

Written Statement - Positive Planning: Planning for a better Wales



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Carl Sargeant, Minister for Housing and Regeneration

Today I have published a draft Planning (Wales) Bill and supporting paper Positive Planning detailing proposals to reform the planning system in Wales. This landmark Bill sets out our ambitions for Wales. It is a key part of our Legislative Programme and looks to deliver a modern planning system that is fit for the 21st century. To achieve this, I want to see a change in planning culture, repositioning planning from regulating development to enabling appropriate development, actively helping to deliver the homes, jobs and infrastructure that current and future generations require.

The draft Bill and consultation paper have been informed by a comprehensive evidence base and detailed conversations with users of the planning system. The extensive programme of change that I intend to take forward requires new primary legislation, amendments to secondary legislation and a review of policy and guidance. Collectively, the programme takes forward and builds on many of the recommendations from the report Towards a Welsh Planning Act: Ensuring the Planning System Delivers prepared for us by the Independent Advisory Group, chaired by John Davies MBE.

The draft Planning (Wales) Bill and consultation paper capitalise on the devolution dividend. They propose updating structures to provide a legal framework that confirms our distinctive approach and which is fully responsive to the needs of our country. Taken together, they redefine the respective roles and responsibilities of all organisations involved in delivering planning services and complement the work being undertaken by the Commission on Public Service Delivery and Governance.

An enhanced role for the Welsh Ministers is proposed through the preparation of a national development plan and taking direct decision making responsibility for developments of national significance, including energy projects of between 25 and 50 megawatts. For the first time in Wales, a statutory framework for strategic planning is proposed to ensure that issues of larger than local importance, such as housing supply, are properly addressed. We will also fine tune the Local Development Plan process based on lessons learned from those successfully adopted to date.

To improve collaboration at the local level, existing powers will be overhauled to allow local planning authorities to be merged to create larger and more resilient bodies with access to a wider range of specialist skills.

The effectiveness and consistency of local planning services will be enhanced by making improvements to development management procedures, including frontloading the planning application process, increasing community engagement and reforming planning committee procedures.

An important element of our proposals is the introduction of performance monitoring, designed to ensure that all users of the planning system have access to a good quality local planning service wherever they may be in Wales. This will be backed up by sanctions for persistent poor performance, including the ability to submit planning applications direct to Welsh Ministers.

The draft Bill, the proposed amendments to secondary legislation and the review of policy and guidance, will provide a comprehensive and robust framework for decision making in Wales. They will not however deliver the reform that I am seeking in isolation. They must be accompanied by culture change and the confidence to deliver a new way of working.

To help drive culture change, I propose to establish a Planning Advisory and Improvement Service hosted by the Welsh Government. I will also work with stakeholders to develop a competency framework for planning practitioners and councillors to set out the skills, knowledge and behaviours necessary to deliver this ambitious agenda.

The consultation on the draft Planning (Wales) Bill and consultation paper will run until 26 February 2014. The Bill will be introduced to the National Assembly for Wales later in 2014.

www.wales.gov.uk/consultations/planning/draft-planning-wales-bill/?lang=en