

Communities and Children Secretary welcomes figures that show how homes are improving lives

The WHQS aims to ensure all homes provided by local authorities and housing associations are safe and secure and offer modern amenities.

The Welsh Government provides £108 million each year to help all social landlords meet the WHQS by 2020.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“The Welsh Housing Quality Standard will ensure that more than 220,000 households in Wales have a home that is safe, warm and secure.

“It is also vital to us achieving many of our other goals as a Government including improving the nation’s health and well being. Investment in improving and building homes also has huge potential to create jobs and training opportunities in our communities and help us build a prosperous society.”

So far, expenditure of £702 million has been tracked and 82% of that expenditure has been re-invested in Wales. The investment has also helped over 1407 people into employment or training, and provided the equivalent of 36,983 weeks of training.

“The statistics show our continued investment in our social housing stock is having a significant and far reaching impact. We have seen good progress, helping us towards our target of ensuring all social housing meets our high quality standards by 2020. I congratulate social landlords for their achievements so far, although there is still work to be done. We will continue to work with them to improve their housing stock.”

Welsh Government invests £8.2m in new ambulance vehicles

The investment will allow the service to purchase:

- 18 Emergency Ambulances
- 67 Non Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPTS)
- Five specialist Hazardous Area Response Team (HART) vehicles, to replace the existing fleet.

The Welsh Ambulance Service currently has over 700 vehicles in its fleet, which cover an area of more than 8,000 square miles across Wales.

Since 2011, the Welsh Government has invested almost £45m in new ambulance vehicles for the Welsh Ambulance Service.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“The Welsh Ambulance Service continues to experience a growing demand for its services every year.

“The £8.2 million investment I’m announcing today will enable the Welsh Ambulance Service to continue upgrading its existing fleet, allowing the service to deliver the best care for people in Wales.

“This will ensure the ambulance service is able to deploy the most appropriate clinician in the most appropriate vehicle, ensuring people receive the quickest response possible.”

Richard Lee, Director of Operations for the Welsh Ambulance Service said:

“In Wales we’re proud to have some of the most up-to-date and best equipped ambulances to benefit our patients and staff.

“Whether we’re attending emergency calls, taking non-emergency patients to appointments or providing life-saving care at major incidents, it’s vital that we have a modern fleet capable of responding to everyone’s needs.

“We would like to thank the Welsh Government for its continued support as we aim to further improve the services and quality of care we provide for our patients.”

[Plan to help improve mobile connectivity in Wales](#)

Although mobile connectivity is the responsibility of the UK Government, the Welsh Government is looking at the powers it has in order to ensure a series

of actions are implemented to facilitate improving the service in Wales.

The plan sets out how the Welsh Government will work together with the mobile phone industry and the regulator to improve connectivity.

There are particular challenges in boosting mobile connectivity in Wales.

For example, data from Ofcom on television masts show that because of the country's topography Wales needs 67 masts to reach one million people, while in England to reach the same amount of people 12 masts are required, in Northern Ireland it is 25 and Scotland 45.

The series of actions follows a Mobile Roundtable held by the Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James, with mobile providers and the regulator earlier this year. The plan has been developed in consultation with those at the meeting and others including farming unions, landowners and business organisations.

It focuses on nine key areas where the Welsh Government can use the levers at its disposal and its influence to help improve connectivity and capacity.

The areas include:

- Planning – Research has been commissioned, due to be completed in the Autumn, to inform changes to permitted development rights for telecommunications equipment to improve mobile connectivity. Planning Policy Wales (PPW) will be refreshed to highlight the positive relationship between telecommunications and the economy. A revised PPW will be published for consultation by Spring 2018. We will also work with mobile network operators to revise and update the code of best practice and Technical Advice Note (TAN19)
- Non-domestic rates – Where evidence suggests that a reduction in non-domestic rates would encourage investment the Welsh Government will consider providing non-domestic rates relief on appropriate mobile mast sites.
- Innovation and emerging technologies – The Welsh Government and mobile network operators will work together to identify opportunities to develop and test innovative technologies in Wales, including 5G. There have already been success stories in Wales in this field, such as the Welsh Government working with EE in the Teifi Valley to extend coverage using small cell technology.
- Major events and special projects – Build on work already done at the Royal Welsh Show where collaborative working has resulted in a permanent mast at the showground. The Welsh Government will facilitate relationships between mobile network operators and major event organisers

The Mobile Action Plan will be reviewed regularly and updated as the actions are carried out and progress recorded.

Minister for Skills and Science Julie James said:

“Mobile phone connectivity is becoming increasingly important for

both residents and businesses. We know there are challenges in Wales and that the service needs to be better.

“This plan outlines what we as a Welsh Government can do to help create the right environment to further improve connectivity in Wales. I have to be clear that we do not have the main levers as these rest with the UK Government and Ofcom, and it is important to emphasise there is not one single solution to boosting mobile connectivity.

“Wales’ topography presents many challenges and we need to ensure we strike the right balance between the local economic benefits of improved mobile coverage with the need to safeguard our sensitive landscape.

“We already have good examples of where we have worked with mobile operators to bring about innovative solutions to rural areas, and Wales will continue to play an important role in the support of emerging technologies within the mobile communications sector.

“I’m pleased this plan has come together with the co-operation of the mobile providers and stakeholders. It is by looking at various options and working together that we can all do this.

“We are already improving connectivity across Wales with the rollout of Superfast Cymru which has to date provided over 653,000 premises across the country with access to superfast broadband. While we do not have all the powers to improve mobile connectivity it is only right that we look at what we as a Welsh Government can do.

“I look forward to reporting back on the progress made on this plan. I intend the first review to take place at the turn of the year.”

Hamish MacLeod, Director of Mobile UK said:

“Mobile UK is pleased to see the publication of the Welsh Government’s Mobile Action Plan, which rightly recognises the urgent need for reform and identifies barriers to effective deployment of mobile infrastructure.

“The Mobile Action Plan commits the Welsh Government to work with the mobile industry, Ofcom and others to deliver effective reform. The challenge now is to realise this ambition and implement the proposals promptly.”

First Minister opens new £22m college campus in Aberdare

More than 600 students will attend the new state-of-the-art campus, which was supported with £11m from the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools and Education programme.

The 21st Century Schools programme is the largest investment in Welsh schools and colleges since the 1960s, which will see over £1.4bn being invested in the 5 years to 2019.

As well as offering courses in more traditional subjects such as computing and science, Coleg y Cymoedd offers practical courses including bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, electrical installation and plumbing that are designed to meet the demands of local employers.

First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, said:

"I am proud the Welsh Government has supported this new college with £11m of funding. When you look around this fantastic site, you can see it has been money well spent.

"This new college provides students with an impressive learning environment and the very best resources to help them reach their full potential. As well as benefitting teachers and students, the college will be an invaluable community resource for the people of Aberdare to use and enjoy."

Judith Evans, principal of Coleg y Cymoedd, said:

"This is truly a day of celebration as we officially open the doors of the new campus to showcase the facility Aberdare has been waiting for. We believe that it is the right of all in Wales to have access to high quality education and training that leads to real employment paths.

"We are grateful to Welsh Government for joining us in our mission to ensure that our communities in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Caerphilly can access the facilities and opportunities they deserve. Our thanks also go to the businesses who work with us each year to allow our learners to gain the experience and job opportunities that will see them prosper."

The official opening was also attended by Aberdare-born Dr Lyn Evans, who flew home to Wales from the CERN site in Switzerland to talk about the importance of encouraging people to study science, technology, engineering

and mathematics.

Wales secures the highest number of finalists for WorldSkills UK competition

The WorldSkills UK finals will take place at Birmingham's NEC between 16 and 18 November as part of the NEC's annual Skills Show, the largest skills and careers event in the UK.

The competition is used to benchmark excellence across a range of vocational skills areas. It is also used as part of the selection process for WorldSkills, a global competition held every two years where the UK regions compete as one team. These finals are part of the selection process for WorldSkills 2019, which is being held in Kazan.

A total of 462 competitors are taking part in the WorldSkills UK finals, which consists of up to 60 national competitions where entrants battle it out for Gold, Silver and Bronze award recognition. Of that figure, 74 competitors are Welsh, which is 16% of the UK total and by far the highest regional representation.

In addition to the 74 Welsh finalists taking part in the national competitions, a further nineteen entrants will be representing Wales at the Skills Show in other competitions, bringing Wales' overall number of entrants to this year's Skills Show to 93.

The additional competitors are the 'Kazan cohort'; nine talented students who have already met the qualifying criteria for Kazan 2019 so will now be competing to for a place on WorldSkills' Team UK. Ten entrants are also taking part in the 'Inclusive Skills' competitions, which have been specifically designed for those with disabilities.

Welcoming the news, Skills and Science Minister Julie James said:

"That Wales has been recognised as the top region for entries in the whole of the UK is a reflection of our skills excellence and the huge collaborative effort from partners that we have here in Wales.

"Through Skills Competitions we are creating a highly skilled nation that will support our economy, safeguard our industries and

improve the prospects of Wales.

“I wish everyone taking part in next month’s competitions the very best of luck and would like to thank those who have supported them on their journey for all their hard work and dedication to help make this happen.”