

Views sought on lettings agents' fees

The consultation is the first step towards fulfilling the Welsh Government's Commitment to bringing forward the Fees Charged to Tenants Bill to address fees charged in the private rented sector.

Mr Sargeant said:

"I believe the time has come to ask serious questions about the future ability of anyone to charge fees to tenants when they enter into a tenancy.

"Fees can cause major problems for people when looking for accommodation. To ask tenants to come up with a tenancy deposit, which is often in excess of a month's rent, plus a month's rent up-front and an "administration" fee can cause a major financial headache for some and has the potential to drive people into debt.

"I want to know the extent of the fees charged, what those fees cover and understand the implications of the removal of these fees for letting agents, landlords, tenants and any third parties involved in the private rented sector.

"I encourage everyone with an interest to participate in this consultation, which will help to inform what fees, if any, can be charged in the future."

Wales passes Trade Union Bill to reverse damaging and divisive UK Act

Last year the UK Government passed the Trade Union Act 2016. The Act imposes stringent new strike ballot thresholds in public services and also monitors and restricts the activities of trade unions in supporting the workforce.

The NHS, education, local government and the fire service are examples of devolved public services which are the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

The Welsh Government's Trade Union Bill dis-applies parts of the Act that relate to these services.

This means that the imposition of an overall support threshold of 40% on strike ballots, provisions on trade union facility time and conditions on

payroll deductions for trade union membership – commonly known as check-off – will be reversed and will no longer apply to Wales.

The Bill also protects the position where agency workers are prevented from covering the work of public sector employees during industrial action, in the event the UK Government acts to remove that protection.

Welcoming the passing of the Bill, Local Government Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“This is a very significant day for devolved public services in Wales and devolution as a whole.

“We should never have been in a position where we had to introduce a Bill to reverse parts of a UK Act. Time and again we warned the UK Government that this damaging and divisive legislation interfered with devolved policy and the powers held by the National Assembly for Wales. Even their own lawyers advised them that they would be on thin ground when it came to this area but they still decided to press ahead.

“We always said that the Trade Union Act was unnecessary and would lead to more confrontational relationships between employers and workers, undermining rather than supporting public services and the economy.

“Key sections on ballot thresholds, facility time and check-off would make the delivery of devolved public services in Wales more difficult, changing the balance of the relationship between employers and unions.

“In Wales, the Welsh Government, employers and the trade union movement work together constructively. We have built up a tradition of social partnership, founded on respect for the work of trades unions and the rights of their members, and it is a tradition that has served us well – especially when you consider how the UK Government has handled disputes in recent years.

“Today, the National Assembly for Wales has taken the right course of action and acted to protect public services here from this regressive UK Act. We will robustly defend any attempt by the UK Government to interfere in this legitimate and democratic process.”

Commenting on today’s Senedd vote on the Trade Union (Wales) Bill, Wales TUC General Secretary Martin Mansfield said:

“The Welsh Government promised that they would protect our devolved services from the Westminster government’s anti-union attack and today they delivered on that promise.

“The Wales TUC warmly welcomes the new Bill and the strong support shown by the Assembly for our social partnership approach in Wales.

“Our government is committed to working in partnership with unions and employers to get the very best deal for our Welsh public services and its valued workforce.

“The ‘Welsh Way’ works in avoiding industrial action. Our partnership approach is all about engaging with employers and government at an early stage, allowing us to deal with disagreements before they become disputes through mature negotiation and honest debate.

“Thanks to the support of Welsh Government and other political parties in the Senedd, this approach can continue to deliver for both the people of Wales and for the services we all rely on.”

Commenting on previous threats from UK Government ministers that the UK Government would seek to legislate against the Trade Union (Wales) Bill in the future, Martin Mansfield added:

“The UK Government must now fully respect the democratic will of the people of Wales and the decision made by our National Assembly to pass this Bill. Any underhanded attempts to interfere in how our devolved public services are run in Wales would be undemocratic and unconstitutional.”

£450,000 funding boost to back Welsh businesses wishing to target the multi-billion pound nuclear sector

The £450,000 funding will secure support for a cohort of 50 companies on the Fit For Nuclear (F4N) programme – a unique service to help UK manufacturers get ready to bid for work in the civil nuclear supply chain.

The programme enables companies to measure their operations against the standards required to supply the nuclear industry – in new build, operations and decommissioning – and take the necessary steps to close any gaps.

Forecasts suggest that globally, over the next twenty years, there will be £930 billion investment in new nuclear reactors and £250 billion in the decommissioning of existing nuclear reactors.

Ken Skates said:

“The nuclear sector will provide a wide range of business opportunities over the next twenty years and we want to ensure that businesses in Wales are in a position to bid for and win a share of this business.

“In Wales, research has identified that Welsh businesses have the potential, with the relevant accreditations and organisational systems, to compete for a significant proportion of nuclear sector contracts both in Wales and further afield and Welsh Government is eager to support business efforts to maximise their share for the benefit of the Welsh economy.”

Helen Arthur, F4N programme manager at the Nuclear AMRC, said:

“The 20 Welsh companies currently working through the F4N programme have highlighted the wealth of high-quality manufacturers in Wales which could meet the demands of the nuclear industry. We are very excited to continue working with the Welsh Government to make sure that more Welsh manufacturers can access our support and get ready to win work in the nuclear supply chain at home and worldwide.”

F4N has been developed by the Nuclear Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC), part of Sheffield University, with the support of its top tier partners, including nuclear new build developers and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, which use the programme to identify potential companies for their supply chains.

There is no set timescale for businesses to undergo an assessment to being granted Fit For Nuclear status but most achieve it within 12-18 month timeframe.

Expressions of interest are now being sought from businesses in Wales wishing to participate in the F4N programme. Eligible companies must have a manufacturing facility in Wales, a turnover of £1.6m or above and employ ten or more people.

Participating companies range from contract manufacturers with no nuclear experience – that are aiming to take a first step into the sector – to established suppliers wanting to benchmark their position and drive business excellence.

For more information and to register an expression of interest by 1 August 2017 business should contact:

DigwyddiadauNiwclear.NuclearEvents@wales.gsi.gov.uk or visit <https://businesswales.gov.wales/news-and-blogs/news/fit-4-nuclear-programme-â€-funding-available> (external link).

Abolition of the Right to Buy moves a step closer

The Bill aims to protect the stock of social housing in Wales from further reduction, ensuring it is available to provide safe, secure and affordable housing for people who are unable to buy or rent a home of their own. It complements other actions being taken by the Welsh Government to increase the supply of housing.

Proposing the motion to agree the general principles of the Bill, Communities and Children Secretary Carl Sargeant said:

“This Bill aims to protect the supply of social housing from further erosion in the face of a high level of demand and a shortage of supply.

“Between 1981 and 2016, over 139,000 local authority and housing association homes were sold under these schemes. This has resulted in people in housing need, many of whom are vulnerable, waiting longer to access a home they can afford.

“By abolishing the Right to Buy and Right to Acquire, the Bill will also encourage social landlords to invest in new social housing safe in the knowledge that it won’t be at risk of having to be sold after only a few years.”

Following the agreement of the general principles of the Bill, a [consultation on the information document](#) that will be issued to tenants is intended to be launched tomorrow. A series of tenant engagement events hosted by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service Cymru will form a key element of the consultation. The consultation will also focus on best practice for tenant engagement and will inform advice to be provided to social landlords on disseminating the information.

UK's first Development Bank to open in October in Wales

The Development Bank of Wales will provide the necessary growth finance and business support to attract, and retain micro businesses and SMEs within Wales.

It will seek to generate more than a billion pounds of investment to the Welsh economy over the next five years and, as the first of its kind in the UK, will provide Wales with a competitive business edge over the rest of the UK.

And today the Economy Secretary has confirmed that a further £35m of EU funding will be added to the £136m Wales Business Fund that was announced last year to support both start-up and existing small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) across Wales.

This takes the new total of the fund to £171m and the Economy Secretary signalled that further funding for the Development Bank would be announced later in the year.

Ken Skates said:

“I am delighted to confirm that following Welsh Government approval of the business case, the Development Bank of Wales is set to be up and running by October.

“The Development Bank will be the first of its kind in the UK, addressing current market failures within business finance and providing focussed support for micro, small start ups and innovative businesses across Wales enabling them to become fitter, bigger and stronger.

“It will increase the availability of funding to SMEs to £80m per annum within five years and we anticipate that taking into account private sector leverage this will have a potentially transformational impact on the Welsh economy of over £170m per annum by 2021/22.

“To support the Bank we are extending the Wales Business Fund by a further £35m with EU funding. This will take the total of the fund to £171m, and we will have news of more money to support the Bank's work later this year.

“The Development Bank will have its headquarter in North Wales with a strong presence across the whole of Wales and I look forward to the formal launch in October.”

Giles Thorley said:

“The creation of a development bank is innovative in approach and represents a significant step change in the way Government backed funding is delivered in Wales. It will be built on the solid foundations of the skills and experience already in place within the team.

“A thriving SME population across the whole of Wales is critical to ensuring a prosperous economy. We are proud to have worked with some fantastic, ambitious businesses and entrepreneurs over the last 15 years and look forward to supporting even more as we transition to the new organisation.”

The Development Bank is a key part of the Welsh Government’s strategy to deliver a more prosperous and secure Wales. It will differ from Finance Wales not only in terms of the increased scale of funding available but also in the way it develops new products. This will be informed through the creation of an intelligence unit tasked with conducting research into the needs of Welsh businesses, ultimately enabling an improved response to changes in supply and demand in the market.

It will increasingly become self funding with the business model assuming that it will no longer need grant support for operational costs from next year onwards.