# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | ***Our Valleys, Our Future*: Delivery Plan** |
| **DATE** | **16 November 2017** |
| **BY** | **Alun Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services** |

The Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys published its action plan *Our Valleys, Our Future* in July, which outlined three priority areas and an ambitious work programme for the future. The plan was based on evidence taken by members of the taskforce and, crucially, on feedback from people living and working in the South Wales Valleys.

In the months since, we have been working hard on the delivery plan, which sits alongside *Our Valleys, Our Future*. The delivery plan was published on 7 November 2017:

I have been clear since the First Minister asked me to chair the taskforce that this must be a long-term piece of work. Some of the issues facing the South Wales Valleys – not least the social and economic legacy from a century of coal mining – are deep-rooted and generational.

I have also been clear that the taskforce is not about “fixing” the South Wales Valleys – this is a part of Wales which is full of opportunities, rich in culture, people and natural resources and in hope and ambition. The taskforce’s immediate role will be to build on all these assets to bring about lasting social and economic prosperity for all our Valleys communities.

This delivery plan sets out how we will achieve the actions set out in *Our Valleys, Our Future*. We have looked at the each of the three priority areas – good-quality jobs and the skills to do them; better public services and the local community – in detail and mapped out how and what will be needed to make each commitment a reality.

There are more than 60 actions detailed in this delivery plan, together with their expected outcomes and how they will be delivered.

To make this plan a success, the taskforce must bring all the resources of the Welsh Government and its many partners – including local government and the two city deals – other public services, the private and third sectors together to support the Valleys. This includes working with with people living and working in the South Wales Valleys.

The taskforce also has a role in shaping the work of the Welsh Government, particularly in changing and setting government policy in relation to the Valleys.

As we have been working on the delivery plan, we have continued to engage with the public and businesses across the Valleys – they hold the key to success of this plan; they have shaped this plan and we need their ongoing support to deliver the ambitions set out within it.

One area where we need people’s input is the creation of a Valleys Landscape Park. Throughout our conversations with people living and working in the Valleys, we heard that not enough is being done to make the most of the natural landscape and the rich heritage.

The taskforce has had inspiring discussions with Natural Resources Wales, community groups, third and private sector organisations about the idea for a landscape park. But we need to continue to develop this further to ensure we make the most of this exciting idea.

We have agreed we should focus on making the Valleys a place people are proud to call home; a place where businesses choose to invest and operate; where communities are empowered and show pride in their environment and the environment itself is an integral part of people’s lifestyles.

The next step is to secure the funding for a support team to lead on the development of the landscape park, which will work with communities to help them to get the most out of the natural environment and support them to overcome barriers such as access to funding and public land access.

We have set the ambitious target of helping 7,000 unemployed or economically-inactive people living in the Valleys into work through creating thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs in the Valleys by 2021.

As part of achieving this stretching target we identified six locations for strategic hubs across the South Wales Valleys in the original action plan. These will be areas where we focus public investment which in turn attracts private sector investment and the creation of new jobs and opportunities. Since we published the action plan – and as a result of ongoing conversations with the public and key partners – a seventh strategic hub in Northern Bridgend has been identified.

Over the course of the last few months, Welsh Government officials have met local authorities to discuss the strategic hubs, and in particular the opportunities and demands in each area and their aspirations for the future. Local authorities are leading the process of developing the proposals for their strategic hub – the initial themes are included in the delivery plan.

Over the next few weeks, the taskforce and each of the seven local authorities will hold a strategic hub seminar to support the development of an investment blueprint for each location for the next 15 years. The specific projects to be funded over this Assembly term will be identified by April.

I am determined that, by delivering on the actions in this plan, the taskforce will make a real difference to Valleys communities over the course of this Assembly term.

This is the first version of the delivery plan. The taskforce will report annually on progress and the delivery plan will be updated as actions are taken forward with people living in communities in the Valleys.

I am looking forward to the next phase of the work in the Valleys – it will be exciting to see real improvement being achieved and be part of such positive changes in this unique, vibrant area of Wales.