

The progress of the Welsh Assembly Government's legislative programme

25 September 2007

Carwyn Jones, Counsel General and Leader of the House

In June the First Minister announced the Assembly Government's intention to bring forward 6 Legislative Competence Orders, or LCOs, aimed at securing powers for the Assembly to legislate on particular policy areas, together with 3 Assembly Measures. This statement provides a progress report on that initial programme of legislation in advance of the First Minister's statement on the Assembly Government's strategic and legislative programme, which he is intending to make in October.

We have made substantial progress. Before the summer recess, three LCOs and two Assembly Measures were published.

With regards the three Orders that have already been brought forward; the first is on Additional Learning Needs which will give the Assembly power to strengthen requirements in this area and respond to calls from both the previous Assembly and the Children's Commissioner for Wales to improve the rights of children with additional learning needs, the Order was sent to Parliament on 26 July for pre-legislative scrutiny. Assembly scrutiny of the proposed Order has already begun.

The Welsh Affairs Committee will commence its scrutiny of the Additional Learning Needs LCO when Parliament resumes at the start of October. As with all subsequent LCOs, it is expected that the findings of the Welsh Affairs Committee will help inform the Assembly consideration. The Business Committee has agreed that the Assembly committee should report by 23 November.

The second LCO, published on 18 June, relates to Environmental Protection and Waste Management. Improving the local environment, increasing recycling, improving waste management and controlling pollution are key concerns of this Government and of people in Wales, making this too a fitting early subject for legislation by this Assembly. Evidence gathering has commenced and the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing attended the Committee earlier today in order to provide evidence.

The final LCO published before the summer recess related to Vulnerable Children. The powers proposed in this Order will be key in delivering our commitment to reduce child poverty and in improving the lives of vulnerable children by putting a greater emphasis on support for families, to prevent situations arising where children need to be taken into care. Pre-legislative scrutiny of this order is getting underway, with the committee expected to report in the New Year.

Turning to the other three LCOs which the First Minister referred to in his June statement; the next two LCOs, which are due to be presented to the Assembly concern Domiciliary Care and Affordable Housing. Again, these will enable the Welsh Assembly Government to deliver key commitments in the One Wales programme. Access to affordable housing is a fundamental issue for people in many parts of Wales. The Order on this topic will enable the Assembly to legislate to help maintain the stock of housing for rent in areas of housing pressure, as part of the strategy for tackling this issue. The domiciliary care order will enable the Assembly to legislate to create a more level playing field in relation to charges for home care. Both these items of legislation are currently being discussed with the UK Government and I hope that agreement on the text of the orders can be reached shortly. It is therefore our intention that both these LCOs will be brought forward to you this autumn.

The final Order relates to the Welsh Language. This LCO is following a slightly longer timeframe and as you will appreciate this is an important issue that we need to get right. Nonetheless, we are in the process of developing this commitment and we should be in a position to bring forward a draft LCO in the Spring of 2008.

Now turning to the three Measures which have already been announced; the first of these is the NHS Redress Measure, which was introduced into the Assembly on 2 July. Without wishing to pre-empt in any way the scrutiny by the "Stage One" Measure Committee, I believe that this first Assembly Measure has been generally welcomed. I am glad that there is continuing cross-party engagement in developing arrangements to enable anyone who has unfortunately suffered as a result of NHS treatment to secure appropriate redress. The debate on the general principles of the Measure will take place in the New Year.

The second Measure that has been published is the Learner Travel Measure. This Measure was issued for consultation on 26 June with a closing date of 28 September. We will of course need to consider very carefully the issues raised during the consultation and reflect on whether changes are needed as a result. The current intention is for this Measure to be formally introduced into the Assembly in December 2007.

The final item of legislation referred to in the First Minister's June statement is the 14-19 Learning Pathways Measure. This is a genuinely groundbreaking approach, giving every learner in Wales an entitlement to learning provision from a wide choice of high quality academic and vocational options, together with learning and personal support. This Measure is currently being drafted. and will underpin the implementation of Learning Pathways for all 14-19 year old learners in Wales I look forward to schools, colleges, employers, training providers, sector skills councils, local authorities, voluntary bodies and all the other organisations with an interest in this area giving us their comments on the proposals early in the new year.

We have made substantial progress in bringing forward legislation to enable the Welsh Assembly Government to deliver its policies for the people of

Wales. At the same time, we recognise the need to move forward in a consultative way in order to ensure that the legislation itself is robust, clear and responsive to people's needs.