

7. MAKING YOUR VOICE COUNT

Consultation and participation

1. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to consulting widely and openly on proposed policies and legislation. This commitment rests on a firm legislative foundation within the Government of Wales Act 1998 and its obligations under Standing Orders. Many of the functions transferred to the Assembly under that Act also carry a statutory requirement of consultation.

2. The Welsh Assembly Government is also committed to greater participation in the policy-making process for all sections of society, to create rounded and inclusive policies that fit the distinctive needs of Wales.

Where we are today

- The Assembly supports the involvement of Local Government, the Voluntary Sector and Business in its work through the three established Partnership Councils;
- Funky Dragon is taking forward the work started by Llais Ifanc in providing a forum for children and young people to get involved in civil society. Young people from Wales travelled with the First Minister to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, where they were able to provide the perspective of young people in discussions on the Sustainable Development agenda. The Welsh Assembly Government is continuing to provide capacity funding for under-represented groups. It has also established the Wales Social Partners Unit to provide a link between the Assembly and the its social partners;

- Consult Wales, a suite of IT tools that will help conserve organisational capacity and make consultation procedures more responsive, is ready for launch. It is the most progressive system of its kind in the UK, and possibly Europe;
- A study into effective partnership working is set to report to Cabinet and its findings will

be incorporated into policy guidance; and

- Information on becoming a local authority councillor, targeted at under-represented groups, has been produced and disseminated.

What we are doing

7.3 The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to:

- issuing guidance on policy-making on its Internet site. The three Partnership Councils have had an opportunity to comment on the guidance, which should ease engagement in policy-making and make it more transparent;
- incorporating the findings of the partnership study into policy guidance, in order to make partnership working more effective;
- reviewing consultation procedures; an evaluation of Consult Wales has been set up; and
- exploring, with the Welsh Local Government Association, further means of widening participation in local government and making council chambers more representative of their local communities.

Community Planning

4. Community planning is a way of bringing organisations and communities

together to agree what they would like their areas to be like in the future and what has to be done to achieve the vision. It covers each local authority area and is facilitated by the local authority.

5. This process will lead to a community strategy and an action plan – but it is not

the piece of paper that is important. What matters is the process of getting different

organisations (public, private and voluntary) to work together to produce the vision

and to continuously review it. Community planning, if it is to be effective, has to

involve local communities, including communities of interest, in agreeing what the priorities and key actions should be.

Where we are today

7.6 Strategies are required to be in place before the next local elections in 2004. The community planning process is now underway in every local authority area in Wales. Most local authorities have identified their key partners and have established community strategy partnerships, to take forward the production of the strategies and

95

make sure that the vision is translated into action. They have also identified a wider range of partners who will contribute to the strategy preparation process and are looking at ways of obtaining views from different parts of the community. The voluntary sector will have a key role to play and county voluntary councils will work with local authorities and others to develop the community strategy.

What we are doing

7.7 The Assembly:

- Has produced guidance on preparing community strategies. It is directed towards local authorities, who have the legal duty to prepare the strategies, and others involved in the process. The guidance will be reviewed in 2003;
- Has required Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies' to play a full part in preparing and implementing community strategies;
- Has established a community strategies working group which includes representatives of the voluntary sector, business, local government and the Assembly's sponsored bodies to oversee progress in preparing the strategies, encourage the dissemination of good practices and advise on support needs;
- Has held three seminars over the last year, in Wrexham, Carmarthen and Barry, to promote community planning. There will be a national seminar in the Summer to review progress; and
- Will shortly be setting up a dedicated community strategies website. This will

provide information on community planning, including contact points and links to other websites.

The Voluntary Sector

Voluntary Sector Scheme and Volunteering

7.8 The Voluntary Sector Scheme was adopted by the Assembly on 5th July 2000. It builds on the success of the Compact and paves the way for the Assembly's long-term working relationship with the voluntary sector here in Wales. Now in its third year of operation the Voluntary Sector Scheme has drawn interest from several world Governments including Canada and some European countries.

Where we are today

7.9 Under the Scheme the Assembly has established the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council. This puts the voluntary sector on to an equal footing with local government and business in their partnership arrangements with the Assembly Government. The Partnership Council is chaired by the Assembly's Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt AM. It meets at least twice in any calendar

year and comprises 11 Assembly Members (reflecting party balance),

96

representatives of 21 identified categories in the voluntary sector and representatives of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

7.10 The Scheme also requires twice yearly meetings between Assembly Government Ministers and representatives of the relevant voluntary sector networks to look at ways in which the Assembly can address its concerns. At least one of these meetings is tied in with the Assembly's Budget Planning Round and focuses on funding issues. The meetings also provide an opportunity for voluntary sector organisations to outline how they can support the Assembly in meeting the objectives set out in the Assembly Government's Plan for Wales.

7.11 The Assembly Government also commissioned two research projects to establish a baseline of information relating to voluntary activity and volunteering. The studies reported on volunteering within the adult population and the population of Wales under 18 years of age.

The research considered various aspects of volunteering including motivation, barriers/reasons which prevent individuals becoming involved and the types of volunteering activities being undertaken. This baseline information will be used both as a measure of activity and provide a focus for future policy development.

7.12 The Voluntary Sector Scheme itself will be reviewed in 2003.

What we are doing

7.13 The Assembly Government continues to support a number of initiatives including:

- **The Volunteering in Wales Fund** (the promotion of volunteering in Wales, particularly involving unemployed people, to undertake volunteering activities in the fields of health and social welfare). £815,000 has been made available for 2002-03.

- **Wales: The Active Community** (aiming to increase the involvement of the public in community life through promoting a greater degree of voluntary activity within the community); supports projects which address at least one of the four main themes:
 - improving the infrastructure;
 - capacity building;
 - media; and
 - promotion and research.

£1.652 million has been made available for 2002-03.

- **Millennium Volunteers** - now in its fifth year. An evaluation of the programme has been completed and the Assembly Government is in discussion with the voluntary sector in Wales on the programme's future. £300,000 has been made available for 2002-03.

97

- **Local Voluntary Services Scheme** - aims to ensure an effective support structure for voluntary organisations in all fields of activity in each local authority area. The scheme provides funding for the 19 county voluntary councils (CVCs) in Wales. £2.655 million has been made available for 2002-03.

- **Support for Voluntary Intermediary Services Scheme** - allocates funds to voluntary organisations of a 'generalist' or 'intermediary' nature covering the whole of Wales i.e.

those which provide a wide range of services to the voluntary sector at large, or to significant parts of it. £884,000 has been made available for 2002-03.

7.14 The Assembly Government will shortly be publishing an updated Guide to Voluntary Sector Grants. This document will act as a compendium of grant information and will be eventually expanded to include grant funding available from Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies.

7.15 To tie in with this the Assembly Government is, with the advice of the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council, in the process of revising its Code of Practice on Funding the Voluntary Sector. A 3 year funding cycle is in place with a programme of bi-annual reviews agreed with the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council.

7.16 The Assembly Government has drawn up a voluntary code of principles which UK voluntary organisations working in Wales will be invited to adopt. It provides for the appropriate sharing of information and a commitment to early consultation with funders, stakeholders and service users in advance of any decision to significantly alter services for people in Wales. The draft code was approved by the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council on 18th October 2002 and has been issued for consultation.

7.17 In 2003, the Assembly Government will publish a new strategy for the voluntary sector in Wales. The strategy will set out long-term vision for the voluntary and community sector and its relationship with the Assembly Government. It will be drawn up in partnership and will identify strategic objectives for the sector, including its potential contribution to promoting social inclusion.

Using the Welsh Language

7.18 The Welsh Language Act 1993 provides the statutory basis for the equal treatment of Welsh and English in public life. Public bodies are obliged to produce Welsh Language Schemes setting out how they will, as far as is reasonably practicable and appropriate in the circumstances, treat the Welsh and English language on the basis of equality in providing services to the public in Wales. The purpose of these Schemes is to enable the public to use either Welsh or English when receiving public services.

7.19 Iaith Pawb, the Assembly Government's national action plan for the Welsh language includes a wide range of initiatives to increase the use of the language, particularly at a community level, amongst young people and in the private sector.

Where we are today

7.20 The 2001 Census has shown a reversal in the long-term decline of the Welsh language. The National Assembly has set out, in *laith Pawb*, the following targets to be achieved by 2011:

- Increase the percentage of people in Wales able to speak Welsh by 5%;
- Arrest the decline in the number of communities where Welsh is spoken by over 70% of the population;
- Increase the percentage of children receiving Welsh medium pre-school education;
- Increase the percentage of families where Welsh is the principal language of conversation/communication between adults and children; and
- Enable more services by public, private and voluntary organisations to be delivered through the medium of Welsh.

7.21 The Welsh Language Board has approved a total of 208 public sector Language Schemes. It also grant aids *Mentrau laith* which are community based organisations with a remit to promote the language locally and to maximise opportunities for Welsh speakers to use the language, both socially and in community life. 23 *Menter* and 6 local language action plans have been established.

What we are doing

7.22 The Assembly Government has allocated an additional £26.8 million support for the Welsh language between 2003-06. This comprises increased funding for the Welsh Language Board to continue its work as the national planning body for Wales and to play a central role in delivering the Assembly Government's Action Plan, *laith Pawb*; additional funding for measures within the formal education structure; additional funding for the Welsh Books Council and a the establishment of a new national Welsh language theatre company.

7.23 The Assembly Government has a rolling programme of subordinate legislation which aims to extend the number of organisations which can be designated as public bodies for the purposes of the Welsh Language Act.

7.24 The pioneering family language transfer project **Twf** is playing a vital role in encouraging parents who are fluent in Welsh to transfer the language to their children.

7.25 A *Fforwm laith* (Language Forum) will be established to share ideas and best practice.

7.26 *laith Pawb* recognises the importance of enabling individuals within disadvantaged communities to continue to live and work there if they so wish. The Assembly Government has

a range of measures designed to facilitate access to housing to ensure the sustainability of communities.

7.27 The Assembly Government will work to ensure that we maximise the

99

opportunities for our young people and teenagers to use the language in everyday leisure and social situations. The number of Mentrau Iaith and local Language Action Plans are being increased and will focus on drawing together local people and local organisations to facilitate the use of Welsh in the community. Urdd Gobaith Cymru has received additional funding to allow it to develop sports and youth projects through the medium of Welsh in different parts of Wales, including disadvantaged areas.

7.28 Older people are one of the key groups of Welsh speakers that cannot be treated or cared for effectively in many instances unless it is in their first language. The Assembly Government's Strategy for Older People in Wales is addressing this issue.

7.29 The Welsh Language Act 1993 provides the statutory basis for the equal treatment of Welsh and English in public life. Public bodies are obliged to produce Welsh Language Schemes setting out how they will, as far as is reasonably practicable and appropriate in the circumstances, treat the Welsh and English language on the basis of equality in providing services to the public in Wales. The purpose of these schemes is to enable the public to use either Welsh or English when receiving public services.

