



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Improving the accessibility of Welsh law**

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Transition**

The coronavirus pandemic has led to a perhaps unprecedented focus on the law as people's lives have been subject to exceptional legal restrictions. As a Government we are more conscious than ever of the need to draft laws that are clear and published effectively. We have made over 190 items of subordinate legislation to deal with a wide ranging and pervasive set of circumstances. Just as importantly, we have sought to help people understand the law with a range of explanatory material.

We have ensured that all of the subordinate legislation that we have made has been published to a dedicated part of the GOV.WALES website, and linked it to focussed guidance aimed at specific stakeholder groups. That guidance has sought to ensure that individuals, businesses and organisations are aware of their responsibilities and the requirements upon them. We have made extensive efforts to ensure the guidance is updated as the legislation has changed, and we have made sure that up-to-date versions of the key main restrictions Regulations and the international travel Regulations have been available, and in both languages. More generally we have sought to ensure that simple, yet legally accurate, messages are conveyed in our communications.

Helping people understand the law systematically in this way breaks new ground. But unfortunately it is an exception rather than the norm. Whilst the amount of time and resources needed to help explain the coronavirus restrictions has been significant, it has highlighted how more accessible law can be achieved even in the most difficult circumstances, and I want to ensure that more of this type of work is done in "normal" times. This work makes a difference as it helps people to understand their rights and obligations. Meanwhile failing to do this risks criminalising individuals unnecessarily, undermines our policy intentions, and can even undermine the rule of law itself.

We as the Senedd fully understand this, and I am grateful to Members for their support and continuing interest in the Government's work to improve the accessibility of Welsh law. Most notably of course we have passed Legislation (Wales) Act 2019, and it will be for the

next Government to bring forward the first formal programme of activity to make Welsh law more accessible under that Act

As Counsel General I have been clear about the type of projects we need to focus on, and about the time and resource it will take. This Government has already committed to two consolidation Bills and work is already under way on these: a consolidation of historic environment legislation and the simplification and modernisation of planning law. And I believe that further consolidation projects should focus on areas of law where individuals' rights, obligations and freedoms are affected the most.

Consolidation is not the only way that we can improve accessibility, and in line with the intentions set out in *The Future of Welsh Law* (a consultation undertaken at the end of 2019) we also have three projects underway to:

- develop a model to classify legislation by subject matter, which will provide a structure for future work (and the organisation of the new Codes of Welsh Law) and a method by which users can locate and use legislation;
- improve and expand the explanatory material available on our Law Wales website, and here the lessons learnt from our work making the coronavirus legislation available and understandable has significantly informed the approach to be taken in future;
- work with The National Archives to further improve the legislation.gov.uk website so that users can search Welsh law by subject, and access up to date versions of legislation in the Welsh language.

Members will understand that progress with these projects have been affected by the diversion of resources to respond to the pandemic, but a renewed focus is being brought to them which I believe will yield positive outcomes soon.

In tumultuous times it is perhaps too easy to overlook some of the less high profile, yet still fundamental, responsibilities that we as lawmakers have; and I trust that the next Senedd, and the next Government, will continue to appreciate that this is important work that needs to continue.