

First Minister sets out legislative priorities

First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, has today set out his government's legislative priorities for the year ahead.

In the first of 5 bills, the Welsh Government will introduce legislation that will make it illegal for alcohol to be sold below a set price.

Evidence shows a direct link between drinking harmful levels and the availability of cheap alcohol. The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) Bill will propose a formula for calculating the minimum price for alcohol, based on its strength and volume, and enable local authorities to enforce the powers and bring prosecutions.

The government is also introducing a bill to stop landlords and estate agents from charging unfair, up-front fees to tenants and prospective tenants in the private rented sector.

Increasing evidence shows the current fees – which can be as high as £700 – are a barrier to people looking to rent their own place and discourage people from moving home. The bill will provide private renters with clarity about the costs involved and ensure the system is fair and sustainable.

Over the next 12 months, the government will also introduce a bill that will pave the way for one of its key pledges – 30 hours of free childcare a week for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds.

Good progress is being made on the childcare offer, with the first pilot set to begin in September. The bill will support this and enable the childcare offer to be rolled out in full by 2020 by creating a national system for applications and eligibility checks.

The Welsh Government will also bring forward legislation to reform local government in Wales. The bill will establish a new relationship between the Welsh Government and local government, create greater transparency in decision making and ensure greater collaboration through mandatory regional working arrangements.

The government will also bring forward legislation in the next 12 months to reform the regulatory controls for registered social landlords in Wales. In September 2016, the Office for National Statistics reclassified RSLs into the public sector. As a consequence, any private sector borrowing by RSLs will become a charge against the Welsh Government's capital budget.

If not addressed, the change by ONS could restrict the development of new affordable social housing and restrict our own ability to fund other capital infrastructure projects. The Welsh Government's bill proposes to reform central and local government controls over RSLs, enabling the ONS to reconsider the reclassification and return them to the private sector.

The government is also seeking cross-party support for legislation to remove the defence of reasonable punishment, and will consult on proposals with the intention of introducing a bill in the 3rd year of this Assembly term.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“The bills we intend to introduce during the 2nd year of this Assembly will support our efforts to build a Wales that is healthy and active, prosperous and secure, ambitious and learning and united and connected.

“The 5 bills will tackle harmful alcohol consumption, help support working parents, protect tenants from unfair fees and reform and improve local government.

“Last week the UK government set out its legislative intentions in the Queen’s Speech. While wholly unambitious, the statement included the Repeal Bill and other Brexit-related bills.

“As I have repeatedly made clear, the UK government must respect the devolution settlement. If this does not happen, we will consider other options, such as a Continuity bill, to protect Wales’ interests.

“Leaving the European Union will have a significant impact on the business of this Welsh Government and National Assembly. It would be naive to assume that it will not also have an impact on our own legislative programme – but, we will do all we can to keep driving forward progress and delivering for the people of Wales.”

Bill to introduce landfill disposals tax in Wales is passed

The Landfill Disposals Tax (Wales) Bill is the third of three Bills to establish tax arrangements in Wales.

Landfill disposals tax, which will replace landfill tax in Wales, will come into effect in April 2018. The revenue raised will help fund public services in Wales.

Landfill disposals tax – similar to the current landfill tax, which is collected throughout Wales and England – will be a tax on the disposal of waste to landfill. It will be paid by landfill site operators who pass these costs on to waste operators.

The Bill extends the application of landfill disposals tax to unauthorised disposals of waste. This will introduce a financial deterrent to discourage people from disposing of waste unlawfully, encouraging them to pay their fair share of tax by disposing of waste at a registered landfill site.

There are currently 25 landfill sites in Wales, operated by 20 landfill site operators. In Wales, the Office for Budgetary Responsibility forecasts that landfill tax will generate £25m in 2018-19.

The Finance Secretary will announce the rates for landfill disposals tax by October 1 and the regulations will be laid after the UK Autumn Budget.

Local communities affected by the disposal of waste to landfill will benefit from a new grant-funded scheme in Wales – the Landfill Disposals Tax Communities Scheme, which will be introduced in April 2018.

Welcoming the passing of the Bill by the National Assembly, Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“ This Bill is the third piece of legislation to establish tax arrangements in Wales and another important step in our devolution journey.

“In less than a year’s time, we will be introducing the first Welsh taxes in almost 800 years and Wales will become responsible for raising our own money to spend on public services.

“Once law, this Bill will enable us to introduce a tax on landfill disposals in Wales from April 2018. The Bill ensures public services in Wales will continue to benefit from the revenues raised by this tax.

“Wales is at the forefront of waste policy and landfill disposals tax is an important element of achieving our goal of a zero waste Wales.

“ We have worked closely with stakeholders in developing this Bill. While it is broadly consistent with the existing landfill tax, therefore providing stability to businesses and minimising the risk of waste tourism, we have made a number of improvements to the tax.

“It is simple and clear to apply; addresses areas of confusion and uncertainty; is up to date and relevant to Wales. Together with the other tax legislation we have introduced it will pave the way to a smooth transition to tax powers.”

The Landfill Disposals Tax (Wales) Bill is anticipated to receive Royal Assent in the summer.

“Remove the 1% pay cap and give us the money to give NHS Wales staff the pay rise they deserve” – Vaughan Gething

Welsh Health Secretary Vaughan Gething has called on the UK Government to remove the pay cap and make funds available to the Welsh Government so NHS Wales staff get the pay rise they deserve.

Tuesday 27 June 2017

Vaughan Gething said:

“I’ve today written to the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, urging him to make the case to the UK Treasury to remove the cap on pay and make funds available across the UK to allow hard working NHS staff to receive a pay uplift of greater than 1%.

“Yesterday, the UK Government found more than £1bn to effectively end austerity in Northern Ireland. I fully expect them to make money available so that we can give our hardworking health service staff the pay rise they deserve. They deserve nothing less.”

Appointment to Human Tissue Authority announced

The appointment will run from 1 August 2017 to 31 July 2020.

The Human Tissue Authority is responsible for the regulation of activities concerning the removal, storage, use and disposal of human tissue for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Vaughan Gething said:

“I am pleased William Horne has agreed to continue work on the Human Tissue Authority Board.

“I am confident he will continue to actively contribute to the

Board and his wealth of experience will remain of great benefit to the Authority.

“I wish him well in the continuation of his role.”

[Award winning social business to launch new service and create 66 new jobs in South Wales Valleys](#)

The new service, which will create 66 new jobs over the next eighteen months in the South Wales valleys, is backed by £222,600 from the Welsh Government and will enable Connect Assist to launch the service imminently.

There is a high demand for such a service following a number of high profile allegations of mal-practice by fundraising agencies in recent years. As a consequent a number of charities pulled their contracts with these agencies, many of which ceased trading.

The new service for charities will include the provision of emergency appeal response lines and fundraising appeals. It will also handle enquiries around the work that each charity undertakes as well as enquiries around supporting charities.

Connect Assist, which is based in Nantgarw and celebrated its 10th anniversary last year, was set up with the main aim of making a positive difference to people living and working in the Valleys

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“The Welsh Government is pleased to support Connect Assist in launching this new service which will be creating a significant number of local jobs and offering a range of career opportunities for people.

“Connect Assist currently employs 100 people and its work over the past ten years has made a real impact, supporting and helping people into employment which has been recognized through a number of well deserved awards.”

Ron Moody, Client Services Director said:

“We are delighted to be launching this much needed ethical

fundraising service. Having worked with the charity sector for over a decade helping charities to help their beneficiaries, this new fundraising and supporter care service is a natural extension to our offering. Support from the Welsh Government is a very important element to the launch and our objective of creating sustainable jobs.''

The organization focuses on providing information, advice guidance and support to individuals facing challenging circumstances. It has a strong track record of providing professional multi-channel helpline and contact centre services, web systems and consultancy services to not for profit organisations throughout the UK.

Connect Assist delivers 365 days a year 24 hours a day running professionally staffed charity helplines for organisations enabling people to contact the service at any time and in the way that suits them best.