



National Assembly for Wales Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Fourth Assembly Legacy Report

March 2016

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



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Communities, Equality and
Local Government Committee

**Fourth Assembly
Legacy Report**

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Committee membership:

Committee member	Party	Constituency or Region
Christine Chapman AM (Chair)	Welsh Labour	Cynon Valley
Peter Black AM	Welsh Liberal Democrats	South Wales West
Alun Davies AM	Welsh Labour	Blaenau Gwent
Janet Finch-Saunders AM	Welsh Conservative Party	Aberconwy
Mike Hedges AM	Welsh Labour	Swansea East
Mark Isherwood AM	Welsh Conservative Party	North Wales
Bethan Jenkins AM	Plaid Cymru	South Wales West
Gwyn R Price AM	Welsh Labour	Islwyn
Gwenda Thomas AM	Welsh Labour	Neath
Lindsay Whittle AM	Plaid Cymru	South Wales East

John Griffiths AM (Welsh Labour, Newport East) attended as a substitute member for Gwenda Thomas AM between February 2015 and March 2016.

Previous members of the Committee:

Committee member	Party	Constituency or Region
Leighton Andrews AM	Welsh Labour	Rhondda
Jocelyn Davies AM	Plaid Cymru	South Wales East
William Graham AM	Welsh Conservative Party	South Wales East
Ann Jones AM	Welsh Labour	Vale of Clwyd
Jenny Rathbone AM	Welsh Labour	Cardiff Central
Ken Skates AM	Welsh Labour	Clwyd South
Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM	Plaid Cymru	Carmarthen East and Dinefwr
Joyce Watson AM	Welsh Labour	Mid and West Wales

Committee remit

The Committee's role is to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account in the following policy areas:

- Housing and housing-related activities
- Homelessness and housing advice
- Affordable housing (including quality)
- Local government and communities
- Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
- Public service improvement
- Equal opportunities
- Domestic violence
- Asylum, immigration and migrant workers
- Community cohesion
- Community safety
- Gypsies and travellers
- Culture
- Welsh language
- Welsh heritage and the historic environment and buildings
- Museums, public libraries and archives
- Arts
- Sport, physical activity and active recreation
- Fire and rescue services
- Civil contingencies
- Broadcasting
- Relevant EU policy matters

At the start of the Fourth Assembly, the Committee's remit also included tourism. This was transferred to the Enterprise and Business Committee in 2014, following a review of committee remits by the Assembly's Business Committee.

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BY THE COMMITTEE

 CONSIDERATION OF 11 LEGISLATIVE
CONSENT MEMORANDA

PRE-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY
OF 1 DRAFT BILL

2 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS ESTABLISHED

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY BREAKDOWN



- LEGISLATION **66%**
- POLICY **25%**
- FINANCIAL SCRUTINY **6%**
- OTHER BUSINESS **3%**
(INCLUDING CONSIDERATION OF LCMS)

ENGAGEMENT

 OPEN MIC
PUBLIC MEETINGS

 STAKEHOLDER
EVENTS

 FOCUS GROUPS

 WEB
CHAT

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Introduction

The remit of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee is very broad, covering a large number of significant policy areas including housing and homelessness, local government, public service improvement, culture, heritage, sport, the Welsh language, equality of opportunity and broadcasting. In planning our work programme for this Assembly, we have sought to ensure that our choice of policy inquiries spanned the breadth of our remit. We were also conscious of the need to be responsive to matters of public interest as and when they arose.

In terms of our legislative work, the Committee has been responsible for the consideration of 10 Assembly Bills; around 30% of the primary legislative output of the Fourth Assembly. This work was concentrated in the second half of this Assembly, with six Bills referred to us since the latter part of 2013.

In order to inform our policy and legislation inquiries, we have sought to maximise the opportunities for evidence-gathering and engagement. In doing this, we have used a number of different methods, including focus groups, surveys, stakeholder events, public meetings and a web-chat. We have also benefitted from the assistance of an expert adviser. In addition to the more traditional reporting method, we have produced a number of different types of outputs aimed at different audiences, including executive summaries, 60-second video reports and, more recently, an 'at a glance' report designed to be viewed on a mobile device.

Over the course of this Assembly, we have received a wealth of evidence, both written and oral, from individuals and organisations. We would like to express our sincere thanks to all those who have taken the time to contribute to our work.

This report is intended to reflect on the Committee's work during the Fourth Assembly. It does not provide an analysis of every inquiry we have undertaken, but instead gives details of a selection of policy and legislation inquiries from across our remit, organised under the following subject area headings:

- Housing;
- Culture, media and sport;
- Communities and equality;
- Local government and public services;
- Welsh language.

We have also identified a number of areas that our successor committee may wish to pick up in the next Assembly.

Fourth Assembly Activity

The work of the Committee can be broadly arranged into three categories— policy scrutiny, legislative scrutiny and financial scrutiny.

Policy scrutiny

During the Fourth Assembly, we undertook 18 policy inquiries, as well as a number of one-off inquiries. These are listed below under subject area headings. We also held a number of general scrutiny sessions with Ministers and Deputy Ministers whose portfolios fell within the remit of the Committee.

Housing

- **The Provision of Affordable Housing, across all tenures in Wales** (May 2012)
- **Home Adaptations** (July 2013)
- **Barriers to Home Building in Wales** (December 2013)
- **The draft Private Rented Sector Code of Practice for Landlords and Letting Agents** (June 2015)

Culture, Media and Sport

- **The Future Outlook for the Media in Wales** (May 2012)
- **Welsh Premier League** (November 2012)
- **Participation in the Arts in Wales** (January 2013)
- **The Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy** (March 2013)
- **Participation Levels in Sport** (March 2014)
- **BBC Charter Review** (March 2016)

Communities and Equality

- **Community Safety in Wales** (December 2011)
- **Disability-related Harassment in Wales** (December 2011)
- **Equality Considerations in the Welsh Government's Budget** (November 2012)
- **The Future of Equality and Human Rights** (August 2013)
- **Human Trafficking** (June 2014)
- **Poverty in Wales – Poverty and Inequality** (October 2015)
- **The Welsh Government's Refreshed Financial Inclusion Strategy** (January 2016)
- **Poverty in Wales: Community-based Approaches to Tackling Poverty** (March 2016)

Local Government and Public Services

- Progress with Local Government Collaboration (December 2013)
- Public Libraries in Wales (July 2014)
- Scrutiny of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's annual report

Welsh Language

- Scrutiny of the Welsh Language Commissioner's annual report
- Scrutiny of the First Minister on his responsibilities for the Welsh Language

Legislative scrutiny

Over the course of this Assembly, we have scrutinised 10 Bills, listed below under subject area headings. Seven of those Bills were introduced by the Welsh Government, two were introduced by individual Assembly Members, and one Bill was the responsibility of the Assembly Commission.

Housing

- Mobile Homes (Wales) Bill
- Housing (Wales) Bill
- Holiday Caravan Sites (Wales) Bill
- Renting Homes (Wales) Bill

Culture, Media and Sport

- Historic Environment (Wales) Bill

Communities and Equality

- Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill

Local Government and Public Services

- Local Government Byelaws (Wales) Bill
- Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Bill
- Local Government (Wales) Bill

Welsh Language

- National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill

We have also considered 11 legislative consent memoranda, and undertaken pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Local Government (Wales) Bill.

Financial scrutiny

We have examined the Welsh Government's expenditure within our remit, both as part of our inquiry work on policy and legislation, and in separate budget and financial scrutiny sessions.

Engagement

In June 2013, we held an event to talk to people about the problems they had experienced when trying to get adaptations made to their homes. This is what they told us:

- the person should be at the centre of the system. They should be more involved in the process - they should have a say in what they want.
 - there should be a register of adapted homes, to save having to pull out adaptations and put them in new properties when people move on.
 - there should be follow up assessments - to check if the work was appropriate and to the right standard.
 - there should be better communication between services (for example local authorities, hospitals and social workers) to ensure each individual is treated fairly and in a reasonable timeframe.
-



Housing

Policy inquiry: Home Adaptations

Purpose of the inquiry

Towards the end of 2012, we began an inquiry into home adaptations. This was intended to be a follow-up to work already completed on home adaptation services in the Third Assembly by our predecessor committee.

We were keen to consider:

- why there were still significant variations in the time taken to deliver aids and adaptations, and
- what more needed to be done to improve home adaptation services in Wales.

Engagement

To inform our work, we talked to service users, to help us understand the issues that really mattered to them. It was clear that, for many people, home adaptations are a lifeline, allowing them to live a full life.

Findings

We reported in July 2013, and found that progress had not been fast enough or consistent enough across Wales. Our report contained 23 recommendations to the Minister, aimed at driving forward improvements to the adaptation system.

Responding to our report, the Minister told us that the Welsh Government would be undertaking a review of adaptation services to address many of the issues that we had raised.

Update since publication of our report

In September 2015, we asked the Minister about progress made in taking forward our recommendations. She told us that there had been some improvement in adaptation services but that people were still waiting too long for adaptations and there was still significant disparity between authorities in terms of waiting times. The Minister had set up a taskforce to look at how the delivery of adaptations could be enhanced. The taskforce was due to report in March 2016.

Matters for the Fifth Assembly

The problems associated with home adaptation services are long-standing and little progress has been made in the last ten years. We believe that our successor committee should continue to pursue this matter with the Welsh Government.

Engagement

On 18 March, we held a stakeholder event to speak to tenants about their experiences of renting properties from council, housing association and private landlords, and find out what they thought about the Welsh Government's proposals.

We also appointed an expert adviser to assist in our consideration of this complex subject area.



Legislation inquiry: Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016

Purpose of the inquiry

The Renting Homes (Wales) Bill was introduced in February 2015 by the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty. The Bill sought to reform the law applying to rented homes in Wales and replaced the majority of existing types of tenancy and licence agreements with two new types of occupation contract.

Findings

Based on the evidence, there were three areas we were particularly concerned about:

- the condition of rental properties;
- the proposals for 16 or 17 year olds to be able to hold an occupation contract; and
- the proposals allowing landlords to exclude someone with a supported standard contract from their home for up to 48 hours without a court order.

These concerns were reflected in our report, published in June 2015.

Update since publication of our report

In light of concerns raised, the Minister brought forward an amendment at Stage 3 to raise the minimum age for an individual to hold an occupation contract from 16 to 18.

Our recommendation to remove the temporary exclusion provisions within supported standard contracts from the Bill was not taken forward. However, the Minister did bring forward an amendment which placed a duty on the Welsh Ministers to issue guidance to which landlords must have regard in deciding to temporarily exclude a contract-holder.

The Minister also strengthened the provisions relating to fitness for human habitation, placing a duty on the Welsh Ministers to prescribe matters and circumstances to which regard must be had when determining whether a dwelling is fit for human habitation.

The Bill received Royal Assent on 18 January 2016.

Matters for the Fifth Assembly

As the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 significantly reformed the law applying to rented homes in Wales, we believe that our successor committee should undertake some form of post-legislative scrutiny to consider the implementation and impact of, and the subordinate legislation emanating from, the Act, particularly with regards to the temporary exclusion provisions within supported standard contracts and the provisions relating to fitness for human habitation.

Engagement

In gathering evidence for the inquiry, the Task and Finish Group:

- issued a call for written evidence;
- held a number of oral evidence sessions with stakeholders;
- held an online discussion with bloggers and representatives of hyperlocal news websites.

This work informed our findings and helped to shape our recommendations to the Minister.



Culture, Media and Sport

Policy inquiry: Future Outlook for the Media in Wales

Purpose of the inquiry

In September 2011, we set up a Task and Finish Group to look at the future outlook for various media platforms in Wales.

Findings

Key recommendations and messages in our report included:

- the need for an independent forum to advise the Welsh Government on media policy, and to keep under review the issue of devolving broadcasting;
- a need for the Welsh Government to strengthen its means of dealing with broadcasting issues and with media organisations; and
- a need for the Welsh Government to strengthen links across departments and with the UK Government with regard to policy in this area.

Responding to the report, the Minister acknowledged our concerns about the lack of plurality in the Welsh media but said that the actions needed to address them were, in the main, under way.

Update since publication of the report

In September 2012, the First Minister set up a Broadcasting Advisory Panel to advise the Welsh Government on how to deliver the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) needs of Wales and its people. Many of the Panel's findings echoed those of our Task and Finish Group.

The Panel recommended that the Welsh Government establish a Public Service Media Council for Wales to lead the debate on the future of PSB content delivery in Wales and to represent the needs of Wales at a UK level. This has not been taken forward to date.

The Committee has held follow-up evidence sessions with Ofcom and broadcasters to discuss their responsibilities and commitments to Wales.

Matters for the Fifth Assembly

More recently, we have undertaken an inquiry into the UK Government's review of the BBC Charter and how it will impact on the BBC's services for Wales. We made a number of recommendations in our report, including:

- that the BBC's statement of public purposes should be strengthened to ensure that the BBC reflects, represents and serves the needs of the UK, its nations, regions and communities;
- that the Welsh Government should establish an independent media forum for Wales to review, monitor and evaluate PSB provision in Wales and provide expert advice to the Welsh Government;
- that the Fifth Assembly establishes a Communications Committee to strengthen the accountability arrangements between the Assembly and the media operating in Wales.

Sport

"Our aim was to look at how opportunities are created for different groups of people in Wales to participate in sport. Of equal importance were the barriers that prevent various groups from doing so. Sport should be something that is available and accessible to all, regardless of age or ability.

We need to ensure that a range of sporting opportunities are provided, both for those who wish to take part in sport within a formal or competitive setting, as well as those who favour recreational activities."

Christine Chapman AM, Chair



Policy inquiry: Participation levels in Sport

Purpose of the inquiry

Widening participation in sport in order to increase physical activity was a key aim of the Welsh Government's *Programme for Government*. We therefore decided, in April 2013, to look at what progress the Welsh Government had made in increasing participation in sport and what opportunities and barriers existed for different groups of people.

Findings

We published our report in March 2014, and made a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government:

- to assess the impact of the reductions in local authority budgets on sport and leisure services on access and affordability;
- to work with local authorities to identify opportunities to increase and improve access to leisure facilities across Wales; and
- to ensure that further work is undertaken to identify ways to encourage girls to participate in sport. This should include research into the types of sport or activities that appeal specifically to girls, and the factors affecting their participation.

Update since the report was published

In July 2013, the Minister said that he accepted that further work would be required across the Welsh Government and the sport sector to bring about the improvements that the Government was seeking. To this end, a Physical Activity Executive Group had been set up by the Welsh Government to "set a new direction to increase levels of physical activity".

In September 2015, the Minister reported that the Group was developing a pan-Wales physical activity plan, which he anticipated would be published in December 2015 (at the time of writing, this plan is not available).

He reported that the Welsh Government had launched a £5 million interest free loan scheme, available to local authorities, to improve local sport and recreation facilities across Wales and encourage more people to get physically active. He also advised that Sport Wales had been commissioned to look at the range of sports facilities across the whole of Wales, and that they were in the process of conducting a mapping exercise to look at what was fit for purpose, what may need to be invested in, and where there were new and emerging sports facilities.

Matters for the Fifth Assembly

It is widely accepted that keeping active is important in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The dangers of obesity and sedentary behaviour and the implications of this for our well-being are well documented, and are all too evident both within Wales and beyond. It has also been shown that young people living unhealthy lifestyles are more likely to be excluded from social activities and education. We believe that our successor committee should keep under review the progress made by the Welsh Government to increase participation in physical activity.

Historic environment

"It is essential that our cultural and architectural heritage is protected for generations to come. We believe that the Historic Environment (Wales) Bill has the potential to contribute to that aim.

However, we heard compelling evidence about the role of historic place names and the unique insight that they provide to Wales' heritage. It was surprising to hear that names that have been around for centuries have no statutory protection and could easily be changed."

Christine Chapman AM, Chair



Legislation inquiry: Historic Environment (Wales) Bill

Purpose of the inquiry

In May 2015, we began scrutinising the Historic Environment (Wales) Bill, introduced by the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism. Generally, the Bill aimed to improve the arrangements for protecting listed buildings and scheduled monuments, and establish an Advisory Panel for the Welsh Historic Environment (the Panel).

Engagement

During our inquiry, we experimented with producing a 60-second video clip of each meeting, picking out one key message from each witness. We published these clips on our webpages as well as sharing them via Twitter.

Findings

We took evidence on the Bill and reported in October 2015. Our report contained a number of recommendations aimed at strengthening the Bill's provisions and ensuring their effective implementation. Key recommendations included:

- that the Deputy Minister considers financial penalties for owners of listed buildings who deliberately allow their buildings to fall into disrepair;
- that the Bill should be amended to include specific reference to historic place-names; and
- that the Bill should be amended to provide a statutory reporting requirement on the Panel.

Update since the report was published

During the Bill's amending stages, the Deputy Minister brought forward amendments to require Welsh Ministers to compile and maintain a list of historic place names in Wales. These amendments were agreed, along with a number of other amendments that gave effect to our recommendations on financial penalties and reports by the Panel.

The Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent in March 2016.

Matters for the Fifth Assembly

During our consideration of the Bill, we discussed whether a single, consolidating Bill relating to the Historic Environment would have been preferable to a Bill that amended the existing law in this area.

In our report, we acknowledged that a consolidation Bill was not practicable, given the stage of the Bill's passage through the Assembly and the limited time available before dissolution. However, we believe that this is a matter that our successor committee may wish to consider, at the appropriate time in the future, as part of a piece of wider post-legislative scrutiny.

Engagement

As part of the first strand of our inquiry, we held focus group discussions with individuals from various organisations across Wales currently dealing with poverty.

The themes for discussion on the day were:

- how effectively the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other government strategies work together;
- the impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people;
- how legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality are co-ordinated and prioritised across the Welsh Government.

We also visited a number of projects around Wales and talked to people about the impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people.



Communities and Equality

Policy inquiry: Poverty in Wales

Purpose of the inquiry

In 2014, we agreed to undertake an inquiry into poverty in Wales. The inquiry was divided into four strands:

- poverty and inequality;
- community-based approaches to tackling poverty;
- the impact of welfare reform on poverty in Wales;
- in-work poverty.

We received evidence on the first two strands, and questioned the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty about the Welsh Government's work to date.

Findings

We reported on the first inquiry and have corresponded with the Minister in relation to the second. There were a number of **key themes** that came out of the evidence on both strands:

- there has been a general lack of progress by the Welsh Government in reducing poverty in Wales. This is despite long-term commitment and investment. **The Welsh Government's approach to tackling poverty deals with the consequences of poverty, rather than addressing its causes;**
- the Welsh Government's poverty reduction programmes are heavily targeted towards specific places, and there is a presumption that the population within these areas is homogenous;
- the Welsh Government needs **more robust data** about people living in poverty so that it can target its resources at those most in need;
- **monitoring and evaluating** the impact and progress of poverty programmes **needs considerable improvement**. The Welsh Government needs to undertake a hard analysis of the effectiveness of its programmes, particularly as poverty levels have remained largely static in Wales for the past 25 years. It also needs to ensure that its targets are appropriate and that there is data available to measure progress against those targets. There would be benefits in the greater use of **results-based accountability** to demonstrate, for example, whether Communities First areas are performing relatively better in socio-economic terms compared to non-Communities First areas;
- there needs to be a **stronger link between economic policy and tackling poverty**, and a better understanding of the low-skilled end of the labour market;
- the Minister has established a number of **advisory groups**, involving different people, for different purposes. There may be merit in **streamlining these arrangements** into a single source of authoritative advice;
- the infrastructure in place to tackle poverty in Wales is comparatively good, but there is a **lack of understanding about poverty and how it affects people**.

Matters for the Fifth Assembly

Poverty in Wales has been, and continues to be, one of the biggest challenges facing successive Welsh Governments. Our work in this Assembly has demonstrated that the current Welsh Government has continued to struggle with this issue, both in terms of its understanding of poverty and how to address its causes effectively.

We believe that the continuing examination of the Welsh Government's approach to tackling poverty in Wales should be a key priority for our successor committee.

In order to fulfil our obligations relating to scrutiny of Assembly legislation, we were unable to consider the final two strands of the poverty inquiry – welfare reform and in-work poverty. We believe that our successor committee should pick these up in the Fifth Assembly.

Legislation inquiry: Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Gender-based Violence (Wales) Act 2015

Purpose of the inquiry

In June 2014, we began our scrutiny of the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill. The purpose of the Bill was to improve arrangements for the prevention of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence and for the protection of victims of such abuse and violence, and to improve support for people affected by such abuse and violence. It also required the Welsh Ministers to appoint a Ministerial Adviser to advise on these issues.

Engagement

Ahead of our formal consideration of the Bill, we held a stakeholder event with representatives from the third sector to familiarise ourselves with the subject area and the issues facing the sector in tackling these forms of abuse and violence. The event gave representatives the opportunity to speak to us directly in an informal setting and to help us identify, at an early stage, issues likely to be raised during the scrutiny process.

Findings

Our report was published in November 2014 and included 12 recommendations to the Minister, four of which resulted in changes being made to the Bill during the amending stages.

Our recommendation:

That the Minister amends the Bill to refer to “Violence Against Women”, rather than Gender-Based Violence.

Outcome:

The Minister brought forward an amendment to introduce a new section to make specific reference to violence against women and girls and to amend the short title to refer to “Violence Against Women”.

Our recommendation:

That the Minister amends the Bill to make provision for compulsory, whole-school, age-appropriate education programmes on healthy relationships.

Outcome:

Although the recommendation was not fully accepted, the Bill was amended to introduce a duty on local authorities to report on how they are addressing gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence within their education institutions, including in schools.

Our recommendation:

That the Minister amends the Bill to provide for a duty on Welsh Ministers and local authorities to consult with service providers, the police, victims and any other relevant groups in the design of the national and local strategies.

Outcome:

The Minister brought forward amendments to include provision for consultation on the national and local strategies.

Our recommendation:

That the Minister amends the Bill to change the title of the role of Ministerial Adviser to reflect its arms-length position.

Outcome:

The Minister brought forward a series of amendments to change the name of Ministerial Adviser to National Adviser.

Update since the report was published

The Bill received Royal Assent on 29 April 2015.

In September 2015, the Minister told us that a National Advisor had been appointed and that almost 100 independent domestic violence advocates were receiving training. He also told us that the first National Strategy would be published in November 2016, in line with the deadline provided in the Act.

Matters for the Fifth Assembly

Given the significance of this legislation, we believe that our successor should review the progress of implementing the provisions within the Act as part of its ongoing scrutiny work, including the effectiveness of the regional approach to service delivery. This work could include consideration of the draft National Strategy, which we anticipate will be published early in the Fifth Assembly.

Local Government and Public Services

Legislation inquiry: Local Government (Wales) Act 2015

Purpose of the inquiry

In February 2015, we began our scrutiny of the Local Government (Wales) Bill, which was the first of two Bills that, if enacted, would lead to significant structural changes to local government in Wales. The Bill made provision for the voluntary merger of local authorities and for preparatory work to be undertaken ahead of the main merger programme.

Findings

As part of our consideration of the general principles of the Bill, we looked at the wider issue of local government reform and the Welsh Government's proposal to merge existing authorities. We reported in October 2015 and asked the Minister to look at whether more fundamental changes to authority boundaries would be a better option and lead to a more sustainable structure for local government.

We also made recommendations in a number of areas where we believed the Bill's provisions needed to be strengthened or where we thought that further clarity was required.

Update since the report was published

The Bill was passed by the Assembly on 20 October 2015 and received Royal Assent on 25 November 2015.

Following on from our scrutiny of the Bill, we undertook pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Local Government (Wales) Bill, which puts in place provision to complete the merger programme and includes two alternative proposals (maps) for the number of new authorities (one map of eight authorities and the other of nine authorities). It also sets out how the new authorities will operate.

We reported in February 2016, outlining our concerns about:

- the lack of progress made between and across local and national government on the final merger map;
- the ability of authorities to meet the costs of mergers and the potential financial impact of council tax and pay harmonisation;
- the appropriateness of placing statutory duties on councillors; and
- the competency requirements for “community councils with competence”.

Matters for the Fifth Assembly

It will, of course, be for our successor to undertake more detailed scrutiny of the final Bill in the Fifth Assembly. We hope that our report, and any subsequent response from the Minister, will help inform its work. We believe that scrutiny of the financial implications of the Bill should be subject to in-depth scrutiny, and that this would best be undertaken by the Finance Committee's successor.

Welsh Language

"As Wales's principal democratic institution, the National Assembly has a duty to enable all citizens and Assembly Members to be informed about, and contribute fully to, the democratic process through the medium of Welsh and English."

National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill, Explanatory Memorandum



Welsh Language

Within our remit, we also have responsibility for Welsh language policy matters. Our activities in this area have included:

- consideration of the **National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill**;
- membership of the selection panel for the appointment of the Welsh Language Commissioner in 2012;
- scrutiny of the Welsh Language Commissioner's annual reports and implementation of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011;
- regular scrutiny of the First Minister on his responsibilities relating to the Welsh language, including the Welsh Government's budget priorities in this area.

Following our consideration of the Welsh Government's draft budget proposals for 2016-17 in January 2016, we wrote to the First Minister expressing concern that funding for the Welsh language had, again, been reduced in the government's draft budget.

We have taken an interest in whether the Welsh Government's *Bwrw Mlaen* strategy, introduced in 2014 as a response to the disappointing 2011 Census figures on the number of Welsh speakers, is delivering its aims.

We also highlighted concerns about the impact that the cuts to the Welsh Language Commissioner's budget would have on her ability to deliver her statutory responsibilities under the Welsh Language Measure.

Matters for the Fifth Assembly

The Welsh Government has a clear responsibility both to maintain vitality in, and encourage the growth of, the Welsh language.

Given the general downward trend in Welsh Government funding for the Welsh language over the course of this Assembly, we believe that our successor committee should continue to monitor whether the next government's policies, strategies and budgets are delivering what is needed to ensure the Welsh language thrives.

It may want to monitor the on-going funding arrangements for the Welsh Language Commissioner's office, particularly as the next two years will see the roll out of the next rounds of Welsh language standards by the Commissioner.

Our successor committee may also wish to look at whether the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 is fit for purpose.

Looking to the Fifth Assembly

Inquiries for next time

In looking back at our work over the last five years, we have identified a small selection of issues that we believe would benefit from scrutiny by our successor:

Housing

– **Home adaptations**

The problems associated with home adaptation services are long-standing and little progress has been made in the last ten years. Our successor committee may wish to continue to pursue this matter with the Welsh Government.

– **Housing (Wales) Act 2014**

The Act introduced a new system of landlord and agent licensing, as well as changing homelessness legislation. Our successor committee may wish to undertake a post-legislative inquiry to evaluate the implementation and impact of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

– **Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016**

Our successor committee may wish to undertake a post-legislative inquiry into the implementation and impact of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016.

Culture, Media and Sport

– **Media and communications**

We believe that the Fifth Assembly should establish a Communications Committee to strengthen the accountability arrangements between the Assembly and the media operating in Wales.

– **Sport and physical activity**

Our successor committee may wish to keep under review the progress made by the Welsh Government to increase participation in physical activity.

– **Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016**

Subject to the Bill receiving Royal Assent, our successor committee may wish to undertake a post-legislative inquiry into the implementation and impact of the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Communities and Equality

– **Poverty**

We believe that examining the impact of poverty in Wales should be a key priority for our successor committee. In particular, it may wish to consider the impact of welfare reform and in-work poverty on poverty in Wales.

– **Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Gender-based Violence (Wales) Act 2015**

Our successor committee may wish to undertake a post-legislative inquiry of the implementation of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Gender-based Violence (Wales) Act 2015.

Local Government

– Local government reform

Our successor committee may wish to scrutinise any local government reform programme, if brought forward by the next Welsh Government. This could include scrutiny of the proposed structures and functions of any reorganised local authorities, as well as the financial implications of any reorganisation programme.

Welsh language

– Funding for the Welsh language and Welsh Language Commissioner

Our successor committee may wish to monitor the funding priorities of the next Welsh Government in relation to the Welsh language, and the office of the Welsh Language Commissioner.

– Welsh language standards

Our successor committee may wish to review the roll-out of the next rounds of Welsh language standards, as well as undertaking post-legislative scrutiny of the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011.