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Housing and Transport – Policy Briefing

Introduction - Housing

There is much housing policy debate in Wales around issues of housing needs, affordable housing supply, the quality of the housing stock, community sustainability and the role and regulation of social housing. The responsibility for most aspects of housing has been devolved to the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). WAG's aims for housing are set out in *One Wales* in its aspirations for 'Living Communities'; however, there has been little debate about the details of these proposals. There is also uncertainty to the degree to which policy debate and development in England might be relevant to Wales.

1. Governance Structures

1.1 *UK-wide level* - Westminster is responsible for the primary legislation in relation to housing (e.g. Planning Policy Statements; Housing Acts) that direct WAG and Local Authority strategic housing function. The Home Office also has responsibilities for areas that impact on housing issues, such as anti-social behaviour and homelessness.

1.2 *All Wales level* - WAG is responsible for most aspects of housing in Wales such as delivering a national housing strategy and related policies. The emergence of a new approach to public service delivery (*Making the Connections*) and a stronger co-ordination of different strategies and policies have also begun to shape housing policy development in Wales.

1.3 *Regional level* - The Wales Spatial Plan has helped shape regional collaborative working in housing at an enabling level (e.g. the establishment of the Rural Housing Authorities Network, closer collaboration at regional/sub regional levels between housing, planning and economic development, and the development of regional/sub-regional housing market assessments). Key settlements in WSP regions form the focus for future investment and development of housing.

1.4 *Local level* – local authorities' housing function involves the delivery of a range of separate housing activities. The importance of the LA strategic housing function has increased with an enabling and partnership role to ensure the delivery of affordable housing and more sustainable local communities.

2. Key Policy Documents

2.1 *Sustainable Homes: A National Housing Strategy for Wales: Consultation Draft* (WAG, 2009) was published in May 2009 and sets out WAG's long term vision for housing in Wales. This replaces the *Better Homes* policy document. It is informed by *One Wales* housing agenda, the *Essex Review*, the *JRF review of rural housing* and the *Tribal Consulting review*.

2.2 *Better Homes for People in Wales: A National Housing Strategy for Wales* (WAG, 2001) was Wales' first formal National Housing Strategy. It provides a vision for the future of Welsh housing and a clear policy framework to facilitate action at the local level (implemented through the National Housing Strategy Action Plan (updated Oct. 2006)).

2.3 *Affordable Housing in Wales: Task and Finish Group Report to the Deputy Minister for Housing (The Essex Review)* (WAG, 2008) proposes wide and urgent changes needed to deliver *One Wales* housing commitments.

2.4 *Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales: 2009-2019* (WAG, 2009) sets out some guiding principles for the development and delivery of homelessness services in line with *One Wales*. It is a working document and will be continuously reviewed.

2.5 *Preparing local housing strategies: Guidance to local authorities in Wales from the Welsh Assembly Government* (WAG, 2006), provides guidance to local authorities on the preparation of Local Housing Strategies in Wales.

There are also a range of publications which provide a more detail housing policy / literature context in the localities: *JRF Commission on Rural Housing in Wales*, (JRF, 2008); *Review of Evidence to Inform the Development of the National Housing Strategy* (WAG, 2008); *Second Homes In Wales, 2005* (WAG, 2005); *The Role of the Housing System in Rural Wales* (WAG, 2005); *A Review of Welsh Social Landlords' approaches to increasing choice in letting accommodation*, Research Summary, (WAG, 2007); *Accommodation for older people in Wales* (WAG, 2007); National planning policy and guidance for housing is set out in *Planning Policy Wales* and *Technical Advice Notes (TAN) 1 and 2*.

3. Key Data Sets

3.1 *Welsh Housing Statistics 2008* (WAG, 2009) - This annual publication contains a wide range of historical and contemporary information on housing topics in Wales. The majority of the data in this publication relates to returns submitted by Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords. The data is either at the all Wales level, or broken down by Local Authority and/or Tenure. Available from 2003.

3.2 *Living in Wales Surveys (2004-2008)* (WAG, 2008) – an annual dataset/report providing the main source of general statistical information about households and the condition of homes for the whole of Wales. Pooling data from consecutive surveys allows data to be presented at

local authority or middle layer super output areas (MSOA). A house condition survey was undertaken in 2004 & 2008 on a sub-sample of properties.

3.3 *Neighbourhood Statistics* (ONS, 2009) – provides statistics on 25 datasets covering a variety of housing topics such as housing demand and supply, tenure and condition, overcrowding and homelessness, council tax bands and second homes. A large majority of these are available for small areas (e.g. Lower Super Output Area) although much of the data for small areas are derived from the 2001 census.

3.4 *House Price Indexes* (Land Registry, 2009) – the Land Registry provides a house price index and average sales price by dwelling type for local authorities in Wales dated back to 1995. It is the most accurate independent house price index available as it is the only index based on repeat sales.

4. Emerging Themes and Questions

A range of themes and questions have been pinpointed in the *Sustainable Homes* Consultation Draft:

Providing the right mix of housing

- What more is needed to understand housing need and supply in all its forms locally and nationally?
- How do we ensure planning and housing interventions are more effective at reflecting different needs?
- Do we need to develop a comprehensive approach to intermediate market housing?

Using housing as a catalyst to improve lives

- How effective are existing vehicles for area-based improvements?
- Are current interventions working?
- How can we make the most of the home as a setting which promises health and well-being?
- What more should social landlords do to improve the life-chances of tenants?
- Are vulnerable groups, such as refugees, being failed through existing provision?
- Where and how should improvements be targeted?

Strengthening communities

- How can housing support area-based regeneration?
- How can success be measured in future rural housing provision?
- How can housing contribute to cohesive communities

Radically reducing the ecological footprint

- What can be done to the housing stock to make the biggest impact on reducing the ecological footprint of existing homes?
- Are existing and new homes equipped to deal with the effects of climate change?

Providing better housing services

- How can the social rented housing stock be better used?

Introduction - Transport

The overall context of transport policy within Wales reflects the cross-cutting nature of the policy area and WAG's commitment to an 'integrated transport strategy', promoting integration within and between different modes of transport and between transport and related policy areas, such as land-use planning, economic development and education. A wide range of themes compete for space: sustainable development & climate change, economic development & regeneration, social justice/inclusion, nation-building etc... In recent years WAG's role in transport has been significantly extended through the devolution of further functions via the Railways Act 2005 and Transport (Wales) Act 2006, including responsibility as co-signatory to the Wales and Borders rail franchise.

1. Governance Structures

The governance of transport policy in Wales is divided across a range of levels reflecting the uneven devolution of powers to the Welsh Assembly Government:

1.1 UK-wide level – the Department of Transport (DfT) and its sponsored agencies, such as Network Rail, retain substantial powers in many of the core modal areas (rail, bus, ports etc...). In addition the regulatory context is set at the UK-wide level, for example, bus and rail regulation are retained at the UK level, the latter by the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR).

1.2 All-Wales level – transport strategy in Wales is led by the WAG and its Transport Wales department, made-up of the Rail and New Roads (RNR), Roads Network Management (RNM) and Transport Planning and Administration (TP and A) Divisions. WAG is responsible for a wide range of areas including trunk roads within Wales, a co-signatory of the Wales and Borders Rail franchise; funding rail and road infrastructure improvements and delivering a national transport strategy. WAG established the Wales Transport Forum, Wales Freight Group and Community rail partnerships to engage with stakeholder groups within Wales, such as Sustrans, the Freight Transport Association, Campaign for Better Transport etc... In addition the Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales is due to be set-up in the near future.

1.3 Regional level – there are four Regional Transport Consortia (RTCs) made up of local authorities - Taith, TraCC, SWWITCH and SEWTA – responsible for to strengthening inter-authority co-operation and delivering the Wales Transport Strategy at the regional level through Regional Transport Plans (RTPs). The four RTCs are currently under review and an announcement on their future is expected in the near future.

1.4 Local level – local authorities in Wales remain responsible for a number of areas, including highways maintenance, road safety, public transport, community transport, transport planning, traffic management, and school transport.

In addition to the formal governance arrangements within Wales, public transport modes are delivered by a range of private companies and agencies – such as Arriva Trains Wales (Wales & Borders Franchise).

2. Key Policy Documents

2.1 - *One Wales: Connecting the Nation – The Welsh Transport Strategy* (WAG, 2008), published in April 2008 by the Welsh Assembly Government, the strategy replaces the *Transport Framework for Wales* (WAG, 2003) and sets out the strategic objectives of WAG in line with *One Wales*.

2.2 - *National Transport Plan* (WAG, 2010), published by the Welsh Assembly Government in sets out in detail of how the Wales Transport Strategy will be delivered over the next five years. The Plan sets out solutions using four main movement corridors: east-west in north Wales; east-west in mid-Wales; east-west in south Wales; and north-south.

2.3 - *Ministerial Advisory Group on the Economy and Transport: Phase 2 Transport Report* (MAG, 2009), the group was established to ‘provide advice and guidance to Ministers on policy and strategic direction and to challenge existing activities and plans.’ The report includes recommendations around policy priorities and the governance of transport policy in Wales.

2.4 – *Regional Transport Plans* (RTCs, 2009) the plans published by the four Regional Transport Consortia in September 2009 provide a strategic overview of the delivery of transport within each of the regions:

2.7 - *Wales Freight Strategy* (WAG, 2008) published by the Welsh Assembly Government in May 2008, the strategy sets out high-level aims and policies for freight transport, and identifies a series of ‘steps’ towards their delivery. The Wales Freight Group, set-up by the Assembly Government, played a key role in feeding into the strategy.

2.8 - *Walking and Cycling Action Plan 2009-2013* (WAG, 2008) published by the Welsh Assembly Government in December 2008, the action plan updates the *Walking and Cycling Strategy* (WAG, 2003). The Plan outlines the Welsh Assembly Government’s commitment to work with partners to support walking and cycling.

In addition there are a range of DfT publications which provide the broader policy context: *Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS)* (DfT, 2008); *The Nichols Review of Highways Agency’s Major Roads Programme* (DfT, 2007); *The Eddington Transport Study* (DfT, 2007); *The Future of Transport – White Paper* (DfT, 2004); *The Future of Rail – White Paper* (DfT, 2004); *Transport Ten Year Plan 2000* (2000) and *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone* (1998).

3. Key Data Sets

3.1 - *Welsh Transport Statistics 2007* (WAG, 2008) - The key points from the latest release included the estimated volume of motor vehicle traffic on all roads in Wales in 2006 was 2 per cent higher than in 2005 and an estimated 71 per cent of trips were made by car or van in 2005/06, compared to 67 per cent in the period 1998/2000. The *Transport Statistics* compendia are available to 2003 but the data pre-2003 is patchy.

3.2 - *Transport Statistics Great Britain* (DfT & ONS, 2008) – Provides data for the whole of Great Britain and previous compendia for 1986, 1996, 2005, 2006 and 2007 are available in PDF on the DfT website.

3.3 - *Transport Trends* (DfT & ONS, 2008) – The eleventh annual edition of the compendia which provides a wide range of indicators and statistical analysis for the whole of Great Britain to illustrate longer-term trends and to help put key policy targets and trends into a broader context.

3.4 - *Regional transport statistics: 2008 edition* (DfT & ONS, 2009) - brings together a wide range of transport statistics for Great Britain and Northern Ireland at Government Office Region and former Metropolitan County level including data on personal travel, public transport, road vehicles, road traffic etc... The compendium is available to 2001 and replaced the *Transport Statistics for Metropolitan Areas*, previously published in 1995, 1998, 1999 and 2000.

3.5 - *National Travel Survey* (DfT & ONS, 2007) - a household survey designed to provide a databank of personal travel information for Great Britain. It has been conducted as a continuous survey since July 1988, following ad hoc surveys since the mid-1960s.

3.6 - *Attitudes towards transport reports* (DfT & ONS, NA) – various Omnibus surveys carried out by ONS and NatCen to provide detailed findings on what the public think about various transport issues and their experiences of different forms of transport. For example, recent reports include *Public attitudes to road network performance* (2009) and *Public experiences of and attitudes towards bus travel* (2009).

4. Emerging Themes and Questions

A range of overarching and fairly specific questions are on the policy agenda in Wales:

- In the context of reduced budgets and increased costs highlighted by the Nichols Review, to what extent can the Welsh Assembly Government and RTCs continue investment in transport infrastructure and services in Wales?
- To what extent will existing commitments, for example, so-called 'legacy' road schemes, eat up the budget of the priorities identified by RTPs?
- Do RTC's have the capacity to develop and deliver robust RTPs in line with the Welsh Transport Strategy and National Transport Plan?

- Will the Welsh Assembly Government introduce Joint Transport Authorities (JTAs) if the RTCs are perceived as failing?
- Does the continued commitment of WAG to improved North-South road and rail links and the subsidised intra-Wales air link represent an ongoing 'nation-building' agenda?
- In terms of transport policy, how will Wales respond to the climate change agenda?
- How far will the Welsh Assembly Government, RTCs or local authorities move towards explicit behavioural change policies, such as road user charging and workplace parking levies?