

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Housing, Regeneration and Heritage

Portfolio

1. As Minister for a portfolio that brings together housing, regeneration and heritage, I have the opportunity to develop new, integrated and inclusive strategies to work at the heart of wider actions to achieve a more prosperous economy, better places to live and a fairer future.
2. It is clear that these three areas of policy can have a significant contribution to the two key themes of improving sustainability and wellbeing which lie at the heart of our Programme for Government.

Programme for Government

3. The Programme for Government sets out specific actions we're taking. It also makes clear how we'll judge whether these are on track and how we assess progress in tackling the long-term challenges facing Wales.
4. I have particular accountability for ensuring delivery is on track in a number of areas within the programme – most notably in the chapters covering Welsh Homes (6), Tackling Poverty (9) and The Culture and Heritage of Wales (12).
5. However, it is a programme for co-operation across Government departments and one where we look to all those across the public, private and third sector to recognise this agenda and take it forward in partnership with us.

Priorities

6. Whilst it is not possible to address all my portfolio in this paper, I have outlined below further details on some of my priorities and the activities and organisations my Department sponsors and funds - ensuring that sustainability lies at the heart of the agenda and defining the long term development path.

Housing

7. I have made a clear public commitment to making housing a greater priority in the coming years.
8. Housing is an essential part of our commitment to tackling poverty and inequalities. This crucial agenda is not just about providing new homes, and improving existing homes, it is also about helping people to live independently for as long as possible and reducing demand on the NHS and social care services.

9. Investment in housing also contributes to national and local economies, supports businesses large and small in the construction sector and creates jobs and training opportunities.
10. Our new powers give us the opportunity to do even more to change things for the better.
11. In December (2011) I published 'Meeting the Housing Challenge Building a consensus for action' and invited views on housing issues to help us prepare a new Housing Bill. I was delighted to receive over 80 responses, which are now being analysed.
<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/housingcommunity/housingchallenge/?lang=en>
12. I will follow this up by publishing a White Paper this spring. This will set out my plans and priorities over the remainder of the term, reflecting Programme for Government commitments but also taking into account the responses to my paper.
13. Some of these commitments will require legislative solutions and the Housing Bill will be the vehicle for taking those forward: I have already said that tackling homelessness and driving up standards in the private rented sector are top priorities.
14. However, this is only part of our commitment. I will take action that improves the way that the housing system operates as a whole – from the Houses to Homes' Fund (£5m empty homes initiative) to supporting a range of work that aims to mitigate and monitor the impacts of the UK Government's Welfare Reform proposals – that are already having a substantial impact in Wales.

Regeneration Review

15. On 21 February I announced a review of regeneration policy in Wales. The review will consider our current policy, in particular the Regeneration Area approach, and a future direction for regeneration in Wales. As well as continuing to deliver on the commitments made to date, we need to think carefully about the future.
16. The Enterprise and Business Committee report on Town Centre Regeneration has made it quite clear to me that the way we live, how we shop and where we shop has evolved. The Review will therefore also inform how we develop an approach to our manifesto commitments on town centres and seaside towns.
17. As a Cabinet, we are committed to making sure that regeneration activity is co-ordinated across all our portfolios. Deeper and broader integration will help us deliver better value and better outcomes.

18. In particular, I am working closely with the Minister for Local Government and Communities on the anti-poverty agenda under Communities First. I am also looking at the links between my portfolio and the new Enterprise Zones and work on City Regions, being pursued by the Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science.
19. I will also be giving particular focus to the development of the 2014-2020 European Programme in Wales. I am eager for future programmes to focus on interventions that address market failure which mainstream economic development and anti-poverty activities will not necessarily address.
20. I intend to set out my future regeneration priorities following the review in early 2013.

Heritage Bill

21. I am committed to seeking to introduce a Heritage Bill in the 2014-15 session. Cadw is leading on this Bill and is undertaking an initial wide ranging scoping exercise to inform future policies and strategies, including the proposed Bill.
22. The intention is for a wide ranging discussion through workshops, seminars, and a public conference; and to undertake research, engaging as many sectoral interests as possible, as well as to explore the issues in the sector's more routine fora.
23. I recently outlined my priorities for the Historic Environment of Wales (24 January):
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/historic/cadw/priorities/?lang=en>
24. The document outlines the priorities for Cadw, and the activities and organisations it sponsors and funds, over the next four years. There are ten priority issues encompassing the need to ensure that heritage sites are accessible and enjoyable both for visitors to Wales and people who live here; making the most of working with partners and securing the best partnerships; developing new and broader audiences and engaging with people; promoting learning, skills development and job creation; ensuring protection of historic assets; and very importantly, supporting the historic environment third sector.
25. I want to stimulate discussion, ideas and additional perspectives to help Cadw develop approaches which will really work for Wales. The consultative workshops being held in the first half of this year will help refine proposals for the Heritage Bill and Cadw's work programme, with a view to publication of the my Historic Environment Strategy in autumn 2012.

Arts

26. I welcome this Committee's intention to look at participation in the arts, especially the scope for new sources of funding in these difficult times.
27. I have set out my priorities for the arts in my annual remit letter to the Arts Council of Wales (ACW):
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/publications/acremitletter/?lang=en&status=open>
28. In particular, I want to continue to take forward the recommendations contained in the Communities and Culture Committee Report into the Accessibility of Arts and Culture and to engage with the Communities First programme.
29. I am equally passionate about the provision of high quality arts experiences for children and young people and so I am delighted that the Minister for Education and Skills and I will together be commissioning a review of the support for arts in schools.
30. ACW is already implementing an action plan on tackling child poverty - this complements its 'Young Creators' strategy for young people and the arts. We often talk about the personal benefits of participating in the arts yet the benefits can reach far wider than the individual, helping improve the social and physical regeneration of our communities.
31. I also want to draw your attention to our Cultural Olympiad programme that will see activities across Wales, many of which are aimed at our young people.

Culture

32. The Welsh Government will provide over £12 million to the National Library of Wales and over £24 million to Amgueddfa Cymru- National Museum Wales, as Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies in 2012/13. We are also committed to maintaining free entry to the Library and to the Museum's seven sites.
33. The work of both organisations contributes to many of the key areas identified in the Programme for Government, including growth and sustainable jobs, public services in Wales, education, and the culture and heritage of Wales.
34. In November 2011, I launched 'Libraries Inspire' which outlines our plans to work in partnership with the library sector in Wales. Public, educational, and workplace libraries are at the heart of their communities. The very reason for their existence is to inspire and assist people to make a positive difference to their lives. This strategy describes how we will maintain and

develop new innovative services to meet the needs of the people of Wales over the next 5 years.

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/museumsarchiveslibraries/cymal/libraries/librariesinspire/?lang=en>

35. Elsewhere, the Museums Strategy for Wales was launched in June 2010. I have been encouraged by the commitment of museums across Wales to delivering the strategy and in particular the work that is being done by individual museums to improve and increase participation. From developing disabled access, to working with a whole range of groups to bringing national collections to local audiences, museums are driving forward improvements.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/museumsarchiveslibraries/cymal/museums/strategy/?lang=en>

36. Both the National Library and National Museum have also published draft Child Poverty strategies, aimed at improving the participation of children in culture. These are currently out for consultation. I am delighted to see the commitment of our national cultural organisations to this agenda and this reflects the wider work they are doing in improving access to Welsh culture for everyone in Wales.

Sport

37. As the main advocate for sport and physical activity in the Welsh Government, I am keen to ensure value for our investment in terms of improved health and wellbeing, social community cohesion and the economic benefits associated with it.

38. I issued the Sports Wales remit letter last month:

<http://cymru.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/publications/sportwalesremit/jsessionid=9DJYPfPXJytMc5vtzxdJxhw0hxQDHJ2DGgfz5pTnCjYjLgH23v3Y!-862695484?lang=en>

39. Our existing investment in sport and physical activity is providing people of all ages and abilities the opportunities to be physically active in their communities. Through Sport Wales' Community Sport Strategy and its Child Poverty Strategy, both of which are in development stage, those in greatest need will be targeted for support and investment in the future.

40. I am also discussing with local authorities, Sport Wales, the Royal British Legion and other stakeholders how best to extend our Free Swimming scheme to veterans and armed forces personnel on leave.

Local Government Compact

41. Finally, I am determined to oversee a joint programme of reform to deliver my commitments within the compact. I want to ensure that the services for which I am responsible for across Wales are delivered more effectively

through joint working and partnership. My priorities include shared service development goals, integrated investment strategies, new ways to modernise service delivery, and other initiatives such as shared evaluation and research.

42. Ongoing discussion to date has demonstrated the commitment of the Welsh Government and local government to work together to deliver savings that can be reinvested in front-line services and improved services across Wales.

Huw Lewis AM
Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage

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