

# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Communities Policy** |
| **DATE**  | **04 July 2022** |
| **BY** | **Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice, Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change & Rebecca Evans MS, Minister for Finance & Local Government.** |

Our Programme for Government is founded on the distinctively Welsh values of community, equality and social justice. It puts collaboration ahead of competition, showing how we will act to maximise fairness for all and eliminate inequality at every level of society.

In recent years, our communities have faced unprecedented challenges, with impacts which are still unfolding. There is growing evidence that not all communities have coped in the same way and that those with key resources, including physical assets, strong partnerships and local advocates, tend to be more resilient to the types of shocks which all have experienced in recent years and which are likely to continue. Yet, in the most challenging of circumstances, Welsh communities have repeatedly shown the strength, resilience and unity so synonymous with who we are as a nation.

Conversations with partners are telling us there is a need for a fresh look at community policy in the light of the pandemic, when local action was so vital.  We are now taking the first steps in developing a Communities Policy which will in turn develop new, co-productive, ways of working with our communities. This will help to ensure that the principles of community empowerment already built into our primary legislation are translated consistently into effective local engagement.

Many commitments in our Programme for Government are focused on enabling people to thrive in their local areas as well as supporting communities of interest. For example:

* Developing a Wales Community Food Strategy to encourage the production and supply of locally sourced food in Wales.
* Investing in the learning environment of community schools.
* Ensuring the history and culture of our Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities are properly represented, as part of our Anti-Racist Action Plan for Wales.

* Developing a positive narrative around tackling climate change and supporting renewable energy, especially in deprived communities.
* Supporting co-operative housing, community-led initiatives, and community land trusts.
* Developing more than 50 local community hubs to co-locate front-line health and social care and other services.
* Commencing the socio-economic duty to ensure that public bodies consider the impacts of their decisions, particularly on disadvantaged communities.
* Making Wales a Nation of Sanctuary, drawing on the generosity of communities in every part of Wales who in recent years have made homes for people from Syria, Afghanistan and now Ukraine.

It is timely for us to look again at how these and many other programmes come together at the very local level and how the entire Welsh Government supports and works with our communities. We also want to listen to and learn from our communities, drawing on local knowledge and hard-won experience. In doing so we will fully respect existing local and regional structures. The aim is not to impose new burdens or duties but something that complements important existing legislation and policies, like our Future Generations Act, and which helps us to discover, together, what more can be done to support our communities.

We recognise that what is needed is not a standalone community programme, but a cross-cutting, whole of government response. This will mean working with our communities and other partners to co-produce solutions that will support delivery of our Programme for Government and, at the same time, enable all our communities to be thriving, empowered and connected.

To support this new approach, we have developed an internal Communities Policy Board, with every Ministerial portfolio represented, and gathered information on more than 100 community-facing Welsh Government programmes and funding streams. We now need to expand our discussions to include Welsh stakeholders at every level, including communities themselves. We intend to begin with pilot work in a few areas, by agreement with their respective Public Service Boards, to find out more about what is happening in their communities and explore what more could be done.

There will be many aspects to this work and we have recently published research on [Place-based approaches to community engagement and support](https://gov.wales/place-based-approaches-community-engagement-and-support) which will inform the next stage. For example, local assets such as community centres, green spaces and heritage sites are of great importance for many communities. Our Community Facilities Programme has provided over £41million since 2015 to help communities all over Wales buy, develop and improve crucial local buildings and green space. We have also made a firm commitment to supporting Community Asset Transfers and community led developments by providing a support framework that delivers advice, guidance and finance. There are challenges ahead – the UK Government’s failure to replace important EU structural funds will impact many communities and third sector groups. While the Welsh Government cannot replace that lost funding, it’s important effective, place-based engagement is encouraged and supported.

Many other forms of community work are also relevant and we know that there are numerous and varied examples of participatory democracy in place around Wales. We want to encourage wide involvement with the development of our new Communities Policy and invite anyone who wants to know more to contact us at CommunitiesPolicy@gov.wales.