

Mark Drakeford in Brussels to meet Guy Verhofstadt MEP

Over the two days, the Cabinet Secretary will meet Sir Tim Barrow, the UK Permanent Representative to the EU and key figures from the European Parliament. He will also take part in a European Policy Centre and Wales Governance Centre *Cross Nations Panel on Brexit* alongside the Scottish Government's Brexit Minister Mike Russell.

During the meetings, the Finance Secretary will highlight the Welsh Government's priorities for Brexit – including the importance of full and unfettered access to the single market, a sensible approach to migration which protects the Welsh economy and a transition period to avoid falling off a cliff edge.

The meetings are an opportunity to continue to build a direct relationship between the Welsh Government and EU leaders and gain a greater understanding of the EU's negotiating position.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Mark Drakeford said:

“Leaving the EU is the biggest challenge of our lifetime – the decisions made today will affect Wales for decades to come.

“Today's visit is therefore very timely, coming on the back of the latest round of Brexit talks and ahead of a crucial decision this week by the European Council on whether these can progress to discuss trade arrangements.

“This is an opportunity for me to set out our priorities for a deal that works for Wales, the UK and the rest of the EU 27.

“We're hearing alarming noises suggesting a no deal is a viable outcome. This is a deeply dangerous fallacy. Walking away from talks would be a catastrophic failure which would have dire economic, security and social consequences.

“It is more important than ever for transition discussions between the UK and the EU 27 to commence as soon as possible. Business confidence is already suffering due to the uncertainty.

“The UK Government has a responsibility to follow up the positive overtures from the Florence speech with detailed proposals on withdrawal issues. Two years is the absolute minimum viable period to resolve all the outstanding issues if we are to protect the needs of businesses and citizens and avoid falling off a cliff edge.

“As a government, we will always want the best outcome for Wales

and the Welsh economy. In the short, medium and long-term, we believe the only way of achieving this is by securing the closest possible relationship with the single market.

“We also continue to call on the UK government to provide firm evidence on why being outside a customs union with the EU would be of advantage to the UK in the longer term.

“Europe is one of our biggest trading partners, they are our closest neighbour and we share a border with them. Our economic ties cannot be severed on the day we leave the EU. It is essential all parts of the UK and the EU work together to agree a way forward that meets all our needs.”