

**Welsh Assembly Government Response to the Audit Committee Report
on the Renewal of Private Sector Housing in Wales**

**The Welsh Assembly Government is grateful for the Report. We
welcome the findings and offer the following response to the nine
recommendations in the report**

The Committee **recommended** that the Assembly:

Recommendation i

update the Audit Committee on the outcome of the next Welsh Household and Dwelling survey in terms of whether or not it achieves its target for improvement in the quality of the Welsh Housing stock;

Agreed. The Committee will be updated in due course on the outcome of the 'Living in Wales' survey. The survey is underway and the first results are expected in mid 2005.

Recommendation ii

reconsider whether national surveys on the condition of housing are undertaken on a sufficiently frequent basis;

Agreed. Following completion of the 'Living in Wales' survey the frequency of further national surveys will be reconsidered.

Recommendation iii

ensure that it is able to track changes in the quality of the housing stock when the new health and safety-based system takes effect so that it might benchmark changes against existing historical data;

Agreed. The Assembly Government is already looking at ways in which the proposed Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) can feature in future surveys following its introduction. The new HHSRS is a radical departure from the current fitness standard and is much more aligned to health and safety issues. The Assembly Government will consider the extent to which links can be made to data from the current survey.

Recommendation iv

remain alert to the key risk concerning the devolution of power to local authorities and continue to play a fully active role in partnership with local authorities;

Agreed. The Assembly's strategic objectives for Housing in Wales are set out in its National Housing Strategy "Better Homes for People in Wales". The responsibility for the development of local housing renewal policies rests with local authorities. The Assembly Government will continue to work in partnership with authorities within the framework of the comprehensive guidance it has issued on housing renewal to meet the aims and objectives in the National Housing Strategy. The Assembly Government's Housing Directorate is already in touch with the Society of Directors of Public Protection in Wales to arrange seminars to consider progress with local authority renewal policies and identify good practice.

Recommendation v

especially in the early years of the new policy, continue to work closely with local authorities to enable them to produce appropriate and innovative local policies of the highest quality in order to ensure the continuing improvement of the condition of property in the private sector across Wales;

Agreed. The Assembly Government will continue to work with local authorities on the development of their housing renewal policies and will consider whether the existing guidance on housing renewal should be revised in the light of experience and good practice. There will be further discussions with local authorities on progress with their new policies and developing innovative approaches to renewal. It is expected that good practice seminars will take place in Autumn 2004.

Recommendation vi

keep the risk of fraud under review, work in partnership with local authorities to ensure that robust systems are in place at the local level and that relevant lessons are disseminated across the sector;

Agreed. The guidance issued to local authorities in National Assembly for Wales circular 20/02 includes very clear advice on the need to have sound and robust systems in place to deal with potential fraud under the new arrangements. The Assembly Government will continue to keep the risk of fraud under review working in partnership with local authorities. It will take account of counter fraud initiatives and ensure that lessons and examples of good practice are disseminated. Local authorities are also subject to the Audit Commission and District Audit in this respect.

Recommendation vii

consider how it might review the efficient and effective delivery of disabled facilities grants by local authorities and encourage the implementation of good practice;

Agreed. A review of Housing Adaptations in Wales has recently started. That includes looking at the efficient and effective delivery of disabled facilities grants (DFG). Following the review the Assembly Government will prepare new guidance for local authorities. That will include examples of good practice. It is expected that the review will be completed in spring 2005.

Recommendation viii

investigate the way in which loans are being used in other areas of the United Kingdom and consider how they could best be applied to Wales; and

Agreed. The Assembly Government is already investigating how loans are being developed in other areas of the UK and will be working with Welsh local authorities to consider the scope for a pilot in Wales. Officials met with an existing loans-agency in England earlier this year and initial informal discussions with local authorities are favourable. Further meetings have been arranged with local authorities, loans-agencies and colleagues in Scotland and England to develop a suitable pilot. That pilot will draw on existing experience and expertise developed elsewhere in the UK.

Recommendation ix

when it reports on the outcome of the next Welsh Household and Dwelling Survey (recommendation i), also update the Committee on the progress it is making on managing all the risks identified by the Auditor General.

Agreed. The Committee will be updated on progress in managing the risks when the Assembly Government reports on the outcome of the Survey.