

Welsh Government invests over £7million to help local authorities become energy efficient and reduce carbon emissions

Monmouthshire Council will receive £4.5million funding through the Welsh Government's [Invest to Save Green Growth Fund](#), allowing it to run its own solar park on council owned land.

The Oak Grove Solar Farm in Monmouthshire has the potential to generate enough electricity to power around 1,400 homes. It will also save more than 2,000 tonnes of CO₂e per year by generating clean, renewable energy.

Flintshire Council will receive £3.13m for an ambitious project to upgrade 11,000 street lights to LED equivalents, saving the Local Authority around £360,000 and 1,387 tCO₂e annually.

The change will also improve lighting levels and reduce the number of faults occurring on the network each year, cutting down maintenance costs as a result.

The approved funding brings the total investment by the Welsh Government through its Green Growth Wales initiative over the past year to £14million. This funding is helping local authorities to become more energy efficient and save money.

Incomes and savings generated by the local authorities from the projects will be used to repay the investment, support local community projects and leave the council with a net income.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“Through our Green Growth Wales initiative, we are supporting the development of public sector energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. I am delighted we have been able to support these ambitious projects, which will save significant money for the future. These projects have huge potential and all public bodies should be developing green growth projects like this to deliver decarbonisation in Wales.”

Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Mark Drakeford, said:

“At a time of reducing budgets, public services need to think and work differently. I'm pleased to see this fund will not only enable

these councils to generate savings but also become more energy efficient, improving the wellbeing of local communities.”

[News story: Maintaining our close ties with Slovakia](#)

The UK and Slovakia share a great number of common interests, not least the thriving trade between our great nations and the security of our continent.

So my simple message, as I visit Bratislava today, is that our strong relationship will not diminish after the UK leaves the European Union following last summer’s referendum.

For while we may be leaving the institutions of the EU, we are not turning our back on Europe. The UK intends to remain a good European and global citizen.

Our countries have both already achieved a huge amount together.

The UK is among the top five export destinations for Slovakia, and overall trade between our countries has grown by an impressive 30 per cent in the last two years alone.

We both have thriving automotive industries – Slovakia is a world leader in car production, with Volkswagen, Kia and Peugeot all manufacturing in the country.

And more recently, Jaguar Land Rover, one of Britain’s best known multinational car manufacturers, announced a £1.2 billion investment in Slovakia to produce its latest Discovery model from 2018.

In fact, one in every seven cars made in Slovakia is sold to drivers in the UK.

Building on existing trade ties is important for both of us, and it won’t be in anyone’s interest to see barriers to trade erected between our two countries.

That is precisely why we are seeking a comprehensive new free trade agreement with the EU, that allows for the freest possible trade in goods and services between Britain and the EU’s member states.

Of course, trade is not our only shared interest.

There are also around 90,000 Slovaks currently living in the UK and around 2,000 Brits living in Slovakia.

Nothing should change for either group after the UK leaves the EU – and indeed, we would have liked to have provided that guarantee with an agreement with the EU already.

It is only fair that those who have built lives for themselves abroad, and who are contributing to our economies, see their status secured as soon as possible. So we want to reach agreement on this issue as a top priority once the formal negotiations over the UK's new partnership with the EU commence.

We also have a very strong interest in maintaining the security of Europe and protecting our citizens.

Whether implementing sanctions against Russia, sharing counter-terrorism intelligence or working to secure Europe's external border, we are committed to standing with our allies.

But we know we cannot do it alone. As members of NATO, we both understand the importance of collaboration on defence and security.

Solidarity is crucial and, in the face of growing concern about the threat to security across the continent, working together has never been so vital.

That is why we want to continue partnering closely with Slovakia's armed forces on land, sea and air, with your police and your intelligence community.

So as we look ahead to negotiations to leave the EU, we do so in the spirit of friendship and goodwill. We want to see the EU succeed politically, economically and socially, and that is in the UK's interests as much as it is that of EU member states.

We are seeking a new, positive partnership between the UK and the EU – one based on mutual values, trust, free trade and continued cooperation.

[Press release: Social housing regulator to charge fees from October 2017](#)

The regulator of social housing has confirmed that it has listened to the sector and will delay the introduction of fees for social housing regulation to October 2017. Providers will pay 50% of the annual fee for 2017 to 2018.

The regulator was granted powers to charge fees under the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. It set out initial proposals in a discussion paper in 2014 and held a further statutory consultation at the end of 2016.

Following the outcome of the consultation, the regulator will introduce:

- a one-off flat-rate registration fee of £2,500 for successful registration with the regulator
- a fixed annual fee of £300 for providers with fewer than 1,000 social housing units
- an annual per unit fee of £4.72 for large providers with 1,000 or more social housing units – with the fee charged at group level rather than for each individual entity on the register.

Taking account of points raised in the consultation responses, the regulator has also committed to:

- waive fees for 2017 to 2018 for providers with fewer than 60 social housing units, where a complete de-registration application is made by 1 September 2017 and it has a reasonable chance of being completed by the financial year end
- a cap on the maximum increase to total income raised from fees to 1% per annum until the end of current Spending Review period in 2020 from a base of £12.5 million
- introduce a Fees and Resources Advisory Panel alongside existing stakeholder arrangements publish an annual fees statement in addition to the transparency information it already publishes.

Julian Ashby, Chair of the HCA Regulation Committee said:

Thank you to everyone who participated in the consultation and our various discussions around fees. I'm pleased to see a high level of support for our proposals, which were described as fair, simple, transparent and practical. In our approach to implementing fee charging we have carefully considered the impact on existing budgets and business planning for 2017 to 2018 and noted the affordability challenges raised by some of the very small providers.

Introducing fee charging complements the HCA review conclusion to establish the regulator as a separate legal entity. We're committed to keeping our costs low and therefore the fee level reasonable and proportionate, while maintaining effective regulation. We will establish a Fees and Resources Advisory Panel to ensure that there is accountability for fees charged.

A decision statement which outlines an analysis of the consultation responses, has been published on the [fees consultation page](#) of the Gov.uk website.

There were 169 responses to the statutory consultation which ran from 25 November 2016 to 9 January 2017. The regulator also consulted extensively with sector representative bodies.

The case for charging fees was supported by many respondents as the best way

of maintaining the effectiveness and independence of the regulator. Many confirmed regulation to be essential to enable the sector to continue to access the investment it needs on attractive terms.

Funding for some aspects of the regulation function such as reactive regulation, including consumer regulation, will be continued through government grant in aid.

The Homes and Communities Agency is the single, national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England, and is the regulator of social housing providers. As regulator, its purpose is to promote a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It will do this by undertaking robust economic regulation, as enshrined in legislation, focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer.

For more information, visit the [HCA website](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#).

Our [media enquiries page](#) has contact details for journalists.

For general queries to the HCA, please email mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk or call 0300 1234 500.

[Press release: Step up to the challenge as the South West flood committee's new chair](#)

The successful candidate will play a pivotal role in flood and coastal risk management across Devon and Cornwall, heading up a committee that works closely with other public bodies and interest groups.

In addition to leadership skills, the chair must be able to provide strategic direction, stimulate discussion and be an effective networker and influencer. He or she will also be required to work with other flood committee chairs and develop a good understanding of government priorities for flood management.

Ben Johnstone, Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

This is a great role, working to reduce the risk of flooding and coastal erosion in one of the most beautiful parts of our country. The challenges are varied and will become more significant as our climate changes. We have a huge exposed coastline, rapid responding

catchments, river and surface water flooding, not just in urban areas, but spread all across hundreds of rural communities.

How we think about managing risks is changing. We need to design to work with and co-exist with nature. As the committee chair you will be instrumental in making this happen.

The South West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee is one of 12 committees across the country that make key decisions on local priorities for flood and coastal risk management.

The committee is made up of members appointed by Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) and independent members with relevant experience and sets out to achieve the following goals:

- ensuring suitable plans are in place for identifying, communicating and managing flood and coastal erosion risks across catchments and shorelines
- encouraging the appropriate level of investment in flood and coastal risk management that provides value for money and benefits local communities.
- providing a link between the Environment Agency, LLFAs, other risk management authorities and relevant bodies to increase understanding of flood and coastal erosion risks in its area

People from a wide range of backgrounds are invited to apply for this post, especially those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and women who are currently under-represented on regional flood and coastal committees.

Further information is available from the [Cabinet Office](#). The closing date for applications is 20 March 2017.

[Press release: Government commits to helping survivors of domestic abuse](#)

Chris Skidmore, Minister for the Constitution, has published a range of proposals that will make the anonymous registration scheme in England and Wales more accessible to those escaping domestic abuse, and ensure that survivors can participate in our democracy.

The anonymous registration scheme protects people whose safety would be at risk if their name and address appeared in the electoral register. For example, this might include victims of harassment or stalking, as well as some witnesses in criminal court cases.

The current system has come under criticism for lacking the flexibility and understanding of various scenarios which survivors of domestic abuse often find themselves in. This can include limiting police attestations to police officers at or above the rank of superintendent, and restricting social services attestations to directors of social services.

Among the measures announced today are plans to update the list of court and other orders that are acceptable as evidence of the risk to an applicant, and lowering the seniority required for an attestor from the police or social services.

The minister has been working with domestic abuse charities over the past 6 months, including Women's Aid, to explore what could be done to ease the process for one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Women's Aid estimate that the proposals in the policy statement could help thousands of survivors of domestic abuse.

Mehala Osborne, survivor and founder of the Right to Vote campaign, said:

I was denied a vote whilst living in a refuge, and I never realised how much having a vote meant until it was taken away from me. I had already been through enough, and to be disempowered even more was so difficult. I am so proud to have started the campaign that has led to these proposed changes. Survivors in the future will not be denied their voice and democratic right to vote.

Dawn Morville, survivor of domestic abuse who lived in a refuge, said:

When I was living in a refuge, I could never register to vote as I was worried my ex would be able to hunt me down – and if he had been able to find my address, there is no doubt he would have come after me. This would have put not only me but the other women in the refuge at risk. And for years after I left the refuge, I could still not vote, because I knew that he would find me if he could, and seriously harm me and my children. So the proposed changes are great news. It will empower survivors, and give us back something that domestic abuse takes away: our right to have our say, and be heard, without being terrified that voting could mean our abuser comes after us.

Polly Neate, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said:

Domestic abuse must not deny women their right to take part in democracy. So, we welcome the changes proposed today on anonymous registration, and we thank the government – particularly the Minister Chris Skidmore, for decisive action on this. The proposed new measures send out a clear message to all survivors of domestic abuse: that their voices matter, and their participation in

politics matters.

Chris Skidmore, Minister for the Constitution, said:

This government is committed to removing any barriers that prevent voters from exercising their democratic right. Having met survivors of domestic abuse over the past 6 months, it is clear that the existing system has often let down those affected by domestic abuse.

That is why today we are setting out proposals to reform the anonymous registration scheme in England and Wales to make it more accessible for those escaping domestic abuse. Protecting the safety of survivors by making it easier for them to register to vote without their name and address appearing on the electoral register is a key part of that change.

We are clear that those who have been constrained by their abusers must have full freedom to express themselves in the democratic process – part of this government's determination to build a democracy that works for everyone.

The government is now welcoming feedback on proposals to expand the evidence to include new types of attester and new types of documentary evidence, along with other measures in the statement. To share your comments, please contact the Cabinet Office at anonymous-registration@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.

Under provisions of the Scotland Act 2016, the Scottish Parliament will shortly gain legislative competence for electoral registration in relation to Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections in Scotland. The Minister for the Constitution will be working with his counterpart in the Scottish government in order to together deliver reforms in respect of the UK Parliamentary electoral register and the local government electoral register in Scotland.

Under provisions of the Wales Act 2017, the National Assembly for Wales will in due course gain legislative competence for electoral registration in relation to elections to the National Assembly for Wales and Local Government elections in Wales. However, the changes proposed to anonymous registration will most likely come into force prior to commencement of these provisions.