



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

National Housing Strategy for Wales

A Selective Review

**Welsh Assembly Government Housing Directorate
Report**

November 2006

Introduction

The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration, Edwina Hart AM MBE, responded positively to calls for a selective review of the national housing strategy *Better Homes for People in Wales* by authorising a re-examination of key housing issues. This examination has been undertaken as part of the update of the National Housing Strategy Action Plan.

Background

The development of *Better Homes* has been taken forward via the National Housing Strategy Action Plan, with the strategy continuing to evolve over its projected ten year tenure. New material has continued to supplement the published version (circa 2001) of *Better Homes*.

The Action Plan not only monitors progress towards implementation of the strategy objectives but also records: changes, new policies, programmes and targets developed in response to the evolving housing market. It is routinely under review and formally updated at regular intervals, currently half yearly, in its published presentation. The Action Plan reflects the need for the national housing strategy to encompass a dynamic set of policies and an evolving strategic direction that continues to reflect changing market conditions and other factors affecting housing in Wales.

Review focus

Changes in the housing market and the domestic backdrop means we should address concerns about the national strategies' coverage and adequacy and investigate whether refined policy interventions are required for the key issues. The priority issues identified were:

- The strategic housing function, particularly in the post stock transfer period including the supply of affordable housing. Local authorities' strategic housing function will be an increasing focus as the process of collaborative working within and between local authorities is galvanised. The revised guidance on: preparing local housing strategies, the Local Housing Market Assessment Guidance and the Affordable Housing Toolkit all promote cross boundary and regional/sub-regional collaboration in recognition that housing markets and concerns transcend administrative boundaries. The strategic housing function will, therefore, be a key factor for delivery of the national housing strategy. The implications of WHQS and concerns over affordability and the supply of housing to meet housing requirements are imperatives. Home ownership is currently beyond the reach of many and a critical look at our policies relating to the provision of affordable housing will do much to reinforce the steps already taken with the 2006 publication of the package of guidance on affordable housing.
- WHQS – Local Authorities' ability to meet the standard and the approach to option appraisals for those who have not yet resolved to ballot.
- Homelessness.
- The National Housing Strategy linkages, cross-cutting aspects and how it should be integrated into other significant policies that have been developed since its publication.

Methodology

The assessment of priority housing issues has been conducted through Housing Directorate policy leads reviewing and consulting with a number of key housing partners to reassess the appropriateness of policy interventions, targets and strategic direction. The review has been undertaken within the aegis of updating the National Housing Strategy Action Plan in order to appraise its effectiveness in dealing with these vital issues and the need for changes or additions to the strategy and suitable policy interventions.

Format

This report encompasses brief summaries of the findings in terms of: the issues, the appropriateness of policy and the future strategic direction for each of the four issues. Each section also concludes with a succinct assessment of the relative effectiveness of policy and possible next steps.

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The Strategic Housing Function

Including the supply of affordable housing

The need for an operative strategic housing function in Welsh local authorities has been increasing, mainly as a consequence of the impact of housing market imbalance and the affordability problems that have developed in many areas. However there are serious concerns that the centrality and influence of housing (for example, to regeneration, economic development and the health and well-being agenda) and the importance of the strategic housing function is not well understood nor given commensurate importance by some local authorities. The need for more explicit prioritisation of the function and improved synergy with other community centric services like social care, health and education is becoming increasingly evident. This necessitates that the strategic housing function is given sufficient status at a political level. A robust and adequately resourced strategic housing team is essential to fully meeting the housing needs and demands across all tenures in an area.

With Plan Rationalisation and the potential for stock transfer and the consequent disappearance of the Housing Revenue Account it is critical that local authorities recognise the importance of strengthening and supporting the on-going housing strategy requirement which should include:

- Enabling and development;
- Affordable Housing;
- Strategy and Research;
- Private Sector;
- Regeneration;
- Homelessness and nominations; and
- The needs of vulnerable people.

Local Authorities have identified the following barriers to providing sufficient affordable housing:

- Lack of adequate evidence base;
- lack of co-ordination and joint working between housing and planning;
- because of the above, a lack of consistent policies;
- lack of supplementary planning guidance for affordable housing in some local authorities;
- lack of skills to negotiate with developers;
- lack of consistency between local authorities in a sub-region;
- lack of available sites and local authority sites being committed, and
- more corporate commitment within local authorities being required.

Unitary authorities should consider developing/ strengthening their collaborative working with neighbouring authorities, including the National Park authorities. This regional working with other local authorities can enhance the strategic housing function. The Welsh Assembly Government strongly supports those developments which can respond to regional housing markets without losing local democratic accountability.

The strategic housing function relies upon regional co-operation and an appreciation of regional housing markets and their impact locally. Strategic housing officers in Mid, South East and North Wales have demonstrated an ability to take the lead in relation to regional working and these collaborations need to be put on a sounder footing.

In order to support the strengthening of the strategic housing role and through this to encourage the provision of affordable housing, Welsh Assembly Government Housing Directorate has been working with local authorities through:

- AWCHOP
- CIH and the 'Fit for Purpose– Building Capacity in the Strategic Housing Function' training
- Housing Strategy Officers Network
- WLGA and their self-assessment toolkits
- SHMG funding for undertaking collaborative Housing Market Assessments

As part of the preparation of Local Housing Strategies, authorities must commission a Housing Market Assessment to examine housing need including affordability in their local authority and housing market areas. This will provide the evidence base from which to:

- negotiate affordable housing through the Planning process and
- through which to bid for Social Housing Grant.

In addition to the above networks and training sessions, WAG has supported local authorities in an attempt to overcome the perceived barriers, for example, through:

- the Affordable Housing Toolkit, issued in June 2006;
- funding and support for the Three Dragons Development Appraisal Toolkit (to cost new residential schemes and demonstrate a scheme can afford to provide affordable housing);
- support for the Rural Housing Authorities Network (RHAN) and Rural Housing Enabler posts;
- support for the Heads of the Valleys initiative (which aims include increasing private residential investment and affordable housing).

Consultation with Councils and other relevant interests, including CIH Cymru, WLGA, Community Housing Cymru also includes support for the following WAG initiatives:

- regional seminars with Planning Division to be conducted in 2007 on the implementation of:
 - Technical Advice Note (TAN) 1 on Joint Housing Land availability studies
 - TAN 2 on affordable housing and the Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS) 01/2002
- Further use of the Three Dragons Development Appraisal Toolkit and training programme for site regeneration
- Further guidance on Affordable Housing to be issued including a 'library' of relevant model legal agreements
- Encourage local authorities to further develop private sector empty homes strategies particularly in the light of the recent introduction of Empty

Dwelling Management Orders, giving local authorities greater powers to deal with empty properties in this sector.

- Affordable housing targets to be developed by Wales Spatial Plan area groups, to be implemented through Local Development Plans.
- Strengthening of WAG support and expertise in affordable housing delivery through use of secondees.
- Building on the work of the South-East Regional Housing Forum (SEWRHF) and rolling out positive practice across Wales.
- Further use of regional work and co-ordination through WAG and local authority jointly funded posts and studies.
- Further implementation of the tenure neutral model to provide more choice for home seekers.

These initiatives are reflected in the up-date of the National Housing Strategy Action Plan.

See Appendix for the list of consultees.

Conclusion

A significant raft of new and cohesive support has been implemented in 2006 to support the strategic function and develop an understanding of the local housing market. Substantive guidance on the development of local housing strategies has been well received and is being implemented. This complements other significant guides on the crucial affordability issue and Local Housing Market Assessments and those issued to enable the provision of housing through the planning system. Training modules have underpinned the guidance and will continue into 2007 on the Housing/Planning front. The Housing Strategy Officer's Network is providing a continued and valuable new resource.

There is recognition that much more needs to be done. Co-ordinated delivery on regional or sub-regional basis appear to be significant factors in the effectiveness of the strategy. The role out of successful regional initiatives should assist this. A key overlay, particularly for the supply side, will be the Spatial Plan focus on strategic locally driven solutions. Much consideration is being given to additional support and new initiatives to further help strengthen the strategic housing function and the supply of affordable housing.

The profile of housing has been raised but continued efforts are needed to maintain the momentum and to help realise the centrality and benefits that good housing brings to communities on many fronts. The effect of new policy and support will not be capable of assessment until the new local housing strategies are received in 2007 and appraised and this following the effective undertaking of housing market assessments on a sub-regional and collaborative basis.

Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)

The transfer of Bridgend's housing stock to Valleys to Coast Housing Association (September 2003) remains the sole completed large scale housing stock transfer in Wales.

In terms of the other local authorities' position and their ability to meet the standard by 2012, the overall picture remains a diverse and disparate one.

The latest significant milestones have seen the positive ballot (60:40) result in Monmouthshire on 17 November 2006 and Rhondda Cynon Taff's positive result (58:42) on 23 November 2006.

Five other authorities: Swansea; Torfaen; Newport; Conwy and Merthyr (whose housing stock business plans have demonstrated that there will be insufficient resources to meet WHQS) have resolved to ballot their tenants. It is anticipated that these ballots will take place in 2007.

At the other end of the spectrum, four local authorities: Carmarthenshire; Denbighshire; Pembrokeshire and Powys have presented business plans that indicate that they can achieve WHQS by the deadline using their own resources. Initial concerns about individual aspects of those business plans having been resolved with the Welsh Assembly Government.

The position in the other ten authorities reflect a more variable picture:

Blaenau Gwent and the Vale of Glamorgan are engaged at officer level in finalising their appraisal process and the business plan viability respectively. The outcomes of which are anticipated in Spring 2007 and will determine the way forward for these two authorities.

The Assembly is currently waiting for a response from Cardiff Council regarding the financial viability of their business plan.

Gwynedd are submitting their report to Cabinet and Council before the end of this year.

Both Flintshire and Ceredigion have embarked on a full options appraisal process. This will result in new stock condition surveys and business plans being completed by March 2007.

Anglesey has completed and submitted their updated stock condition survey and options analysis to Council. The Council has indicated that their preferred option is retention and that they will submit a viable business plan to the Assembly in January 2007.

Neath, Port-Talbot Council is presently considering their options appraisal report with the decision anticipated in the near future.

Wrexham council is currently considering its position in the context of the other upcoming tenant ballots in Wales.

Caerphilly Council has recently resolved to undertake a full option appraisal.

Local authorities who have resolved to ballot their tenants on the transfer of their housing stock to a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) are not required to submit annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plans.

Local authorities who have indicated that WHQS can be achieved within their current resources will be required to produce annual HRA business plans. These business plans will be reviewed to ensure that agreed milestones for achieving the WHQS are met.

In those local authorities that have decided to ballot their tenants to transfer their housing stock to an RSL to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, there has been feedback that tenants want to know more about what will happen to rents after the five year guarantee period.

Previously, the Assembly Government would not normally agree to a rent guarantee for more than five years, however, the period over which rent guarantees can be given in a transfer situation has been extended.

This will allow local authorities to offer guarantees to transferring tenants that rent increases post ballot will not exceed the rent increases they would have paid as council tenants if transfer had not taken place.

It has been agreed to provide financial support (to a maximum of £250,000 per local authority) to those Councils who have taken the decision to ballot to fund the development of “Show Homes”. Tenants should be well informed about the implications of the achievement of WHQS and this will provide a visible example of what they can expect if stock transfer takes place. These costs are to be treated as eligible for inclusion within set up costs and will be included within the “dowry” funding procedure already advised to local authorities (i.e. cost neutral to the Assembly).

A key responsibility placed upon local authorities is to ensure that tenants are well informed about the implications of the achievement of the WHQS. Any information distributed by local authorities during the formal consultation stages in a stock transfer situation are approved by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Assembly has produced a supplement to the stock transfer guidelines with answers to frequently asked questions to help clarify the position for tenants. A Heads of the Valleys WHQS support project has been established to assist local authority tenants, staff and members in the five heads of the valleys areas to establish good practice in information to tenants and to develop further the “Right to Know” concept.

The Assembly has commissioned the production of guidance and training modules which will provide social landlords with good practice and minimum standards in how to build tenants capacity in order to contribute to the management and

development of their homes. Whilst the modules are aimed at tenants they are designed to provide meaningful information to all interested parties. The modules aim to raise the level of understanding amongst tenants on what WHQS could mean for them and to provide guidance to local authorities and tenant bodies on ways to facilitate greater participation. They also seek to inform tenants so that they are able to have greater confidence in their understanding of a possible range of options. It is anticipated that the guidance and training modules will be published shortly.

Regeneration Context

Achieving the WHQS is seen as a means of contributing to the regeneration of local communities. For full WHQS to be achieved an investment of approximately £3billion (including infrastructure) is required. Key work is currently underway to ensure a construction and trades skills base is in place to allow for the modernisation, internal and external housing improvement work to take place. V2C has set an example with its Caerau Skills Training Centre at Maesteg and use of both local labour and long-term unemployed. WAG is working with Local Authorities on a regional basis to put similar initiatives in place where a positive transfer vote is achieved.

Conclusion

There has been a perceived hiatus in the voluntary stock transfer option in pursuit of WHQS. The necessary lengthy process involved is a factor but the three year gap since V2C seems to be the dominant take on progress in implementing this policy.

The very recent positive ballots in Monmouthshire and Rhondda Cynon Taff are potential milestones and could significantly galvanise future activity. Whilst the preponderance of tenant ballots in 2007 will see next year as pivotal for the future of social housing in Wales.

The main question that remains is what can be done for those authorities whose business plans indicate that they cannot meet WHQS from within their own resources but who do not pursue the housing stock transfer route. This will require resolution and significant determination is likely to be needed to achieve a satisfactory conclusion.

Homelessness

Following the adoption of Better Homes in 2001, the Assembly Government undertook extensive consultation on homelessness. This was initially focused on the Homelessness Commission, and then on a draft National Homelessness Strategy. The first National Homelessness Strategy for Wales was then adopted in April 2003.

The initial Strategy set out the broad agenda of action required to tackle homelessness, reflecting the range of factors and policy issues which cause and inter-relate with homelessness, including health, support, criminal justice, substance misuse, debt, and many others. Prevention and the need to focus services around the assessment of the particular needs of each homeless household were main themes in the Strategy.

Progress was made across many but not all areas in this Strategy. The Assembly Government undertook a full review of the Homelessness Strategy in 2005, with extensive consultation amongst organisations working with homeless people, and through them, homeless people themselves.

The outcome of this review was that a revised National Homelessness Strategy for Wales for 2006-8 was adopted in November 2005. This builds on the original document, with a stronger and more specific focus on working to prevent homelessness, as well as clear direction on expectations of other agencies to work in a joined-up way to tackle homelessness. The Strategy thus reflects the principles in 'Making the Connections', and contains a range of action commitments across the spectrum of homelessness related policy.

The Strategy is monitored and reviewed by the Homelessness Strategies Working Group, a consultative body containing representation from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The group continues to review progress, and will advise the Assembly Government on the progress report to be delivered by the Minister to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee in early 2007, and at regular intervals thereafter. The first progress report was discussed in Committee in July 2006.

The implementation of the Strategy continues to reflect development of the policy through consultation. This includes introduction of: legislation to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, review of the homelessness grants scheme, and revised guidance to local authorities on implementing the statutory homelessness functions.

As a result of this approach significant progress has already been made, with a reduction in the number of homelessness acceptances by local authorities of 18%, and a fall in the numbers in temporary accommodation of 15%. Further work continues to develop mechanisms for involving homeless service users, young people and other vulnerable groups in the Strategy, and ensure that the Strategy and its implementation is 'owned' by all those working with or affected by homelessness.

Conclusion

The recent reappraisal of the National Homelessness Strategy and its revised 2006-08 reformulation means it is somewhat premature to make an assessment of its efficacy.

What is evident, however, are that early indications are that the measures are having a positive impact with progress made on several important parameters. The emphasis on preventative policies delivered in a more cohesive manner has the potential to see significant improvement in tackling homelessness.

Those policies are not standing still and continue to be refined and improved, particularly through greater service user involvement. The mechanisms for monitoring progress and well developed consultation input will help to ensure that the strategy continues to work.

National Housing Strategy Cross-Cutting linkages and wider integration

Plan Rationalisation

Plan Rationalisation has been the driver for the timetable for delivery of the 2007 Local Housing Strategies. For housing, this meant that the requirement for revised local housing strategies would mean full rationalization of local authority plans could be preceded by consolidation of: the Local BME Housing Strategy, the Local Homelessness Strategy and the Supporting People Operational Plan into the local housing strategy as an interim step.

Under Plan Rationalisation proposals, the local housing strategy will be incorporated within the Community Strategy in 2008-09 and provide a composite element of the Local Development Plan.

Work with Local Government Policy Division has been ongoing to ensure housing is properly and adequately reflected in Community Strategies and counterpart guidance. Housing Directorate will contribute towards the drafting and planned consultation on draft guidance to be issued in March 2007.

Planning and Housing

Extensive work with Planning and stakeholders has been undertaken to revise the Technical Advice Notes (TANs) 1 Joint Housing Land Availability Studies and TAN 2 Planning and Affordable Housing to support the delivery of affordable housing at a local level. These policies collectively seek to address the issue of the provision of housing through the planning system and the need to ensure that there is a robust evidence base, through the outcomes of the Local Housing Market Assessments, to support Local Development Plan (LDPs) and Local Housing Strategies' preparation. These together with the Affordable Housing Toolkit and the revised TANs form the suite of new planning policies for housing to tackle affordability issued in 2006.

Implementation of the TANs and the housing guidance rely on housing and planning officers in local authorities and their neighbouring authorities working closely at the local and sub-regional levels.

Work with regional groupings such as SEWRHF and RHAN and counterpart Planning Forums sees increased cross-fertilisation of policy. The establishment of the Housing Strategy Officer's Network has facilitated many training opportunities and additional resource for joint consideration and collaborative working.

The successful implementation of these policies is crucial to delivering affordable housing and consequently the Assembly Government will be holding a series of regionally based joint training workshops across Wales, early in 2007, to assist with the implementation of the policy.

Making the Connections and Beecham‘Beyond Boundaries’

The refocusing of policy on service delivery and the co-ordination of policies driven by these Welsh Assembly Government initiatives see an over-arching commitment to embed this philosophy in new policy development. Regional collaborative working is a feature of the Housing Market Assessment guidance and support provided by WAG. Further assistance for the establishment of more regional studies and initiatives in procurement and in response to housing need, for example, joint emergency control centres and housing market studies will also be investigated.

Wales Spatial Plan and Housing

The Wales Spatial Plan has been progressing well in each of the 6 spatial areas. The core work has involved looking at strategic development needs over the long term. Housing is a core element of this given its key influence over population growth/decline, economic development, regeneration and travel patterns.

The process for establishing the work programme in each area was to provide each spatial area with the opportunity to prioritise actions set out in the spatial plan. Housing was not always a specific action identified but the rationale for dealing with it has become apparent as it impacted on the wider strategy work being undertaken. The way it is dealt with in each area therefore varies slightly and is summarised below.

North West Wales

A housing baseline Assessment has been undertaken by Natalie Jones, (Gwynedd CC) on behalf of Gwynedd, Anglesey, Conwy and Denbighshire. A Knowledge Transfer Partnership has been set up with the University of Wales Bangor to work together to gain the skills required to enable the Local Authorities in North Wales to work together on a full housing assessment. Peter James, Conwy County Council is taking the lead with the work being completed within 7-8 months.

Central Wales

Task and Finish Group has been set up in Central Wales to assess local needs for affordable housing and take action to meet them using the national toolkit. A policy and strategy sub group has been established within RHAN (Rural Housing Authorities Network) to take this work forward. Key activities RHAN wish to undertake include identifying the key affordable housing issues and to identify potential solution, collaboration for the development of Local Housing Assessments, investigating and testing approaches/models within other areas.

South East Wales

The SE Wales Core Group has developed a number of options for managing the projected growth in households and population which is predicted over the Spatial Plan period. The preferred option is a hybrid option which realises that networked and balanced growth are key, but if this option were pushed too hard in isolation from market realities it could damage development in SE Wales as a whole. Housing has a

key role in the work of the core group and is being examined on the basis of housing market areas.

Housing market areas are defined on the basis of their relative self-containment particularly within the private sector and for this reason the boundaries of the HMAs are unlikely to co-incide with a local authority area. The housing market areas in South East Wales are influenced by physical geography with the hills and the valleys helping to create the market structure.

The M4 corridor authorities and housing market are defined by their effective infrastructure and contrast with the housing markets and authorities to the North. Some LAs cross more than one market area, e.g. Torfaen and Caerphilly which stretch from the M4 corridor to the Heads of the Valleys. All of the local authorities and housing market areas have identified need for affordable housing through the SE Wales regional housing market study (through their own housing need surveys) and through housing market assessments currently under production.

There is a clear need for balancing some of the more affluent parts of the region (much of the area to the South of the M4 corridor and in parts of rural Monmouthshire) with areas where the housing market is less buoyant and potentially at risk.

North East Wales

In North East Wales housing is being considered in the briefs of two studies, the North East Wales Sub Regional Strategy and the Conwy/Denbighshire Study. These studies are looking at the strategic development issues and options for the next 10 years and beyond. The NE Wales West Cheshire study looks in particular at the issues surrounding housing supply and demand taking into account the growth and restraint around Chester and the emerging work from the Liverpool City Region area. The Conwy-Denbighshire study looks in detail at the regeneration issues of coastal town and development pressures arising from both the East (Chester) and the west (Menai Hub).

South West Wales (Swansea Bay and Pembrokeshire Spatial Plan Areas)

The work in South West Wales has considered the likely scale of housing and its spatial distribution for the Swansea Bay / Western Valleys area and the Pembrokeshire Haven spatial plan area. The work has been undertaken by the WSP groups together with the South West Wales Regional Planning Officers Group. Alternative strategies, both for the scale of housing and spatial distribution have been assessed. This work culminated in a workshop held in Carmarthen at which the group was supplemented by representatives from housing, transport (SWITCH), CCW, Environment Agency, and WAG (Planning Services). The discussion addressed housing and population issues within the context of: economic development, affordable housing, traffic and transport and environmental issues. The work will be further considered and refined particularly with regard to the inter-relationships with other topic areas, delivering sustainable patterns of development, integrating spatial planning with achieving a step change in public transport provision to meet the increasingly diffuse and longer distance commuting patterns, affordable housing and

environmental impacts. The collection and assessment of information required for the SEA would be a mechanism for driving this forward.

Sustainability - Housing and Sustainable Development

A radically enhanced agenda of global significance since publication of *Better Homes* has been sustainability. The planning, design, construction and maintenance of housing provide significant opportunities to contribute towards sustainable development. Well built, safe and environmentally friendly housing is fundamental to individual and community well-being. The investment in new housing, refurbishment and maintenance provides opportunities for social and economic benefits to the local community and economy.

The 1.3 million homes in Wales contribute a significant part of the total impact on our local and global environment, particularly in carbon emissions and waste. Improving the environmental and energy performance of housing construction, occupation and maintenance is a key element in a sustainable future for Wales. It can also help to meet Wales' targets for energy use and the promotion of microgeneration and renewable energy technologies in housing.

The increased focus and absorption of sustainable development factors in housing policy is recognised because of its importance in:

- The location, planning, layout and design of housing contribution to the long term vitality and identity of communities;
- Well-designed, constructed and maintained housing is essential to supporting sustainable communities that reflect diversity and social inclusion;
- The quality, cost and availability of housing are key factors in the quality of life of local communities and their residents;
- Good housing contributes to health and well-being, educational attainment and access to employment;
- Housing can reduce major environmental impacts through its siting, its construction, its use of resources such as energy and water and its demands on transportation;
- Housing can play an important part in alleviating poverty, in supporting people and generating employment; and
- The location, cost and availability of housing are key factors in the safeguarding of Welsh speaking communities.

Housing for Older People

A key undertaking of the Strategy for Older People in Wales was the requirement to hold a National Housing Debate on independence and the housing needs of older people. This took place in late 2004 and 2005 and comprised a consultation exercise involving over 250 organisations as well as individual service-users. Building on the SJR Committee's policy review *Housing for Older People*, the consultation paper focused on twenty key questions covering a wide range of housing and other cross-cutting issues. Over 50 statutory, voluntary and independent organisations responded together with some 100 service users.

The consultation outcomes were considered at and the process supplemented by two regional conferences. The summary outcomes of the Debate can be grouped into three grades of assessment.

Support was shown for the following aspects:

- Older people being able to follow their preference to live in their own homes as long as possible;
- The principle that independent living should be seen as a priority wherever appropriate;
- Older people having increased choices and options;
- Older people being involved in the design of their properties;
- The Welsh Assembly Government and other statutory authorities becoming more integrated and joined-up at the local level;
- Care and Repair services;
- Assistive technology/telecare, and
- Extra care.

The Debate reported mixed views in the following areas:

- Disabled Facilities Grants, although very effective in fostering independence, they could be hindered by delays and administrative complexities;
- The Supporting People programme was generally welcomed but future levels of funding were reported to be of concern;
- Retirement villages.

The outcomes of the Debate showed that there was concern in the following areas:

- the need for equity release to operate sensitively, with recognition of the needs of older people;
- effective partnership working should be improved and increased particularly for services for people with dementia;
- a fundamental remodelling of services was felt to be needed as many existing sheltered housing schemes were no longer suitable.

Other outcomes provided information about the housing and related services for older people. These principally included the following:

- * The needs of older BME people revolved around language, culture and unsuitable services;
- * The problems of housing in rural areas also revolved around affordability, transport, support networks, low incomes and isolation;
- * The preventative measures identified to minimise the fire risks faced by older people were in line with Assembly Government policies;
- * Fuel poverty was a key factor experienced by older people and demonstrated one of the key links between poor housing and poor health.

To further develop the findings to the Debate, the Housing Directorate has commissioned three follow-up research projects which are currently on-going. The findings of these projects will assist in the design of future policy development.

1. Strategic Guidelines on Independence and the Housing Needs of Older People (undertaken by ECOTEC [with Contact Consulting]).
2. Specialised Housing Accommodation for Older People in Wales: Foundations for the Future (undertaken by ECOTEC).
3. The provision of housing-related goods, services and advice to older people in their homes. (Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit, University of Salford).

As well as the Strategy for Older People, other cross-cutting documentary linkages in relation to housing for older people include: *Fulfilled Lives: a Strategy for Social Services in Wales Over the Next Decade*, *Designed for Life*, *the National Service Framework for Older People* and the *Fuel Poverty Strategy*. The citizen-centred focus of the Beecham report is also clearly relevant for future policy in this area. The Assembly Government's Health, Social Care and Housing Officials Group is responsible for monitoring the progress made on these cross-cutting issues.

Equality and Diversity

A number of initiatives have been undertaken or commenced which go beyond the requirements as set out in the National Housing Strategy. A significant raft of new policy and strategy is being implemented with increasing emphasis on the delivery of our strategic aims and an examination of how this can be achieved. A number of measures have also been taken to link the work of housing and equality to wider Welsh Assembly Government aims and objectives and this has encouraged actions to look at housing and its effect on all equality strands.

- BME Housing Action Plan for Wales

One of the key projects currently taking place is the review of the BME Housing Action Plan for Wales. The current action plan, published in 2002, was monitored and evaluated biannually and it has been decided that a new action plan could better reflect contemporary housing issues for BME communities in Wales. It has also been agreed that emphasis can be placed on delivery as many of the building blocks have now been put in place. These building blocks have included: the establishment of Tai Pawb, the embedding of race relations legislation, the launch of the Welsh Assembly Government's Race Equality Scheme and the recent publication of the CRE's Statutory Code of Practice on Housing. The development of the new action plan is currently at an early stage and being undertaken by a small working group. The group and the Assembly Government will be engaging with key stakeholders throughout this process in the run-up to formal consultation next year.

- Refugee Housing Action Plan

The Refugee Housing Action Plan was published in July 2006. The Housing Sub Group of the All Wales Refugee Policy Forum has agreed to monitor the plan and the Welsh Assembly Government will present updates against the actions to the group on a quarterly basis for scrutiny. The work undertaken by Housing in response to refugee

accommodation needs has also been closely linked to the wider Refugee Inclusion Strategy which has currently issued for consultation.

- The Accommodate Project – Refugee Integration Partnership

In August 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government agreed to funding of the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT) to operate one partnership project based on the 'Accommodate Project' in England. The project seeks to look for innovative ways to increase refugee integration through housing. Newport has been chosen as the preferred bidder and the project there will look at private sector issues and raising awareness of refugee housing issues.

- Space for People – Disability Housing Project

The Welsh Assembly Government has agreed to part fund the Space for People project until 2008. This project which operates in Gwent seeks to provide a housing advisory and advocacy service to disabled people in Gwent to enable them to achieve independent living and housing choice. The project is also raising and promoting good practice ideas around design, accessibility and independent living.

- Migrant Workers

Officials from the Housing Directorate have been closely working with colleagues from the Voluntary Sector and Inclusion Unit to undertake work around migrant workers. This collaboration has led to the development of two key publications; the migrant workers welcome pack; and the Code of Practice for Employers which should be published next year.

- Gypsies and Travellers

The Welsh Assembly Government illustrated its commitment to improving the accommodation standards for Gypsies and Travellers in Wales by commissioning the research 'Accommodation Needs of Gypsy – Travellers in Wales' by Pat Niner which was published in April 2006. This research identified the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community in Wales. The recommendations arising from the research are being implemented. At the report launch, Jane Hutt AM indicated there would be a grant within the next financial year for site improvement in Wales and a dedicated unit established within the Housing Directorate to co-ordinate Assembly wide work on Gypsy and Travellers issues.

Commencement of sections 225 & 226 of the Housing Act 2004 projected for Spring 2007, will place a statutory duty on local authorities to assess and then strategically plan to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. Guidance to carry out this function has been issued within the 'Local Housing Market Assessment Guide' (Annex F) of March 2006 and within the 'Local Housing Strategy Guidance' issued in November 2006.

- Wider Equality Links

A number of linkages have been made by the work undertaken by Housing and wider equality work in the Assembly Government. Housing representatives attended and facilitated at Welsh Assembly Government engagement events on the Disability and Gender Equality Schemes which housing have also contributed key action and commitment to these documents.

- Mainstreaming Equality

The Welsh Assembly Government has also published its Mainstreaming Equality Scheme and Housing Directorate are committed to embracing this agenda particularly in light of changes in equality legislation and the establishment of the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights in 2007.

The commitment to mainstreaming equality issues is also reflected in the newly published Local Housing Strategy Guidance which requires local housing authorities to mainstream their BME Housing Strategies into their local housing strategies.

Conclusion

The national housing strategy benefited from its wide-ranging and inclusive development process which provided an ideal platform to develop its cross-cutting agenda. *Better Homes* was a seminal document for the Assembly in articulating the linkages to the plethora of such wide ranging policy areas.

The number, range and complexity of cross-cutting policies and issues that housing influences, however, are also a drawback in successfully taking all those agenda's forward together.

Housing, under the Assembly, if anything has been ahead of the game in achieving the development of policy in collaborative and partnership working. The national housing strategy continues to evolve in this way in order to remain dynamic and a working document. This is reflected in the Action Plan for the strategy and exemplified by the number of 'new' initiatives that have come on stream. This has been necessary to reflect the dynamism of the housing market.

The future development of the strategy continues to hold as many challenges. The focus upon more targeted and local service delivery and increasing emphasis on regional/sub-regional collaboration is likely to further enhance the need for a wider and more fundamental reappraisal of the national housing strategy in the shorter term.

Appendix

National Housing Strategy Selective Review 2006

- Community Housing Cymru (WFHA) – 13 Nov. 2006
- Housing Strategy Officers Network - 14 July, 22 Sept, 27 Nov. 2006
- CIH 'Fit for Purpose' training - 14 Nov. 2006
- SEWRHF – 21 Aug., 16 Oct. 2006
- S W Wales Housing and Planning officers 29 Sept. 2006
- Homelessness Strategy Working Group
- 22 Local Authorities Housing Departments in Wales
- Local Authority tenants
- WAG Health and Social Care
- WAG SEDU
- WAG Sustainable Futures
- WAG Local Government
- WAG Planning