

First One Wales Government Budget – the Vision becomes a Reality

Last week was yet another historic week in the Assembly as Plaid in Government presented its first budget to the National Assembly. In forming the One Wales Government with Labour in the Assembly, Plaid has been able to see many of its manifesto pledges and historic aims become official government policy.

This new progressive alliance is committed to an all-Wales approach to policy making be that in geographic terms or generational. The vision of the new Assembly Government has obviously fallen foul of the opposition, but surprisingly also some London Labour MPs whose actions are seemingly guided by inherent self-interest. Make no mistake, the Government of Wales faced severe financial difficulties when formulating this budget.

The robbing of money from Wales to fund the Olympics and an adjustment to the Welsh block grant baseline by the Labour Government in London all left Wales the best part of a billion pounds short-changed. Despite the challenging financial position forced upon the Government of Wales, it was gratifying to see how Plaid in Government is already making a real difference to the lives of every part of our nation.

Our budget highlights include an extra £120m over four years to help increase provision of universal affordable childcare helps meet a key Plaid election pledge and forms a central plank in wider strategies to combat child poverty. Extra money will be given to help regenerate urban Wales. Pensioners will be given help with Council tax payments from 2009. All-Wales business tax cuts will be introduced to help the development and growth of our local indigenous companies.

The NHS will enter a new exciting chapter in its history with the development of a genuine community-based health service via the rolling out of wellbeing centres and there introduction of school nurses. £30m extra will be allocated to increase provision of affordable housing for young people in our communities. In the run up to the election we promised the people of Wales that should we form the next Government of Wales we would help build a modern and successful Wales.

A New National Science Academy will be built; A National Institute of Health Research; an English Speaking National Theatre together with the long held Plaid aspiration of a Welsh Language Federal College.

These are seismic steps forward in the development of our nation, policies that will leave lasting stamp on our history.

Considering the financial settlement available to Wales, certain sectors were inevitably going to feel a financial pinch. However, the Government of Wales has played a good hand in response to the poor deal offered by the London Labour Government. Plaid in Government is certainly providing the sort of dynamism that we have sadly lacked over the years.