

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

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Sustainable Development: Update on how the SJR portfolio is mainstreaming sustainable development.

Housing - Construction and Domestic Energy

Construction

Constructing Excellence in Wales

Housing Directorate sponsors and sets the objectives for Constructing Excellence in Wales and its promotion of best practice construction methods. Its activities encourage the achievement of environmental, social and economic benefits through construction. In partnership with the Environment Agency, it is taking forward the Construction Waste Campaign in Wales, aiming to reduce construction waste and increase recycling. With the Health & Safety Executive Wales it is producing an Action Plan for Wales to improve conditions for construction workers. Its Sustainable Construction Task Group has produced proposals for a Sustainable Construction Centre for Wales, and is discussing how this can be developed with partners including the Regeneration Skills Collective.

Constructing Excellence in Wales works with public sector clients and Housing Associations in developing best practice and is a partner (with CITB Construction Skills and DEIN) in the ERDF project 'Construct Wales'. This helps construction SMEs in Wales to improve their performance and their ability to participate in the longer term construction programmes being generated by the WHQS, RSL Housing Consortiums and the NHS Wales Framework.

Greater Energy Efficiency in Homes

Energy efficiency has direct benefits in terms of energy savings which lead to reduced carbon dioxide emissions - one of the Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales. SJ&R and DEIN work closely together to promote energy efficiency to all sectors through the Energy Efficiency Action Plan, and Energy Saving Wales portal. DEIN lead on energy efficiency in the business sector, with funding and advice being delivered by the Carbon Trust.

Improvements in energy efficiency in existing homes are driven at UK and Wales level by a range of regulation, advice and incentives. Local Authorities are required to improve the energy efficiency of their own properties as part of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. They also play an important role in advocating to landlords and local residents the benefits of improving the energy efficiency of their own properties. The Energy Saving Trust provides advice to householders on actions they can take to

save energy at home. Vulnerable households can receive energy efficiency measures through the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) programme. Energy companies also offer their customers discounted energy efficiency measures through their Energy Efficiency Commitment Programmes.

Development of Sustainable Energy

Department for Trade & Industry lead on energy policy for Great Britain, and have recently carried out an Energy Review. Microgeneration is defined as the small scale production of heat and/or electricity from a low carbon source, and is key to development of sustainable energy sources. The development of an indigenous microgeneration industry in Wales is one of the top ten commitments of the Sustainable Development action plan. DEIN is leading on developing a Welsh microgeneration action plan alongside the associated DTI strategy. Another of the top 10 commitments from the Sustainable Development action plan is to explore the potential of using renewable energy solutions in our policies and programmes aimed at tackling fuel poverty. Proposals for this are being developed and will be delivered through HEES.

Combating Fuel Poverty

(HEES) is the Welsh Assembly Government's main vehicle for lifting Welsh households out of fuel poverty. Over 70,000 households will have received energy efficiency measures such as cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, draught proofing, and central heating through the scheme by the end of 2006-07 at a total cost of some £74m.

Each insulation measure has an associated and accredited energy saving, and a carbon saving can be calculated for each home if the fuel used is known. The energy and carbon savings from heating measures can be calculated in a similar way, using information on the type of heating present and fuel used before and after the grant work has been carried out.

Eaga Partnership who manages HEES on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government has used the methodology for the Energy Efficiency Commitment to assess the carbon savings from HEES in Wales for the period 2000 to April 2006. This assessment suggests that the carbon savings from HEES might be 21,307 tonnes of carbon per year, or a total of 511,727,625 tonnes of carbon across the lifetime of the measures installed under HEES thus far.

Reaching hard to heat households and treating the most difficult properties are significant hurdles to achieving our fuel poverty targets. The intention is therefore to develop pilot projects to explore the potential of using renewable energy solutions in HEES to tackle fuel poverty amongst low income vulnerable households, particularly those unable to benefit from traditional improvement solutions. For the medium to long term a full scoping study will be undertaken into the matter. However, in the short term we have offered financial support to a number of authorities who have already expressed an interest in piloting a particular proven technology.

Under the Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC), electricity and gas suppliers are required to achieve energy saving targets for improvement in domestic energy efficiency. The programme reduces energy costs for consumers and carbon emissions, and as 50% of the savings are targeted at

‘priority’ low income-households, it also contributes to reducing fuel poverty.

Under the second phase of the commitment (2005-2008) energy suppliers have been set energy saving targets which are approximately double those for phase 1. Suppliers are making good progress towards meeting their EEC targets. In order to maintain momentum the government has announced that suppliers will be able to carry over targets into the next phase of the commitment which will have a target which is even larger.

Affordable Housing

The majority of new social housing is provided by housing associations in partnership with local authorities utilising Social Housing Grant. Design standards and minimum quality requirements are set out for these homes in the Assembly Government’s Development Quality Requirements (DQR). The requirements expand on the Assembly Government’s Regulatory Code that protects investment in housing associations in Wales and safeguards the interests of tenants.

Development Quality Requirements 2007

To demonstrate our commitment to making housing more sustainable and to set an example to other sectors proposals will be put forward to change Development Quality Requirements as follows: -

Sustainability and Energy Efficiency

It is proposed that the requirement for ECOHomes is replaced by the Code for Sustainable Homes. The target code level will represent a higher standard than the current ECOHomes ‘good’ standard i. e. code level 3 or 4 and will be dependent on the sustainability targets set across all Assembly portfolios.

To complement the Code standard an equivalent standard for energy efficiency will be required based on the Energy Savings Best or Advanced Standard. These standards will represent significant improvements over the current building regulations.

Waste Management and Recycling

Public sector bodies and construction clients are increasingly setting minimum requirements for recycled content in construction projects and asking for good practice in site waste management. Therefore it is proposed that Development Quality Requirements (DQR) includes a requirement that Associations should ensure that construction works implement good practice in waste minimisation, recycling of site waste and the use of recycled content. This contributes to sustainable development by diverting materials from increasingly scarce landfill, limiting the depletion of finite resources and reducing environmental impacts.

Social Housing Grant

The Committee has been previously advised about proposals to reform the way in which the Social

Housing Grant programme is allocated and its delivery. The aim of the proposals is to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness and to focus SHG investment more sharply on Assembly Government strategic priorities and local needs.

In line with this, the introduction of multi-year programmes is seen as a key factor in providing greater certainty in planning programmes which should lead to more efficient procurement and delivery of housing developments. Programmes for 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 were allocated in February 2006 and bids for the 2008/2009 programme are currently being considered.

As part of the SHG reforms, six groups of housing associations have been working towards implementing collaborative procurement arrangements. All six have received provisional approved status and in consultation with officials they are now working to achieve full compliance with requirements. One of the requirements is that each consortium develops a sustainability policy to be adopted by all members of the consortium.

Fire and Rescue Service

Most of the functions of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) contribute to sustaining the community both in the public, private sector and commerce.

The New Dimension Programme

The New Dimension Programme has been implemented to respond to major catastrophic incidents which by their very term, either through nature or intention, can result in the destruction of population, property, infrastructure and environment. The equipment, training and interaction with other agencies is targeted at the sustainability of those elements.

Building Regulations

Building Regulations, in particular, Part B, Fire Safety, are designed primarily for life safety, but the new review of the Approved Document clearly recognises the importance of sustainability of buildings and the environment.

The introduction of automatic sprinkler systems to the new Part B in certain settings as a compensatory feature is a step forward in the sustainability of buildings and reduction of risk to life. The objective to introduce sprinklers in all new-build schools in Wales again meets sustainability objectives.

The Fire and Rescue Services may take action if it considers appropriate, under section 11 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, to attend in the event of flooding.

Risk Reduction Planning (RRP)

Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) base the delivery of their services on identified risk. Under the Assembly Government's RRP guidance, FRAs must fully engage stakeholders including their communities on the shape of their services. This policy clearly places the citizen at the centre of shaping their FRA.

North Wales FRA are pursuing the Green Dragon environmental award.

Collaboration

The 3 FRAs in Wales collaborate on many activities, such as training, assessment and procurement. Utilisation of resources in this manner builds to a sustainable service.

Community Cohesion

FRAs are engaged in the reduction of risk in many and innovative ways. FRAs deliver home fire safety checks, installation of smoke detectors, youth engagement activities; Young Fire-fighter schemes, Prince's Trust. Firebrake offers a conduit of delivering sustainable communities through the promotion of community safety messages.

Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) for Fire and Rescue Authorities

New guidance will be introduced early in 2007 to monitor FRAs' performance and improvement through WPI. The guidance reflects the approach developed for local authorities in terms of meeting best value obligations in a way that reflects and furthers the shared vision of public service improvement developed in Making the Connections. The guidance indicates that equality and sustainability assessments must be included as part of each FRA's annual assessment process.

Performance Indicators

The Welsh Assembly Government will be consulting on a new suite of performance indicators in 2007 which monitor effectiveness of FRS intervention, both in terms of emergency response and community fire safety. In terms of sustainability the performance indicators will look to measure outcomes relating to fire deaths and injuries and fires, including fires in dwellings.

Procurement

The Wales CFOA Procurement Group are will work closely with the Welsh Assembly Government and Value Wales to develop a strategy for Procurement in Wales which encompasses recognition of the value of procurement both locally, collaboratively across Wales and through procurement at UK level. The strategy will recognise Wales specific requirements in terms of sustainability under the SME Charter.

Communities First

The Communities First programme is targeted at the most disadvantaged communities in Wales and exists to provide local people with opportunities to play an active role in shaping the future of their community not only for their own generation but for those to come. The Communities First areas comprise the 100 most deprived electoral division, 32 smaller areas and 10 sectoral initiatives. Of these 142 areas, 137 now have local Communities First Partnerships to work with their own communities to determine priorities for action.

The ethos of Communities First is one of partnership working between local people and the authorities, agencies and other organisations which deliver key services and support. The Communities First Vision Framework was developed to encourage a holistic approach within those communities to tackling poverty and social exclusion. It provides a broad range of potential aspirations within six themes: Jobs and Business; Education and Training; Environment; Health and Well being; Active Community; and Crime and Community Safety.

Within the Environment theme, aspirations include addressing issues around ensuring: a clean and pleasant physical environment for communities; safe play areas; acceptable housing; adequate transport that enables individuals to participate in social and economic activity; and reducing risks to health from the environment. Communities First Partnerships must decide the route to achieving these aspirations in their own way if changes are to prove to be sustainable.

Social Enterprise Strategy

The Social Enterprise Strategy sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's vision of dynamic and sustainable enterprises strengthening an inclusive and growing economy. The Strategy acknowledges that social enterprise is helping to deliver Welsh Assembly Government policy to tackle poverty and provide people and their communities with the means to help themselves break out of the poverty trap.

Social enterprises have an important role to play in Wales. They help tackle social exclusion, bringing financially inactive people back into work; they help create a strong, sustainable and inclusive economy with a dual or triple bottom line of financial, social and often environmental goals. Many of our successful social enterprises contribute directly to sustainable development in the broadest sense involving recycling, food co-operatives, childcare and protecting the environment.

Social enterprise is not a new concept, there are many examples of successful social enterprises around Wales some large some small and with different operating models depending on the individual enterprise: at Llanndaniel Fab on Anglesey, when the local shop and post office closed, local people bought and renovated the old Smithy in the village to make sure that they didn't lose this crucial part of village life. This shop and post office now employs 2 local people and has proved itself a sustainable solution; and in Cardiff Pack-IT, a larger social firm and community business provides mailing, storage and distribution and on-line fulfillment. Pack-IT employs 21 staff, half of whom have Down's Syndrome, are profoundly deaf or have behavioural problems and learning difficulties. Last year Pack-IT's achievements were recognised when it won the European Social Firm of the year award.

We want to build on current success stories and to create an environment where all social enterprises in Wales can flourish and grow. In particular for the Welsh Assembly Government this means breaking down the barriers which currently hinder the development of the sector - for example legal and regulatory issues. The Social Enterprise Joint Working Group has established some priorities for action for example, procurement, finance, asset transfer and mentoring. The Finance sub group continues to explore ways of developing expertise eg on Community Development Finance Initiatives and community banking partnerships.

Community Facilities and Activities Programme (CFAP)

The programme, open to voluntary and community groups, helps provide facilities or activities that promote the regeneration of communities. Priorities supported include:

- The creation or refurbishing of community facilities including adaptation for equal access for disabled people;
- Improving the well-being of the community by encouraging active and healthy life styles.
- Encouraging training that targets vulnerable or excluded people and assisting the promotion of job opportunities and increased incomes.
- Supporting the growth of community businesses and social enterprises.

Since 2002, 463 projects attracting CFAP grant of £38.66m have been supported.

Sustainability of Projects Supported

CFAP does not provide core or continuation funding to groups. Applicants are asked to demonstrate the sustainability of their project i.e. how the building attracting grant funding will be maintained, how the running costs and future funding of activities for which revenue grant is awarded will be raised.

An example of a CFAP funded project is the Bryncynon Healthy Living Centre in Rhondda Cynon Taff. The project involved the refurbishment of a derelict church into a community asset giving community access to a quality location and activities to improve the health and wellbeing in the area. Three staff are employed to help resource, promote, support and co-ordinate activities.

The project is the latest being implemented by the Bryncynon Strategy Ltd an organisation, employing 25 people (many local) concerned with regenerating the socially and financially excluded community of Bryncynon. The original aim was to examine ways in which the local community could improve their quality of life and future prospects.

A community consultation highlighted a number of health issues that needed to be addressed, such as high levels of long term illness, substance misuse and mental health problems, as well as problems in relation to sexual health issues.

The organisation developed the idea of the Bryncynon Healthy Living Centre, a one stop shop healthy living venue where residents can participate in various activities such as yoga and aerobics,

and get advice on issues such as smoking cessation and healthy eating. The centre provides courses and support in academic subjects such as Maths and English supported by partners in community education, further education and higher education.

The centre cost £902,333 of which £110,518 was CFAP grant.

Sustainability of the Centre

Bryncynon Strategy stated on their CFAP application form that the project had the full support of partners including the North Glamorgan NHS Trust. The partners would rent part of the building to deliver their services; the building will be used for seminars and conferences generating income from lettings with buffets prepared by the community café.