

New measures introduced to tackle leasehold concerns in Wales

The Minister announced the package of measures with a visit to The Quays in Barry, and met representatives from Taylor Wimpey and Barratts, who have developments at the site.

For houses and flats which qualify for support under Help to Buy – Wales:

- new criteria will require a developer to present a genuine reason for a house to be marketed as leasehold
- leasehold contracts will have to meet minimum standards, including limiting the starting ground rent to a maximum of 0.1% of the property's sale value
- leasehold agreements will have to run for a minimum of 125 years for flats and 250 years for houses.

The Help to Buy Wales – Conveyancer Accreditation Scheme will ensure that trained and registered conveyancers provide clear advice to all Help to Buy – Wales purchasers. The scheme already has more than 150 trained members across Wales. This is designed to ensure that home buyers are properly advised of the implications of their agreements and other ongoing commitments. As well as Help to Buy – Wales buyers, other home buyers will be able to make use of their services.

The Welsh Government provides smaller home builders with affordable loans through the Wales Property Development Fund and the same Help to Buy – Wales leasehold criteria will now apply to properties built through this scheme.

Rebecca Evans said:

“I am delighted that major home builders such as Taylor Wimpey, Bellway, Barratts, Redrow and Persimmon will no longer offer houses for sale on a leasehold basis, unless absolutely necessary. I look forward to other developers making the same commitment.

“These measures have been developed in co-operation with the industry through our House Builder Engagement Programme including the Home Builders Federation and Federation of Master Builders.

“We have acted swiftly to take targeted and tangible action over concerns about leasehold sales on newbuild homes, and where leasehold is already the tenure, I am setting up a new group to recommend reforms to the system. I intend to put in place a voluntary Code of Practice to underpin these measures, improve standards and to promote best practice.

“This is only the start of my plans to address concerns around leasehold. I have not ruled out the possibility of legislation in

the future, which may well be needed to make leasehold, or an alternative to it, fit for the modern housing market.”

Anthony Essien, Chief Executive of LEASE, said:

“We look forward to continuing to work with the Welsh and English governments in supporting leaseholders. Measures like these are clear evidence of their intent to support leasehold homeowners now and in the future. LEASE will do all it can to assist both governments to improve the sector for our leasehold customers”.

[Minister urges more LGBT people to adopt or foster children in Wales](#)

To mark LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week (5th-11th March), the Minister said Wales needs more prospective adoptive families to care for the 140 children who are currently waiting for an adoptive family.

Adoptions by same-sex couples have been allowed in England and Wales since 2005, and in 2016-17 one in eight adoptions in Wales were with same-sex couples.

Nearly 6,000 children in Wales were looked-after in 2017. But 140 children are currently waiting to be adopted, while 4,435 children are in foster care.

Of the children waiting to be placed for adoption, 6 in 10 are part of a sibling group, which means there is a particular need for prospective adoptive parents who are prepared to adopt a group of children. Similarly, there are children with additional health and developmental needs who need to be adopted. There is also a need for more local authority foster carers as many foster carers approach retirement (the average age of foster carers is 55).

Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Adopting or fostering a child can be an incredibly rewarding experience. The responsibility for raising a child is considerable, but the reward of seeing a child grow up and achieve their true potential is such an incredible experience.

“1 in 8 adoptions in Wales during 2016-17 were to same-sex couples, but I want to encourage more LGBT people to consider adopting or

fostering children.

“It is an exciting time to become a foster carer in Wales. Implementation of the National Fostering Framework will ensure that all foster carers in Wales are properly supported and rewarded to provide the best possible care for the children and young people in their care.

“So if you are willing and able to give your time, commitment and dedication to giving vulnerable children the best start in life, please consider adoption or fostering.”

Health Secretary gives “utmost thanks” to NHS, emergency services and social services staff

Vaughan Gething said:

“I’d like to thank all our dedicated staff who have kept our health and social care services going over the past few days. I have been in awe of the lengths they have been going to, making sure our hospitals, primary and community care and other essential services were able to continue operating, despite pressures from all angles.

“I’d also like to thank all local government workers who ensured the roads were kept clear and the volunteers who ferried staff to and from work, or did anything they could to help in such difficult conditions, without whom, there would have been even more pressure on the NHS, social care and other emergency services.”

The Health Secretary said that as the weather improves, NHS Wales will be catching up, as well as meeting normal day-to-day demand and it’s likely that some disruption to local services will continue.

People can keep up to date with the latest information from local health boards, GP surgeries and local authorities through social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter.

The Health Secretary added:

“I urge people to please help and choose well before deciding which

service you need and only calling 999 and attend A&E for serious illness or a genuine emergency.

“If people are unsure, they can visit the NHS Direct Wales website for health advice through a range of symptom checkers, and on availability of local services. Choosing Well means you and your family will get the best treatment and also allows busy NHS services to help the people who need them the most.

“Once again I would like to give my utmost thanks to NHS, social services, and emergency services staff for their commitment and support during this extremely challenging period. They have shown extreme resilience under great adversity. I would also like to appeal to people who have accessed services to be patient while staff deal with the aftermath of storm Emma, as we collectively strive to ensure all patients receive the care they need.”

[Report on Welsh dairy farm performance published](#)

In 2017, the Welsh Government provided £3.2 million of European conditional aid to Welsh dairy farmers through two schemes focusing on farm business benchmarking and herd milk recording.

An encouraging 75% of dairy farmers took up the opportunity – the highest level of uptake in the UK. Along with aid funding, farmers also received a bespoke report showing the strengths and weaknesses of their business with a comparison with other dairy farms.

Invaluable data produced from the benchmarking scheme was used to produce a [report](#) (external link) providing a snapshot of Welsh dairy farm performance. Key findings include:

- The importance of farmers constantly measuring the financial performance of their business to help them become more efficient;
- the top performing farms demonstrate that profitable dairy farming is possible with excellent returns, even in difficult trading conditions;
- some farms, have costs of production which are higher than the milk price has ever reached;
- farmers should take advantage of the plentiful supply of grass and maximise the milk they produce from grass and forage;
- farmers who have made a conscious choice about their production system tend to be more profitable; and
- maintaining high standards of animal health and welfare reduced the financial impact of diseases and can give the industry a competitive

advantage.

Support to help dairy farmers address the issues identified in the report is available through the Welsh Government's Farming Connect programme and via the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) Dairy.

Welcoming the report, Cabinet Secretary said:

"The approach we adopted to providing aid to our dairy farmers has provided us with useful data on the performance of the industry in Wales.

"The report published today will go a long way to help farmers improve the performance of their business by reducing their costs of production. This will improve the efficiency of our dairy farms, allowing them to become more resilient to business risks and milk price volatility.

"As a government, our priority is to work with everyone affected to prepare for a world outside the European Union and for a resilient agricultural sector. This report will provide invaluable information to help us decide how best to support the dairy sector to prepare for the future.

"While the report shows profitable dairy farming is possible, I am particularly concerned that some Welsh dairy farms have costs of production which are higher than the milk price has ever reached. That is why I am in the process of tailoring the support we offer these farms to help them re-evaluate the structure of their business and use their benchmarking report to see where improvements can be made.

"It is clear from the report that by becoming more efficient and focusing on producing milk at a lower cost of production, all farms can become more profitable, no matter what the milk price is.

"Brexit presents significant challenges to the agriculture industry but also opportunities. The industry, and individual farmers, must start to plan now for the future.

"The long term outlook for the dairy sector is good with global demand forecasted to increase year on year. Our dairy farmers need to be competitive and market focused to compete with the best in the world. If this happens then I firmly believe our dairy farmers have a bright future.

"I encourage all Welsh dairy farmers and the wider industry to use the available data to help them prepare for the post Brexit world; to help make their businesses both resilient and prosperous."

Kirsty Williams announces £14 million for school repairs

The funding will be spent on areas such as boilers and plumbing works to school toilets, caretaker costs, painting and decorating, plastering and repairing or replacing flooring. This will complement work to improve school buildings through the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools and Education Programme.

Local Authorities will receive the funding in the first instance who will then distribute the money to all schools in Wales.

Kirsty Williams said:

"I hear it often enough, from teachers and headteachers across the country, that time and funding is too often taken up by school maintenance issues, as opposed to supporting learners.

"That's why today I am making available an additional £14 million, which is to be allocated directly to schools.

"This will address small scale maintenance costs, alleviating pressures on school budgets. Every single school across Wales will benefit from this money and it will go directly to the frontline.

"I hope local authorities are now able to transfer this money across to schools as quickly as possible so that essential work can begin."