

First Minister sets out legislative priorities

Wales to introduce legislation to tackle harmful alcohol consumption, provide free childcare for working parents, protect tenants from unfair fees and reform local government

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

In the first of five 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 three and four 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 third year of this Assembly term.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said: "The Bills we intend to introduce during the second 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 five 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."

Ends

Notes:

The Bills the Government intends to introduce during the second year of the legislative programme are:

- Regulatory Reform of Registered Social Landlords Bill;
- Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) Bill - pending the Supreme Court judgement
- Childcare Offer Application Processing Bill;
- Fees Charged to Tenants in the Private Rented Sector Bill;
- Local Government Bill.