

**THIRD
ANNUAL REPORT
ON
SOCIAL INCLUSION
IN WALES**

Communities Directorate March 2003

Welsh Assembly Government

Creating Strong Communities

- A sustainable, inclusive and equal Wales should be a place where young people want to live and work, where the gap between the poorest and wealthiest in society has been reduced, where a revitalised local government speaks for and responds to the needs of the communities it serves, ensuring they get high quality services, where people feel safe and enjoy a high quality local environment.

Plan for Wales 2001, The Government of the National Assembly for Wales, October 2001

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FOREWORD

Our aim, simply, is to improve the lives of all people in Wales. We see this happening through helping to create communities that are safe and a pleasure to live in, and where everyone is actively involved in creating the community that they want.

It is by no means an easy task, but we are achieving it through:

- Regenerating our most deprived communities;
- Providing employment and training opportunities for all those able to work;
- Improving the nation's health and well-being;
- Giving every child the best possible start in life;
- Providing flexible and accessible learning opportunities;
- Ensuring access to better, more open and responsive public services;
- Empowering our people to shape their own futures and achieve their full potential.

All our policies - health, education, economic development, transport, housing, the Welsh language and culture, the environment - are focused on building stronger and more sustainable communities across the length and breadth of Wales. This report sets out the progress we have made towards achieving our objectives.

People do not deserve to be poor and, with the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, we are in a stronger position than ever to identify disadvantaged communities and to address their problems effectively and comprehensively.

It is not an exaggeration to say that community development and empowerment are at the very heart of the Assembly's programmes and the Assembly's vision for building a better Wales. The Communities First programme is fundamental to that vision. It brings many challenges - it is a way of working which is new and which may at times be difficult for some of those involved. But however difficult

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it may initially prove to be, we must remember that its success lies in building the confidence; raising the self-esteem and the aspirations of local people. We in the Assembly and our partners must provide the necessary support to ensure this happens.

Communities First symbolises the Assembly's commitment to community empowerment. A commitment which is driven by a belief in social justice, a belief in equality of opportunity for all our citizens and a belief in the power of community to bring people together and enable each and every individual to fulfil their potential.

But this does not only apply to Communities First areas. I recognise that there are many communities in Wales needing regeneration and I am encouraging the application of Communities First principles to areas not covered by the Communities First programme. My latest Assembly budget therefore allows for a co-ordinated, integrated and flexible approach to tackling social deprivation and community regeneration across Wales.

I look forward to this coming year when the Assembly Government will be taking further strides in its battle against poverty and social exclusion. In particular the work of the Child Poverty Task Group; taking forward the measures of Well Being in Wales; the development of Community Strategies; and the ongoing implementation of Communities First which will bring real benefits to the people of Wales.

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