

National Assembly for Wales
Europe Matters

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The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account.

Introduction

I am delighted to welcome you to the 24th issue of Europe Matters, our regular update on the work of the National Assembly for Wales on European issues.

It's been busy times over the last few months on Europe-related issues, and I am delighted to see a high level of engagement across our Committees in this area of importance to Wales. We count no less than 40 of the 47 AMs being directly involved in EU-related work in our Committees, and at least three plenary debates on Europe during the autumn and this current term.

Early days, perhaps, however, very positive evidence that mainstreaming can increase engagement, and I am pleased to note the enthusiasm, reported to me at a recent informal meeting of Committee Chairs, with which Committees have endorsed this new approach.

The **Environment and Sustainability Committee's** two Task and Finish Groups have both completed the first phase of their work on the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy. They are planning a visit to Brussels in the coming months to discuss the key findings from this work, which will include meetings with the Welsh MEPs, the European Commission, the UK Permanent Representation to the EU, and the European Parliament's rapporteurs on these legislative proposals.

The **Enterprise and Business Committee** has also completed the first phase of its work on the future EU Structural Funds, which largely gives the European Commission a 'thumbs up' for the draft legislative package it published in October. This Committee is set to undertake a linked inquiry on Horizon 2020, the EU Framework for research and innovation, focusing in particular on how Wales can most effectively create synergies with EU Structural Funds to strengthen Welsh participation in the highly competitive EU research programme.



The Enterprise and Business Committee's Task and Finish Group on Procurement continues its inquiry into the draft EU Directives, and has also launched a new inquiry on international connectivity of our airports and ports, which is of direct relevance to the Connecting Europe Facility, for which proposals were published in October.

The **Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee** considered its first subsidiarity issue at its meeting on 20 February, which has come out of the public procurement inquiry in Enterprise and Business Committee, and we have informed the House of Lords and House of Commons of the potential concerns so that these can be taken into account in their deliberations on the draft EU Directives.

Health and Social Care Committee will consider different ownership models in the EU in its inquiry into residential care for elderly people, whilst Children and Young People will look at best practice at EU level in its inquiry on adoption in Wales. Finally, Finance Committee is due to complete its inquiry into the effectiveness of the current EU Structural Funds in Wales this term.

Mark Drakeford AM, Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee fed all of this information into the recent meeting of the EC(UK)Forum on 23 January, which was hosted by the Scottish Parliament and which brings together the relevant Chairs from the House of Lords, House of Commons, Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish Parliament, dealing with European issues. We also prepared a detailed response to the **House of Lords Review of the European Commission's Work Programme for 2012**, outlining areas of potential future work on EU issues by the Assembly's Committees.

I would like to put on record my thanks to Dr Gerhard Stahl, the Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions for allowing us such regular use of their excellent video conference facilities, which has enabled us in the last few months to have evidence sessions with officials from the European Commission as well as informal sessions with our Brussels Office. This has been invaluable.

I am also very pleased to note the number of structured visits to Brussels and elsewhere by AMs, including **William Graham AM** and **Antoinette Sandbach AM** to Brussels in December, **Ieuan Wyn Jones AM** and **Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM** to Brussels on 14–15 February, and **Christine Chapman AM**, **Julie Morgan AM** and **Keith Davies AM** to Finland on 15–16 February.

We have received a number of high profile visitors to the Assembly in the last few months. I was delighted to welcome the Danish Ambassador to the UK, Her Excellence Anne Hedensted Steffensen to the Assembly on 10 January, to discuss the Danish priorities for their six-month EU Presidency with Chairs of Committees.

We look forward to hosting a visit by the Flemish Parliament on St David's Day, the first such visit of our fellow members of the CALRE network of European regional parliaments and assemblies.

Rosemary Butler AM
Presiding Officer

EU related topics in the Assembly's Committees

Environment and Sustainability Committee

- **Task and Finish Group inquiry into the Reform of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP):** on 30 January, letters setting out the Group's initial findings were issued to the Welsh Government, the European Commission, and the rapporteurs in the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions. Jim Paice MP, the UK Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, is appearing before the Group on 15 March.
- **Task and Finish Group inquiry into the Reform of Common Fisheries Policy (CFP):** the Group took evidence from the European Commission's Director General Maritime and Fisheries on 18 January. It is planning to issue letters to the Welsh Government, the European Commission, and the rapporteurs in the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions in early March.

Enterprise and Business Committee

- **Draft legislative proposals for EU Structural Funds 2014–2020:** the Committee held evidence sessions with Welsh stakeholders from higher education, local government, voluntary sector and business on 11 January and the Deputy Minister on 19 January. The Committee published the report of its inquiry on 13 February.
- **Procurement Task and Finish Group inquiry into influencing the Modernisation of European Procurement policy:** throughout February the group continues to hold private informal discussions with key Welsh stakeholders, the Welsh Government and UK Government officials on the possible implications for Wales of the EU Draft Directives. The Group has highlighted a potential concern regarding transposition of the directives in Wales and subsidiarity which it has alerted to Welsh Ministers, and to the House of Lords/House of Commons European Committees. The Group will present the full findings from this inquiry to the Enterprise and Business Committee, before making any recommendations to the Welsh Government and/or UK Government, as appropriate.
- **Town centre regeneration:** the Committee published its report on 25 January. The Welsh Government's response to the 21 recommendations is expected towards the end of March, and a Plenary debate will be held on 28 March.
- **Inquiry into international connectivity through Welsh ports and airports:** the Committee has launched the inquiry and is calling for written evidence to be submitted to the Clerk by 29 February. The Committee will take oral evidence during March, including a concurrent (joint) meeting in Cardiff with the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee.
- **Horizon 2020:** The Committee will be holding a short inquiry into the Horizon 2020 proposals, with two evidence sessions scheduled for 28 March and 26 April.

Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee

- **Subsidiarity monitoring:** lead responsibility for consideration of subsidiarity issues relating to all new legislative proposals coming out of the EU having relevance to the devolved competences of the Assembly (in accordance with Protocol Subsidiarity of the Treaty of Lisbon). The Committee considered a potential subsidiarity concern on the draft EU Public Procurement Directives at its meeting on 20 February, which has come out of the work by the Task and Finish Group (referred to above).

Finance Committee

- **Effectiveness of European Structural Funding in Wales 2007–2013:** oral evidence sessions held in the Spring term, with the Committee taking evidence from the European Commission, Welsh Government and representatives from the third and private sectors, social enterprises, local government, Further Education and Higher Education. Committee expects to publish their findings in May 2012.

Children and Young People Committee

- **Inquiry into adoption:** The Committee launched a call for evidence for this new inquiry on 9 December which closed on 3 February. Oral evidence sessions are planned up to the summer. Following the EU update session of 1 December, where Members expressed an interest in looking at EU best practice and comparative information from other European countries, this inquiry may include a session or background information on adoption practices in the EU and/or beyond.

Health and Social Care Committee

- **EU update:** on 25 January members discussed possible future work on EU related matters following the EU update of 8 December. The Committee agreed to incorporate an EU dimension to their inquiry into residential care for elderly people, focusing in particular on ownership models in other European countries (including the Netherlands and Germany).

External activities of Members on Assembly business

- On 19–20 December **William Graham AM** and **Antoinette Sandbach AM** visited Brussels for a series of meetings with European Commission officials, UKREP, and EU networks, on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, EU Structural Funds, Horizon 2020, and impact of EU policies on small businesses.
- On 31 January **Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM** was in Brussels for a meeting of the Natural Resources Commission of the Committee of the Regions, which considered a draft report on the proposals for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.
- On 12–13 February **Christine Chapman AM**, **Julie Morgan AM** and **Keith Davies AM** visited Helsinki for a fact-finding visit looking at how the ban on corporal punishment of children is being enforced in Finland.
- On 14–15 February **Ieuan Wyn Jones AM** and **Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM** visited Brussels for a series of meetings on agriculture, EU Structural Funds, Horizon 2020 and EU research and innovation policy.
- On 15–16 February **Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM** attended the plenary session of the Committee of the Regions in Brussels.

International and other VIPs visiting the Senedd

- On 9 December the **Deputy Presiding Officer, David Melding AM** attended a conference in Brussels organised by the Flemish Parliament. The theme of the conference was ‘Federalism and regionalism, each time another story’.
- On 9 January the **Danish Ambassador, Mrs Anne Hedensted Steffensen** visited the Assembly to mark the beginning of Denmark’s Presidency of the council of the EU and to meet with the Presiding Officers, the First Minister, other AMs and EU stakeholders in Wales. On 10 January the Ambassador gave evidence to the Chairs of Committees on Denmark’s priorities for their six-month EU Presidency.
- On 1 March a delegation from the Flemish Parliament, led by the **Speaker Jan Peumans** will visit the Assembly to learn more about the Devolution process in the UK and the priorities of the Assembly.
- On 6 March **Sir Alan Haselhurst**, the CPA Chair, will visit the Assembly for a series of meetings with the CPA Branch Chair, Executive Committee and a private meeting with the Presiding Officer.
- On 15 March the **Singapore High Commissioner, Mr T Jasudasen** will visit the Assembly for a series of meetings and a private meeting with the Presiding Officer.
- On 21 March the **Ukraine Ambassador, Mr Ünal Çeviköz** will visit the Assembly for a series of meetings and a private meeting with the Presiding Officer.

Links

- [National Assembly for Wales homepage](#)
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