Impact

Legislation Bill
The Constitutional and Legislative Affairs published a summary of responses to a consultation on the Legislation (Wales) Bill before an evidence session with Counsel General Jeremy Miles on Monday 18th February. Evidence from the Law Society was included.

Legislation

Legislation Bill
AMs on the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee were joined by Jeremy Miles for the final evidence session on the Legislation (Wales) Bill. Jeremy Miles explained that the Welsh Government’s programmes for accessibility will include a “significant” development of the Law Wales website, work with the National Archive on the publication of Welsh law, and organising laws by subject matter. The Counsel General cited the example of a planning code. He said existing primary legislation would be consolidated into one Act, with statutory instruments, guidelines and technical notices consolidated beneath that.

Section 12
Mick Antoniw asked about the relationship between Section 12 and the Civil Procedure Rules. Mr Miles argued that the legislation will not be able to cut across the Civil Procedure Rules, which are not devolved. James George, legislative counsel, said there will not be any conflict. He pointed out that the Civil Procedure Rules are not the “be all and end all” on the service of documents. Dr George said Sections 12 and 13 would not require anybody to agree to receive a document electronically. He told AMs the sections only apply where legislation allows or requires a document to be served electronically.

Timetable
The Business Committee published a revised timetable for consideration of the Legislation (Wales) Bill. The stage 1 reporting deadline was pushed back until Tuesday 26th March.

Assembly Reforms
The Assembly Commission introduced the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill, which promises to give 16- and 17-year-olds the chance to vote for the first time in Assembly elections; change the Assembly’s name to Senedd; and change the law on disqualification from being an AM. An explanatory memorandum and a statement on legislative competence were published alongside the Bill. The Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee launched a consultation on the Bill, which closes on 12th April.

Welsh Language
Eluned Morgan, the Minister for International Affairs and the Welsh Language, issued a written statement abandoning plans for a Welsh Language Bill. Baroness Morgan said she will start introducing standards regulations for new bodies as soon as the legislative timetable relating to Brexit is clearer. She said she will consult with private bodies to push them to provide more consistent services in Welsh.
Law Commission
The Welsh Government published a report on the implementation of Law Commission proposals.

Fly-tipping
The Assembly approved the Household Waste Duty of Care (Fixed Penalties) (Wales) Regulations 2019. The regulations will allow Natural Resources Wales and councils to issue £300 fixed-penalty notices if people give their waste to someone who then fly-tips it. The Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government, Hannah Blythyn, said householders have a duty of care to ensure when they pass their waste to someone else for disposal to check that they are a registered waste disposal carrier. She told AMs that councils will be able to retain the receipts to contribute to the costs of dealing with waste crime.

Justice System

Justice Commission
The Welsh Government published a submission to the Commission on Justice in Wales from Ruth Costigan of Swansea University. The evidence focused on legal services in the Cynon Valley.

Probation
Deputy Minister and Chief Whip Jane Hutt welcomed assurances from the Ministry of Justice after Working Links, which provides probation services in Wales, went into administration.

Voting Rights
The Welsh Government published a report on extending the right to vote in council elections to prisoners.

Finance and Taxation

Policy
The Welsh Government published its 2019 tax policy work plan. In a written statement, Minister for Finance Rebecca Evans confirmed that she will publish a report on findings from the work this autumn.

Land Transaction Tax
The Welsh Government updated documents for paper returns for the Land Transaction Tax. Guidance on how to complete a return using the Welsh Revenue Authority’s online services was also published.

Minimum Pricing
Vaughan Gething announced a 50p minimum unit price for alcohol under the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018.

Council Tax
Rebecca Evans announced plans to legislate to ensure care leavers are exempt from council tax from April.
Budget

AMs on the Finance Committee took evidence from Rebecca Evans on the Welsh Government’s second supplementary budget for 2018-19. She said the Welsh Government is committed to ensuring that it provides value for money on all budget allocations and that the supplementary budget accounts for about 3% of the overall budget. Asked when forecasts for non-domestic rates will be updated, Ms Evans said there is no in-year adjustment. Matthew Denham-Jones, deputy director for financial controls, said forecasts are considered when setting the local government settlement at the start of a year, but they are kept under review. He explained that any over- or under-collection is included in next year’s calculation.

Planning and Housing

Small Housebuilders

The Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee began an inquiry on the barriers facing small home building companies, taking evidence from the Federation of Small Businesses, Hygrove Homes Group, and the Federation of Master Builders Wales. Huw Francis, chief executive of Hygrove, said the consensus from talking to other people in the industry is that the process is too long, complicated, uncertain and costly. Mr Francis argued that all the national companies have an advantage and highlighted the increase in the number of reports needed for a planning application as a barrier for small house builders.

Section 106 Agreements

During questions to the Housing and Local Government Minister, Gareth Bennett raised the role of Section 106 agreements, saying there have been complaints that developers have not fully provided the promised facilities. He asked if enforcement of Section 106 agreements has been robust enough. Hannah Blythyn, the Deputy Minister, said 106 agreements offer an opportunity for communities to gain broader benefits from large developments. She said the Welsh Government is looking at enforcement to ensure people can be confident that the full benefits of 106 agreements will be realised.

Llyr Gruffydd also asked about the steps being taken to ensure developers honour their obligations, raising concerns over examples where developers have refused to provide the necessary percentage of affordable homes they have agreed to provide on the basis of making insufficient profit. Hannah Blythyn said the Welsh Government is aware of some developers seeking to renegotiate planning obligations after they have been agreed, and that officials are looking into the matter.

Regulations

AMs approved the Developments of National Significance (Specified Criteria, Fees and Fees for Deemed Applications) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2019. Housing Minister Julie James explained that the regulations seek to correct anomalies in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 introduced by newly devolved powers to consent to energy developments under the Wales Act 2017.

Planning Policy Wales

Julie James answered a written question on the weight that councils must give to Planning Policy Wales (PPW) when considering Local Development Plans and planning decisions. The Minister for Housing and Local Government explained that PPW sets out the criteria against which decisions on whether to call in planning applications are assessed.
M4 Relief Road

Inquiry Report
First Minister Mark Drakeford received the report produced by the independent public inquiry on the M4 relief road. Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns told the press that he understood that the report recommends going ahead with the £1.4bn road. Prof Drakeford, who is widely thought to be sceptical about the project, will consider the 558-page report and technical advice prepared by officials before making a decision.

Brexit

Joint Statement
Mark Drakeford issued a joint statement with Nicola Sturgeon arguing that the UK is not prepared for a “catastrophic” no-deal Brexit and the withdrawal agreement would make the UK poorer and open the door to a “blind Brexit”. The first ministers called on the UK Government to put forward secondary legislation to remove 29th March as exit day from the EU (Withdrawal) Act and request an extension to Article 50.

Legislation
The External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee published a letter from Mark Drakeford to Presiding Officer Elin Jones on legislating for Brexit. The First Minister noted that Welsh ministers only consent to UK statutory instruments where there is no divergence in policy between Wales and the UK, and on the basis that the SIs are not politically sensitive.

No-deal Brexit
The External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee took evidence from Jeremy Miles on Brexit. He repeated previous warnings on the dangers of no deal and called on the UK Government to request an extension to the Article 50 process as soon as possible.

Intergovernmental Agreement
Mark Drakeford wrote to the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee to provide clarity about the intergovernmental agreement on the EU (Withdrawal) Act.

Preparations
Following a Wales Audit Office report on a no-deal Brexit, the chairs of the External Affairs and Public Accounts Committees issued a statement endorsing the Auditor General’s calls to strengthen preparations.

Briefing
The Research Service published a briefing on preparing the law for Brexit.

Assembly News
**Question Times**

Jane Hutt, the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, will answer questions on her portfolio responsibilities – which include justice, volunteering and equality – for the last 15 minutes of First Minister’s Questions once a month. The session will be extended to 60 minutes. Meanwhile, questions to Jeremy Miles in his role as Counsel General will now take place on Tuesdays rather than Wednesdays.

**South Wales East**

Delyth Jewell was sworn in as the AM for South Wales East following the death of Steffan Lewis. Ms Jewell was also elected as a member of the National Assembly’s Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee and External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee. She will act as Plaid Cymru’s spokesman on culture and international affairs.

**Shadow Counsel General**

Former MP and barrister Elfyn Llwyd was appointed as Plaid Cymru’s shadow counsel general.

**Youth Parliament**

The Welsh Youth Parliament held its inaugural plenary, with members voting to prioritise emotional and mental health support.

**Polling**

The latest Welsh Political Barometer showed a fall in support for the Labour Party. According to the YouGov poll for ITV Wales and Cardiff University, the party would lose five Welsh MPs as well as five AMs. YouGov projected an 8% fall in support for Labour in Westminster and Cardiff Bay. The St David’s Day Poll by ICM also indicated a loss of support for Labour, down 6% in the Senedd and 7% at Westminster.

**Westminster News**

**Newport West**

By-election: The Newport West by-election was called for Thursday 4th April following the death of Paul Flynn. Labour has selected Ruth Jones, an ex-president of the Wales TUC, as its candidate, while former Newport mayor Matthew Evans will stand for the Tories. Plaid Cymru’s Jonathan Clark, Green Party deputy leader Amelia Womack, the Renew Party’s June Davies and Richard Suchorzewski, of the Abolish the Assembly Party, will also contest the seat.