

Housing policy

Introduction

The Welsh Assembly Government has the following vision for housing in Walesⁱ:

"We want everyone in Wales to have the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable, housing; to be able to choose where they live and decide whether buying or renting is best for them and their families."

The main responsibilities of the Assembly Government's Housing Directorate are: ensuring good quality, affordable housing; increasing domestic energy efficiency; planning for housing that meets the needs of older people; reducing homelessness; promoting fire safety.

- ◆ The total number of dwellings in Wales at 31 December 2004 was estimated to be 1.30 million.
- ◆ In Wales there is a high proportion of dwellings built before 1919 (34 per cent) and a high proportion of owner occupied dwellings (74 per cent).
- ◆ The long run decline in the number of dwellings rented from local authorities continues, falling to 158,000 by April 2005. This decline is mainly as a result of the Right to Buy scheme. The number of properties rented from Registered Social Landlords has increased from 11,000 in 1981 to 65,000 in 2005ⁱⁱ.

Overview of current statutory powers of the Assembly

"Housing" is Field 11 of Schedule 5 of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*. This means that the National Assembly for Wales can seek Measure-making powers over housing matters through Legislative Competence Orders.

The following responsibilities concerning housing fell within the portfolio of the Social Justice and Regeneration Minister during the Second Assembly:

- ◆ Allocation of housing resources to local authorities and to housing associations in Wales, and oversight of their activities;
- ◆ Oversight and regulation of the activities of Registered Social Landlords in Wales, and of the private rented sector;
- ◆ The provision of housing in Wales for those with special needs;
- ◆ Regeneration of problem estates and of low-grade housing in Wales;
- ◆ The exemption of certain classes of building from Building Regulations, and the determination of appeals on matters relating to them, but not Building Regulations more generally (not devolved);
- ◆ The regulation of commercial tenancies let by local authorities;
- ◆ The provision of grants to aid energy efficiency;
- ◆ The prescription of persons who are not to be eligible for housing assistance (not housing benefit).

Forthcoming EU and UK primary legislation

- ◆ The *Housing Association (Rights and Representation of Residents) Bill 2006-07* was introduced on 13 December 2006.

Key Assembly Government strategy documents and action plans from the Second Assembly:

- ◆ Better Homes for People in Walesⁱⁱⁱ is the national housing strategy for Wales, published in July 2001.
- ◆ The Better Homes for People in Wales – Action Plan^{iv} provides a summary of how the Assembly Government is delivering its national housing strategy and progress toward the targets.
- ◆ The Refugee Housing Action Plan^v, produced in July 2006, identifies actions that will be taken to address the housing and related support needs of refugees. The plan also provides information on relevant law and policy.
- ◆ The National Homelessness Strategy for Wales 2006-08^{vi} sets out how the Assembly Government will tackle homelessness in Wales, published in November 2005.
- ◆ The Black, Minority Ethnic Housing Action Plan for Wales^{vii} was published in September 2002 and is designed to help the Assembly Government meet its duties under the *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*.

Legacy issues from the Second Assembly

The Social Justice and Regeneration Committee legacy paper highlights the following issues relating to housing for the attention of the Third Assembly:

- ◆ Affordable housing – including the Social Housing Grant, the impact of Right to Buy legislation and the condition and supply of social housing in both the public and private sectors;
- ◆ Grants for home improvement, adaptation and renovation;
- ◆ Mobile home legislation;
- ◆ Fuel poverty / home energy efficiency;
- ◆ Housing stock transfer;
- ◆ Homelessness, including the recommendations from the Committee's final policy review report.

Useful links

1. The Housing section of the Welsh Assembly Government web-site:
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/?lang=en>
2. Community Housing Cymru: <http://www.welshhousing.org.uk/index.html>
3. The Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru:
http://www.cih.org/your_location/cymru/index.php?menu28nav=visible

Further information

For further information on any aspect of housing, please contact:

Rebekah James, Members' Research Service on ext. 8678

Rebekah.James@wales.gsi.gov.uk

ⁱ National Assembly for Wales, *Better Homes for People in Wales: A National Housing Strategy for Wales*, July 2001:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/sjr/housing/strategy/betterhomese?lang=en>

ⁱⁱ National Assembly for Wales, *Welsh Housing Statistics 2005*, Chapter 1:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/whs2005/?lang=en>

ⁱⁱⁱ National Assembly for Wales, *Better Homes for People in Wales: A National Housing Strategy for Wales*, July 2001:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/sjr/housing/strategy/betterhomese?lang=en>

^{iv} National Assembly for Wales, *Better Homes for People in Wales – Action Plan*:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/strategy/publications/betterhomesactionplan/?lang=en>

^v Welsh Assembly Government, *Refugee Housing Action Plan*, July 2006:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/publications/refugeeactionplan?lang=en>

^{vi} Welsh Assembly Government, *National Homelessness Strategy for Wales 2006-08*, November 2005:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/publications/homelessnesstrategy?lang=en>

^{vii} Welsh Assembly Government, *Black, Minority Ethnic Housing Action Plan for Wales*, September 2002:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/publications/bmehousingplan?lang=en>