

6. WHERE WE LIVE

Housing

6.1 The Welsh Assembly Government published "*Better Homes for People in Wales*" in 2001, the first national housing strategy for Wales. It sets out a clear vision for housing in Wales, embracing the Assembly's key themes of equality of opportunity, sustainable development and social inclusion. The vision states that "*all households in Wales shall have the opportunity to live in good quality homes.*" The strategy's "Action Plan" records progress towards delivering the aims, objectives and targets set out in Better Homes.

6.2 To tackle the problems of the housing stock condition, the Assembly Government is committed to bringing all Welsh social housing stock up to the new '*Welsh Housing Quality Standard*' by 2012. This standard is in keeping with people's expectations of the quality and features of their homes in the 21st Century.

Where we are

6.3 Care & Repair services are provided on an all-Wales basis to enable older and disabled people to carry out improvements to their homes. There are Care & Repair agencies situated in each local authority. The service provided is wide-ranging and includes practical support within the private sector renewal process, management of building work and advice on reputable builders, with particular emphasis on the caring side of the service.

What we are doing

6.4 The Welsh Assembly Government is:

- Providing financial support of £1.36 million for Care and Repair agencies in Wales from 2002-03 in order to establish continuity and their effective operation;
- Increasing the support to Care and Repair substantially from 2003-04 to £3.2 million; and

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- Continuing to provide funding for the Rapid Response Adaptations Programme, which was introduced in July 2002 to support older and disabled people and provides an immediate response to specific needs in their own homes.

Fuel Poverty

6.5 A household is in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain satisfactory heating, more than 10% of the household income (including Housing Benefit or Income Support for Mortgage Interest) is spent on all household fuel use.

Where we are today

6.6 It is estimated that 220,000 households in Wales fall into this category by lacking basic insulation and/or heating in their homes.

What we are doing

6.7 The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) provides grant assistance, for insulation and heating measures to vulnerable people claiming benefits. In 2002-03 this totals £11.085 million and is aimed at providing assistance to some 17,000 households in Wales.

Homelessness

6.8 Homelessness is one of the most dramatic, and often visible, forms of social exclusion. Rough sleeping is, though, only the "tip of the iceberg". The Homelessness Commission defined a homeless person very broadly, as "anyone who lacks accommodation or where the tenure is not secure". The Commission emphasised that homelessness is not solely a housing issue requiring housing solutions, but has many deep rooted and wide ranging causes and consequences.

Where we are today

6.9 The Assembly has identified the need to tackle homelessness as one of the key priorities within its national housing strategy. It has extended the categories of persons classed as being in priority need and to whom local housing authorities therefore owe a statutory duty. The Assembly has issued a draft national homelessness strategy for consultation, and is supporting local authorities in the development of local homelessness strategies under the Homelessness Act 2002. These strategies are to be in place by September 2003.

What we are doing

6.10 Building on the work and recommendations of the Homelessness Commission, the Assembly is developing its national homelessness strategy,

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setting out a raft of measures which will be taken at national and local level to alleviate and prevent homelessness. A revised draft of the Code of Guidance to local authorities on allocations and homelessness has been issued for consultation. A network of local homelessness strategy officers has been established across Wales to facilitate sharing of experiences and ideas.

6.12 The Assembly has increased grants to fund local projects for homeless people. In 2003-04 the homelessness and rooflessness programme for voluntary organisations offering support to homeless people will be increased to £4.9 million. This will focus on advice, outreach and preventative support through projects prioritised by local authorities.

Supported Housing

6.13 "Supporting People" is a new funding and policy framework for delivering accommodation-based support to vulnerable people, in different types of accommodation and across all tenures. It puts on a secure and legal footing the funding that was previously delivered in an ad hoc way through Housing Benefit. In addition it amalgamates a diverse range of revenue funding streams and, as a result of the development process in advance of implementation, has led to significant growth in the level of available resources in Wales.

Where we are today

6.14 Supporting People will commence in Wales, as in other parts of the United Kingdom, on 1st April 2003.

What we are doing

6.15 The Assembly Government has initiated a series of measures with local authorities to prepare for the new funding regime from April 2003, including the provision of detailed guidance on its implications.

6.16 A Network of all local authority lead officers for Supporting People has been facilitated and meets on a regular basis. Commitments to continuity of funding have been given to providers and extensive work is currently underway to establish the funding levels of every supported housing project in Wales to ensure that this commitment is met.

Black, Minority Ethnic Housing

6.17 Early findings from Assembly Government research suggest that some minority ethnic groups in Wales are disadvantaged in very important aspects of their housing. For example:

- people of Black African and Pakistani heritage are more likely than any other people in Wales to be living in overcrowded conditions;

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- black, minority ethnic (BME) communities are known to be concentrated in poor quality private housing. In particular, some parts of Wales have populations of South Asian home-owners living in run down housing in areas with poor facilities; and
- in the private rented sector, there is evidence that people of Black African and Chinese heritage are still reliant on this tenure in substantial numbers. This is a concern as successive house condition surveys show that Wales' worst stock is owned by private landlords.

Where we are today

6.18 In September 2002 the Assembly Government formally launched the *BME Housing Action Plan for Wales*. The Plan is designed to ensure that race and equality issues are properly mainstreamed in the housing policies of the Assembly Government and Wales's landlords, in combination with initiatives aimed specifically at BME groups.

6.19 The aim of the Action Plan is: "*To ensure that clear directives and targets are set for social landlords and other providers of housing, to ensure that discrimination and disadvantage is eliminated across BME communities living in Wales.*" This aim is underpinned by 16 objectives. To meet these objectives the Action Plan contains a comprehensive, prioritised set of actions. For each of these there is a clear indication of the lead organisation and timescale for implementation. Each action has targets and monitoring / review mechanisms.

What we are doing

6.20 The Assembly Government is taking action to mainstream BME issues in all aspects of its work. For example, recent guidance on private sector housing renewal and homelessness and social housing allocation has taken account of BME dimension. Priorities over the next year are to:

- include in the revised Registered Social Landlord (RSLs) Regulatory Framework a requirement that RSLs promote race equality and tackle racial discrimination; and
- revise Local Authority performance indicators against the BME Housing Action Plan for Wales.

6.21 Further, the Assembly Government is providing direct support to social landlords through:

- funding for local authorities and RSLs to produce BME Housing Strategies;
- funding for innovative and good practice BME housing projects;

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- research evidence that can be used at the local level;
- the production of a "social housing and race" training package; and
- a National BME Housing Conference.

Tenant involvement

6.22 The rationale for Assembly Government policy on tenant participation is based on the generally accepted belief that a higher degree of tenant participation in housing will lead to improvements in the quality of management. The Assembly is committed to:

- improving the contribution, and widening the involvement, of tenants to complement and reinforce the application of the Wales Programme for Improvement / Best Value to housing;

- delivering more efficient housing services with better quality decisions and sustainable improvements in council and registered social landlord (RSL) performance which will benefit everyone; and
- placing tenants at the heart of the management of housing services in the future.

Where we are today

6.23 A best value regime for housing associations has been introduced, with an emphasis on customer involvement in the improvement of services. All social landlords are required to develop tenant participation compacts (TPCs) establishing standards and expectations for joint working and tenant participation.

What we are doing

6.24 A best value support officer is being funded in the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations to support associations in their work on best value. The coverage and effectiveness of TPCs across Wales is being monitored and will be reviewed from Autumn 2003.

6.25 A Tenant Empowerment Grant Scheme has been introduced for council and housing association tenants who want to explore future options for the management and control of their homes and other services.

6.26 Core funding is provided to the Tenant Participation Advisory Service and the Welsh Tenants Federation. Both of these organisations work to promote tenant participation and involvement in the management of their housing. Funding is also provided to the National Tenants Resource Centre to deliver capacity building training and small grants to Welsh tenants.

Transport

6.27 In Wales, around 30% of households do not own a car. Public and community transport needs to be improved to enhance everyone's accessibility to essential services and facilities. In urban areas we have an added objective of helping people to make more of their journeys by public transport, rather than private car.

6.28 Public transport in rural areas is perceived to be limited, and tends to result in those without access to a car being more isolated, socially excluded and more limited in their work, health, education and social opportunities.

6.29 It is likely that a significant proportion of those not in work would have better opportunities to take up further education, training or employment if they had better access to an improved public transport service.

Where we are today

6.30 The Transport Framework for Wales was published in November 2001 and reiterated the importance of improving accessibility and mobility for everyone, particularly those without access to a car.

6.31 In its report published in December 2001 reviewing public transport in Wales, the Assembly's Environment, Planning and Transport Committee made several recommendations. These included that a quality kite mark be developed for bus services, initially, and extended subsequently to other modes; that free concessionary travel by pensioners and disabled people should be extended to community transport, and taxis on a limited basis; that an overarching all-Wales passenger group be established to cover all public transport modes; that community transport be developed as part of the mainstream provision; and that long-distance coach services within Wales be improved.

6.32 Free travel by pensioners and disabled people on local bus services has been guaranteed since April 2002, and the Assembly is providing more than £24million to local authorities in 2002-03 to support the new scheme.

What we are doing

6.33 From April 2003 free concessionary travel by pensioners and disabled people on local bus services will be extended to include men aged 60-64. The scheme is improving access to bus services by pensioners and disabled people, ending isolation and social exclusion. There is a beneficial impact on the wider population too, as early evidence shows it has improved the provision of services by increased demand in many places.

6.34 The Welsh Transport Forum - chaired by the Minister for Environment - has accepted that

concessionary travel by older and disabled people should, as funding allows, be extended to community transport. An advisory group is being established to advise the Minister about the practical and financial implications of such a measure. It is scheduled to report in June 2003.

6.35 A Community Transport Review Group has presented its report to the Welsh Transport Forum. The report contains 75 recommendations for the Assembly, local government, the community transport and voluntary sectors, and the health, education and social services sectors, and was launched by the Minister for Environment on 21 October 2002. A Stakeholders Group is being established including representatives of all these sectors to take forward and implement the recommendations. Its first task will be to prioritise the recommendations and establish a timescale for their delivery. The Group is expected to meet for the first time early in 2003.

6.36 More than £300,000 is being provided over three years to enable the Community Transport Association to develop and expand its advice network throughout Wales. Around £40,000 over three years is funding the post of an officer of the National Federation of Bus Users in Wales, to ensure passengers' voices are heard.

6.37 A Public Transport Unit (PTU) has been established within the Transport Directorate to drive forward policy and technical work that is needed to implement our commitments. The Minister for Environment has announced her intention to establish an advisory non-executive body to keep an overview across public transport activity and to provide expertise to the PTU. This body will include representatives of the key stakeholders, who will work in collaboration with the Assembly and experts to get the best from public transport resources.

6.38 The Minister for Environment recently launched a consultation exercise in respect of the Welsh Assembly Government's funding of local bus services in Wales.

6.39 A long-distance bus and coach group has been established to review the provision of services in this sector. It has commissioned research undertaken by consultants and expects to report early in 2003.

6.40 Bringing together the former Bus Subsidy and Welsh Rural (community) Transport Grant (WRTG) schemes, the Local Transport Services Grant scheme in 2003-04 will allocate more than £8.5m to local authorities to enable them to subsidise socially-necessary bus services, and to support community transport projects.

6.41 Local authorities are being encouraged to use Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) as an essential part of the strategy to make bus services more attractive and responsive to customers. By tying Transport Grant to the QBP

process the Minister for Environment will lever-in contributions from bus operators to make the use of Transport Grant more effective. It is hoped to provide revenue support in certain cases alongside capital support to pump prime some of these initiatives. The working group on Quality Bus Partnerships and the kitemark is looking to develop a Welsh version of the recently published British Standards Institute Quality Standard for public transport (BS EN 13816).

6.42 The Assembly is working with Crime Concern, local authorities, bus operators and the police to introduce a Secure Bus Scheme in Wales. The Scheme is based on the Secure Stations Scheme for the railways. It addresses design and management issues and will accredit bus stations where passengers are found to feel safe and where crime is below a certain level.

6.43 The Assembly has asked bidders for the Wales and Borders franchise to provide suggestions for implementing free rail travel for elderly and disabled people.

6.44 The traveline multi-modal public transport information system has already received more than £1million from the Assembly, and subject to annual reviews, will receive up to £250,000 annually until 2006.

Safe Routes to School Initiative

6.45 Under the Safe Routes to School Initiative, projects demonstrate active co-operation between schools, parents, teachers and local authorities to determine the approach to reduce car journeys to schools. In addition, the initiative should also result in safer communities, especially those in deprived areas.

6.46 As well as tackling the congestion caused by the school run, the safe routes initiative is important for the promotion of healthier lifestyles for children and for helping those families who do not have ready access to private car. By showing children from an early age that alternatives to the car such as walking and cycling are attractive and fun, they can be encouraged to develop healthy, independent travel habits for the future.

6.47 It is especially important that Safe Routes to School projects should contribute alongside the Road Safety Grant and local authorities' own resources in developing safer communities.

Where we are today

6.48 The Safe Routes to School initiative was introduced in 1999-2000. To date a total of £10.9 million has been allocated directly to local authorities across Wales.

What we are doing

6.49 In 2002-03 £2.7 million was allocated to 22 projects covering approximately 80 schools. An additional £3.3 million has recently been allocated to the initiative to support a further 26 projects covering approximately 40 schools across Wales.

Road Safety

6.50 The Assembly has adopted the specific UK target of a 40% reduction in total numbers and a 50% reduction in the number of children killed and seriously injured by the year 2010.

Where we are today

6.51 A special road safety grant has been made available to local authorities since 2000-01 to provide support for the delivery of local safety strategies, with special focus on the safety needs of vulnerable road users. The following funding has been allocated - £3.662 million in 2000-01; £3.038 million in 2001-02; £5.078 million in 2002-03; and £6.746 million for 2003-04.

What we are doing

6.52 In January 2003 the Assembly published the first Road Safety Strategy for Wales. The Strategy aims to reduce real and perceived danger for all road and footway users in Wales in order to promote safe and sustainable access. Improving safety for the more socially disadvantaged members of society will be a priority.

Access to culture and leisure services

6.53 The Welsh Assembly Government's culture strategy, *Creative Future - Cymru Greadigol*, identifies key commitments such as the need to ensure that all people - men and women, young and old, able-bodied and disabled, as well as from the diverse cultural strands of our society - are able to participate and share in the cultural life of Wales. The strategy has the dual purpose of making cultural life accessible to all and opening doors to learning and expressing new skills - artistic, technical, managerial and physical.

Where we are today

6.54 The Minister for Culture, Sport and Welsh Language launched the strategy in February 2002. Nearly one year on, substantial progress has been made with most targets being completed or good progress being made.

6.55 Cymru'n Creu, the Assembly's Cultural Forum, is monitoring and assisting with the implementation of the eight detailed action plans within the strategy.

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What we are doing

6.56 The Assembly's culture policy is holistic and dedicated to promoting and supporting standards, accessibility and involvement at the professional, amateur and community levels throughout Wales.

6.57 The action plans which are being developed within the framework of the strategy include:

- Ensuring that schools and colleges provide opportunities through the National Curriculum for pupils and students to explore, develop and express their own talent, imagination and creativity;
- Ensuring that all ASPBs play their role in making cultural activity more accessible and interesting to people from all backgrounds;
- Ensuring that cultural activity at the community level is supported and developed and that professional arts organisations have an active commitment to engaging people from diverse backgrounds;
- Working to gain the widest popular support for the arts and encouraging people to see and get involved in different art forms;
- Ensuring that funding from central and local government sources is used to ensure that the professional arts and amateur/community organisations develop complementary relationships;
- Re-invigorating amateur and semi-professional community arts organisations in areas which have suffered from the decline of heavy industry;
- Encouraging local authorities to invest in cultural activities. All local authorities are expected to include cultural issues as a key component in their community plans;
- Supporting the University of Glamorgan in establishing a Chair of Community Arts; and
- Establishing agreements with all the national remit arts companies (Welsh National

Opera, BBC NOW, Clwyd Theatr Cymru etc) to undertake outreach work in schools and communities.

6.58 Additionally, a new Culture Fund has been established for 2003-04 to take forward the priorities identified in the strategy.

Access to National Museums and Galleries and Libraries

59. The National Museums and Galleries of Wales (NMGW) has 8 sites

which displays Wales' cultural, historical, artistic and industrial history. They include the Welsh Slate Museum in Llanberis, Big Pit Mining Museum in Blaenavon, the Museum of the Welsh Woollen Industry at Dre-fach Felindre in Carmarthenshire, the Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagans and the National Museum and Gallery in Cardiff.

60. Libraries have a long tradition of serving the whole community. They

provide a unique, free, local resource offering a non-threatening environment, which provides a sense of place and identity, access to training and confidence-building for the whole community. Libraries act as key community-based, customer friendly institutions providing assisted and easy access to

information to ensure that citizens can make informed decisions. They are

also important in the continuing growth of a bilingual culture, having a crucial

role in the distribution and dissemination of printed and electronic information

in the Welsh language.

Where we are today

61. A major step forward has been taken to enable people from all

backgrounds, irrespective of income levels, to enjoy the treasures of our heritage, by abolishing entry charges to the sites of the NMGW throughout Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government provided additional funding to the National Museum to enable it to offer free admission for all visitors. The new policy has proved a remarkable success to date with the increase in visitor numbers being maintained at 63% more than before the policy was introduced. Visitor exit surveys indicate that the percentage of visitors described as being skilled, semi-skilled and manual workers, as well as people dependent on state benefits, have gone up from 31% to 37% since

free entry was introduced.

6.62 Service standards have been produced for public library authorities, in particular to assist disadvantaged groups and lifelong learners. These also cover the provision of a minimum of children's books; maximum distance or travelling time from home to the nearest library; and conducting separate regular user satisfaction surveys for children.

What we are doing

6.63 NMGW is undertaking research into the reasons why people choose not to visit museums, especially young people. Initial results point to a greater need to mainstream social inclusion throughout the organisation and NMGW is planning how to implement this.

6.64 NMGW has a planned programme of events and exhibitions celebrating diversity including *Let Paul Robeson Sing*, *Creating Durga: Hindu Art of Image Making*, *Black History Month*, and a Multicultural Wales Festival..

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6.65 In terms of libraries, the Assembly is:

- Monitoring on an annual basis each local library authority's library plan, showing how they will meet the standards by 2005;

- Ensuring that, under the People's ICT Network in Public Libraries, which introduces free internet access in libraries throughout Wales, nobody is excluded from obtaining ICT literacy and gaining access to networked content; and
- Through a mapping exercise, researching and disseminating how public libraries can be more focused in promoting social inclusion and celebrate good practice.

Crime Reduction

6.66 The Welsh Assembly Government has taken crime reduction as one of its major overarching cross cutting themes and one of the key policy aims of the Assembly is to create safer communities.

6.67 The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed on the police and the local authority a joint statutory responsibility to prepare and implement a local strategy and action plan to reduce crime and disorder. As a result of the 1998 Act, 22 Community Safety Partnerships, based on unitary authority areas, have been established and the Welsh Assembly Government's Community Safety Unit supports the Partnerships and their strategies. The Unit also manages Home Office and Assembly crime reduction funding streams which amount to over £27 million since 1999.

6.68 Community Safety Partnerships develop and implement cross-cutting crime and disorder strategies which involve all agencies and communities. The Partnerships published their first plans in April 1999 and reviewed them in 2001. Each of the 22 Partnerships has consulted on its priorities until 2005 and revised strategies were in place for April 2003 – a number of the Partnerships have broadened out their strategic planning to include social inclusion and people's quality of life. Generally, the Partnerships are encouraged to establish a close synergy between their work and other community strategies and there are several examples of best practice emerging across Wales.

Where we are today

6.69 The Community Safety Partnerships also run Home Office and Assembly funded crime reduction projects many of which focus on areas of greatest social deprivation. These include protecting homes against burglary, action against bogus callers, and funding Neighbourhood Wardens. Two funding streams have seen resources going exclusively to Communities First areas - £470,000 over the last 2 years for small retailers in deprived areas and

£1.4 million for CCTV. The Assembly has also agreed to continue funding two important

projects to prevent the development of criminality amongst children aged 4 to 11 in two of the most deprived wards in Wales; and £1.006 million has been set aside for these 'On Track' projects in 2002-03.

What we are doing

6.70 Through 3 funding streams the Crime Reduction Unit is:

- Funding capacity building through the Home Office Partnership Development Fund of £1.188 million in 2002-03. Support is given for development and training; crime and disorder audits; and all-Wales training events and conferences;
- Supporting the Partnerships through the Home Office Safer Communities Initiative, a new £1.1 million fund to fight crime in Wales. The focus is on locally determined projects to complement the new 3 year local crime reduction Strategies; and
- Supporting the Partnerships in tackling drug related crime and in disrupting drug markets under the Home Office **Communities Against Drugs** initiative. In 2002-03 £2.78 million has been shared between the Welsh Partnerships according to population and levels of crime. Packages of interventions have been developed by the Partnerships working closely with their local Drugs and Alcohol Teams.

6.71 In addition, the Assembly has recently agreed a new Safer Communities Fund, worth over £11 million over three years beginning in 2003 to work with the Partnerships, local communities and the police to tackle crime and disorder. The Fund will support a range of activities linked to the safer community agenda, including support to tackle the supply of Class A drugs into South Wales.

Post Offices

6.72 The important role of Post Offices in regenerating communities remains at the heart of the Assembly Government's social inclusion agenda.

6.73 Post Offices can often sustain communities, which have access to few other shops. They act as an anchor for the last shops in some areas as well as providing a service in their own right. For many communities, especially the older residents, the closure or decline of their local Post Office can have a negative impact on their quality of life. Post Offices not only provide postal services they often act as providers of advice and help, a place to access cash or simply somewhere people can meet.

Where we are today

6.74 There has been a steady but slowing decline in the number of Post Offices over the last few years. In Wales there were around 1445 Post Offices in July 2000 dropping to around 1373 in December 2002. The decline has been less marked in urban as opposed to rural areas. The Post Office network is still the largest retail network in Europe and it has not seen significant rationalisation in the same way as comparable businesses such as banks and building societies.

What we are doing

6.75 Through influence and close liaison with the Department of Trade and Industry, the Government Department responsible for Post Office policy, the Assembly Government continues to ensure that UK policy takes account of Welsh needs. The current measures in place designed to support the UK network are:

- **£450m** to be provided by Government to maintain the rural network up to 2006. The money will underpin the continued provision of rural post offices and maintain front line services in local communities;
- **A £2 million fund** established to support one-off set-up costs of community Post Offices where the sub-postmaster is leaving; and
- **Universal Banking Services**, due to come on stream in 2003. There are two elements to this new service. First, the banks will make their basic bank accounts accessible at Post Offices. Account holders will be able to withdraw their benefits in cash at Post Offices. Second, for people who are unable or unwilling to open a basic bank account, there will be an account, available only through Post Offices, to allow benefits claimants to access their benefits in cash at Post Offices using a Post Office based card instead of an order book. The intention is to provide a stepping stone to banks' basic accounts and to financial inclusion.

6.76 In addition, in Wales the Assembly Government recently launched the **Post Office Development Fund**. This £2.5 million Fund supports the retention and development of Post Office services in the most deprived and isolated communities in Wales. Post Offices in Wales will be the first in the UK to benefit from such targeted support.

Retail Outlets

6.77 In the document "*Putting Wales First*", the Assembly expressed its intention to take

measures to protect rural retail outlets from closure. It was agreed that the problem needed to be scoped and a range of possible solutions identified.

Where we are today

6.78 The Wales Co-operative Centre was commissioned by the Assembly Government to scope the needs of rural retail outlets in 2001. The final report's findings and recommendations were considered by the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee in December 2002. The scope and type of small businesses in rural areas that will benefit from rate relief has been extended with effect from April 2002.

What we are doing

6.79 On 23rd October 2002, as part of the Rural Community Action proposals, the Assembly committed £750,000 a year to fund provision of specialist advice and to create a small project fund to help develop and maintain rural retail outlets. In addition, capital grants will be available for retail-related projects, such as renovation and conversion of premises. Funding will be available from April 2003.

The Environment

6.80 The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to improving the physical and social environment of Wales in partnership with key agencies and organisations, including local authorities. It is particularly concerned to regenerate the more deprived areas of Wales and currently aims to do this through the Local Regeneration Fund and support to organisations such as the Groundwork Trust and the Coalfields Regeneration Trust.

Where we are today

6.81 The Local Regeneration Fund (LRF) funds a wide variety of schemes that contribute to wider regeneration objectives. However, in all cases the promotion of social inclusion is at the heart of the assessment process. LRF will continue to target social inclusion particularly within the most deprived communities in Wales by allocating funding to projects which directly contribute to alleviating poverty and social disadvantage.

6.82 Whilst the Groundwork movement has historically been concerned with environmental improvement involving local communities, social inclusion has always been at the heart of its activities. The Groundwork Trusts in Wales are active in up to 70% of the 100 most deprived wards in Wales. The promotion of social inclusion remains a significant aim of national Groundwork initiatives such as the Greencare community environmental network, as well as

locally developed strategies and projects.

6.83 The Coalfield Regeneration Trust was established to promote the economic and social regeneration of areas affected by the decline of the coal mining industry following the publication of the Coalfield Task Force Report.

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What we are doing

6.84 The Local Authority Non Match LRF is currently being reviewed in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association. The review will inform the scope and administration of the programme in 2003-04 and beyond.

6.85 In November 2002 a new funding programme was introduced. The all-Wales Community Facilities and Activities Programme (CFAP) is designed to provide funds for projects aimed at the provision or improvement of community facilities, including faith based facilities open to the wider community and to support or improve access to activities aimed at area regeneration.

6.86 The Welsh Assembly Government provided £634,000 to support the core activities of the Groundwork movement in Wales during 2002-2003. Groundwork Wales, the umbrella organisation, is now a member of the Communities First Support Network funded by the Assembly.

6.87 The Welsh Assembly Government provided £1.552 million in 2002-2003 to support of the activities of the Coalfield Regeneration Trust during the course of the year. The Trust administers a grant programme that targets the regeneration of deprived communities in former coalfield areas. It administers grants within specified priority areas which target projects that contribute to social inclusion.

Access to the Countryside

6.88 Implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 creates opportunity to improve access to the countryside for minority and socially disadvantaged groups.

Where we are today

6.89 Local Access Forums have been established by local authorities and national park authorities for their areas. They have encouraged representatives from disadvantaged and minority groups to apply for membership of the forums - as required in the Assembly approved regulations.

6.90 The Assembly has issued statutory guidance to local authorities on the preparation of rights of way improvement plans. These will be the prime means by which local authorities should identify, prioritise and plan for improvements to their local rights of way network - to make better provisions for walkers, cyclists, equestrians, people with mobility problems and for local communities generally.

What we are doing

6.91 Regulations and guidance being drafted by the Assembly take into account, wherever possible, the needs of disadvantaged groups.

National Parks

6.92 As well as protecting and improving the landscape, National Park Authorities have a statutory duty to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Parks by the public. In doing so, they are also required to seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the Park.

Where we are today

6.93 The Assembly has provided the National Parks with an additional £1 million in direct grant for 2003-04, an increase of 11.72%, to enable them to pursue their statutory purposes.

What we are doing

6.94 The National Park Authorities have implemented various initiatives that impact on social inclusion. There are sustainable transport schemes, such as the Beacons Bus and Pembrokeshire Puffin Shuttle, which allow affordable and convenient access to the Park without the need for a car, and initiatives such as a community composting scheme that involves the whole community, including school children, in recycling household waste.

Environment Wales

6.95 Environment Wales is an Assembly funded grant scheme, administered by the Prince's Trust – Cymru and delivered through a partnership of seven voluntary sector environmental organisations. Within the scheme's overall aim to achieve sustainable improvements to the local environment, there is a strong emphasis on community involvement and inclusion of all

sections of society.

Where we are today

6.96 The Environment Wales scheme is currently worth £727,000 a year. The money funds a wide range of environmental projects across the whole of Wales, in both rural and urban settings. Projects range from recycling initiatives, including furniture recycling, through biodiversity and environmental education, to community gardens and environmental arts.

What we are doing

6.97 Environment Wales offered financial support to approximately 80 projects in 2002-03. The scheme also funds a network of development officers

offering practical advice and assistance to these projects and to many others. A diverse range of projects are funded, many of which directly promote the Assembly's social inclusion aims, such as the Radnor Support project, which aims to establish meaningful employment, work experience and training opportunities for local adults with learning difficulties. The Tree Nursery involves people in realistic community based settings in order to develop their horticultural and social skills.

6.98 Environment Wales has recently been awarded an increase in funding of 13.75% from next April which will ensure even greater support for innovative sustainable development projects designed to improve the environment of local communities across Wales

Sustainable Development Fund

6.99 In order to develop practical methods of implementing the theory of sustainable development, and translating the idea into tangible models, the Assembly has introduced the Environment Development Fund. Priority is given to projects demonstrating community involvement or those that are community led.

Where we are today

6.100 The Environment Development Fund, which has been operating since June 2000, provides £1 million per year for three years, to support projects in the 3 National Parks and 5 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The scheme's objectives are to explore ways of pursuing the principles of sustainability and of breaking down barriers that can act as obstacles to sustainability; to develop models for the sustainable management of the countryside that could be applied more widely in Wales; and to generate greater awareness and understanding of sustainability.

What we are doing

6.101 By April 2003, the scheme will have supported over 200 projects, which would not have taken place without the help of the Fund. It has contributed to social inclusion by funding projects such as those providing alternatives to the car for reaching and exploring National Parks, projects improving access to facilities, work to recruit and train new volunteers, particularly young people, and the refurbishment of community facilities in an environmentally sensitive way. The scheme was reviewed in 2002 and has been extended for a further 3 years.

Rural Wales

6.102 The rural economy includes the key industries of agriculture, the agri-food sector and tourism. In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government is working to promote the development of mainstream economic activity in rural areas and tackle issues of social exclusion and access to services in the countryside.

Where we are today

6.103 The Rural Partnership for Wales continues to fully represent the Welsh rural economy and act as a vehicle for developing rural policy. The remit of the Partnership will be extended to include a steering group overseeing six thematic working groups examining a range of issues important to rural Wales.

6.104 The Rural Recovery Plan provided £65 million, of which £60 million was new money, to help the rural economy recover from the effects of foot and mouth disease. The allocations in 2002-03 include:

- £2 million to the Wales Tourist Board for the integrated tourism and leisure scheme 'Adfywio';
- £0.15 million allocated to the Wales Council for Voluntary Action to fund the Rural Stress Information Network; and
- £7.2 million in total to the Welsh Development Agency to undertake a

range of activities in rural Wales.

Rural Community Action programme

6.105 One of the Assembly Government's main priorities for rural Wales is to create:

"Better communities - communities where people want to live, work and play, where there is access to economic opportunity and reward, a pleasant and safe environment and active and inclusive social community networks."

Where we are today

6.106 A new *Rural Community Action* programme was launched on 26 November 2002 to support rural community regeneration and help strengthen living and working in rural Wales.

What we are doing

6.107 £3 million a year will be available over three years in an overall programme for rural community action, to include:

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- £2 million to projects run by local organisations to help build regeneration capacity in local rural communities;
- £250,000 secured in 2003-2004 financial year for a scheme to develop Entrepreneurial Skills for Young People in Rural Areas. This will rise to £750,000 in 2005; and
- £300,000 a year will be available to fund a new Rural Observatory to monitor long-term trends and changes in the countryside and provide solutions to issues

identified.

6.108 The first element of this is a grant scheme to support area based *Rural Community Action Partnerships* across rural Wales to address community capacity building needs within an integrated strategic approach across a range of economic, social, environmental, cultural and other sectors. Funding for approved Development Strategies for Partnerships within the nine predominantly rural local authorities of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Monmouthshire will be available from April 1st 2003.

6.109 The second element is a grant scheme to provide support to projects put forward by the communities themselves. Each approved Partnership will be asked to submit initial bids for projects that the community/communities they serve want to undertake. This process will start off a rolling programme of project bids which will need to have a close synergy with the Community Strategies that local authorities are producing.

6.110 In a separate phase, Partnerships in the rural areas of Flintshire, Wrexham and the Vale of Glamorgan are expected to submit bids in early 2003 and will access funding under Article 33 provisions of the Rural Development Plan for Wales. Article 33 is concerned with the specific measures of provision of basic services for the rural economy and population; renovation and development of villages; protection and conservation of the rural heritage; and encouragement of tourist and craft activities. These measures will bring some £8.7 million of funding to the eligible areas. To maximise the effectiveness of the European and Assembly funding being made available, a strategic approach is being taken through the use of development partnerships for each local authority area concerned.

Agriculture

Where we are today

6.111 "***Farming for the Future: a new direction for farming in Wales***" was published in November 2001. The document sets out the Assembly Government's strategic vision for the future sustainability of Welsh agriculture. The strategy is distinctively Welsh and puts the emphasis on quality and the importance of family farms. At its heart is a vision for a sustainable industry

which moves away from traditional production subsidies to support for producers to adapt, and which:

- produces high quality, value added branded products;

- is responsive to consumer needs;
- works collaboratively in the food chain;
- is environmentally responsible; and
- forms an integral part of the wider rural economy.

6.112 The wide-ranging programme of action to help farming adapt will be implemented in partnership with the industry and other key partners, and progress will be monitored against a set of indicators outlined in the strategy document. The 52 action points represent a mix of immediate actions and longer term work on restructuring, diversification, marketing, developing new skills and removing regulatory burdens. All actions are either underway or complete.

6.113 Since 1999, Wales has had its own **agri-food strategy** with a distinctive Welsh approach which includes funding to develop and improve processing and marketing. The strategy already covers dairy, lamb and beef and the organic sectors, and additional action plans are being developed for horticulture, woodland development and biomass, and fisheries and aquaculture.

6.114 The action plans are based on a common vision – again highlighted in "*Farming for the Future*" - linking the primary produce of Welsh agriculture to profitable markets, with much more added-value food processing and recognising the need to create a sustainable, competitive and diverse food and farming industry vital for a thriving and sustainable rural economy. The action plans are taken forward and monitored by the Agri-Food Partnership in conjunction with the WDA Food Directorate and the Assembly. Funding for developments in the agri-food sector is channelled through processing and marketing grants.

6.115 The **Farming Connect programme** was launched in September 2001. The programme aims to provide a comprehensive approach across Wales to support and advice for farmers to help them to adapt to new market realities and adopt more efficient methods. The programme currently comprises:

- A Farming Connect telephone helpline and Service Centre;
- A network of around 30 locally-based Farming Connect facilitators;
- Free, on-farm business planning advice (from a choice of around 100 trained and accredited consultants) leading to the completion of a Farm Business Development Plan (FBDP);

- Capital grants - available on completion of a valid FBDDP - in the form of Farm Improvement Grant, Farm Enterprise Grant (WAG), Farm Tourism Grant (WTB) and Timber Processing Grant (FC);
- 3 Development Centres (Beef & Sheep, Dairy and Organic) linked to a network of 30 Demonstration Farms and a Grassland and Forage Technology Transfer programme delivered through the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research;
- A network of 3 Machinery Rings; and
- Access to bespoke training in ICT.

What we are doing

6.116 The current ***Processing and Marketing Grant scheme***, which aims to improve the agricultural processing and marketing infrastructure in Wales and encourage added-value, was launched by the WDA in May 2001 and uses funds available under the 2000-2006 EU structural funds arrangements, including the Objective 1 programme and the Rural Development Plan.

By the end of 2002, 61 projects had been approved, with grant of £16.86 million committed on a total investment of £49.75 million. Over £5 million grant had been paid.

6.117 For the red meat sector, a new company ***Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales*** is being established to provide a clear strategic focus for the beef, lamb and pork sectors in Wales. This addresses one of the key action points in "*Farming for the Future*" and involves the Welsh Development Agency, the Meat and Livestock Commission Wales and Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Ltd, together with the farming unions, coming together to establish a powerful single body to take overall responsibility for all market development and promotional activity for red meat in Wales.

6.118 Initial demand for the ***Farming Connect*** services was substantially higher than had been anticipated and there were some delays in providing services to farmers. New, more efficient and more flexible arrangements have therefore been introduced for the delivery of the business advice service to speed up the process. In addition the contract with the Farming Connect consultants is also being revised to encourage more consultants to take on the work and to ensure that more of the consultants' time is devoted to Farming Connect.

Outward migration

6.119 The outward migration of young people from communities in rural Wales has been a source of major concern for some time, as recognised in a number of the Assembly's key policy documents, including *Plan for Wales 2001*, *A Winning Wales* and *Planning Policy Wales*.

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Where we are today

6.120 An Assembly funded research project was carried out by Newidïem, in partnership with Cardiff University and Menter a Busnes, which sought to establish a clear evidential basis for them and most importantly will set out an Action Plan to increase the opportunities for young people to stay in, or return to rural Wales.

What we are doing

6.121 The study is strongly evidence-based and takes account of the views of young people and others representing their interests. The Assembly Government is currently considering an Action Plan based on the project's findings.

Rural housing

6.122 Many housing issues facing Wales's rural communities mirror those of valleys and urban communities. It is recognised that in-migration and the purchase of second homes have influenced communities in some rural and coastal tourist areas. Right to Buy sales have also reduced the numbers of social housing stock.

Where we are today

6.123 In January 2001, the Welsh Assembly Government introduced greater flexibility within the Homebuy scheme in rural areas, through a new 50% equity threshold. Additional resources of £1.5 million were provided in 2001-02, which enabled 150 Homebuy purchases in rural areas.

What we are doing

6.124 In 2002-03 the total allocation for Homebuy in rural areas is £5 million. This is expected to produce about 250 Homebuy loans in rural areas. In addition the introduction of a more generous Social Housing Grant in August 2001 and greater flexibility in the need to comply with the new "Design Quality Standards" has improved access to home ownership and rented accommodation in rural areas.

6.125 The Assembly introduced an Order in February 2003 extending the number of rural areas where restrictions may apply to re-sales of properties purchased under the Right to Buy. The purpose of the Order is to assist local people in accessing affordable housing in rural areas.