

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Tai, Adfywio a Threftadaeth
Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref SF-HL-1332-12

Ann Jones AM
Chair
Communities, Equality and Local
Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel

30 April 2012

Dear Ann,

I was pleased to attend the National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee for its general scrutiny session on Thursday 29 March. As agreed, I am now providing further information on Empty Homes policy, Co-operative Housing and grants available for sports clubs.

I am aware that some Members have suggested that a Wales-wide empty property strategy is needed. However, I am not convinced that this is necessary. We now have a nationally coordinated programme of action, *Houses into Homes*, to tackle empty properties. This will effectively serve the same purpose as an empty home strategy without having a new, separate strategy that runs parallel to our national housing strategy.

Most local authorities across Wales have their own empty homes strategies and these are supported by the revised guidance the Welsh Government introduced in September 2010. I do not wish to burden local authorities with a plethora of strategies, particularly when our National Housing Strategy *Improving Lives and Communities: Homes in Wales* covers the issue of empty homes and it has also been discussed extensively at the Housing Strategy Implementation Programme Board.

I also see an important role for the *Houses into Homes* national steering group in this respect. The group's membership will include the six chairs of each collaborative working area along with Welsh Government officials and representatives from the Welsh Local Government Association. The group will monitor the initiative's progress and also advise on target setting.

As you know, I am also very interested in developing co-operative housing in Wales as an additional method of delivering affordable and accessible housing. In fact we have made firm commitments in our Programme for Government to look at how we can support co-operative housing, including a new form of co-operative home ownership and also whether there is an opportunity in the Housing Bill to break down any legislative barriers to this approach to housing.

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There is a rich history of co-operative housing in Wales, going back to the Garden Village movement at the turn of the century and more recently the formation of community mutual's resulting from a number of large scale voluntary stock transfers.

We have brought together key stakeholders from both the housing and co-operative sectors to agree how we will approach this work and we have set out criteria that we think co-operative housing should meet in Wales. This includes how it will provide democratic and community based involvement, choice and flexibility, as well as demonstrating the quality of place through social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The group has also been the conduit for a number of key pioneer co-operative housing schemes that range in size, location and type and we are working in conjunction with the Wales Co-operative Centre and a number of other key stakeholders to explore how we can support these pioneer schemes, to bring forward delivery as soon as possible.

Some of these pioneers could make efficient use of public land, including our own Welsh Government land and alongside work we are doing to try and secure new sources of longer term funding for equity based co-operative housing, I am hopeful we can be innovative in our approach and provide a new affordable and sustainable way for people to live.

Finally, with regards to grants available to sports clubs in Wales, Sports Wales provides information on its website about its grant schemes, for example, Community Chest. Other sources of funding which may help fund sport related projects include the Communities Facilities & Activities Programme (CFAP), Regeneration Funding, Communities First and Big Lottery Funding. Elsewhere, local authorities offer separate grants schemes to assist in sport related projects. I intend to give consideration to the feasibility of how all these funding sources might be publicised further.

I trust that I have addressed the Committee's queries in full.



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