



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our ref: JJ/PO/445/23

John Griffiths MS
Chair
Local Government and Housing Committee

20 December 2023

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 22 November seeking further information following the general scrutiny session I attended on 9 November.

You asked if other areas are undertaking schemes similar to that mentioned in Newport on use of empty property. Newport is currently utilising funding provided through our Transforming Towns Loan Fund to refurbish 2 floors within an existing large city centre building to create 28 Apart Hotel rooms and serviced apartments. Prior to this it has also accessed this fund to deliver the redevelopment of a listed property to create 3 ground floor commercial units and 10 upper floor residential apartments. Application to this loan fund is available to all Local Authorities and is already being utilised by most for a variety of purposes. The core aims of the scheme are to reduce the number of vacant, underutilised and redundant sites and premises in town centres and to support the diversification of town centres. This scheme will encourage more sustainable uses for empty sites and premises, such as residential, leisure and for key services. By supporting the vibrancy and viability of town centres the outcomes should focus on supporting job creation and economic growth, tackling poverty, increasing the supply and quality of accommodation offer, and supporting targeted training and recruitment during construction.

You asked for details of the alignment of the various planning policies across Wales. Future Wales is the Welsh Government's national development plan. It sets out a framework for regional planning and the preparation of four strategic development plans by the Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) in North Wales, Mid Wales, South-West Wales and South-East Wales. Future Wales Policy 19 – 'Strategic Policies for Regional Planning' sets out 11 policy issues that each SDP should plan for its respective region. Future Wales has a detailed section on each of the 4 regions of Wales. These sections set out an overarching policy for each region, setting out where strategic growth should be focussed and policies on important spatial issues in the respective regions. Alongside its role considering planning issues at the national scale, Future Wales was prepared to give a strategic context to planning at the regional level. It creates the space for local authorities to work together and lead the planning for development and growth of their region. CJCs will provide the governance arrangements for regional planning and can lead this work. Individual LDPs are required to be prepared in accordance with Future Wales. LDPs, and the evidence base which supported their preparation, will help shape SDPs. LHMA's are one of the key pieces

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

of evidence for the preparation of LDPs and SDPs. The alignment therefore is as follows – Future Wales sets out the Welsh Government’s national and regional spatial objectives; and provides a framework for the preparation of SDPs. The preparation of SDPs will be led by the CJsCs and their work will draw on Future Wales for strategic direction whilst having the space to shape their own plan. LDPs are prepared by each local planning authority, and these will be important sources of evidence and up to date planning policy to support the preparation of SDPs.

You requested an indicative timetable for the introduction of a Bill relating to homelessness. As the Committee will be aware, the First Minister sets out the legislative programme each year in his annual legislative statement. The Programme for Government and the Co-operation agreement contain a commitment to “reform housing law and implement the Homelessness Action Group’s recommendation to fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing”. I remain steadfast in my commitment to introduce a Bill on reforming homelessness law in Wales before the end of this Senedd term and was pleased to launch a comprehensive White Paper setting out our proposed reforms on 10 October.

You also requested a breakdown of affordable housing statistics. The latest release, published on 7 November, shows that in 2022-23, 3,369 additional affordable housing units were delivered across Wales. This is a 26% increase (693 units) on the previous year (2,676 delivered in 2021-22) and the second highest total since data was first recorded in 2007-08. The Affordable Housing Statistics show that a total of 6,045 additional affordable homes were delivered across 2021-22 and 2022-23 (2,676 and 3,369 respectively). The current 20,000 target is focussed on homes for rent in the social sector and is a subset of the total additional affordable housing delivered (excluding shared equity tenure). 5,575 homes have been delivered towards the target across the same period, 2021-22 and 2022-23 (2,563 and 3,212 respectively). These 5,575 homes can be broken down as follows:

	2021-22	2022-23
Social Rented Units	1712	1,940
Intermediate Rented	204	201
Shared Ownership	137	111
Social or intermediate rent units by Local Authorities	450	642
Units delivered by other providers	60	318
TOTAL	2,563	3,212

You asked for an update on the third River Pollution Summit which I chaired on 30 November. The summit had a focus on the impact of the Action Plan to date on unlocking planning applications and new housing developments. A Written Ministerial was issued following the Summit and can be found here: [Written Statement: Third River Pollution Summit \(8 December 2023\) | GOV.WALES](#)

Finally you requested information on take up of the Help to Stay Scheme. The Welsh Government is committed to ending homelessness across Wales and Help to Stay Wales is an important lever in assisting this. The rise in the cost of borrowing in particular is a concern for many. I want to protect those who face the greatest challenge from cost-of-living increases, keeping them safe in their homes. Help to Stay Wales works alongside support offered by mortgage providers through the UK Mortgage Charter for customers who are struggling to afford their mortgage payments. The purpose of the Scheme is to reduce the number of homeowners at risk of repossession and homelessness by offering them time to resolve their underlying financial issues. To ensure the scheme targets homeowners most at need, a fundamental stage of the scheme, prior to issuing an equity loan, is that

applicants receive free mortgage advice provided by specialist debt advisors. This support will ensure the applicant has received independent advice as to the options available, confirm that all other avenues have been exhausted and verify the levels of debt service the Applicant could reasonably afford based on a review of their current circumstances. This is clearly a demand-led scheme and it is therefore difficult to gauge uptake however the level of support needed will be kept under close review. As of 11 December over 80 scheme enquiries have been received resulting in 26 applications, of which 5 have been approved to move to the next stages of the process.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change