

## **ANNEX B – EXTRACT FROM MINUTES – 7 NOVEMBER**

### **Item 8: Presentation from Cymuned on housing issues and the Welsh language: LGH-13-01 (p.6)**

8.1 The Chair welcomed Gwilym Euros Roberts, Wyn Hobson and Dylan Foster Evans of Cymuned to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation.

8.2 Gwilym Euros Roberts said that under normal circumstances house prices reflect the state of the local economy with low prices expected in areas where the economy is weak, wages are low and unemployment is high. However, the opposite was true in rural Wales where prices are high and beyond the means of local people due to external factors.

8.3 He suggested a number of possible policy solutions to address this problem which included: designating property to local people; enforcing against landlords who encouraged people from deprived backgrounds in England to live in disadvantaged areas of Wales; actively discouraging the purchasing of holiday homes in Welsh-speaking areas; and offering further assistance to local people in gaining access to available housing.

8.4 Gwilym Euros Roberts said that the suggested policy guidelines were a measure of supporting local communities which were often weak economically and under pressure linguistically. He said that the solutions to the housing crisis were complex. However, this complexity should not deter the government from attempting to identify and implement those solutions.

8.5 Cymuned supported the Assembly's Homebuy Scheme which provided home ownership opportunities as an alternative to rent for people who were unable to afford a suitable property unaided. The scheme was an important contribution to social justice since it enabled local people to buy houses and live in their own communities. However, it was felt that further funding should be made available to meet the demand for the scheme.

8.6 The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members agreed that the Assembly had shown continuing commitment to ensuring local people were given the opportunity to remain in their own communities. This would be achieved, in part by providing appropriate housing and employment opportunities. It would be unacceptable and impracticable to enforce restrictive practices to address the housing problems of rural Wales. It was imperative that the Assembly continue to promote free choice for both local and non-local people within Welsh speaking communities.
- It was noted that the Assembly had demonstrated its commitment to tackling rural

housing problems through the promotion of low cost home ownership schemes. These included the Homebuy Scheme where Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) could provide an interest free equity loan that was recovered when the property was sold. The introduction of an equity threshold of 50 per cent at the beginning of the year would enable more local people in rural areas to buy homes in their existing communities.

- There was some discussion on the Social Housing Grant (SHG) budget which was currently £56.4 million per year. The majority of the SHG budget was allocated to local authorities who were able to commission RSLs to provide housing for rent and low cost home ownership according to locally determined priorities. It was noted that local authorities generally gave lower priority to low cost home ownership schemes.
- Some Members felt that the allocation of £18 million of the SHG budget to rural authorities should be increased. It was noted that there was no limit to the amount of the SHG budget that authorities can designate for Homebuy in rural areas. In addition, match funding of £1.5 million had been made available for SHG that local authorities allocated to rural Homebuy.
- There was support for the introduction of a 'welcome pack' to potential buyers by estate agents which would explain the linguistic and cultural background of the community. It was suggested that promotion of the Welsh language amongst non-local people could be achieved through community language schemes and the voluntary sector. It was the aim of the Assembly to create a bi-lingual society based on mutual respect.
- There was some discussion on the effect of large numbers of holiday homes on social and linguistic networks in rural areas. Some Members felt that properties, which remained empty for a large part of the year had a negative effect on the community and its surrounding environment. In addition, it was suggested that holiday homes, which are let for part of the year may inadvertently increase the incidence of homelessness. This may create additional pressures on local authorities and affect the lettings and allocations process for housing in the local area.
- There was some support for the need to gain planning permission before changing a permanent dwelling into a holiday home. However, any move to restrict the number of holiday homes should take into account the role of tourism in strengthening the rural economy. In addition, it was important to avoid penalising local people who wanted to sell their property.
- There was concern that the more radical recommendations including reassessing previously granted planning permission to take account of the Welsh language, were over-bureaucratic and would be of little value in assisting to address the housing problem in rural communities. However, there was support for language impact surveys, which had been introduced by the Minister for Environment.
- There was some discussion on the demand for new housing. It was noted that housing needs assessment were carried out by local authorities at a local level. It would be important for Local Housing Strategies and subsequent housing development to reflect the needs of communities.
- There was support for the need to tackle poor quality housing in the rented sector. It was felt that the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation would, in part help improve the

standards within the rented sector.

- The Minister said that the Minister for Environment was currently examining restrictions on planning and land use implications of second homes in rural areas to inform the future review of planning policy.

8.7 The Chair thanked the representatives from Cymuned for their presentation and for taking part in discussion.