the voice of patients and the public at a national level. It sets out the national standards CHCs must meet, provides advice, guidance and support and is also responsible for monitoring and managing their performance.

This is an exciting yet challenging time for the Board and the current CHC model during its transition to the new Citizen Voice body. The role of the Chair provides an all Wales strategic leadership opportunity which will require the Chair to lead the Board of CHCs and the wider CHC movement through the period of transition.

Mr Pearce has a strong background in public services in particular local government, as a Director of Education and later as a Corporate Director.

He was a member of Aneurin Bevan Community Health Council from 2010 to 2018, serving the last three years as Chair. During this time he was engaged within the health sector on a number of different committees, working groups and research projects.

Mr Pearce said

“Community Health Councils have fulfilled a vital role for patients and communities to ensure their individual and collective voices are heard and make a difference.

“It is crucial that Wales continues to have an independent organisation that fulfils such a role so that the voice of patients and communities are central to ensuring health services meet the current and future expectations of the Nation. I am looking forward to leading CHCs through a challenging period of transition to the setting up of the new Citizen Voice body and with it, the closer integration of health and social care.”

Vaughan Gething said:

“I congratulate John on his appointment, I’m sure he’ll make a significant contribution to Community Health Councils and I wish him every success in his new role.”

£2m funding announced to improve the lives of people with a learning disability in Wales

This new investment is part of Learning Disability: Improving Lives Programme, which aims to improve the way services are delivered to people with a learning disability in Wales. The programme of work covers housing, health, education, transport and social care services.

The £2m announced today will be used to achieve improvements related to the health actions in the programme, over the next three years, including:

- reduce the inappropriate use of medication and restraint through increasing the use of a range of evidence based interventions such as positive behavioural support
- improve the take up and quality of annual health checks offered by GPs to people with a learning disability
- improve the capability and capacity of acute hospital care to make reasonable adjustments enabling people with a learning disability to access mainstream services
- to ensure that people with complex needs have timely and easy access to learning disability specialist services including trauma/crisis, the

full range of accommodation including secure provision and out of hours access

- implement the specialist and mainstream school nursing framework – a set of evidence based standards for nursing in schools.

Minister for Health and Social Services, Vaughan Gething, said:

“In our ‘Prosperity for All’ strategy we have committed to improving the overall health and well-being of all individuals in Wales.

“This new investment will support improvements in health services for people with a learning disability to reduce health inequalities and to help improve people’s health and quality of life.”

Head teachers have more time to focus on leadership thanks to School Business Managers

Funded as part of the School Business Managers pilot and the Small and Rural Schools Grant, the business support officers take on some of the administrative and organisational tasks that head teachers would usually undertake.

This allows head teachers to manage their workload better, meaning more time to focus on leading teaching and learning, raising standards, and improve pupil performance within schools.

The meeting took place at Ysgol Dyffryn Conwy in Llanrwst , where the 3 business support officers in charge of the Conwy Valley school cluster are based.

Now a year into their employment, the business support officers are already making a big difference to the 21 schools within the cluster.

Speaking after the meeting, Kirsty Williams said:

“I’m really grateful for the opportunity to meet with the school business managers and head teachers to hear first-hand the effects the programme has had on the schools they are responsible for.”

“It is encouraging to see how Conwy has used its grant to provide additional administrative support to free up time for the head

teachers of primary schools to focus on leadership and management.”

“I am also extremely pleased to see that 70% of head teachers that have taken advantage of this project have reported that they have seen reduced workloads in terms of administrative tasks, and that this has led to more co-operation between primary schools.”

Delyth Williams Business Manager at Ysgol Dyffryn Conwy said:

“This scheme makes a real difference in schools.

“The introduction of Business Support Officers within our schools has allowed us to be released from our higher administrative tasks, meaning that we can focus more of our time on leadership.

“Not only has this helped to raise standards and improve the performance of the learners, it has also been a big help in contributing to the sustainability of our small and rural schools.

“The benefits associated with the SBM goes hand in hand with the ‘cluster model’ approach adopted for schools in Conwy, as it encourages and supports school-to-school working, enabling head teachers to share good practice and collaborate to maximise capacity and share expertise.”

“The UK government must urgently change its position on devolving air passenger duty to Wales” – Finance Minister

APD has been fully devolved to Scotland and in part to Northern Ireland but it remains under the control of the UK government in Wales.

The Welsh Government has long argued it should have powers over APD, enabling it to attract more flights to Wales.

But UK ministers have said it would give Cardiff an unfair advantage over other regional UK airports. These concerns have been debunked by independent research.

Speaking ahead of her session at the Welsh Affairs Committee, Finance Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“Despite the Welsh Government’s repeated calls to the UK Government about APD, a decision has still not been made. Scotland, Northern Ireland and England all control APD to different extents – there is no justification for Wales being treated differently.

“There is unanimous support for the devolution of APD to Wales from aviation, tourism and business sectors in Wales and it’s time the UK government stopped stalling and changed its position as a matter of urgency.”

Last month the Economy and Transport Minister Ken Skates submitted a statement from the Council for Economic Development to the Welsh Affairs Committee, which is conducting an inquiry about APD, in support of devolving the tax to Wales.

Ken Skates said:

“The UK government’s failure to devolve APD continues to place unjustifiable constraints on our ability to promote Wales to overseas markets and support growth in the aviation sector and wider economy.

“We want the UK government to stop seeing devolution of APD as a barrier and more of an opportunity. Devolution would be a win for Cardiff Airport; for Wales and for the UK.”

The devolution of APD to Wales is consistent with the UK government’s policy of supporting the aviation sector to make a significant contribution to the economic growth of the country and the UK economy and aligns with other taxes, which have been devolved to Wales.