

**P-04-487 A Welsh Government deposit loan scheme for first time Welsh home buyers – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 18.10.14**

Dear Mr Powell and all at the petition panel,

I'm grateful for the opportunity to respond to Mr Carl Sargeant's latest reply of the 3rd of September 2014 to the proposed deposit for first time home buyers petition.

I would like to reiterate, contrary to what Mr Sargeant states in his letter, that I believe the deposit petition is a very effective way of addressing the problems facing first time buyers with low earnings that are looking to purchase a new property in Wales. Access to affordable finance and securing a deposit are the two main factors acting as barriers to home ownership for low earners in Wales.

It is very troubling that Mr Sargeant makes the below statement in his letter:

“the underlying issue is an under supply of properties across the UK. For this reason, since I became Minister for Housing and Regeneration last year, my overarching priority has been to look at ways to increase the level of building activity in Wales across all tenures”

Mr Sargeant is here admitting that, contrary to what he is legally required to do under the Government of Wales act 2006, he is basing his new housing policy on UK needs and not Welsh ones. As Mr Sargeant knows, housing is a devolved issue in Wales. His remit through the Government of Wales Act 2006 is to act in the interest of Wales and Wales alone in this devolved areas. Mr Sargeant has therefore publicly stated that all of his work as Housing Minister has been concerned with the UK and not Wales.

I am afraid that this statement confirms the concerns of many that there is no genuine housing policy for Wales but rather an 'UK policy'. This UK policy projects unsustainable new housing onto Wales and caters for the whole of the UK rather than Wales specifically as the case should be and as is set in legal statute.

This also confirms that the housing projections, Local Development Plans for Wales and the Housing bill are therefore not fit for purpose and need to be frozen, re-evaluated and a root and branch inquiry conducted into how the mishandling of this devolved issue has been allowed to happen.

A previous Sovereign Wales petition pointed out that household projections for Wales were massively overly projected. Since then the 323,009 new households previously projected have been brought down to around 190,000 by 2036 according to the Welsh Government. The original 323,009 figure did not even match the Welsh Government's own projection process or census data. This 190,000 figure, although a more sustainable sum, is still exuberantly high, is purely assumptive and still cannot be properly justified. And as can now be seen, this present 190,000 figure is based on UK, not Welsh need.

There are obviously housing needs in Wales but the Welsh Government's housing plans are not proportionate to existing and sustainable Welsh needs. This statement by Mr Sargeant sadly explains why this is so; houses are presently being built in view of UK needs and are not catered for the natural gradually occurring population increase within Wales as well as a gradual level of inward migration in-line with work opportunities and public services capabilities.

In a previous letter Mr Sargeant claimed the Sovereign Wales petition for a deposit for first time buyers would be 'difficult to pursue' but invited suggestions for ways risk could be mitigated. I replied in detail stating that the deposit plan was far less risky and required far less investment than the Welsh government's proposed Help to Buy scheme. In my view the deposit scheme would also be far more effective and cost efficient as it would be a repayable loan rather than the far riskier Help to Buy guarantee scheme proposed by Mr Sargeant. Mr Sargeant seems to have ignored this and has now presented another reason why the petition cannot be considered which is that he is catering for UK housing needs rather than solely Welsh need.

The purpose of this petition is to urge the Welsh Government to develop a simple but effective scheme that would help first time buyers. I still believe this scheme would be very beneficial but I also believe Mr Sargeant's statement on UK housing over Welsh housing means that the whole housing and planning policy of the Welsh Government is now under question.

The Ministerial code issued by the First Minister on behalf of the Welsh Government states accountability as one of the seven principles of public life and states that: "Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office"

Standing Order 1 / 1.10 (iv) clearly states that: “members should not misrepresent the basis on which they are elected nor the area they serve..”

Mr Sargeant himself has offered that “Welsh Ministers who fail to adhere to fairness, openness and impartiality may be liable to challenge in the Courts”

I would suggest that Mr Sargeant, as Housing Minister and a political representative, is not working within the devolved remit of Welsh housing as he has stated his concern is housing in the UK, not Wales. I would also suggest that the Welsh Government cannot possibly carry on with their present housing and planning work in light of Mr Sargeant's statement.

It is of general serious concern for the citizens of Wales if their representatives and Government are not working within the legal remit for which they were elected as representatives and public servants. I would like to ask the panel if they can advise what should or can citizens do in light of such a situation.

Thank you again for your time and patience in reading this,

G.Meredith