



Ein cyf/Our ref: SF/LG/2127/15

Christine Chapman AM
Chair, Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

27 July 2015

Dear Christine,

Thank you for your letter of 15 June, regarding the legacy work of the Committee. You requested an update on progress against a number of Committee recommendations in relation to my portfolio, however, you included a reference to the Inquiry into Human Trafficking. This falls to the Minister for Public Services, and I understand he has addressed your queries in a separate letter.

In addition to the inquiries referenced in your letter I also include an update on the Inquiry into Disability Related Harassment in Wales. Undertaken in 2011, the Welsh Government response was issued by my colleague, the then Minister for Finance and Leader of the House. We accepted all of the recommendations contained within the report and have made significant progress in delivering against them.

We published *Tackling Hate Crimes and Incidents: A Framework for Action* in May 2014, alongside a supporting annual delivery plan. This has been formed across three key objectives on prevention, supporting victims and improving multi-agency working so is linked to a number of recommendations from the inquiry report. The Framework was developed through a Task and Finish Group, which included representation from the Disability Hate Crime Action Group. It also includes a specific objective to deliver training and awareness in service delivery.

A review by the Equality and Human Rights Commission has evidenced the work being taken forward across Local Authorities in Wales. This has helped to establish current practice across Wales. For example, 20 out of 22 Local Authorities have an objective in relation to tackling hate crime or have identified a specific disability hate crime objective. The Welsh Government funded eight Regional Community Cohesion Coordinators support tackling hate crime and harassment as part of their work. The *Strategic Equality Plan* for 2012-2016 also includes a specific objective to tackle hate crime and bullying.

The Inquiry into the Provision of Affordable Housing in Wales reported in April 2012. In his response, the then Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage accepted 13 of the 14 recommendations, with one recommendation accepted in principle. With the publication of the *Housing White Paper*, the enactment of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and the introduction of the Renting Homes (Wales) Bill it is clear the Welsh Government has taken the challenges in this area seriously.

Within our Programme for Government we committed to deliver an additional 10,000 affordable homes within this Assembly, and we are on track to do so with almost 70% of those homes in place. Cooperative housing is being developed at a number of sites across Wales which will deliver over 100 affordable cooperative homes. Cadwyn Housing Association will be launching the first cooperative housing scheme over the summer. We have also brought 4,471 empty properties back into use against a target of 5,000 and our recent legislation in respect of the Right to Buy will safeguard social housing stock. We introduced, and extended, *Help to Buy – Wales*. To date there have been over 1,600 completions through the scheme with three quarters of these coming from first time buyers.

In terms of public sector land, progress has been made with the database, with approximately 21,500 entries in Wales. In the first three years of this administration 2,090 additional affordable homes have been delivered on land made available by the public sector. The Welsh Government's Land Release for Affordable Housing programme is expected to deliver in the region of 400 affordable homes within this administration, with a further 100 in the future.

I am working with the Minister for Natural Resources to ensure alignment between housing policy and planning policy. I am also working with colleagues and stakeholders across the private, public and third sectors to deliver a range of options for people seeking affordable housing in Wales. The house-builders are integral to this and regular discussions are held with them about options and proposals.

Meeting the terms of one recommendation in full, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 provides Local Authorities with discretionary powers to introduce a council tax premium of up to 100% of the standard charge on long term empty homes in their areas.

The then Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage accepted 8 of the 23 recommendations set out in the 2013 Inquiry into Home Adaptations. A further 11 recommendations were accepted in principle. As stated in the response, we have undertaken our review into adaptation services, in line with the commitment in the *Housing White Paper*. We have established a Working Group to take forward the development of an enhanced national system for adaptations. The Group is meeting this month to finalise arrangements with a view to roll-out in spring 2016.

I have not progressed the recommendations rejected by my predecessor.

The Inquiry into the Future of Equality and Human Rights in Wales reported in August 2013. The then Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty accepted five of the recommendations and accepted a further three in principle. A number of these related to the need for greater legislative competence, and this is a matter the Welsh Government raised with the Silk Commission. Discussions as to the precise nature and extent of the UK Government's position as set out in the *Powers for a Purpose White Paper* are continuing. As part of those discussions we want to ensure there is no lessening of powers within current competence.

These discussions are particularly important in light of the UK Government position on the Human Rights Act and their stated intention to consult on any changes.

Turning to the other recommendations, a concordat between the Welsh Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission was signed by my predecessor in March 2014. The Commission is not able to accept core funding from the Welsh Government. However, we are able to commission specific projects from them, on a chargeable basis. We have also engaged with Simon Hoffman of Swansea University and Professor Teresa Rees of Cardiff University as suggested. Socio-economic considerations are being taken forward though the provisions of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Finally, the Inquiry into Barriers to Home Building in Wales. As part of my House-Builder Engagement Programme it is my intention to continue working with key partners to understand barriers to development. I recognise some of these are more significant, and it may be possible to resolve them through policy interventions.

My colleague, the Minister for Natural Resources, leads on matters relating to planning policy in Wales. As I have already stated, we are working together to ensure alignment of planning policy and housing policy in Wales. The Welsh Government is committed to seeing the planning system becoming an enabler of appropriate development, which supports national, local and community objectives. Currently there are 16 adopted Local Development Plans in Wales out of a total of 24, and these include land for new home building.

Following discussions with the Design Commission for Wales, my officials have been engaged in raising awareness of alternative and non-traditional approaches to home building. In addition to subject specific design guidance, opportunities to influence standards within the private sector are provided through implementation of National Planning Policy and statutory Building Regulations.

The Welsh Government's Development Quality Requirements, the standard which social landlords need to use when building homes through the Social Housing Grant, has recently been reviewed. The Review Group, which included representation from across the sector, made a number of recommendations for change. However, the fundamental requirements are the same and I have agreed the revised Standard in principle, subject to the statutory requirements for public consultation.

We are also continuing to look for innovative ways to fund house building within Wales. For example, designing a second phase of the innovative Housing Finance Grant which we expect to provide in the region of 2,000 additional new affordable homes. The Committee will also be aware Stamp Duty Land Tax is due to be devolved to Wales from April 2018. Legislation is likely to be introduced in the next Assembly, subject to the will of that Government.

You have also asked for an update on Welsh legislation falling to my portfolio. The Mobile Homes (Wales) Act 2013 has been fully implemented and all the secondary legislation to introduce the new licensing system for mobile home sites is in place.

Work is currently underway on implementing Part 1 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 which will introduce a registration and licensing scheme for landlords and letting and management agents in the private rented sector. Statutory Instruments to introduce elements of Part 1 of the Act are in place covering the establishment of a single licensing authority (Cardiff Council), training requirements and information, periods and fees. It is expected the scheme will formally be in place in October 2015. Implementation of the remainder of the Act will take place over a longer time frame.

I would be happy to provide you with more information on these matters at the Committee session scheduled for 24 September.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Lesley Griffiths'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'L' and a long, flowing 's' at the end.

Lesley Griffiths AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty