# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Update on the Ministerial taskforce for the south Wales Valleys** |
| **DATE**  | **18 July 2019** |
| **BY** | **Lee Waters, Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport** |

Since taking up position of Chair of the taskforce at the end of last year, I have been discussing with the members how we can maximise the potential of the £25m allocated to its work. I have met with the Leaders of the Valleys authorities to seek out best practice that could be scaled up and rolled out across the Valleys taskforce area, and I have also taken soundings from Assembly Members.

Whilst the taskforce will continue to work to deliver all the actions included in *Our Valleys, Our Future: Delivery Plan*, our efforts will focus in particular on seven priority areas.

* Housing
* Foundational Economy
* Entrepreneurship and business support
* Transport
* Strategic hubs
* Valleys taskforce innovation fund
* Valleys Regional Park

As a first step in delivering against this new approach I am rolling out an initiative across all local authorities within the Valleys taskforce area to bring empty homes back into use.

I am keen that the solutions we support to regenerate our valleys communities are drawn on good practice from within our communities. Since 2016 Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) Council have operated the ‘*Empty Home’ grant scheme’* which offers applicants support to bring empty houses back in to use. The Minister for Housing and Local Government has agreed to support rolling this initiative out to all local authorities within the taskforce area in this financial year. We are currently working with the local authorities to discuss the detail of this and propose setting aside around £10 million for this scheme over the next two years.

This is an exciting piece of work, which will directly address concerns raised during initial engagement with Valleys communities. It will create affordable, much needed homes for valleys residents and support the foundational economy by engaging local business in renovation works.

It is also an example of real collaboration as the Valleys taskforce will be working alongside RCT and other local authorities and across Welsh Government.

The scheme will be available in communities right across the Valleys taskforce area, and not only in areas identified as strategic hubs. Indeed, I am pleased to announce that the boundaries of the taskforce area are being will extend to include the Gwendraeth and Amman Valleys. The First Minister has agreed to widening the boundaries as these areas are very much culturally part of the south Wales coalfield, with their distinctive heritage around anthracite mining, shared with the adjacent Valleys located to the east.

I look forward to updating you further on this and the other priority areas in the coming months, and I will deliver a fuller statement to the Assembly in September when there will be opportunity for Assembly Members to fully debate our proposals.