



Mike Hedges MS
Chair of the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

9 September 2020

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your letter of 30 July with follow-up questions from your session of 9 July.

Below I have listed your questions with the appropriate answers.

Fisheries

- 1. You told the Committee you had hoped to make a statement regarding future fisheries policy in March, but that had been delayed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Are you able to tell the Committee when you expect to be able to make that statement?**
- 2. In relation to the Welsh Fisheries Grant, you told the Committee that 120 vessels had received over £0.5 million in grant aid. Can you confirm what the purpose of this grant is and how you will determine whether it has been effective?**

The Welsh Fisheries Grant was for economically viable fishing businesses who are Welsh licensed vessels. The grant scheme was developed to bridge the gap in the support provision for this sector whilst maintaining funding alignment to the Economic Resilience Fund. The aim of the grant scheme was to help sustain fishing businesses in Wales through any short-term economic disruption, to ensure vessels continue fishing beyond the COVID-19 public health crisis.

The Welsh Fisheries Grant may be deemed successful to date as it has successfully supported 97% of Wales pre-identified economically viable fishing businesses, in addition to this 12 further businesses who did not initially meet the schemes criteria were considered on a case by case basis and successfully received aid. The grant was developed to ensure economically viable fishing businesses could continue to fish post Covid-19 and Welsh Government officials will monitor the capacity of the Welsh fleet as the sector recovers from Covid-19 to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- 3. The £0.5 million funding grant constitutes an average of approximately £4,000 per fishing vessel. Can you confirm that you are satisfied that this is sufficient funding? What plans do you have for further financial assistance for this sector to aid its recovery?**

I am satisfied that the total grant value has provided the required level of support to the fishing industry during this time. The grant amounts were based on average monthly fixed costs by vessel size which were developed from an annual industry survey carried out by Seafish, a non-departmental public body, this gave an appropriate level of support to the individual businesses identified.

Further financial assistance from the Welsh Government will provide support to eligible aquaculture businesses in Wales producing stock for the table. The Aquaculture Business Support scheme opened on 10 August and closes on 21 September. It is being managed through Rural Payments Wales and is to be delivered through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). This scheme will provide short term support due to losses as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 4. During the evidence session, you referred to several examples of illegal fishing activity. Can you provide the Committee with details about the levels of illegal activity during this recent period where enforcement vessels have not been patrolling Welsh waters? Can you confirm all enforcement vessels are now operational?**

The evidence and intelligence suggests that while some illegal fishing activity may have taken place, there is no suggestion of an increase in this behaviour during the lockdown period, it was not widespread or extensive. However, any illegal fishing is unacceptable and wherever possible action is and will be taken. All Welsh Government fisheries patrol vessels are now operational.

Environment

- 5. We have been told that delays relating to payments from the Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) have resulted in problems for some NGOs. Can you provide the Committee with an update on the latest position and, if there are outstanding issues, set out a timetable for when they will be resolved?**

Rural Payments Wales (RPW) aims to process all Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) claims within 30 days of receipt of a complete claim form, including all supporting documentary evidence. All claims and supporting documents must be carefully considered to ensure compliance with the scheme rules and European Commission Regulations. To date, 137 claims have been received from 29 of our 31 SMS projects, of which 126 of have been processed for payment worth £6.1m. The average time taken to process these claims was 37 days, with almost half processed within 30 days of receipt.

Of the 11 outstanding claims, 5 are awaiting further information from the beneficiary, and one claim is subject to an 'in-situ' administrative inspection. The remaining 5 claims are progressing through full claim verification process, and I am not aware of any significant outstanding issues.

Over recent years RPW has been subject to a number of audits, most recently from Audit Wales, whose report 'Ensuring value for money from Rural Development Grants made without competition' was recently published. Issues highlighted by the report are those already identified and strengthened by RPW officials. RPW is making every effort to progress the outstanding claims for payment as soon as possible.

6. During the session, you referred to the need to secure a “green recovery” after the Covid-19 pandemic. Can you set out your plans for a green recovery in Wales? Do you intend on publishing a plan or strategy so that others can see the direction of travel?

A Green Recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic fundamentally needs to be one which works to rebuild our economy whilst tackling the serious environmental issues we face and improving the resilience of all our communities. It is not just about the environment, but making the connections between improving social, economic and environmental outcomes to increase resilience. This means co-ordinating policies and delivery which will accelerate the transition to a low carbon economy and a healthier, more equal Wales.

The Counsel General is leading a series of roundtable discussions with experts from across many areas of society, both within Wales and further afield. The discussions to date have been informative and insightful and we will continue to publish summary reports. It is intended to build on this through a further series of virtual roundtables in the weeks ahead.

An open invitation was issued to people in Wales to send in their thoughts on how future post-Covid recovery should be supported, and my Ministerial colleagues wrote to their stakeholders to invite them to submit their views through the same channel by the end of July. We are now considering those inputs as part of work on the recovery. But that dialogue will remain open.

Once we have heard the views and proposals of all our stakeholders, we will be in a position to set out our approach to recovery including on those elements which tackle unsustainable consumption, which promote biodiversity, and which accelerate the transition to a low carbon economy.

In terms of the immediate direction of travel, Committee Members may wish to be aware that early matters for consideration will include: how we invest in our people by equipping them with the skills for the post-Covid economy and the adaptability that comes from lifelong learning; how we maximise the use of our natural resources sustainably; innovation in social housing; how we foster the creativity of our indigenous businesses; and how we reimagine our town centres to become vibrant community hubs again.

7. How will Members of the Senedd and the Welsh public be able to judge whether the Welsh Government has delivered a “green recovery”?

I welcome the Committee's interest and scrutiny in this area and the ideas for action submitted by citizens and stakeholders. What is emerging is a broad consensus around a number of priority areas from helping our communities and towns to rebuild to taking action to protect and restore our environment. We will continue to discuss our proposals for action with citizens and stakeholders as we continue to recover from this unprecedented event.

The current uncertainty means it is not possible to accurately predict a pattern for future events. There are global factors which may help or hinder our efforts here in Wales including the continuing turbulence in the global economy, Brexit and the impact of climate events.

However, this will not deter our efforts from seeking a green recovery which works to take targeted and meaningful actions to tackle the serious environmental issues we face and improves our resilience across all our communities.

Of course, we will continue to publish statements, data and reports about our progress on environmental and climate change issues, for example on our carbon emissions and progress against our carbon budget targets.

8. Can you provide details of the purpose and membership of the biodiversity taskforce? The taskforce has been allocated £0.5 million in funding, what outcomes do you expect to see as a result of your investment?

The purpose of the Biodiversity Taskforce is to mainstream the delivery for biodiversity and ecosystem resilience across the Welsh Government and our partners. Establishing the taskforce delivers against the First Minister's priority to tackle the twin challenges for nature and climate change. Achieving transformational change requires us to mainstream biodiversity across Welsh Government and its partners. This means a fundamental system-wide shift in policy development, finance allocation and the implementation of schemes to work for and not against nature.

I have outlined three objectives for the taskforce to help identify cross government collaboration opportunities, pooled budgets, shared expertise and interventions which impact across all well-being goals. These objectives will focus on:

- people - to increase knowledge and capacity to drive behaviour change;
- processes - to influence the way Welsh Government allocates its budgets and wider public sector spend: and
- piloting new approaches to support the delivery of transformational change for biodiversity, including effective evaluation models.

Actions taken to deliver these objectives will deliver the following outcomes:

- behavioural and organisational change to drive improved processes, policy development and decision making;
- more strategic use of public money to deliver biodiversity benefits; and
- improved evaluation to identify what pilot approaches deliver greatest impact and are replicable.

Delivery of the actions to support transformational change will be undertaken through an internal taskforce supported by an external expert panel where relevant. The taskforce will also work with academia to identify the latest research, best practice examples and potential gaps to address the challenge of mainstreaming biodiversity.

The taskforce will comprise senior policy officials from across Welsh Government supported by key experts. Participants will bring a range of skills and perspectives with the aim of pursuing an action learning approach. The taskforce will agree priorities, oversee delivery, provide challenge and identify how these approaches can be incorporated into their teams.

Three immediate priorities the taskforce will take forward are:

- delivering a behaviour change programme of latest behavioural science using an integrated approach for senior leaders;
- assessment of strategic capital budget bids across all MEGs to identify where bids can be enhanced to deliver biodiversity benefits; and

- development of a transformational, place based multi-year programme for biodiversity as part of Covid recovery for nature working in partnership with eNGOs, NRW and JNCC.

A cost benefit analysis will determine what other proposals are taken forward this financial year, and those that can be delivered next year. The focus will be on those actions that will deliver the biggest impact to halting and reversing the decline in biodiversity.

NRW

9. What is the latest position on NRW's projected funding gap?

In addition to core Grant in Aid (GiA) funding from the Welsh Government, NRW is in receipt of commercial income and several smaller amounts of grant funding, for various projects. Whilst the precise financial impacts are not yet clear, NRW's estimate in June, based on the market circumstances at that time and their potential impact on timber sales, was of a reduction of approximately £8m in its commercial revenue funding as a result of the pandemic. However, this estimate could change as markets develop and we know more about NRW's forecasts.

Whilst all public bodies are under financial pressure, I have given NRW a guarantee of up to £5m extra capital funding for this financial year, should that become necessary and they can demonstrate evidence of need. This will enable NRW to deliver against our priorities, especially on nature and reversing the decline in biodiversity. This is a pressure being managed within the MEG in the usual way.

As you are aware, at their session with your Committee on 9 July, NRW indicated they felt the £5m guarantee was sufficient to enable them to fill the gap. They will keep me apprised of the ongoing impact of Covid-19 during my regular meetings with them. The Welsh Government will continue to work with NRW to ensure we collectively manage their delivery and understand the financial pressures they are experiencing.

Food

10. Can you provide an update on the latest Welsh Government position on testing for Covid-19 in food processing plants?

The policy remains that people should only apply for a test if they develop symptoms of coronavirus. Further information on when to apply for a test can be found at:

<https://gov.wales/apply-coronavirus-test#section-42330>

11. Can you provide the Committee with an update on the funding that has been allocated to and spent by the #LoveWalesLoveTaste initiative?

Following the 1st day of the campaign on 3 July, the reach/impressions via social media was 750,000, with a press coverage reach of 300,000. The response from industry has been extremely positive. A second day of publicity was held on 7 August, targeting the hospitality industry. The cost of the #CaruCymruCaruBlas campaign is in the region of £35-£37K, this is part of the Trade Development Programme.

12. Can you provide the Committee with your current assessment of food security in Wales, including the resilience of supply chains? Do you believe any action needs to be taken to strengthen that resilience, in the light of a potential second wave of Covid-19 infections (and related restrictions) in the Winter?

Food supply has returned to its normal, pre-covid-19, state with the exception of the service sector and wholesale, which are still greatly impacted by lockdown restrictions. Manufacturing and processing plants are operating, and supplies to retail from within the UK and sourced by export have recovered from the panic buying driven shortages of the initial lockdown. The food system has demonstrated resilience and flexibility during lockdown and businesses have been adroit at managing production and logistics, and placing purchasing limits on any scarce products, to maintain supplies for the public across all of Wales and the UK. A combination of persons being advised to shield, and a desire by many people not to visit shops, has caused huge demand for home delivery and sales through this channel have doubled and are being sustained successfully.

Wales' food supply, and so security, is wholly integrated with the UK. Supply chains operate on a UK landscape with the UK's external border being the important factor because it shapes trade flows, labour migration, and is the point at which currency and tariff effects impact prices and sourcing decisions. Consequently all devolved administrations work with Defra in assessing the situation. We play an active role in forming plans and assessments, and Welsh Government is a respected member of stakeholder networks convened by Defra relevant to this work. There is an established cycle of activity, and an infrastructure is in place to obtain the views of food producers and stakeholders. I also meet supermarket representatives monthly to discuss matters. Recent assessments have not identified immediate risks and overall the food system is secure.

Attention has already turned to the risks of further Covid-19 waves and the UK trading with the EU on World Trade Organisation terms if the UK and EU do not reach agreement after the transition period ends. It is important to be thorough and ready and not to make thoughtless assumptions. The assessment is broadly that approaches taken by the supply chain and governments in conjunction to manage Covid-19 so far would be the best methods for managing future disruption. Key to success will be communications with the public to maintain co-operation and to manage the risk of anti-social behaviour.

To assist the food and drink manufacturing and processing sector, the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board and I have published a recovery plan for the coming months and businesses have participated in a webinar about it. The Welsh Government is focussing its effort on helping businesses survive the immediate impact and to turn their attention to preparing for a no deal Brexit.

13. Can you provide the Committee with an update on the timeline for your response to the consultation in relation to the groceries code?

A consultation looking at contractual arrangements in the dairy industry was launched by UK Government and devolved administrations on 24 June and closes on 15 September 2020. The consultation will look at supply chain issues across the UK dairy sector and provide new fairer conditions for milk contracts.

So far the response rate has been positive. As of 17 August Defra have received 208 responses to the consultation and several 'virtual' stakeholder events with farmers have been already taken place. After the consultation closes on 15 September, we will then review the responses. As this is a UK wide consultation we will need to work closely with Defra and the devolved administrations to secure the best outcome for our Welsh dairy producers.

The Welsh, UK, Scottish and Northern Ireland Governments have worked together to launch the 12 week consultation which seeks to end any unfair practices within the sector.

Dairy farmers and processors are being consulted to explore whether regulations could be introduced to strengthen fairness and transparency. This includes the possible introduction of mandatory contracts within the dairy industry.

Proposals launched in the consultation include an option to introduce a mandatory pricing mechanism within all contracts between dairy farmers and processors. It would ensure the price paid for milk produced by the farmer is formally agreed within the contract, and contract negotiations are agreed in a clear, fair and transparent way.

Brexit and Common Frameworks

14. Can you provide the Committee with an update on any relevant matters that were discussed in the inter-Ministerial group (IMG) meeting on 29 July?

At the IMG on 29 July we discussed secondary legislation, border arrangements, the UK Government's internal market proposals and frameworks. During discussions on secondary legislation, I reminded Defra we expected enough time for the Senedd to consider any proposed SIs in full. The Group agreed sharing draft SIs as early as possible was essential, and I was assured we would be receiving as much detail as possible during August.

We had a brief discussion on border related matters and agreed to consider in more detail at our September meeting. I emphasised the Barnett formula was not a suitable means of funding any new border infrastructure.

We discussed the UK Government's recent white paper on the internal market and I expressed the Welsh Government's disappointment it had been published with no consultation and in spite of three years of work to agree an approach to frameworks expressly designed to manage any regulatory divergence within the UK.

We agreed an approach to finalising frameworks to ensure all areas have a provisional framework in place by the end of the year, although this will mean they would be finalised and fully implemented in 2021. Along with my counterparts from the other Devolved Governments, I stressed the importance frameworks are agreed by everyone and not imposed. I will continue to update members via written statements and agreed communiques after each meeting.

Flooding

15. We would be grateful if you would provide a copy of your new flooding strategy when it is published in September.

The new Strategy for Flood and Coast Erosion Risk Management was laid in the Senedd in July 2020 prior to its full publication this autumn. The document can be found at:

<https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/gen-ld13343/gen-ld13343-e.pdf>

and

<https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/gen-ld13343/gen-ld13343-w.pdf>

16. You told the Committee that “significant funding” has been given to local authorities “to enable them to not just investigate but publish their findings and then provide infrastructure, if that’s needed, to stop it from happening again”. How much has been allocated for this purpose?

In the immediate aftermath of the February storms, the Welsh Government contacted all Local Authorities and NRW to invite applications for funding to undertake emergency repairs to flood alleviation assets.

Since then we have provided £4m of emergency funding to Local Authorities (in support of their statutory functions as Flood Risk Management Authorities) in 2019-20 and 2020-21. This funding has been made available to support authorities work in repairing the damage caused by flooding earlier this year. Our emergency funding to repair flood risk infrastructure, including defences and culverts has been covers all the associated capital costs. Other wider financial support was also provided to local authorities by other Welsh Government Departments.

In April I announced the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management investment programme for 2020/21. In 2020-1 the Welsh Government is investing £35m capital funding to support enhanced flood and coastal erosion protection for communities while also providing £27m in revenue support.

In addition, we are continuing to explore ways to improve our support for Flood Risk Management Authorities to accelerate the pipeline of new schemes and maintenance works. This year this includes providing 100% funding for all preparatory work prior to construction of flood and coastal schemes. This new support means that Flood Risk Management Authorities can draw down funding to cover the costs of modelling and design work.

<https://gov.wales/flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-programme-2020-2021>

17. Do you think the current level of funding provided to local authorities to deal with flooding is sufficient, given the increasing frequency of extreme rainfall events? Do you believe that more funding will be necessary to assist local authorities to deal with flooding this Winter?

Tackling climate change requires collective action and the Welsh Government has a central role in making collective action possible. This is why I declared a climate emergency and why the Welsh Government is now investing more than ever before in flood and coastal risk management. The science demonstrates clearly that weather events similar to the recent storms are becoming increasingly common. I recognise that the impacts of flooding are wide-ranging: it affects individual well-being and health, it impacts our natural environment, and it can devastate homes and businesses. The new Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy is now guiding interventions and driving investment programmes, both of which are supported by Wales' independent Flood Committee.

Clearly, significant levels of investment will need to be sustained to help protect and support the most at risk communities from the effects of flooding and coastal erosion particularly as the effects of climate change will compound the risks facing our communities. Multi-year capital and revenue settlements for managing flood risk, as seen in England and Scotland, would help future strategic planning and provide Risk Management Authorities with the confidence to do likewise, providing longer-term pipelines for delivery.

18. When do you expect local authorities to publish their findings from the work that has been funded?

Under Section 19(1) of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 it is the responsibility of the lead Local Flood Authorities to produce a 'Section 19' investigation report following a flooding incident.

These reports can be undertaken quickly, with any recommendations to reduce flood enabling Local Authorities or NRW to bring forward additional applications for Welsh Government funding to reduce flood risk to communities.

Several Local Authorities have already begun to publish their findings, but review timescales will vary according to the number of flooding cases within each local authority area, their scale and nature as well as the capacity of Local Authorities. Once completed, the reports must be published and can be subject to appropriate scrutiny by the public, elected members and all other interested parties.

19. How satisfied are you that the necessary steps have been taken to “stop it from happening again”?

It is not possible to prevent all flooding and coastal erosion. However when people, communities and businesses are threatened we can manage the risk by reducing the likelihood of an event and its associated impacts and consequences.

Proactive management of flood and coastal erosion risk remains a high priority for me.

The focus of Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) is justifiably on reducing risk to communities located in at-risk areas. Historically, development along rivers, estuaries and the coast has been required for trade, economic or agricultural purposes but has, over time, put people at increasing risk from flooding. Advances in engineering and construction mean some of those dangers can be managed, but some risk always remains and as this grows it may require expensive alleviation schemes and constant maintenance to keep people safe.

Better, more open, flood risk data, leads to more informed and better decisions on where to develop and how to adapt communities to actively remove elements of risk. My officials can also provide the public with the information they need to understand how flooding may affect them so they can make their own choices on avoiding or managing their own personal risk.

The new TAN 15 will provide clearer and more robust policy advice on managing areas at high and medium flood risk. Planning and FCERM policies should complement each other, reducing risk by preventing inappropriate development in the flood plain and helping Planning Authorities make clear decisions based upon the best available information.

Climate Change

20. What assessment have you made of the impact on emissions levels of behavioural changes or business decisions arising from the Covid-19 pandemic?

Formal reporting of Wales' greenhouse gas emissions is subject to a time lag. The most recent data we have relate to 2018 and were published in June

<https://gov.wales/greenhouse-gas-emissions-infographic>.

However, a number of studies across the UK and internationally have attempted to forecast the impact of Covid-19 on emissions. For example, the latest progress report from the UK Committee on Climate Change (which can be found at <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Reducing-UK-emissions-Progress-Report-to-Parliament-Committee-on-Cli..-002-1.pdf>) suggests the lockdown restrictions on mobility and economic activity have had an impact.

The UK CCC refer to a published scenario from the International Energy Agency, which forecast an 8% drop in global CO₂ emissions in 2020. They also reference the Global Carbon Project's estimate of a global emissions drop of 2-7% if lockdowns are short-lived and 3-13% if restrictions remain globally to the end of the year. The UKCCC highlight in the medium term emissions will likely be driven by the recovery and in the longer term by investment actions and attitudes to global collaboration.

The pandemic has affected everyone in the UK but may increase wealth and health inequality. This means we will need to ensure our emissions reduction is managed in a way which is socially and economically just.

21. Will you publish a formal Welsh Government response to the report produced by the group led by Chris Joffeh, which was tasked at considering the cost of retrofitting homes in Wales, among other things?

The Minister for Housing and Local Government gave an Oral Statement responding to the Jofeh Report on 24 September 2019. This can be found at the following link. <https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5844#A53270>.

Animal Welfare

22. You told the Committee that you will be bringing forward a Bill in relation to third party puppy sales. The Welsh Government has previously suggested that this matter will be dealt with through secondary legislation under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Can you confirm whether you will be legislating on this matter using primary or secondary legislation?

I can confirm the proposed ban on commercial third party sales of puppies and kittens is being taken forward as secondary legislation. The working title for the new legislation is Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021.

23. You confirmed that a second public consultation was being undertaken on this matter. Can you confirm that you intend to consult on the text of the draft legislation?

No plans have been made to put the draft text of the legislation out to consultation. The timetable for introducing this legislation is incredibly tight. Officials are in discussions with lawyers on this issue. Officials will advise me on this matter over coming weeks and I will make a decision at that time.

24. Can you update the Committee on the Welsh Government's latest position on a support scheme for veterinary costs for vulnerable pet owners?

A number of charities already offer subsidised veterinary treatment for pet owners who are unable to afford veterinary care for their animals. The Welsh Government continues to remind prospective pet owners to be aware of the full cost of owning a pet, including veterinary fees and insurance. The #PawsPreventProtect social media campaign ahead of Christmas was launched to promote responsible purchasing and served as a reminder of the lifetime costs associated with owning a pet, particularly puppies. There are currently no plans to introduce a support scheme.

Agriculture

25. What is the timeline for responding to the Wales Audit Office's report on rural development programme funds?

Andrew Slade, Director General, Economy, Skills and Natural Resources responded to the Audit Wales report 'Ensuring Value for Money from Rural Development Grants Made without Competition' on 13 August.

26. Your official told the Committee that the Welsh Government's budget includes provision to pay disallowance fines. How much is allocated for this purpose?

The current budget allocated to pay potential disallowance penalties is £13,954,692.99. Wales' record on disallowance of EU funding is the lowest in the UK and one of the lowest across Europe.

27. What consideration have you given to the ongoing support for events and organisations that are focused on rural communities in the light of the restrictions arising from the Covid-19 pandemic?

Rural Economy and Legislation Division has worked closely with the central Welsh Government Covid response team to ensure that Covid-19 guidelines have been constantly monitored and updated as the Covid-19 situation evolves to ensure that events and organisations in our rural communities have a clear understanding of the frameworks they can currently operate within.

The Wales Rural Network is in regular communication with rural stakeholders via the various available channels to support our rural communities in the Rural Recovery Process. The relevant links to Welsh Government support for businesses and communities as well as links to wider support available from other public sector sources and charitable organisations have all been published via the refreshed Wales Rural Network webpages, alongside social media channels. A series of workshops are being developed through the Wales Rural Network, starting in the autumn, to share best practise and provide policy advice.

The LEADER Scheme under the *Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme for Wales 2014-2020* (the RDP 2014-2020) provides support to rural communities in 21 of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales. This support is delivered via 18 Local Action Groups (LAGs). The Welsh LAGs identified immediate priorities on the ground in response to Covid-19; these included securing and distributing food and medical supplies to all, including the most rurally/socially isolated. They identified local resources and assisted by co-ordinating volunteers, supporting short supply chains, networking and collaborating to ensure an informed and appropriate approach to meet local needs.

I recently gave approval for the re-purposing of the LEADER Scheme to support the COVID-19 emergency response. The Welsh Government issued a “Supplementary Guidance note for LEADER Local Action Groups and their Administrative Bodies - COVID-19 and the LEADER Scheme” on the 29th June 2020. This launched an associated re-profiling exercise, permitting each LAG the opportunity to amend their approach or refocus their support to respond to the current situation. The Wales Rural Network have offered their support and held meetings with the LEADER Administrative Bodies to ensure they take full advantage of the available flexibilities to benefit their rural communities during the recovery process.

With regard to events specifically, the Welsh Government has commissioned a review of the effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on Agricultural shows. Colleagues in Agricultural Sustainability and Development Division are working with representatives from the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, Pembrokeshire and Anglesey Shows on their financial resilience.

All face-to-face Farming Connect events and support mechanisms were stopped with immediate effect as of 24 March 2020. However, delivery options were quickly reviewed and contractors provided a ‘traffic light system’ indicating which services could be implemented easily while adhering to the social distancing guidance and Coronavirus Regulations 2020. Digital/virtual delivery was implemented as the default position, where appropriate. Those interventions that fell into the “green” category resumed on 15 May 2020 – in line with the Welsh Government Coronavirus Regulations 2020. The traffic light system has been regularly reviewed, in line with the 3 weekly reviews by Welsh Government and any additional Welsh Government guidance on the easing of restrictions. ALL one-to-one face-to-face delivery was resumed on 23 June 2020. One-to-many events that could exclusively be held outside with less than 30 people were resumed on 15 August 2020 and the recommencement of classroom-based accredited training resumed on 1st September 2020 as confirmed in writing on the 19 August 2020.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

Lesley Griffiths AS/MS

Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd, Ynni a Materion Gwledig
Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs