

HB 17
National Assembly for Wales
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
Housing (Wales) Bill: Stage 1
Response from: Royston Jones

January 14th, 2014

I have, as advised by the 'Welsh' Government website, sent this letter to the Clerk of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee, but I have written it primarily for the attention of Carl Sargeant AM.

Dear Mr. Sargeant,

Here is my response to the Housing (Wales) Bill.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Despite claiming to be legislation for Wales, and dealing with the building of new properties and the housing of people, the Bill makes no reference to the Welsh language. As we both know, the answer for this omission lies in the fact that this Bill is the work of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in London. It is the DCLG blueprint for social housing in Wales. Policy dictated by a UK government department to which your so-called 'Welsh Government' has supinely agreed. Making it a negation of devolution.

In addition to the absence of any mention of the Welsh language, there is other evidence to support my belief. Not least that this Bill, purporting to be legislation for Wales, mentions 'England' no fewer than thirty-nine times! By comparison, the Housing (Scotland) Bill makes not a single reference to England. This is because the Scottish legislation is precisely that, legislation for Scotland; whereas the 'Wales' Bill is cross-border legislation.

PRIVATE RENTED v SOCIAL HOUSING

I'm sure no one will object to regulating or even curbing the activities of irresponsible private landlords of the sort that have done such damage in towns like Rhyl through encouraging undesirables from north west England to move to the coastal towns of north Wales.

Yet I strongly suspect that the Regulation of Private Rented Housing (Part 1 of the Bill) is less a measure to give us a well-regulated private rented sector than an attempt to reduce this sector in favour of housing associations, charities and other housing providers. Which, given the record of such bodies in Wales, will almost certainly result in more undesirables being brought in. I say that because, outside of decrepit resorts like Rhyl, private landlords - i.e. those who have paid their own money for what they own - tend to be more careful about who they have as tenants than those whose property portfolio is due entirely to public and other funding.

THE PROBLEM WITH HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS 1

'Welsh' housing associations have for many years operated in a cross-border fashion, taking in - presumably at an enhanced rate - 'problems' from over the border. I'm talking now of white trash; track suit bottoms and tattoos, pit bulls and £100 a week scratch card habits. Worse of course are the criminals, such as the gang of paedophiles from London housed in Kidwelly by the Gwalia Group, and sent down for long sentences in March 2011. This cross-border nature of housing associations was clearly spelled out in an e-mail I received in December 2010 from Nick Bennett, chief executive of Community Housing Cymru.

This is what Bennett had to say in response to a letter of mine published in the *Western Mail* in which I said, in essence, what I have just said in the previous paragraph: "**There are over 2 million people on waiting lists for social housing.**" Why would the head of Community Housing *Cymru* talk of "over 2 million people on waiting lists". I asked him for clarification but, as you can probably guess, he did not answer.

Even so, his reference to "over 2 million" makes it absolutely clear that 'Welsh' housing associations are locked into an Englandandwales framework, which means that someone homeless in London, or a 'problem family' in Leeds, qualifies for social housing in Wales, ahead of Welsh people. But there's another damaging feature to housing associations that few seem to notice.

THE PROBLEM WITH HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS 2

Not so long ago we had council houses owned by local authorities, and these properties were maintained by locally recruited workforces. Now that these properties have passed to housing associations maintenance contracts have in many instances been signed over to large English companies that sub-contract to smaller English companies. With the inevitable result that Welsh people lose jobs, Welsh firms lose contracts, and profits leech out of Wales.

Here in Gwynedd, the council's stock of housing was taken over in 2010 by Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd, which has since contracted out all maintenance to an English firm, Lovell, with offices in Altrincham and Birkenhead. Lovell in turn employs sub-contractors from north west England.

Last year Lovell and its sub-contractors were working on many properties in the Tywyn area. The results were horrendous - jobs left unfinished or badly done, and people having to move out of their homes because work had started on bathrooms or kitchens . . . then suddenly stopped. My disabled next-door neighbour waited weeks for his kitchen to be tiled by a firm called DNA - from Wigan! When DNA's workers deigned to turn up, it was never before 10am, for remember, they had to travel from Wigan to Tywyn, a distance of 120 miles. Welcome to your *local* housing association!

So I defy anyone to explain how it be an improvement for the wider Gwynedd economy to have Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd and Lovell in control of social housing? And because housing associations are not covered by Freedom of Information legislation it's very difficult to find out how they operate. Why should I be able to make an FoI request about social housing to a local authority but not to a housing associations? Why the secrecy?

CONCLUSION

Let us be absolutely clear about this: the Housing (Wales) Bill started life in the Department for Communities and Local Government in London. There is nothing Welsh about it. It is legislation to

strengthen the Englandandwales nature of social housing provision by enshrining in law what may up until now been no more than common practice. For as the Bill makes clear, someone with a local qualification anywhere in England automatically qualifies for a tenancy in Wales. Worse, someone refused a tenancy in England due to criminal or other behaviour will be housed in Wales.

After being formulated in London this Bill was then passed to your Government by those agencies in Wales that are part of the DCLG network: the Knowledge and Analytical Services unit that produces your 'Welsh' statistics, such as the insane 'household projections' used by the Planning Inspectorate - an 'executive agency' of the DCLG - in deciding how many new homes are to be forced on Wales; also the Housing Directorate, which controls social housing. Plus of course, Labour's friends and supporters running the housing associations, on whom your Government has lavished countless millions of pounds in recent years.

Whatever purpose it may serve in England, here in Wales, through its satellite agencies mentioned above, the Department for Communities and Local Government is engineering demographic change in the hope of assimilating Wales into England.

The Department for Communities and Local Government may even have jumped the gun in its take-over of 'Welsh' housing associations. For last week we learnt that the DCLG is disbursing funding from the European Investment Bank to various housing providers, among them the Wales and West Housing Association, which will be lent £25m to "build 251 homes in Wales". But, wait! if your so-called 'Welsh Government' is responsible for social housing in Wales, shouldn't it be handing out this cash? This news seems to be yet more evidence that in future Welsh housing associations are to be controlled from London, because *'he who pays the piper . . . '*

RECOMMENDATION

The pretence that you or your ludicrous 'Government' have any real authority in Wales is finally destroyed with the Housing (Wales) Bill. The charade is exposed. The Bill also makes clear that your department is nothing more than the Cardiff branch of the Department for Communities and Local Government. An arrangement you would no doubt explain as 'co-operation', a term much favoured by those in your position.

What you and your cronies in the 'Welsh Government' fail to understand is that by being willing parties in the undermining of devolution you have made yourselves redundant. The only useful purpose your continuing presence now serves is to disguise your abject surrender. So why not do one great service for Wales and resign *en masse*? You could then get yourselves real jobs - which, I acknowledge, will be difficult if not impossible for most of you - leaving Wales to be ruled, directly and honestly, from London.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Royston Jones', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Royston Jones