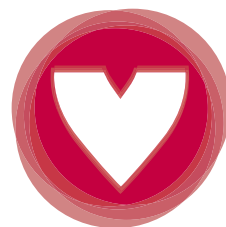




Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein Cymoedd
Ein Dyfodol



Our Valleys
Our Future

Progress Report 2018: One year on



@TalkValleys

#OurValleys

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Introduction

In July 2017, the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys published *Our Valleys, Our Future* – an ambitious, high-level plan, setting out a wide range of actions to transform communities across the Valleys.

The plan was based on feedback from people living and working in the South Wales Valleys – members of the taskforce spent months listening and talking to people across the Valleys about what they want for their local communities, now and in the future. The taskforce also look a wide range of evidence to inform the plan:

Good-quality jobs and the skills to do them

Better public services

My local community

Following the publication of *Our Valleys, Our Future*, the taskforce has developed and published a detailed delivery plan, which shows how each of the priorities and actions will be achieved by 2021. It sets out who will be involved, the expected outcomes and timescales for completion.

As work progresses, the delivery plan will be updated. To ensure we are being open and transparent, it will show where work is not progressing as well as expected and explain how we intend to move forward.

The updated delivery plan is also an opportunity to consider new actions and programmes, which will make a positive difference to the South Wales Valleys.

Each action in *Our Valleys, Our Future* is being reviewed and we will publish the refreshed and updated delivery plan in November 2018.

This is the first progress report since the delivery plan was published just eight months ago. We are still collecting data to show how the actions in *Our Valleys, Our Future* are making a difference to Valleys communities but there is already evidence of positive change.

This includes, of course, the new Wales and Borders franchise announcement, paving the way for the development of the South Wales Metro and improvements to the South Wales Valleys lines and the work being led by the taskforce to develop the seven strategic hubs across the Valleys.

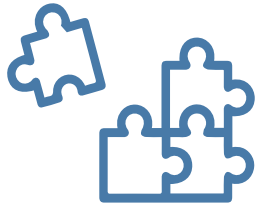
Work on all the actions highlighted in the *Our Valleys, Our Future* delivery report is being carried out against the backdrop of the uncertainty surrounding the final deal as the UK continues to negotiate its exit from the European Union.

Good-quality jobs and the skills to do them

Theme 1: Good quality jobs and the skills to do them

You said: You like living in the Valleys but more good jobs and opportunities to get skills are needed...

... so by 2021 we will have:



made sure people get the right
skills
for a good job



helped
7,000
people into work



supported businesses
to grow and bring
well paid, secure jobs

To achieve this we will:

- create new strategic hubs
- create jobs in the foundational economy
- increase skills support
- support existing businesses in the Valley's

By 2021, the taskforce is determined to close the employment gap between the South Wales Valleys and the rest of Wales. We set our target in 2017 using data on employment levels at the end of 2016. As a result of this information, to close that gap, 7,000 people living in the Valleys needed to enter employment.

To achieve this, new, good-quality jobs across the Valleys need to be created and the right support and access for people to gain the skills and training needed to help them get those jobs must also be available. We also need

to help parents – especially single parents – with the cost of childcare, as this can so often be a barrier to work.

Businesses and entrepreneurs need to know there is support to help them grow and thrive in the South Wales Valleys.

Our Valleys, Our Future included plans to create seven strategic hubs across the South Wales Valleys. Good progress has been made in the development of these hubs.

More than 1,000 economically-inactive people living in the Valleys taskforce areas have started work through Welsh Government-led employment programmes since September 2016.

Nearly 1,000 people and small businesses have been helped through advice and business support and more than 100 new enterprises have been created within the Valleys taskforce area during 2017-18.

More than 5,000 apprenticeship programme starts by those living within the Valleys in the 2016-17 academic year.

Fair Work Commission

Over the past year good progress has been made in identifying the best ways Welsh Government can put fair work at the heart of our economy. We have set out underlying principles, which include a right to be heard, fair and guaranteed hourly earnings, job security and career progression, job quality and working time quality.

A Fair Work Commission is now being established that will examine more closely the levers available to Welsh Government to implement fair work, and that will make recommendations on next steps. Business support, and procurement, will both have an important role to play in driving forward this ambition to make Wales a Fair Work Nation.

Investment to create jobs

Strategic hubs – the story so far

Last July, we committed to exploring all options to target investment and create new strategic hubs in specific areas across the Valleys. These are areas where public money is focused to provide opportunities for the private sector to invest and create new jobs. The taskforce's remit and work is focused on those areas of the South Wales Valleys where the challenges –

and the opportunities – are greatest; where the impacts of deprivation are most keenly felt on people's lives and across their communities.

Working with officials from the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services department, we identified the areas across the South Wales Valleys where economic potential was greatest. These were mapped against communities within public transport travel times of 45 minutes to ensure the proposed strategic hubs would benefit communities across the Valleys and not just those closest to the hubs.

Six areas were initially identified as a base for a strategic hub – Caerphilly/ Ystrad Mynach, Neath, Ebbw Vale, Pontypridd/Treforest, Merthyr Tydfil and Cwmbran. A seventh hub was added in Northern Bridgend, following the publication of the *Our Valleys, Our Future* action plan and further engagement with local communities.



Local authorities have been leading the development of what their respective strategic hubs will look like, ensuring they complement local opportunities and their aspirations for the future of their areas.

Following a series of engagement events in the autumn, local authorities, working with Welsh Government, local communities and businesses, led on the development of strategic project proposals for each of the seven hub areas. Seminars were held between November 2017 and January 2018 where local businesses and stakeholders were invited to discuss, challenge and consider the proposed projects and confirm which ones they believed would make the greatest contribution to the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of their areas.

Next steps

The programme covers a variety of funding packages and models of delivery, including European funding; Welsh Government direct investment; match funding from local authorities and external partners and new joint ventures. As the individual projects within the programme are delivered they will create new jobs and employment space; contribute to the development of an integrated transport network; provide additional residential housing and smart, low-carbon and energy efficient units and those buildings which are important to our heritage will be revitalised, providing wider cultural and community benefits.

Tech Valleys

In 2017 the Welsh Government announced it would invest £100m in the Tech Valleys programme over ten years in order to support the creation of more than 1500 jobs, predominantly within new technologies and advanced manufacturing.

Previously the programme was referred to as the Ebbw Vale Automotive Park but following stakeholder engagement the decision was taken to broaden its scope to extend beyond the automotive sector and broaden its geographic footprint to incorporate Blaenau Gwent, rather than just Ebbw Vale. To reflect these changes a vision document for Tech Valleys was published in December 2017.

In May 2018 the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport confirmed that the Welsh Government would invest £25m in its Tech Valleys programme between 2018 and 2021, as part of the commitment to invest £100m over the next ten years. This is on top of a range of investments to date by Tech Valleys. Alongside this announcement the Tech Valleys Strategic Plan was published, to provide strategic direction for investments and programme activity.

Although viewed as a £100m investment, Tech Valleys will involve a number of underlying stand-alone projects, that are expected to range in complexity, scale and size of investment sought together with support for inward investment propositions. These projects will continue to emerge over time and stimulate job creation and leverage public and private sector investment in the area whilst accelerating the development of high value, advanced technologies that support cutting edge industry.

In line with our Economic Action Plan, Tech Valleys has the principles of growth, fair work and decarbonisation at its heart while seeking to spread the fruits of economic growth to areas that have not fared so well in recent years.

Links to the vision and strategic plan can be found below.

www.gov.wales/topics/businessandconomy/growing-the-economy/enterprisezones/ebbw-vale/?lang=en

www.gov.wales/topics/businessandconomy/growing-the-economy/enterprisezones/ebbw-vale/?lang=cy

Additional hubs

As part of the 2018-19 Budget agreement with Plaid Cymru, we have been exploring the case for additional strategic hubs. The Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services department has looked at the impact of a number of proposed hubs, taking into account the number of people a new hub would benefit, and also journey time using public transport for commuting to work.

Employment and training programmes and apprenticeships

Economic Action Plan

The Economic Action Plan was launched in December 2017 and is a Plan which will grow our economy and spread opportunity to meet the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow. The Welsh Government will provide a leadership and enabling role – working with others to deliver an economy built on strong foundations, the supercharged industries of the future, and productive regions and people. Extensive engagement has been held with business and other stakeholders within the Valleys taskforce areas. These focussed on testing our thinking on how the Contract and Calls to Action will work and getting feedback.

The foundation economy provides essential goods and services and is the backbone of our communities. The importance of this is recognised by the Valleys Taskforce and was used to help develop the Economic Action Plan direction on the foundation economy. This commits to working with a number of foundation sectors across the whole of Wales to understand the challenges they face and opportunities for growth and innovation. The Economic Action Plan will align its approach to cross-government initiatives including the Valleys Taskforce.

Employability Plan

The Welsh Government's *Employability Plan* was published in March 2018, in line with commitments made in the *Our Valleys, Our Future* delivery plan. The plan aims to eliminate the gap in unemployment and economic inactivity rates between Wales and the UK average and the qualification gap between Wales and the rest of the UK.

It brings together and builds on several existing programmes, some of which we have used to report on numbers in to employment within the Valleys taskforce areas this year. These include Communities for Work, Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE), Jobs Growth Wales, ReAct, and Better Jobs Closer to Home which help people build the skills and confidence to find and stay in work, and to ensure employers can find the skills they require for their businesses to flourish. The plan will help to deliver the ambitious jobs and skills actions in *Our Valleys Our Future*.

Better Jobs Closer to Home

This programme has been designed to test the use of commercial interventions to create fair and meaningful employment for people in areas which have traditionally experienced higher levels of joblessness. Four pilots are being run in the Valleys taskforce area.

It is hoped that the Better Jobs Closer to Home pilots will ultimately create new, quality jobs by creating new opportunities to meet public and private sector demand. Each of the pilots is different and is testing distinct commercial interventions, which could be replicated elsewhere in Wales:

- The first of these pilots is working towards a specialist garment manufacturing hub. Working in partnership with the social sector, a social enterprise will be appointed to operate a manufacturing unit in Ebbw Vale making high-end, specialist garments. The aim is to increase long-term employability in the surrounding area. All profits will be reinvested in the business and the local community. The factory is expected to be operational by autumn 2018 and will initially employ 25 people.

- The second pilot involves the manufacture of traffic and commercial signage – highway signs, street nameplates, safety signs and hoarding boards. This is an existing social enterprise that employs people with disabilities. The aim is to increase the hours of work for the current workforce. Extra demand for signage has already resulted in increased orders from two local authority main contractors. Transport for Wales has also stipulated the use of the factory for its signage requirements.
- A special purpose vehicle will be created to re-engineer waste paint collected from local authority waste sites in Wales, bringing together the patent owner of the re-engineering process and a local social enterprise to replicate the operation, which is currently based in Birmingham. They will operate the same process from the Bryn Pica Eco Park, in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- The final pilot project focuses on recycled paper and is based on an existing social enterprise which employs disabled, homeless and previously long-term unemployed people. The company collects sorts and shreds waste paper.

The Access Programme

The Access Programme was launched in October 2017 and supports unemployed adults living in the South Wales Valleys who need a little extra support to find and sustain work. It provides vocational training grants to help update skills and improve employment opportunities. There are three parts to the scheme:

- A vocational training grant for people who need to update their skills to enter work.
- An extra support grant to help remove any barriers to vocational training.
- A contribution towards wages and help with training costs for recruiting employers.

The Access Programme is funded by the Welsh Government and is offered with a wide range of support from partner organisations such as Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus. So far the Access Programme has received more than 400 applications of support. Careers Wales is developing a progress report for the programme, which runs until March 2019. The full outcomes will be available in the 2019 *Our Valleys, Our Future progress* report.

Skills and apprenticeships

Shared apprenticeship model

Work on the development of a shared apprenticeship model in Merthyr Tydfil is progressing. Apprentices will be placed with a host manufacturing company for the duration of the apprenticeship (two to three years) but rotate among partner employers during this time. A learning pathway is agreed by the host company, the apprentice and their delivery partner. Apprentices are paid above the minimum apprenticeship wage.

Recruitment has taken place with local schools and local employers in Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil. The model has been approved and is starting to recruit apprentices. Recruitment within schools is well-established and working well in Blaenau Gwent, with the employer base going from strength to strength. Recruitment within schools and employers has recently begun in Merthyr Tydfil.

Y Prentis was part of the heritage building skills workshop, which considered opportunities for including traditional building skills in construction apprenticeships. It highlighted that as there is a stock of older housing in the Valleys area, there could be opportunities to include traditional skills in the shared apprenticeship scheme. We are still in consultation phase and exploring the opportunities.

Following the decision to focus apprenticeship delivery at level three and above, we are currently exploring options for an appropriate intervention to support entry level skills in sectors such as retail and customer service. Consideration is being given to launch in the Valleys taskforce area.

Account executives for secondary schools in the South Wales Valleys

Account executives are now linked to all secondary schools in the South Wales Valleys. Pilot activity is being developed between the Welsh Government skills team and Careers Wales to align careers and business support activity. The aim is to match local people seeking jobs with small and medium-sized businesses seeking to recruit.

Support for businesses

Business Finance Awards

The Business Finance Scheme was set up to help support projects delivering job creation or safeguarding jobs in Wales. The scheme ended in May 2018 and has been replaced by the Economy Futures Fund, which is a streamlined and simplified approach to business finance.

Between May 2017 and May 2018, 21 offers of Business Finance support have been accepted by businesses in the Valleys taskforce area. These projects are expected to lever a capital investment of almost £48m, creating 651 jobs and safeguarding a further 667 jobs.

An example of the use of this fund was the announcement by BBI Group in 2017 that it was consolidating and expanding its UK manufacturing operations onto a single site in Caerphilly in an £8.5m investment.

BBI Group received a Welsh Government grant of £1.8m, which will help employment increase from 180 to 366 by 2020. The fund will help improve career opportunities in the South Wales Valleys, foster closer links with the scientific and academic community and provide a significant boost for the local economy.

Business Wales

Business Wales, the Welsh Government's bilingual business support service, is designed to make it easier for Welsh micro-businesses and SMEs, to access information, advice and support they need to start and grow their businesses.

Business Wales Accelerated Growth provides specialist tailored support for businesses with the ambition to significantly grow and fulfil their growth potential. Laserwire Solutions based in Pontypridd, manufacture a complete range of off the shelf and tailored Laserwire stripping machines for the laser stripping of insulation from high tech cables and wires. Since joining the Business Wales Accelerated Growth Programme, Laserwire Solutions have created 24 jobs, of which 13 are above the Welsh salary average, and have generated £6.7m worth of export turnover for revenue.

Between April 2017 and March 2018, the Business Wales advisory and accelerated growth services have:

- Helped 996 individuals and small businesses.
- Created 112 new enterprises.
- 883 increase in employment.
- Increased exports by Welsh businesses by £15,912,999.
- Invested £10,639,222 in enterprise.

Be the Spark Event

The Valleys taskforce held a Be the Spark event – Celebrating and Shaping Our Valleys, Our Future, at the Red House in Merthyr. Entrepreneurs and business throughout the Valleys areas attended the event, which was an opportunity to meet and network with innovators, investors and academic talent to transform their ideas into tomorrow’s products and businesses.

The event was attended by around 100 people who heard an inspirational keynote speech by Helen Walbey, an entrepreneur based in the Cynon Valley. The aim was to facilitate, connect and encourage stakeholder engagement. It provided signposting and connectivity and provided link between emerging businesses and existing initiatives. The event gave attendees the opportunity to build on and learn from some showcase stories from people who have taken their idea forward, resulting in successful businesses.

New business facilities

Almost £6m of European and Welsh Government funding is being invested in the South Wales Valleys to create new business facilities.

In Robertstown, Aberdare, a £3.9m scheme will construct 11 new business units to meet local demand. The units will be located on a brownfield site, formerly a goods yard, next to Aberdare train station and Coleg y Cymoedd.

In Caerphilly, £2m will be invested at the Lawns Industrial Estate, Rhymney, to build 10 new units and associated infrastructure on the site. There are currently 21 fully-occupied industrial units and a substantial waiting list on the site.

Childcare offer

The childcare offer for Wales is being tested in three areas of the South Wales Valleys – in parts of Rhondda Cynon Taf; in Caerphilly and in Blaenau Gwent – and in four other areas of Wales. The pilots, which started in September 2017, were expanded in April 2018, so the offer is now available across the whole of Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent. It will be expanded throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf and to the whole of Torfaen from September 2018.

The offer will provide 30 hours of Welsh Government-funded early education and childcare to working parents of three and four-year-olds for 48 weeks of the year. The pilots are designed to test the offer, eligibility and take-up. An independent evaluation of this first year of early implementation is underway. Initial findings suggest that a significant number of parents benefiting from the Offer have earnings at or below the national average wage, and there are emerging cases of parents making different employment choices to support their families and increase their income.

Better public services

Theme 2: Better Public Services

You said: **Services are good but should work together more...**

... so by 2021 we will have:



supported services to
work together
for a good job



better and joined up
public transport
that people can afford



supported more
people to lead a
healthy life



improved
education outcomes
for children

To achieve this we will:

- test new ways to improve local services

- develop community hubs

- make trains and busses more frequent, accessible and affordable

A common theme from the engagement feedback was that public services need to be more responsive to the needs of local communities and there is a general need to join services up more effectively.

As part of testing ways to improve local services and to look for ways they can be better integrated, the taskforce have been working on three pathfinder projects in Llanhilleth, Ferndale and Glynneath/Banwen. The learning from this work has been feeding into the wider Taskforce approach.

We want to improve the use of local facilities and services – we are looking at the use and location of existing community hubs, including the community use of school buildings. We are working with local authorities in the South Wales Valleys to map current provision. We are also working closely with Rhondda Cynon Taff Council and the network of community hub representatives set up by the taskforce to share their learning on the good progress they are making with community hubs in their area.

People living and working in the Valleys were clear about the need for better public transport; *Our Valleys, Our Future* contains a clear commitment to improve transport services.

The South Wales Metro is a long-term programme to transform and integrate public transport across South Wales. We know that the benefits of the Metro will include improved, more frequent journey times. As this is a long-term programme, we are also focused on local transport plans – in 2017-18 Welsh Government invested £8m in local transport schemes in the South Wales Valleys.

A digital vision for the Valleys

Good progress has been made to develop a digital vision for the South Wales Valleys.

In April 2018, the taskforce approved three digital pilot schemes – better and wider access to free Wi-Fi for people living in the Valleys; an Uber-style app for people who need to order NHS or community transport and investigating better use of the online data mapping tool Lle.

The three ideas were developed following close working between taskforce members and local communities to find out how the internet and digital technology can be used to deliver better outcomes for people living and working in the Valleys. They are simple, but effective ideas, which have the potential to benefit communities across the Valleys.

Improved access to free Wi-Fi across the Valleys would see the taskforce working with public sector organisations, schools and community hubs to encourage them to open up their local Wi-Fi networks to the public. This would create a wide web of free Wi-Fi hotspots in local communities, which people could connect to for free while they are out and about.

The idea behind the Uber-style app is to bring together all providers of community transport in one online, digital place, to make it easier for people to order transport when they need to go to a hospital or clinic appointment. It is hoped the idea can be developed and piloted in one of the more remote Valleys communities.

The online data mapping tool Lle is already in use, but it is hoped its wider application and use could encourage more investment to the South Wales Valleys.

Pathfinders

The availability of good-quality, coordinated and integrated public services is a priority for the taskforce and for people living in the South Wales Valleys.

The taskforce set up three pathfinder projects to look at how this could be achieved. A senior Welsh Government official has been working closely with a valleys community – a pathfinder area – to look for ways that services can be better integrated and how public services can work more effectively with community anchor organisations.

The pathfinders are working together to share best practice and are looking at what their specific communities need. Each of the pathfinders held early conversations with community members and delivery staff to identify their individual priority issues.

This work has been informed by a social data collection exercise by the Cynefin Centre, which gathered and analysed stories from people living and working in the areas. To address the priorities identified within each of the communities, the pathfinders have arranged and agreed a number of actions. Examples of these include:

- **Banwen/Glynneath – Digital Inclusion projects** – The pathfinder brought together contacts from Welsh Government, local skills/training providers, employability programmes and local DWP offices to address employability, skills and training. As a direct result of issues identified with that group, DOVE Workshop will be delivering a bespoke programme around the themes of digital inclusion. They will be supporting individuals to use technology, set up email accounts, help with job search or benefit claims. This will also include providing advice and guidance for beneficiaries to encourage progression to further learning, activities and employment opportunities.
- **Fern Partnership** – The community school currently has a successful coding club which the pathfinder has been considering how to support this to expand. Work is now underway to arrange for Welsh Government digital apprentices to utilise their volunteer hours at the school supporting pupils, and also carry out train the trainer sessions to equip teachers and support workers to deliver on demand.
- **Llanilleth** – Building on the success of Llanhilleth Miners’ Institute literacy project Readability, the pathfinder has worked to develop a digital skills programme hosted at the Institute. Forging links with the Cardiff University Computer Science post-graduate course, students have delivered bespoke sessions at the Institute ranging from familiarisation with technology to coding and building websites. This programme is being expanded to include family sessions over the summer holidays and a full suite of courses from September 2018. To support this work, Welsh Government is investing in the infrastructure and hardware available at the Institute to establish it as a community digital skills hub for the area.

The pathfinders will now evaluate the work that has taken place over the last 12 months and come together as three groups to share best practice and consider suggestions and recommendations going forward. The pathfinders will also report on outcomes and next steps for the organisations at a future Ministerial Taskforce Meeting.

Community hubs

The taskforce believes a range of public services can be brought together under one roof with the third sector in community hubs.

We are working with local authorities, the NHS and third sector organisations to establish what services existing community hubs have available and where current gaps in provision are. Opportunities for supporting the community hub approach have been mapped across Welsh Government departments to provide a more strategic approach to developing community hubs.

A series of networking events have been held to enable public sector and third sector partners in the South Wales Valleys to share good practice and to inform the development of guidance for those wishing to develop new hubs. Work is underway to identify barriers and solutions to establishing and sustaining community hubs.

Following the publication of *Our Valleys, Our Future* and the commitments to develop community hubs, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has proposed a programme of investment in community services through the development of community hubs. The taskforce is working closely with the council’s community zones implementation group as this work is taken forward.

Ferndale will be one of the first towns to benefit from a community hub. The council is working with the Fern Partnership to develop the hub, which will house a range of community-based services, including the relocated Ferndale Library. Fern Partnership will also provide comprehensive childcare services at the hub and a range of information, advice and support, including employment support programmes.

The taskforce intends to learn from the work in Rhondda Cynon Taf and share this more widely across the Valleys.

Health

It was apparent during the extensive engagement which led to the publication of *Our Valleys, Our Future*, that people in the Valleys did not feel supported by mental health services. The rollout of the wellbeing bond and the promotion of social prescribing has been a priority for the taskforce and its partners this year.

Wellbeing bond

In February 2018, Ministers decided to take an integrated approach to delivering the wellbeing bond, which is aligned with the commitment to deliver a Challenge Fund for Sport. This will involve establishing a new integrated fund with the objective of improving mental and physical health by enabling healthy and active lifestyles, with an initial focus on developing or strengthening community assets. Applications will be sought from statutory and non-statutory organisations, who are expected to engage with local communities in the development of proposals. There will be a targeted approach to encourage applications from the valleys, with projects expected to be up and running from early 2019.

Social prescribing

The Welsh Government has committed to deliver a social prescribing pilot for mental health.

Bids have been invited to deliver pilot projects that involve a link worker, who will take referrals from primary care and at least one other source, and work with people to refer them to appropriate community support that will help them manage their mental health and wellbeing. Pilot projects will operate in at least two areas, with at least one of these in the Valleys, and will be funded for 3 years.

The pilot scheme is designed to provide an effective trial for what works in relation to social prescribing for mental health. The evaluation element is covering process, impact and value for money in order to provide a detailed addition to the evidence base.

Transport

South Wales Metro

The South Wales Metro will be the blueprint for integrated transport across Wales. It will improve links between Valleys communities and the rest of South Wales but it will also support the wider economy by enhancing connectivity across Wales. It will allow people greater mobility and easier access to jobs and services.

The South Wales Metro is a long-term programme to transform and integrate public transport across South Wales. The Metro is being developed in tandem with the delivery of the new Wales and Borders rail services contract.

The South Wales Metro area includes the railway lines to Maesteg, Bridgend, via the Vale of Glamorgan, Treherbert, Aberdare, Merthyr, Rhymney, Ebbw, and Abergavenny, as well as Bridgend to Cardiff and Newport on the South Wales Main Line.

The benefits from the South Wales Metro will include:

- Improved, more frequent and more reliable journey times compared to the current timetable;
- Enhanced passenger information and communication;
- Integrated services and integration with active travel routes;
- Simpler, fairer fares;

- Better access to trains and stations, especially for disabled people. It will include a doubling of services to support Better Jobs Closer to Home mentioned above, with four services an hour from Treherbert, Aberdare and Merthyr from 2022 and Rhymney from 2023, with the Sunday services providing two services an hour from 2024;
- A doubling of services (two services an hour) on the Ebbw Vale line from 2021 and the Vale of Glamorgan line from 2023;
- 45% more seats into Cardiff during the morning peak;
- A fleet of modern and highly-accessible on-street capable Metro vehicles to serve the TaffVale and City lines and new, innovative tri-mode trains for the Rhymney, Coryton, Penarth, Barry and Vale of Glamorgan lines to allow for through services to the non-electrified lines south and west of Cardiff Central;
- 100% electric traction on all trains operating on Valleys Line services which pass through Cardiff Queen Street.

By the end of 2019 all Pacer trains will be removed from the network.

Bus is a critical component of public transport and remains a key focus for both the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales. Transport for Wales will review how bus services could be delivered in future to ensure that urban and rural communities across Wales benefit from a modern, integrated public transport service.

Investment in the rail service will provide improved links to bus travel. The potential to relocate bus stops and the development of strategic park and rides will make access to the rail elements of Metro easier. Integrated passenger information systems and improved way finding will make door-to-door journey planning easier and public transport more accessible.

Transport for Wales will work with bus operators to promote tickets which can be used on both bus and rail.

Transport for Wales will be engaging with local communities, local authorities and bus operators to discuss how they participate in and benefit from an integrated regional transport system.

Transport for Wales' Headquarters

Transport for Wales is the Welsh Government's not-for-profit company which will be the face of Metro and the wider Wales and Borders rail service. The new headquarters is to be located in Pontypridd's flagship Taff Vale redevelopment, a strategically important scheme being delivered by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council. The redevelopment is being supported by a package of funding that includes £30m from the council, £10m from Welsh Government in addition to £7m from the European Regional Development Fund.

Several hundred staff will be located at the new headquarters set up to drive forward our vision of a high quality, safe, integrated, affordable and accessible transport network. It is hoped that this injection of jobs will become a spark for wider local regeneration. By basing Transport for Wales and its partners in the heart of the valleys, we are underlining our ambition for Metro to be a catalyst for regeneration of the wider region.

Global Centre of Rail Excellence

Plans are progressing to develop a circa £100m Global Centre of Rail Excellence at a preferred site in Onllwyn/Nant Helen at the top of the Dulais Valley. The centre will directly employ well over 100 people utilising new and existing skills and deliver a significant and sustainable economic opportunity for an area historically reliant on coal. More widely it will have an important catalytic impact in support of innovation and growth in the rail industry and its supply chain in Wales, the UK and internationally.

New Depot

Almost £100m is being invested in a new rail depot, which will be built in Taff's Well on a site acquired by the Welsh Government in March 2016. It will house and service 36 of the new Metro vehicles, which will operate services on the Taff Vale lines and eventually be the base for 400 train crew and 35 Metro vehicle maintenance staff.

The new Taff's Well depot will complement the continued use of existing depots such as Canton, where around £5m will be invested to modernise the maintenance facilities to support the new tri-mode rolling stock. Together these depots will perform a critical function supporting the operation of the South Wales Metro.

The new Taff's Well depot will also be home to an integrated control centre for the South Wales Metro employing 52 staff.

Valleys local transport plans

The taskforce has considered local transport planning to ensure greater connectivity across the Valleys. In 2017-18, the Welsh Government funded around £8m in local transport schemes in the South Wales Valleys.

The Welsh Government has also allocated £25m to local authorities across Wales through the Bus Services Support Grant scheme in both 2016-17 and 2017-18 to enable them to subsidise bus and community transport services, supporting connectivity and access to education, training, employment and social events.

21st Century schools

The taskforce committed, in *Our Valleys, Our Future*, to look at ways of improving facilities and services within communities and using them more effectively. We are therefore building on the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools and Education Programme, which aims to overcome barriers and support learning through provision of fit-for-purpose schools and colleges of the right size, in the right location, with the right facilities to deliver the new curriculum.

An example of this is the Idris Davies School in Caerphilly. The new £8m 240-place primary school, which also has 30 nursery places, has replaced the two existing primary schools in Abertysswg and Pontlottyn. It was built on land within the existing Rhymney Comprehensive School site near Abertysswg. This is the area's first three to 18 school and is named after the famous Welsh poet who was born in Rhymney in 1905.

Idris Davies School was opened by the First Minister in April 2018. The new school aims to raise educational standards and improve life chances by reducing levels of poverty. 32 projects within the Valleys taskforce areas have been supported so far through Band A of the 21st Century Schools Programme, 14 of these have been completed with 18 still under construction. Strategic programme plans for Band B of the 21st Century Schools programme, which will begin in April 2019, have been received from local authorities and further education institutions. Individual business cases are now being assessed.

Housing

Affordable homes

The Welsh Government has set an ambitious target of building 20,000 affordable homes over the lifetime of this Assembly – many of these will be built in the South Wales Valleys. Funding is being invested in a range of tenures and schemes to address the varied housing needs across Wales.

In the last year, £52m was invested in the South Wales Valleys through the Social Housing Grant programme. This funding delivers a range of outcomes, including the new social rented flats and supported housing scheme on the site of the former Bargoed Fire Station, which are helping people regain or develop their confidence and ability to live independently.

Innovative approaches to housing are also being supported by the Welsh Government. The Co-operative Housing in Wales project, which has led to co-operative housing models being developed in the Valleys, including in Gellideg in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhydyfelin in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

In the last year, £1.1m from the Innovative Housing programme was invested in the Pobl Group – the largest social landlord in Wales. This will deliver 16 homes in Neath, to be completed by July 2019, as a pathfinder project for future and larger developments of Homes as Power Stations.

Homes as Power Stations is a way of constructing homes, which aims to reduce carbon and tackle fuel poverty by building homes which are more energy efficient and cheaper to run. The Homes as Power Stations pathfinder will create a centre of excellence for shared expertise to develop skills and support local industry.

Land sites for housing

Welsh Government departments are working together to bring forward land sites for housing development. Ty Du, in Nelson, is a strategic priority for Caerphilly Council, where almost 200 could be built close to a Metro station. The potential for innovative design and increased levels of energy efficiency will be included in the specification for the site.

Welsh Housing Quality Standard

There are over 224,000 social homes in Wales provided by Registered Social Landlords and Councils who still have their housing stock. They house some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in society. To ensure people live in decent homes, all these properties must meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by December 2020.

To help fund the required improvements, Welsh Government provides over £27m of capital funding every year in Valley taskforce areas to Local Housing Authorities (through Major Repairs Allowance) and Stock Transfer RSLs (through Dowry Gap funding). We robustly monitor progress in meeting the Standard through a variety of means including this annual statistical return, a requirement for annual business plans and regular meetings with landlords. We also require them to use our grant aid to secure jobs, training and other benefits by maximising community benefits. This supports the Cabinet's core priorities of health, education and jobs. Landlords report these benefits through the Value Wales Tool.

My local community

Theme 3: My Community

You said: You are proud of your community and want to show off the Valley's beauty and heritage...

... so by 2021 we will have:



increased
tourism
in the Valley's



created a
Valleys Landscape Park
to help communities and make the most of the natural resources



helped
town centres
to be lively

To achieve this we will:

- develop a Valley's Landscape Park

- change town centres so they have a mix of shops, homes, businesses and green spaces

- promote the Valley's as a tourist destination

The Valleys Landscape Park is at the heart of our ambition to help Valleys communities celebrate and make the most of their natural resources and heritage. The vision for the park is for communities to feel the Valleys is a place they are proud to call home, and businesses choose to operate. We want communities to be empowered and show pride in their environment which is easily accessible and widely used.

We want to make Valleys town centres vibrant, with attractive green spaces which support the local economy. The £20m Town Centre Loan Fund is

helping to revitalise communities across Wales and there are good examples of how this is helping town centres in the Valleys.

We want the Valleys to be a recognised tourist destination. Tourists spend around £14m a day while in Wales, amounting to around £5.1bn a year. We want to grow the tourism economy in the valleys to benefit from this economic impact. We are currently working with a number of proposed high-quality tourism developments that if realised, will continue to attract new high-spending visitors to the Valleys.

Valleys Landscape Park

Following the inclusion of the Valleys Landscape Park proposal in *Our Valleys, Our Future*, the taskforce has continued to engage and involve Valleys communities and partner organisations in shaping and developing the idea.

The vision for the Valleys Landscape Park is:

- The Valleys is a place where people are proud to call home and businesses choose to operate.
- Communities are empowered and show pride in their environment which is easily accessible and widely used.
- The natural environment is at the heart of Valleys life.

After focused stakeholder workshops were held in Bedwas and Garwnant, three very well-attended engagement events were held in Tredegar, Aberdare and Pontardawe. With attendees and representatives from the business sector, community organisations, and the third and public sector. These generated important insights, input and ideas. Currently, the developing proposals are streamlined into three interlinked themes:

Landscape, Culture and Identity

This seeks to celebrate and promote the Valleys distinctive natural and cultural landscapes. Among its specific objectives is the development of high-quality gateway or discovery sites to encourage visitors and local people to explore the Valleys.

Recreation and Wellbeing

This will work across different sectors to enhance outdoor opportunities to support sustainable tourism – for example, enhancement and promotion of linked long-distance ‘statement’ trails for walking and cycling and the promotion of active lifestyles to improve health and wellbeing in local communities.

Communities and Enterprise

This aims to empower communities to become more involved and take greater stewardship of the Valleys’ natural and cultural heritage assets. Among the specific proposals is development a Valleys Landscape Park peer-to-peer community support network and a ‘guardians’ initiative to support training, skills development and employment opportunities.

An initial start-up phase for the landscape park began in May 2018, during which the team will firm up the proposals and quality standards with partners, including local authorities, Natural Resources Wales, and communities. This phase will agree and deliver improvement plans for the first set of sites and trails to be included in the landscape park, and put in place peer to peer community network aimed at sharing experience and lessons across Valleys communities.

Once this phase has been completed in early 2019, the longer-term structures and funding will be in place to operate and develop the landscape park further.

Town centre regeneration

The Welsh Government’s £27.5m Vibrant and Viable Places Town Centre Loans Fund is helping to support town centre regeneration in 17 areas of Wales.

A £500,000 town centre loan, in addition to an earlier £1m loan, will support regeneration in Neath Port Talbot, as part of the Welsh Government’s commitment to creating prosperity in Valleys communities.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council is seeking to use the loan funds to acquire key sites close to Neath town centre to support major regeneration programmes. The council intends to develop derelict or under-used buildings and sites to provide residential, commercial and employment opportunities.

The Town Centre Loan Fund is designed to help bring empty, underused sites and premises in town centres back into use. It supports activities that increase footfall in town centres, tackle empty sites and help businesses to grow and prosper. Once loans are repaid, the money is used again to fund new loans up to a 15-year period.

Renewable Energy Schemes

We are supporting the development of locally-owned community renewable energy schemes in the Valleys. We will identify the best opportunities by bringing together local and national agencies to deliver projects. The Local Energy Service (LES) is working with four communities within the Valleys on their renewable energy options. The groups are at various stages, and all facing different challenges that we will work to overcome before the developments are built. Details of the schemes are listed below:

The Fern Partnership, Ferndale, Rhondda Cynon Taf – delivers a variety of projects at school and community level mainly in the upper Rhondda Fach but more recently the Rhondda Fawr and further afield. It is now undertaking some place-based prospecting to identify potential renewable energy assets and possible renewable energy technologies which could be used in the area.

The Glofa Navigation Trust, Crumlin Hydro Scheme, Crumlin, Caerphilly – the charity is working to assist in the restoration, preservation and maintenance of the historic complex of buildings and land comprising the Navigation Colliery in Crumlin. It wants to regenerate the site to include a low-head hydro scheme and minewater geothermal heating potential, these would be integrated as part of the wider redevelopment of the site, which is currently derelict. The renewable energy projects are being developed to help benefit the site and surrounding community.

H Factor Community Group – A community group originally set up to tackle housing issues. It has successfully bid for WEFO funding to create a community in Aberfan that generates its own energy, tackles fuel poverty and a range of other social issues. It is looking at using a range of technologies to do this, including solar storage and potentially hydro.

Senghenydd Youth Drop In Centre (SYDIC), Senghenydd SYDIC is multi-faceted engagement project that works in partnership with young people and the local community to develop participation in, and commitment to community projects, community development, cohesion and sustainability. Their Aber Valley Community Turbine project is a single wind turbine up to 900kw in Senghenydd and options are being investigated for using this to supply energy locally or into an innovative storage technology.

Tourism

A commitment within *Our Valleys, Our Future* is to increase tourism in the South Wales Valleys.

Approved for funding in July 2018, the £4.6m M&B Canal Adventure Triangle project aims to develop outdoor recreation, tourism and leisure activity along the Monmouthshire and Brecon canal in Torfaen and Caerphilly and connecting upland area of Mynydd Maen. Through investment in physical infrastructure and adjacent visitor hubs, the project will help develop the economic potential of the canal as a prime location to visit, live and work generating investment and employment for local communities.

The project will be delivered by a partnership consisting of Torfaen Council, Caerphilly Council, the Canal and River Trust, and the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust.

Investments will include the construction of a visitor activity centre at Pontymoile canal basin in Pontypool, infrastructure to enhance access to a new canal basin development at South Sebastopol, restoration of the canal in Cwmbran and along the canal corridor. Visitors will be encouraged to take up adventure sports using the magnificent natural upland landscape and rich heritage that exists between Torfaen and Risca.

The key focus at Cwmcarn will be increasing the navigable length of canal to form a working heritage attraction and providing additional visitor accommodation and facilities at Cwmcarn Forest. This will link with new car parking and improved walking and cycling routes from the canal into the wider landscape.

The project will create a focus for visitors interested in outdoor recreation and adventure sports, bringing together a range of facilities to stimulate overnight visitor stays. It will help exploit the economic potential of the currently underused, southern section of the canal and surrounding uplands.

Also approved in July 2018 is the upgrade of Llechwen Hall, a 3 Star Country House 20 bedroom hotel set within 6 acres of grounds, its origins being a 17th Century long house.

The project is to expand the bedroom capacity, to 46 bedrooms, add a gym and spa facilities, and upgrade the product to a 4 Star quality. A leading investment priority in the Tourism sector, is to deliver top end hotel experiences with an emphasis on creating 4 Star quality product.

This project fully meets those objectives. The investment offered is £409,000, under the Micro & Small Business Fund, supported through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and Welsh Government.

In content the project represents the next logical step for the business, and in achieving the project the business will be able to attract more corporate customers and higher spending leisure guests. The Valleys location just a few minutes off The Wales Way (Cambrian Way route) adds a further strategic context to this project.

The current owners of some 10 years know the product well and have developed the site to date. This project is certain to grow that performance further and strengthen the tourism offer within the region.

The strategic plan for the Valleys identifies the need to develop a new, positive narrative for tourism in the Valleys and identify projects to meet current and future tourism demand, focusing on the landscape, heritage and people. We will build on successful ventures, such as Bike Park Wales which has attracted many visitors to Merthyr Tydfil. As the region develops its own tourism related solutions to regeneration, such as Bike Park Wales, there is a parallel opportunity to create a gear change within the quality of hotel accommodation, and help convert day visits to overnight stays.

Engagement and Communications

Our strategy is to engage, inspire and empower the people of the Valleys and beyond to change perceptions and raise aspirations of the local communities and beyond. The voice of the Valleys communities is instrumental in shaping the future of Our Valleys. We continuously discuss, listen and respond to our communities to enable them to bring about their own change.

The aim is to highlight the people, beautiful landscapes, history, culture and build upon the inspiring community work across the valleys. The taskforce is working with both internal and external partners to develop the actions set out in the plan.

Based on findings from the Engagement Report, significant numbers of people are already proud of their Valleys. We're now working with Valley communities to harness this and work with us to develop *Our Valleys, Our Future*.

Since November, we have held a number of focused events attended by an invited audience. These have explored specific benefits for the Valleys, including:

- Strategic hub seminars (up to 400 people).
- Valleys Landscape Park proposal: four workshops and three public engagement events (up to 300 people).
- Maximising the benefits of the A465 seminar (up to 50 people).
- Strengthening Communities – the role of community hubs in the Valleys Taskforce area event (up to 100 people).
- Three meetings of the Valleys Taskforce comms and engagement network (more than 250 members from organisations across the Valleys).

We have also worked with our partners to build a Valleys focus into planned events. This has enabled us to widen our audience and engage with groups which would otherwise have been difficult to reach.

To engage our communities we've:

- Developed new social media channels and a dedicated website.
- Developed the current “The Valleys, Heart and Soul of Wales” brand further to represent the work of the taskforce.
- Celebrate valleys success stories weekly on social media.
- Working and coordinating our messages with our fellow engagement and communications professionals.
- Engaged with all the primary schools across the Valleys to become part of our Sing Loud, Sing Proud project, engaging in music workshops to develop, and record an original song for the valleys. The song has been released on Spotify and promoted with the pupils.

The next step is to build on the relationship we have with valleys communities, partners and stakeholders so we can continue this journey together and encourage others to join.

To join this journey follow @talkvalleys on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.