



In-depth Briefing

This briefing looks at the Welsh Government's Programme for Government, which was released today, September 20th.

The Welsh Government has today announced its Programme for Government for 2016 -2021, entitled ***Taking Wales Forward***. The announcement follows a delay in releasing the Programme following the vote to leave the European Union in June.

Welsh Government has set out the measures and proposals that it thinks will deliver more and better jobs through a stronger, fairer economy, improve and reform our public services, and build a united, connected and sustainable Wales. However, the Programme is considerably light on the detail of delivery, and key information on funding and legislative proposals.

The main proposals are as follows:

1. Housing

Following the successful Homes for Wales campaign in the run up to the Assembly election, which gained the support of all the parties across the Assembly, the Welsh Government has made the following pledges:

- Work in partnership to deliver an extra 20,000 affordable homes in the next term, including supporting construction of more than 6,000 homes through the Help to Buy scheme.
- Introduce a new 'Rent to Own' housing model.
- Explore options to end land banking.
- Continue long term collaboration with house builders to deliver accelerated rates of house building.
- End the Right to Buy
- Continued support for the work of Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs)

Impact for members

The increased housing target will be a challenge for housing associations, but having been key in exceeding the housing targets of the last two Welsh Governments, we believe the sector is up for the challenge. We will continue our work with Welsh Government and the WLGA on a tripartite pact that allows member to deliver the affordable homes we need. There have been a number of discussions in relation to the pact on land, and we welcome moves to end land banking.



Alongside this, we are encouraged by proposals to end the Right to Buy, which will protect vital housing stock, and by continued support for RHEs; this proposals needs to be met with the funding to support it. We look forward to working with Welsh Government on the detail of many of these policies, including Rent to Own. Housing associations are working hard to provide housing for those in need across tenures, and this may be an opportunity for the sector.

2. Jobs & Skills

Welsh Government has confirmed a number of proposals on jobs & skills that were contained within Welsh Labour's manifesto, including:

- Creating a minimum of 100,000 high quality all-age apprenticeships
- Reshaping employability support for job-ready individuals, and those furthest from the labour market, to acquire the skills and experience to gain and maintain sustainable employment
- Piloting a Better Jobs Closer to Home project, designed to create employment and training hubs in areas of high economic deprivation
- Continuing to improve procurement policies to bring economic, social and community benefits to Wales

Impact for members

Housing associations are key contributors to the economy of Wales; last year our combined direct and indirect economic impact was £2bn. A key part of this has been supporting the communities in which we work by creating quality jobs and offering quality apprenticeships and training. The 100,000 high quality apprenticeships target is ambitious, and housing associations will have a huge opportunity to support their delivery through this pledge. It may also offset some of the impact of the UK Government Apprentice Levy on the sector.

3. Care & Older People

Care was consistently raised as a key issue throughout the Welsh Assembly elections, and Welsh Government has brought forward a number of Welsh Labour's manifesto proposals in this area, pledging to:

- More than double the capital people can keep when entering residential care to £50,000
- Ensure ground breaking social services legislation is fully implemented and all the benefits are realised
- Retain the Intermediate Care Fund



Impact for members

With an increasing number of our members working in care, we will be closely monitoring these developments. Many members have raised concerns about the commissioning of care services in different forums, and the new legislative framework provides an opportunity to ensure the system works to allow our members to continue to offer high quality care.

Alongside this, we are encouraged by moves to continue funding the Intermediate Care Fund (ICF), but we believe there is need for more action on the integration of health and housing, and the delivery of the ICF must now link across other funding pots to allow this closer integration in the long term.

4. Supporting Businesses

Business support was another key theme in Welsh Labour's manifesto, and has been consistently raised since the vote to leave the European Union, with a number of Welsh Ministers declaring Wales 'open for business'. Measures to support businesses which may impact upon housing associations include:

- Establishing a Ministerial Taskforce for the valleys
- Delivering the Cardiff City Region, and a developing a similar deal for Swansea and a Growth Deal for North Wales
- Bringing people together digitally by offering fast reliable broadband to every property in Wales.
- Aim to help 95% of people gain at least the basic digital skills needed for the 21st century by 2021.

Impact for members

There are a number of opportunities for the sector in the various City and Growth deals being developed, and it is vital that housing associations are included in these discussions. CHC will continue to make the case for members to be involved as we have done with the Cardiff City Growth Deal.

The ambition to roll out better broadband provision and digital skills provision are encouraging, especially in the light of changes via Universal Credit.

5. Other measures

A number of other measures which may impact upon the work of housing associations were announced today as part of the Programme for Government, including:



- The establishment of a National Infrastructure Commission to provide increased certainty and sustainability for investment in the future.
- Welsh Language proposals to work towards one million Welsh speakers by 2050
- The creation of a South Wales Metro, and the delivery of an M4 relief road and the A55
- Working with local government to review council tax to make it fairer, so that people with low and moderately valued properties pay less than they do now

Impact for members

It is vital that housing is considered by the National Infrastructure Commission, both in terms of the economic impact and the long term sustainability of infrastructure investment.

Welsh Language Standards are a key part of Welsh Government's drive for one million Welsh speakers, and with these currently being developed for the sector, CHC will continue to work closely with members to support them in the process of adopting the standards. This will include a specific training offer for members as part of our work with Agored Cymru.

Council tax changes could have a dual impact on members; in the first instance, changes to bills for tenants are likely to have a significant impact with the ongoing welfare reforms. Secondly, council tax reforms may impact on Local Government funding, and any reduction in funding for Local Government services is likely to have an impact on local services.