

£8.1m Active Travel funding awarded to local authorities

The funding will accelerate delivery of a range of travel improvements linked to Welsh Government transport priorities in support of the landmark Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013.

A total of fifty-four Active Travel and road safety schemes across Wales will receive a share of over £8m.

Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport Ken Skates said:

“Different areas of Wales present very different travel challenges and we know that opportunities for people to be able to travel on foot and by bicycle for everyday journeys vary greatly between rural and urban areas.

“The local schemes that we are funding with this £8.1m offer a simple way of building physical activity into everyday lives and driving associated health and well being improvements.

“In addition we know our investment in active travel will reduce motorised traffic and with it decrease air pollution, carbon emissions and congestion. It will also help make our communities feel more connected and, improve access to education, jobs and services while reducing travel costs for many families across Wales.”

Health Secretary reveals £100m plan to transform NHS in Wales

The £100m Fund, announced as part of the budget, will help to deliver the recommendations of the Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care, published last month.

The review, chaired by Dr Ruth Hussey, makes a number of recommendations on how to meet the challenges facing health and social care services in the years ahead. It recommends bold new models of care with services organised around the individual and their family, as close to home as possible.

Speaking at the NHS Confederation today (Wednesday, 7 February) Mr Gething told the audience of health professionals that he expects to see new, bold

and innovative ways of delivering services to secure a sustainable future for the NHS in Wales.

“This additional funding takes our investment in the NHS beyond what the Nuffield Trust and Health Foundation said was needed to maintain core health services. It will not be used to offset pressures in the system that should be managed through increases in efficiency from the additional funding already allocated.

The Transformation Fund will be heavily targeted at driving forward those changes to health and social care services that the Parliamentary Review said were needed. The focus will be on using the funding for a small number of programmes that can have the greatest impact in developing and delivering new models of transformed services.

It will be used to improve population health, drive forward integration of health and care services, focus on building primary care services, provide care closer to home, and provide some support to transforming hospital-based care.”

Action to tackle homelessness

The Minister is expected to say:

“Talking to those I meet, I often hear distressing accounts of family breakdown, domestic violence, mental health problems, financial problems, substance misuse and bereavement.

“These issues can lead to some people losing their homes and create a vicious cycle leading to rough sleeping.

“The recent increase seen in the National Rough Sleeper Count is disappointing in the face of our efforts and investment but I believe it largely reflects the increasing effects of continued austerity, increasing in-work poverty and welfare reforms”.

As well as new funding to their revenue settlements, councils in Wales will receive grant funding of £2.8m in 2018/19 to embed homelessness prevention best practice models which will help to reduce rough sleeping, prevent youth homelessness, improve access to the private rented sector and strengthen services for people with mental health and substance misuse problems.

Rebecca Evans AM will also say:

“Today I’m publishing a policy document which outlines how Housing First will be taken forward across Wales. There is strong evidence that Housing First works best where its core principles are followed – housing with no strings attached, ready and available support services and access to funds to help meet individuals’ needs.

“I’m also launching our Action Plan to reduce rough sleeping. Developed with organisations including Shelter Cymru, and members of Rough Sleepers Cymru, it covers a range of activity, supporting people to engage with services and get off the streets as quickly as possible. It also addresses wider issues such as a review of priority need and our guidance on cold weather plans.

“Rough sleeping is one aspect of homelessness. We can only truly address the issue if we have a system that offers secure housing for all. Building homes and expanding social housing stock can only go so far and I will work with the private rented sector to find innovative ways to harness their supply and meet demand. I will also be looking at how we continue to reduce the number of homes lying empty.

“The Welsh Government has a good track record of delivery on homelessness prevention and we will continue to provide the leadership to ensure we can end the need for people to sleep rough in Wales.”

Plans to mark the Centenary of Women’s Suffrage in Wales

The Welsh Government has committed nearly £300k to mark the Centenary of Women’s Suffrage with a range of activities focused around the themes of Celebrate, Educate and Participate.

Communities across Wales will be able to bid for grants for events to celebrate the achievements of women and there will be a public vote to decide which two women, who have made a significant contribution to Welsh society and history, will be commemorated by statue.

Leader of the House, Julie James said:

“Today marks the significant, one hundred year anniversary of the Representation of the People Act which was passed on 6th February 1918. This Act enabled all men and some women over the age of 30 to

vote for the first time.

It is worth noting, however, it wasn't until ten years later, with the passing of the Equal Franchise Act of 1928, giving women the right to vote at age 21, that women could vote on the same terms as men. So on 2 July this year we can mark the 90th anniversary of that Act.

I am also mindful that this centenary overlaps with the Welsh Government's Cymru'n Cofio Wales Remembers 1914 – 1918 programme which marks the centenary commemoration of the First World War in Wales. The contribution of women at the time to the war effort was paramount and part of the impetus in establishing the Representation of the People Act in 1918."

In a statement to the National Assembly, she outlined a programme of activities to celebrate and recognise the achievements of women, that too often are almost invisible in our history.

The Welsh Government has sponsored Women's Equality Network Wales to deliver a project to celebrate the 'top 100' Welsh women.

In the Autumn, the public will be able to vote to choose the Welsh women who they believe have been most inspirational. Two statues will be commissioned as a result of this project.

Working in partnership with Chwarae Teg and WEN Wales, the Welsh Government will also fund the commissioning of purple plaques for as many of the original 100 nominees as possible.

Julie James added:

"The centenary and the activities related to it will look forwards as well as back. Our aim in highlighting notable Welsh women both past and present is to raise awareness of their achievements and provide lasting memorials for a significant number of them, telling their stories in the context of their local communities. They provide powerful role models for the women and girls of today.

It is right to celebrate the progress we have made in the past hundred years. It is also right to remember the struggle and sacrifice which has been the price of this progress. We need to maintain our momentum, to strengthen democracy further, increase the number of women in decision making roles, and continue to challenge inequality and unfair discrimination."

Seren Network unveils 'life-changing' scholarship with Yale University, as independent report finds project is 'adding value' and 'plugging gaps'

The partnership is aiming to broaden the academic horizons of Welsh students by giving them a taste of university life in the States. The main cost of the summer school – usually \$6000 dollars – will be covered jointly by Seren and Yale.

Year 12 Seren students have until 13th Feb to apply, and will be selected via a competitive application process.

A similar collaboration between Seren and Jesus College Oxford last summer, which resulted in 73% attendees subsequently applying to Oxford, was so successful that it will now treble in size, offering around 70 pupils the chance to sample life at the prestigious institution in August.

The news comes as an independent report on the success to date of Seren, published yesterday, has found that the programme is delivering clear value for Welsh pupils and raising their aspirations.

The report found that the Seren Network is boosting Welsh pupils' confidence, and encouraging them to think more ambitiously about their university choices.

It found that Seren had been valuable in helping students make more informed choices and providing with the skills to make competitive applications.

Liam Rahman, a Yale graduate who now works as a representative for Yale in Wales, said:

"Since returning to Wales last year, it's been a real privilege to work with high potential Welsh students through the Seren Network and Yale's Alumni Schools Committee. Over the past few months, I've worked to build the relationship between Yale and The Seren Network, which has culminated in this fantastic partnership and scholarship opportunity. This scholarship will deliver life-changing opportunities to some of Wales's brightest sixth formers and gives Yale the opportunity to access some of Wales's very best talent."

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, said:

"Since launching in 2015, Seren has quickly grown to become a

recognised and valuable vehicle through which more than 2000 pupils in Wales are channelling their academic talents and ambitions.

"The report details the Network's considerable early success, from plugging gaps in support across Wales, to forging new strategic partnerships between Wales and some of the most prestigious academic institutions in the world including most recently Yale.

"Of course, there are areas for improvement which the report outlines, including a number that we're already working to address. Nonetheless, it's very encouraging to see a positive overview so early in the process."

Lowri Morgan is a sixth-form student from Abercynon who has recently received an offer to study at Oxford University. She is part of the RCT/Merthyr Seren hub. She said:

"The support I received through Seren was so helpful, my degree area is Physics and Philosophy which is quite niche – but through Seren I had the opportunity to take part in several workshops with Oxford and Cambridge Universities, which taught me what to expect in the interviews.

"One of them was an exam practice workshop with Oxford and, even though the exams I ended up sitting were slightly different, the essay writing and critical thinking elements were so important. Then, ahead of the interview itself, I was taken to Howell's School in Cardiff for a prep session, and given practice with other pupils within our subject area.

"After that I had a mock interview with Stephen Parry Jones, my Seren hub co-ordinator, which was so helpful. Without these opportunities through Seren, and the help from my head of sixth-form, I would have been completely in the dark. I wouldn't have had the confidence that I had going into that interview, and I'm truly grateful for that."

Dr Matthew Williams, Access and Career Development Fellow, Jesus College, Oxford, said:

"Seren is a fantastic network. It has been of enormous benefit to its participants, as well as being invaluable to academics like me who want to meet the brightest and best from across Wales.

"It is with the help of Seren that we in Oxford will be able to host our first ever all-Wales summer school in August 2017. Without the expertise and help of Seren, we would never have made as many meaningful connections with Welsh students."

Stephen Parry Jones, RCT Seren Hub Co-ordinator and Steering Group Chair, said:

“The report is a great boost. Only three years ago, I and my fellow coordinators had blank sheets of paper, and a brief to translate Lord Murphy’s report into some sort of reality. We were initially perhaps rather daunted, but the increased confidence and ambition among Welsh students highlighted in the report are really pleasing.

“I was delighted to be at the Jesus College summer school. As coordinators, we were so impressed by the intellectual ability of students from all over Wales. The Yale offer is another exciting development. Of course, there’s still work to be done, but we’re so glad to see that Seren is already proving its worth.”

Areas for improvement outlined in the report include:

- Greater collaboration across the hubs to ensure activities benefit as many pupils as possible
- More data is needed on the overall destinations of participants, though it was recognised that this data is not yet available due to the Network’s early stages
- Though flexibility is important from hub to hub, there should be a minimum offer across hubs so participants know exactly what to expect over their 2-year programme when they join the Network
- The report notes that a Seren-style model should be extended to pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4, to impact them earlier in their academic journey