



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government Annual Report

2023-2024

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Foreword



Vaughan Gething MS

FIRST MINISTER OF WALES

I am proud to publish our third annual report of this Senedd term highlighting the progress we have made towards delivering our Programme for Government and the steps we are taking to meet our well-being objectives.

The challenges in recent years have been unrelenting. This year, we continued to face high inflation, the rising cost of living and global uncertainty with devastating conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

In real terms our budget settlement is £800 million less than expected at the time of the last UK spending review in 2021.

This has meant difficult choices have needed to be made.

Yet, throughout these challenging times, it is important to recognise the dedication and hard work of all our partners across Wales whose commitment and resilience has been unwavering.

This Annual Report demonstrates the strong progress made over the last year, led by my predecessor Mark Drakeford. Despite the difficult financial backdrop, the report shows that we continued to deliver on our priorities. Whether it was rolling out universal free school meals in primary schools, being an international leader in recycling rates, or supporting over 30,000 young people as part of our Young Persons Guarantee, we are delivering for people

wherever they live and whatever their circumstances. I want to take this opportunity to thank Mark for his immense contribution and to reiterate my commitment to build on his legacy.

I would also like to thank the Plaid Cymru Designated Members Siân Gwenllïan MS and Cefin Campbell MS for their collaboration on the Cooperation Agreement.

This year, we have produced a more focused, concise Annual Report and in future we will publish fewer strategies, plans and annual reports. Instead, we will use less resource intensive ways to share our plans and progress so we can relentlessly focus on practical delivery.

Introduction

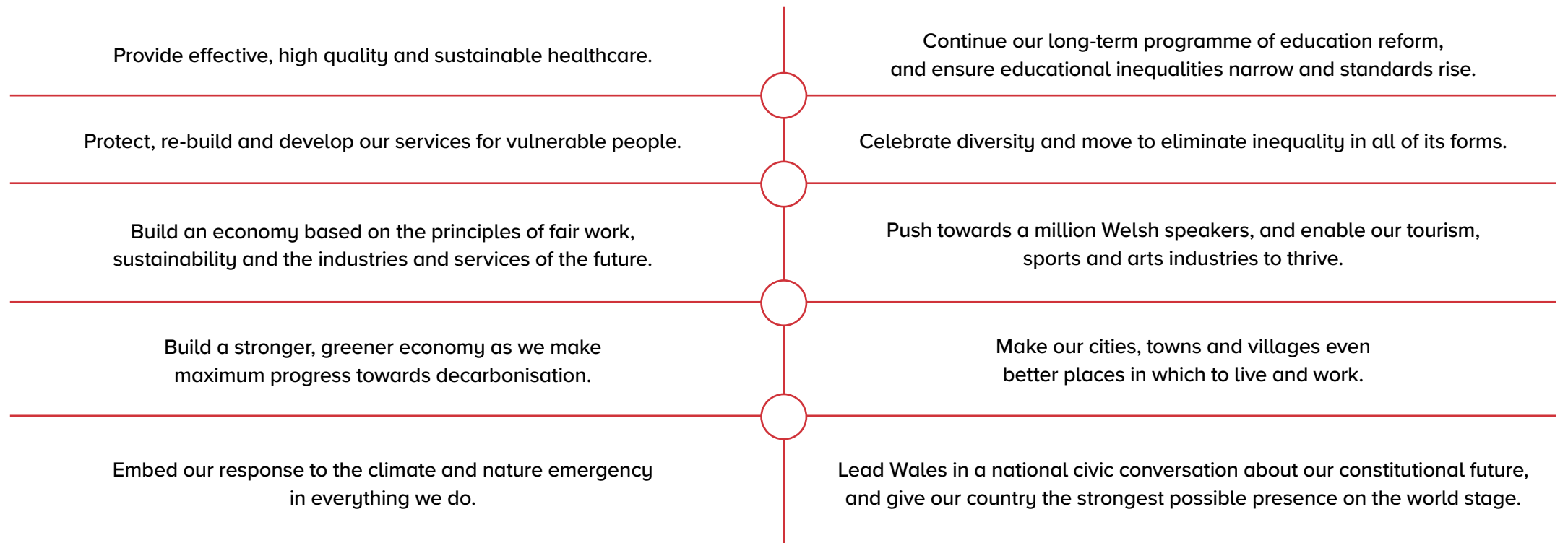
This is the third annual report of this Senedd term, setting out the progress we have made towards our well-being objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

How this report is structured

The report is structured around 10 well-being objectives, highlighting key achievements and actions taken towards meeting these objectives. This is supported with a detailed update (the annex) on each commitment set out under the objectives in the Programme for Government – the steps to delivering our well-being objectives.

Throughout 23/24 we worked with Plaid Cymru on a number of the commitments that contribute to delivery of our well-being objectives and were part of the Co-operation Agreement, these are highlighted in the supporting detailed update (the annex).

The ten well-being objectives are:



1. Provide effective, high quality and sustainable healthcare

Valuing and prioritising our NHS is the cornerstone of ensuring Wales is a healthy and prosperous nation. Our heroic NHS works tirelessly to deliver high-quality services and in recognition of the ongoing pressure on the service and the impact of inflation we provided an additional £425m to support the NHS in October 2023.

We continue to make progress on reducing waiting times with waits over 104 weeks falling every month for two years. In March 2024, these were 71% lower than their post-pandemic peak and cancer performance was at its highest level for 2 years.

The NHS workforce is crucial to reducing waiting times and in March 2024 we signed an agreement with the Government of Kerala for **250 healthcare professionals** to bolster the Welsh NHS. Closer to home, interviews concluded for the first intake of students to begin studying at our **new medical school in North Wales** this September.

Our **'Help Us Help You'** campaign ran between November and February reaching 96% of adults in Wales. It promoted services provided by optometrists, pharmacists, minor injury units as well as NHS 111 Wales, to help people access the right care, first time and diverting them from unnecessary visits to emergency departments.

The **reformed contracts with dentists, community pharmacies and GPs** are

delivering quality care to more people. This year, over 1 million courses of dental treatment have been provided, and over 97% of GP practices now have processes in place to avoid the 8am bottleneck and enable people to contact the practice for an appointment throughout the day. The **Clinical Community Pharmacy Service** can be accessed at 99% of pharmacies with prescribers available at one in four, providing free access to advice and treatment without the need to see a GP.

We continued to prioritise mental health and wellbeing with an additional £25m allocated in 23/24 to support increased capacity in mental health services. This included increased provision in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), primary care liaison, perinatal mental health services and eating disorder services to support early intervention and timely access to services. Our **111 press 2 for urgent mental health support** service is now available across Wales on a 24/7 basis and has been used by 80,000 people.

Social prescribing is a way of connecting people, whatever their age or background, with their community to better manage their health and wellbeing. *The National Framework for Social Prescribing*, launched in December, provides clarity on the model of social prescribing in Wales, and seeks to support local action to mainstream it across Wales.

2. Protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people

The first 1,000 days has a significant influence on a child's life outcomes. We want all children to have the best start in life and we continue to invest in our flagship **Flying Start** programme. Latest figures (22/23) reported that over 35,400 children were receiving support to help them thrive and grow. By March 2024, over 6,900 additional **Flying Start** childcare places had been offered to parents of 2-year olds across Wales and over 1,000 children had taken these up in a in Welsh-medium setting.

In May 2024, we introduced our transformative **Health and Social Care Bill** to end the extraction of private profit from certain children's services. The legislation will ensure that any new provider of a restricted children's service must be a **local authority or a not-for-profit entity**. Additionally, the Bill will empower people who are receiving continuing NHS healthcare to request direct payments so they can choose how to secure services that meet their needs appropriately.

We are working with our young care-experienced ambassadors on our ambitious vision of transforming children's services in Wales and in September we launched the **Corporate Parenting Charter**. Forty new 'corporate parents' have already signed up and are working to ensure that care experienced children and young people have the same life chances and experiences as other

children and young people. In June 2023, the formal enrolment period for the Basic Income Pilot for care leavers closed and as of July 2023, over 97% of those eligible were enrolled.

Our **Housing with Care** fund invested £43m in 23/24 and continues to support accommodation services for children with complex needs closer to home. The fund has supported 25 children's residential schemes and 6 emergency, respite or transitional accommodation schemes for children and young people. Other investments include 24 supported living schemes for adults with a learning disability, and 14 supported accommodation schemes for adults and families experiencing mental health and other support and care needs.

In December we published our initial implementation plan towards a **National Care Service** which maps out phase one of the 10-year programme in detail. The new **National Office for Care and Support**, established in April 2024, is an important milestone on this ambitious journey. Our social care workforce is pivotal to supporting our goal to create an integrated, preventative and person-centred care system and we are proud to have delivered the Real Living Wage to social care workers for a second year.

3. Build an economy based on the principles of fair work, sustainability and the industries and services of the future

We remain committed to an economy with fair work at its heart where businesses, unions and employees work together for the benefit of all. In April 2024, the **Social Partnership Duty** on public bodies came into force ensuring both employers and workers are involved in making decisions about their wellbeing.

Our **Economic mission**, relaunched in November and sets out four priorities: a just transition and green prosperity; a platform for young people, fair work, skills and success; stronger partnerships for stronger regions and the everyday economy; and investing for growth.

We continue to target resources where they are most needed with education and skills a key focus for economic growth. Over 30,000 young people have started on employability and skills programmes as part of our **Young Persons Guarantee**, and since May 2021 we have delivered almost 51,000 all age apprenticeships to provide practical and transferable experience in priority sectors and help reduce skills shortages.

To deliver green prosperity, we are harnessing our natural resources. In March 2024, we announced three winners of the **Tidal Lagoon challenge** who received funding to complete their research projects. We also provided almost £1m of funding to support Wales becoming a leader in tidal stream energy and a further £1m to Milford Haven Port Authority to enable them to maximise the benefits of floating offshore wind in the Celtic Sea.

To attract more investment in infrastructure, including our renewable energy sector, the landmark **Infrastructure Bill** received Royal Assent in June 2024. This legislation provides a new 'one-stop-shop' planning process which allows for certain permissions, consent, and licencing to be awarded to major infrastructure projects, including renewable energy.

Our growing compound semiconductor cluster around Newport creates high skilled jobs and drives Welsh exports. We supported US semiconductor equipment manufacturer KLA to bring its new headquarters and R&D centre to Wales which, when open, will employ around 750 people. To position Wales as a leading location for semiconductor development, in September we joined the **European Semiconductor Regions Alliance**.

We recognise the challenges faced by the retail, leisure and hospitality (RLH) sectors due to high inflation and energy bills. We allocated over £140m to provide 75% non-domestic rates relief for RLH businesses in Wales. One year on from the launch of our **Retail Action Plan**, we are proud to have provided an additional £20m, to support up to 2,500 businesses become more energy efficient. Additionally, our **Smart Towns Programme** is supporting 133 towns to collect and use data to make better, evidence-based decisions.

4. Build a stronger, greener economy as we make maximum progress towards decarbonisation

We are committed to a just transition towards a net zero economy which embraces the opportunities it brings for all our businesses and communities, while ensuring no one is left behind.

To decarbonise transport, we need more of us to use sustainable modes of transportation. In 23/24 more than £100m was invested in **local transport improvements** supporting projects that will provide more electric vehicle charging infrastructure, better local public transport and more infrastructure to support walking and cycling.

Active travel plays a key role in reducing car journeys and improving health outcomes. In March 2024 we published our new *Active Travel Delivery Plan* setting out how we will make walking and cycling more attractive to use and more inclusive.

To improve the bus network, we need to end the deregulation of the bus sector and we are progressing our transformative bus legislation. In March 2024, we published *Our roadmap to Bus Reform* setting out how we will work with the bus industry and trade unions to deliver our vision of a **simpler, cheaper, and more efficient bus network**.

We recognise the importance of digital in reducing journeys, keeping business competitive and in spreading wealth, resilience and wellbeing across Wales. We are proud to have exceeded targets to rollout **gigabit capable broadband** with 44,000 properties benefiting.

The public transport needs in rural areas differ from urban centres. In March 2024, we published new guidance on *Sustainable transport in rural areas* and provided additional funding to create a network of car clubs in these communities.

Our vision is for a successful Welsh farming industry that produces food sustainably, looks after our environment and underpins our rural communities. The **Agriculture (Wales) Act** which gained Royal Assent in August introduced the **Sustainable Land Management** objectives as the framework for future support. Between December and March, we consulted on the *Sustainable Farming Scheme*, we have listened to the concerns this raised and are working in partnership with farmers and stakeholders to develop scheme proposals which continue to support farmers to produce quality produce in a sustainable manner.

In October 2023, we published *Llwybr Newydd i Natur – the Nature Recovery Action Plan* for our Strategic Road Network embedding biodiversity and ecosystem resilience on the Network estate across Wales. In 23/24, across the Network 17,000 new native trees and shrubs, and 220,000 young native plants and bulbs were planted, 7.5 hectares of wildflower areas were created or improved, and 13.7 hectares of woodland was improved and brought into active management.

5. Embed our response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do

Wales is now **second in the world for municipal recycling**. To go further, in April 2024, we brought in the new *Workplace Recycling Regulations* requiring all businesses, the public and third sector workplaces to keep key recyclable materials separate in the same way we do in our households across most of Wales. This will help to further **increase recycling rates** and reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill or for incineration.

Our **Repair and Reuse hubs** continue to be an asset to communities across Wales, helping in the cost of living crisis and tackling the climate and nature emergency all whilst improving our resource efficiency. Our **Circular Economy Fund** has delivered 53 hubs and invested in community organisations such as Repair Café Wales, who have expanded their network of repair cafes to 118 communities across Wales.

The first phase of the **Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Act 2023** commenced on 30 October 2023, with eight single-use plastic products either banned or restricted in Wales. As a next step, we have committed to commence the bans on the remaining products which includes polystyrene lids for cups, food containers and single-use plastic bags by March 2026 and to introduce regulations to ban wet wipes containing plastic by the end of 2024.

In April 2024 residents and visitors in Brecon helped create a world-first initiative by taking part in a townwide trial of a digital **deposit return scheme**. The pilot received positive results with over 18,974 rewards claimed on eligible recyclable items and the majority of participants saying they would recommend a future scheme.

Protecting and preserving the nature and biodiversity of Wales is a vital part of our response to the current climate and nature emergency. Our **Local Places for Nature** programme continued to bring communities together to improve local environments across Wales. This included the creation of more than 730 pollinator sites, more than 220 community food growing sites, 500 green spaces, 260 community orchards of native fruit trees and the creation of 25 Therapeutic sensory gardens delivered with health charities and NHS Cymru.

The **National Forest for Wales Status Scheme** launched in June 2023, enabling woodlands outside the Welsh Government Woodland Estate to join the National Forest. As a result, 28 non-Welsh Government Woodland sites have joined, resulting in a National Forest network of over 100 diverse individual woodlands ranging from 1 to over 1,000 hectares. The total size of the National Forest is currently 67,699 hectares.

6. Continue our long-term programme of education reform, and ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise

In September we completed the roll out of the **Curriculum for Wales** to all non-maintained settings and primary schools. The Curriculum has also been rolled out in years 7 and 8 of our secondary schools.

To meet our aspirations for attainment in numeracy and literacy, in November, we launched our *Mathematics and Numeracy Plan* and we have strengthened our *Oracy and Reading Toolkit* to support schools and settings to develop and embed a whole school approach to achieving high standards.

Since the pandemic, too many young people are missing out on invaluable school time. In 23/24, we invested an additional £6.5m to recruit more family engagement officers and provided £2.5m for education welfare officers to provide additional support to learners with high absence rates. To support schools and settings to improve learner engagement, in October, we published new attendance guidance *Belonging, engaging and participating* and in December we established a **National Attendance Taskforce** to consider and identify further actions to drive improvements.

To ensure no child goes hungry in school, we have made a further £58.5m available to support the rollout of **universal free school meals** to primary schools. As of March 2024, 153,000 pupils became newly eligible for a free school meal under the offer and an additional 16.4m free school

meals were served. The commitment is on track to be developed in full by September 2024, ahead of schedule, with 19 of the 22 local authorities having already completed roll-out to all primary year groups.

In summer 2023, the **School Holiday Enrichment Programme** ran 175 schemes providing over 11,150 places for children in areas of socio-economic disadvantage on each operating day. An evaluation of the programme highlighted its success in supporting school engagement and aspirations during school holidays and observed positive impacts on children's physical activity, diet and emotional wellbeing.

In September we established the **Commission for Tertiary Education and Research**. It will become operational this summer with strategic priorities to deploy flexible learning, maintain excellent standards, reduce attainment gaps and put the learner at the heart of the tertiary education system.

To nurture a vibrant **innovation culture** in Wales and champion innovators, we awarded £11.8m to support over 130 projects with the aim of improving people's lives, growing the economy, and addressing the climate and nature emergencies. A collaborative plan agreed with Innovate UK, has stimulated £57m of UK Investment into Wales.

7. Celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all of its forms

Our aim is for Wales to be a place where everyone feels valued.

In December, we published the first *Anti Racist Wales Action Plan: annual report*. Progress included the appointment of ten **community mentors** from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities in the childcare sector and continued funding to the Welsh Refugee council to support newly recognised refugees (former asylum seekers) access 'Move On' accommodation. To implement the plan, we also launched our **Culture Grant Scheme for Grassroot Organisations** empowering people from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities to celebrate and share their culture, further enriching Wales's rich cultural background.

Everyone should feel safe in all aspects of their lives including on-line, we have held conversations with online social media platforms to identify collaborative ways of working to address hate crime in online spaces. We also provided over £390k of funding to the **Wales Hate Support Centre** which received over 2,200 referrals from victims of hate crime with client satisfaction rates at 85%.

Our *LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales* has been internationally recognised as an example of good practice in human rights policymaking. In 23/24 we expanded support services for survivors of conversion practices across Wales and raised concern with the UK Government about its delay

in bringing forward legislation to ban the practice. We proudly and actively support Pride and funded nine events in 2023.

Through the work of the **Disability Rights Taskforce**, we have ensured the Social Model of Disability is firmly at the centre of our vision for Wales. Through the Taskforce's ten working groups we engaged over 350 stakeholders, including those with lived experience and from disabled people's organisations, to co-produce actions that will create long-term positive change for disabled people.

We continue to provide support to those who need it most. During 23/24, the **Single Advice Fund** helped more than 108k people with over 380k social welfare issues, enabling them to claim additional income of over £33m with £11m in debt written off. We also provided nearly £32m in grants to over 234k individuals through the **Discretionary Assistance Fund**. Over £17.8m of this was in cash payments, providing support to financially vulnerable people with basic living costs such as food and energy bills.

In January, we published our *Child Poverty Strategy* and supported the launch of the first Multibank in Wales, **Cwtch Mawr**. This innovative scheme helps businesses reduce waste through donating surplus, non-perishable goods like toilet paper and toys, while simultaneously supporting those who have the least in our society.

8. Push forward towards a million Welsh speakers, and enable our tourism, sports and arts industries to thrive

Our ambition is to increase the use of the Welsh language and reach a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

In February, we published the summary of responses to our White Paper on the **Welsh Language and Education Bill**. This demonstrated broad support for its transformative ambitions of enabling all pupils to become independent and confident Welsh speakers.

To provide enough teachers to teach through the medium of Welsh, we introduced a £5,000 bursary in April 2023 to those teachers that had gained Qualified Teacher Status since August, to encourage them to enter and remain in the profession. We also launched phase 2 of our **Welsh-medium workforce** capacity plan, supported by £800k to allow schools to address their workforce shortages through localised schemes.

To support parents and teachers who are not confident Welsh speakers to read Welsh with children, we provided funding to Darllen Co, an on-line digital platform which allows children to simultaneously read and listen to Welsh language books. Just under 40,000 people now benefit from the platform.

In March 2024 we launched the **Cultural Ambassador programme**, enabling people across Wales to volunteer, train and qualify as local ambassadors so that they can support newcomers to communities learn

more about the Welsh language and our culture.

Our creative sector is an economic success story. To further drive growth and develop talent and skills we funded a range of initiatives in 23/24, including over 30 projects in the tv, gaming and animation sectors through our **Creative Wales Development Fund**. In February, we also announced over £700k for 17 grassroots independent music venues, to ensure venues can host cultural activities all year round.

We understand the importance Welsh language cultural activities have in providing opportunities to use and retain Welsh language skills. In October, in collaboration with S4C we launched **Sinema Cymru** to fast track and support Welsh language films, so far four films have been fast tracked for development.

We support the power of the arts, culture and creativity and in May 2024 we issued our consultation on a new culture strategy *Priorities for Culture 2024 to 2030*. Despite the difficult financial context, we have continued to invest in flagship cultural projects including the redevelopment of **Theatr Clwyd** and the new **Football Museum for Wales**.

9. Make our cities, towns and villages even better places in which to live and work

Our ambition is to end homelessness in all its forms, in all areas of Wales ensuring homelessness is rare, brief, and unrepeatable and in October, we published a White Paper on **ending homelessness** for consultation with 380 responses. Over the last 12 months, over 17,500 people have been supported with temporary accommodation with over £210m provided in 23/24 for homelessness prevention and support.

In June 2023, the Green Paper on securing a path towards **Adequate Housing** – including Fair Rents and Affordability was published and received over 380 responses which will inform the White Paper.

We remain committed to increasing social housing and the latest Affordable Housing Statistical Release for 2022-23 published in November showed an additional 3,212 homes for rent in the social sector had been delivered across Wales, a 25% increase on the previous year. During 23/24 the **Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme** funded an additional 549 homes for rent in the social sector including the acquisition of 498 homes.

In October 2023, we introduced a new **Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)**, the biggest change to housing standards for existing social homes in more than 20 years. By prioritising high quality requirements centred on flexibility, space and sustainability it ensures that

social housing leads the way in reducing carbon emissions and reduces energy costs for tenants so they can live well within their homes now and in the future.

Our **Transforming Towns** scheme is revitalising our towns by bringing vacant buildings back into use. In 23/24, we provided more than £8m worth of loans to five local authorities, supporting projects that included the restoration of 12 mixed use premises in the Caerphilly area, the redevelopment of Park House in Cardiff and the transformation of a vacant bank in Caernarfon into four flats for homeless young people.

In September 2023, the default speed limit on restricted roads in Wales changed from 30mph to 20mph to save lives and make communities safer. Early data suggests that both **accidents and casualties have fallen** since its introduction. In April 2024, we started a national listening programme to understand if some roads should revert to 30mph.

To address the impact second homes, empty properties and some holiday lets have on local communities, we gave local authorities discretionary powers to charge up to 300% council tax on such properties. As of April 2024, 18 of the 22 local authorities are using these to charge premiums.

10. Lead Wales in a national civic conversation about our constitutional future, and give our country the strongest possible presence on the world stage

A quarter of a century since devolution, we are taking important steps to strengthen democracy in Wales.

The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales published its final report in January 2024, an important step in the constitutional journey of Wales. We have accepted all the Commission's recommendations and begun exploring how they can be taken forward.

To provide a more effective legislature for, and on behalf of, the people of Wales, the landmark **Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill** was introduced in September, passed by the Senedd in May 2024 and received Royal Assent in June 2024. The Bill is based on the recommendations of the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform supported by a majority of Senedd Members in June 2022.

Alongside our efforts to transform the Senedd into a more representative voice for Wales, we are also funding 16 projects via our **Democratic Engagement Grant**. These projects will support those less likely to be active in the democratic process and range from helping people register to vote to delivering bespoke workshops for the deaf community to encourage political participation.

We are continuing to progress our work on a fairer council tax. We introduced the **Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill** to the Senedd in November

enabling revaluation cycles every five years for council tax from 2028, to keep council tax fair and responsive to economic circumstances. A range of other improvements to council tax have continued, working with local authorities, the third sector and other experts.

We continue to champion Wales on the international stage and create life-changing opportunities for people in Wales to learn, study and volunteer all over the world. Since 2022, our cultural and educational exchange programme, **Taith**, has funded over 12,000 opportunities to take part. Taith has focused on supporting people from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain international experiences.

Wales continues to be a proud trading nation and our exports are a vital part of the Welsh economy. Through the *Export Action Plan for Wales*, we have continued to deliver a range of programmes to support existing exporters to grow, expand into new overseas markets, and encourage new exporting businesses in Wales. In 23/24, our export programmes saw a 23% increase in the number of export projects supporting businesses including 26 overseas trade missions and over 300 businesses participating in export clusters, building export capability across Wales.

Review of Wellbeing Objectives

Our Programme for Government published in 2021 is structured around 10 well-being objectives, that when considering our powers are the areas where we can maximise our contribution to the well-being goals.

This year, for the first time, we consulted the Social Partnership Council (SPC) on the review of the well-being objectives. This is an important part of the social partnership duty and we will be working with the SPC on how we can improve and develop the approach moving forward. This will include earlier engagement on the review of our well-being objectives and involving the SPC in our medium to longer term planning through our new approach to the Welsh Spending Review.

Like others across Wales, we faced significant financial pressures in 23/24 as inflation soared. Our budget is £800 million less in real terms than expected at the time of the last UK spending review in 2021. We had to take difficult decisions throughout the year to live within our Budget.

In this context, we have reviewed our well-being objectives set in 2021 and concluded that they should remain unchanged for the coming year.