

Wales a key partner in pioneering EU funded community energy scheme

The Green Valleys, a community interest company based in the Brecon Beacons, is a key project partner in the ECCO project which aims to create five new community owned energy schemes in Wales by 2020.

Working in collaboration with eleven North West European partners the project is working to create a strong network of community energy cooperatives and inspire and enable continued growth of the community energy sector.

The project is backed by €3.2m of EU funds through the North West Europe transnational programme, with Wales set to benefit from €273,000 of EU funds and an additional £156,000 investment from the Welsh Government.

Welsh third sector organisations Datblygu Egni Gwledig and Community Energy Wales are also involved in the project and are set to benefit from the expertise of countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, who for over a decade have been pioneers in the community renewable energy sector.

Professor Drakeford said:

“This project will bring together expertise from across Europe, sharing the same opportunities, challenges and resources. I’m delighted to see EU funding supporting this collaboration to help develop a strong and sustainable community energy sector in Wales.”

“The benefits of building friendships and partnerships to address common global challenges and opportunities are clear to see, which is why it is also very important for Wales to participate in such EU co-operation programmes after the UK leaves the European Union.”

Gareth Ellis, Community Projects Manager, The Green Valleys said:

“We are on the cusp of significant future changes to the way our energy is generated and supplied. These changes create opportunities for communities across Wales to own and benefit directly from future energy projects. The ECCO project will allow us to work with partners across North West Europe to share learning, financing models and community led approaches to the development of new energy generation. ”

Minister praises co-op club supporting people with dementia

The 'Me, Myself and I' (MMI) Club in Briton Ferry was established in response to the growing care and support needs of local people living with early onset dementia.

A wide range of activities are offered to guests, while training is provided to people who care for and support their dependents and relatives. They also offer training to people who wish to develop careers in the care sector.

In 2016, a new law – the Social Services and Well-being Act – was introduced in Wales. It places a duty on local authorities to promote the development of not for private profit organisations, such as co-operative organisations, to provide care and support and support for carers, and preventative services, with the aim of opening up the ways in which people receive care and support.

The MMI Club has received support through the Wales Cooperative Centre's 'Care to Co-operate' project, which is helping people establish their own co-operative group or organisation to support the delivery of local social care and well-being services. The project is funded via the Welsh Government's Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant, receiving over £600,000 over the course of three years.

Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"I was really pleased to visit the Me, Myself and I club in Briton Ferry to see and hear first-hand the great work taking place there to support those living with early onset dementia, and the vital training and support they provide to the people who care for them.

"The club is a great example of how our landmark Social Services and Well-being Act is delivering real, positive change in our communities. It's an excellent example of how co-operatives are opening up new ways for people to receive care and support in their own communities. It also gives them a very clear voice and control over how that care and support is shaped and delivered.

"The Welsh Government is committed to making Wales a dementia friendly nation, which ensures people with dementia feel valued and are supported to live as independently as possible in their own communities."

111 service to be rolled-out nationally

111 is a free treatment and advice service, managed by a team of professionals, who will treat or direct users to the right health service for their need. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Currently the service is only available in the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg Health Board and Carmarthenshire areas, where it was launched as a pilot in October 2016 to test the practicalities of combining NHS Direct Wales and the GP Out of Hours services.

The service brings together NHS Direct Wales and GP Out-of-Hours call handling and triage into a single service. It differs from other UK models by having a greater proportion of clinical staff within it.

The decision to roll out follows an independent evaluation of the pilot. It found the service received over 71,000 calls in the first six months of operation, with 95% of survey respondents saying they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service.

Although changes cannot be wholly attributed to 111. The evaluation found a 1% decrease in Emergency Department attendance in Abertawe Bro Morgannwg during the first six months of service. There was also a reduction in ambulance conveyance to Emergency Departments. This change was mainly seen in non-urgent conveyances – down by just over 25% during the evaluation period.

Vaughan Gething said:

“I am pleased to announce that following the success of the 111 pilot we will be rolling out the service nationally over the next 3 years.

“I’m very encouraged to see evaluation which suggests a link between 111 and a decrease in ambulance conveyance. It is also clear from feedback that this service has been valuable in supporting patients and helping the NHS to treat patients with urgent care needs more effectively.

“We’ve been open and honest about the pressure our Emergency Departments are under, particularly this winter. People can help make a difference by using our health service sensibly. The 111 service will support people to receive the most appropriate services for their needs, at the right time and in the right place.”

Chris Powell, the Welsh Ambulance Service’s Area Manager for 111/NHS Direct Wales, added:

“As the hosts of 111, we’re really pleased by the progress made and the encouraging feedback received during the early stages of the pilot.

“People living in the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg and Carmarthenshire areas have been reaping the benefits of 111 for many months now, and soon everyone in Wales will have access to this service. This is another step towards a more modern approach to delivering urgent care, and we look forward to building on the success of 111 to date.”

Finance Secretary proposes changes to improve collection of business rates in Wales

Non-domestic rates raise more than £1bn each year in Wales, raising vital funding for public services, including education, social care, waste management and housing.

While the vast majority of businesses pay their rates on time, information collected from local authorities suggests up to £20m may be lost to avoidance every year.

Professor Drakeford said:

“As with any tax system, there are those who set out to avoid or reduce their non-domestic rates liability.

“The Welsh Government is committed to reducing the opportunities for avoidance behaviour and to helping organisations investigate cases more effectively.

“It cannot be right that the efforts of the considerable majority to abide by the rules and pay their dues are undercut by a minority intent on exploiting or abusing the system.

“I am pleased to publish a consultation about a range of ideas which could help to address the avoidance of non-domestic rates. I am keen to hear the views of ratepayers, industry representatives and local authorities, about how we can make our non-domestic rates system more effective, fairer and less vulnerable to misuse.

“While avoidance may involve only a small minority of ratepayers, when they do not contribute their fair share it is to the detriment

of local services, the wider community and other ratepayers.”

The Welsh Government provides more than £200m of support to businesses every year to help them pay their rates bills, this includes the new permanent small business rates relief scheme, which will come into effect on April 1 this year.

[The consultation will run from 4 April until 27 June 2018.](#)

£152,575 for Anglesey Council flood defence repairs

Extreme rainfall resulted in widespread flooding across the county. As well as flooding to properties, a large number of drainage and flood risk management assets which reduce flood risk to properties were also damaged.

Announcing the funding, Hannah Blythyn said:

“I am pleased to agree over £150,000 to Anglesey Council to help repair the significant damage caused by flooding last November. Heavy rainfall led to 31 properties being flooded in Llangefni, Dwyran and Benllech. In addition, in Llangefni a number of people were evacuated from their homes. Many flood risk management assets such as walls and earth embankments were also damaged.

“As weather patterns continue to change, flooding is likely to become more frequent. We want to do all we can to reduce the flood risk to our communities while helping them to adapt to the risks they face. Repairing these damaged assets and drainage is essential to ensure the communities they serve remain resilient to future storms.”