

Paper 1

Evidence from Huw Lewis, Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage

My Regeneration Priorities

1. Context

1.1 Regeneration is about people and places. Regeneration aims to make sustainable places over the long term in order to improve the quality of life of the people who live and work in and around those places.

1.2 The term regeneration covers a variety of activities, from sustaining distinctiveness in physical renewal of urban spaces to improve economic viability and address market failures, to working with people in their communities to tackle underlying causes of deprivation. Physical regeneration is often characterised as involving reversing or avoiding the decline of areas, or biasing investment towards areas which are disadvantaged and would not otherwise benefit from investment due to a combination of market failures. Such activities take place all over Wales through different organisations and partnerships.

1.3 The Welsh Government has a number of programmes that specifically aim to support regeneration, from Communities First to the Rural Development Plan. We also use investment across a range of departments to stimulate regeneration.

2. Existing regeneration policy for my portfolio

2.1 In October 2010, the then One Wales Government published the Framework for Regeneration Areas:
wales.gov.uk/docs/desh/publications/101018regenareasframeworken.pdf.

2.2 To support the implementation of the Framework, a National Regeneration Panel was established. The Panel, which is chaired by Viv Sugar, comprises the following organisations:

- Welsh Government
- Welsh Local Government Association
- Welsh Social Enterprise Coalition
- Wales Council for Voluntary Action
- Wales Co-operative Centre
- Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
- Regeneration Skills Collective Wales
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Community Housing Cymru

- Groundwork Wales

2.3 The Framework remains Government policy, although it may in time be superseded by future policy work. I have retained the National Regeneration Panel and very much welcome its continuing input and advice.

2.4 The Government, and regeneration professions and organisations, also benefit from the work of the Centre for Regeneration Excellence Wales (CREW): www.regenwales.org. I am currently considering the most appropriate way to take forward this work, beyond the existing funding arrangements for CREW, which expire in March 2012.

3. Existing activity within my regeneration budget

3.1 The Framework for Regeneration Areas was a stocktake of the Regeneration Areas approach, which was developed using the model of the Heads of the Valleys Programme established in 2005. Regeneration Areas aim to address inequalities experienced across geographical areas in Wales by investing in places that are currently under-performing, both economically and in terms of wellbeing, in order to raise their performance. By investing in areas that are currently under-performing, the aim is to improve overall levels of prosperity and wellbeing in Wales as a whole. It seeks to take advantage of investment opportunities that will lead to sustainable development in urban and rural hubs.

3.2 This approach is now being used in six more Regeneration Areas across Wales: Aberystwyth, Barry, Môn a Menai, North Wales Coast, Swansea, and Western Valleys.

3.3 In addition, the Department for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage also supports the following organisations and partnerships engaged in regeneration activity:

- Newport Unlimited (www.newportunlimited.co.uk)
- Cardiff Harbour Authority (www.cardiffharbour.com)
- Valleys Regional Park (www.thevalleys.org.uk)
- Coalfields Regeneration Trust (www.coalfields-regen.org.uk)
- Groundwork Wales (www.wales.groundwork.org.uk)

3.4 I also have portfolio responsibility for the Regeneration Investment Fund for Wales: www.rifw.co.uk.

4. Cross-cutting regeneration activity

4.1 Regeneration is cross-cutting and as such requires close collaboration across Government portfolios and across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Successful collaborations across Government and beyond include:

- Investment in further education reconfiguration in the Heads of the Valleys to create a landmark centres of learning in Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale.
- The Heart and Soul Campaign – a common approach to place marketing across the Valleys, which has already won three awards.
- The National Station Improvement Programme plus, using public sector investment in Swansea Regeneration Area to enable a pan Wales European-funded project worth £37m.

4.2 Through the creation of my portfolio, the Government has recognised the particularly important role that both Housing and Heritage can play in Regeneration. Housing capital investment, for example, has been a key driver of renewal in deprived areas, in particular through efforts to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, and the quality of housing has a significant effect on people's mental and physical health outcomes. The historic environment provides both economic assets (monuments that encourage tourism, for example) and the distinctiveness that can help shape regeneration activity in a particular area. And the arts and sport provide a range of community development opportunities with economic and social benefits.

4.3 I am determined to make the most of the links between the three parts of my portfolio, building on successes to date. These successes include:

Housing

- Investing £30m in a portfolio of home energy efficiency and renewable energy schemes in Regeneration Areas to tackle fuel poverty and reduce energy use, leading to a pan-Wales European-funded phase 2 project.
- Maximising the community benefits of housing investment, in terms of targeted recruitment and training and local supply chain development, leading to the creation of the Can Do toolkits.

The Historic Environment

- Using urban characterisation work on key settlements such as Merthyr Tydfil to demonstrate the value of heritage and identify where it has a positive role to play in regeneration that respects local distinctiveness. Making the most of historic assets, such as the Castle and the Hafod (Copperopolis) projects in Swansea. Working with British Waterways and CREW to promote best practice on the use of waterways heritage in regeneration that links people and places.
- Levering in investment such as the Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) to stimulate regeneration opportunities through historic building conservation.
- Working with communities, heritage partners and the tourism sector to connect individual sites with other heritage attractions and with the local community and the surrounding area, as well as to link to broader interpretive stories and themes.

Libraries, Museums and Archives

- Modernising public libraries to support services in deprived areas through the Community Learning Libraries Capital Grant Programme.
- Investing in museums to collect, reflect, care for and promote the history and material culture of communities, providing a sense of place and belonging as well as quality of life improvements
- Relocation of Gwent Record Office (now renamed Gwent Archives) to the General Offices, Ebbw Vale as part of the major regeneration project at The Works site.

Sport

- Piloting the Welsh School Games – Gemau Cymru, an innovative project involving a range of sports governing bodies, schools, the Urdd and our Major Events Unit.
- Continuing investment in Free Swimming as part of our efforts to increase physical activity levels and physical literacy.

Arts

- Successfully hosting the 2010 National Eisteddfod in the Heads of the Valleys.
- Continuing support for the regeneration of communities through projects such as Valley Kids, Head 4 Arts, Reach the Heights, Splash, Young Promoters and Community Music Wales.
- Investing in major capital projects, including Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea and the Pontio project in Bangor.

5. Future policy

5.1 Within my portfolio, my main priorities for the future are to deliver the manifesto commitments for which I am responsible, working across the Government. These commitments are:

- Continue our efforts to regenerate our town centres through planning policies breathing new life in to towns by safer & better quality design, developing family friendly environments & mixed use developments.
- Revive our seaside towns by investing in the infrastructure, renewal & regeneration of communities.

5.2 I welcome the Committee's inquiry about the regeneration of town centres, which will be very helpful informing our work on these commitments.

5.3 A number of other manifesto commitments across Ministerial portfolios have direct relevance and strong links to my own. Perhaps the most pertinent of these is:

- Continue to invest in our most deprived communities, integrating our Communities First Programme with all our regeneration activity and

ensuring that Communities First areas are a priority for funding across all Welsh Government programmes.

5.4 Over the coming months I will be considering how best to direct future investment from my portfolio. In doing so, I will be conscious of the need to:

- deliver the above manifesto commitments
- integrate regeneration activity across and beyond Government, including within my portfolio and with Communities First, within the framework of public service collaboration informed by the Simpson Review, and planned strategic infrastructure investments across Wales
- build on best practice and available evidence, including evaluations of current projects and programmes where appropriate
- make the most of the opportunities afforded by a further round of European funding.

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