



Consultation Response – Community Housing Cymru

Community Housing Cymru is the representative body for housing associations and community mutuels in Wales, which are all not-for-profit organisations. Our members provide 95,000 homes and related housing services across Wales. Our members employ 4,000 people and spend over £300M in the Welsh economy every year. We are also active in community regeneration throughout Wales, including some of its most deprived communities.

Proposed Affordable Housing LCO Committee – The National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (No. 5) Order 2008 relating to the disposal of dwellings and dwelling houses by social landlords (Affordable Housing)

1. What are your views on the General principle that legislative competence in the area identified in Matter 11.1 be conferred on the Assembly?

- Community Housing Cymru welcomes the Legislative Competence Order and supports the full devolution of housing policy to Wales. Community Housing Cymru believes that too much social housing stock in Wales has been lost over the past 28 years since the introduction of the Right to Buy. In 1981 Local Authorities in Wales held a stock of 298,000 homes for rent in Wales which represented 28% of total housing stock. By 2005/06 the figure had been reduced to 156,000 – 12% of total stock.
- The Assembly has already successfully used its powers to make secondary legislation to reduce the amount of discount available under Right to Buy and Right to Acquire. Community Housing Cymru believes that it makes sense for power to be conferred to the Assembly to suspend the Right to Buy and Right to Acquire in areas of housing pressure.
- A number of Community Housing Cymru members would support a Wales wide suspension of the Right to Buy/Acquire scheme.
- Since the introduction of the Right-to-Buy scheme, total investment in affordable housing has not kept pace with need. Though welcome increases in investment have taken place in Wales, there is still a great need for further investment.

- The suspension of the Right-to-Buy/Acquire in some areas of housing pressure may help the situation but it will not be a solution to the crisis in supply. Due to the number of homes already sold and not replaced, it is vital that the supply of homes in Wales is increased through a range of actions including:
 - Increased Social Housing Grant,
 - Regulatory Reform of RSLs,
 - Section 106 Agreements,
 - The use of public land for affordable housing development,
 - Rolling out the Rural Housing Enabler initiative to cover the whole of Rural Wales.
- Suspending the Right to Buy/Acquire will not build any new homes and therefore it should be seen as just one action in a wider policy designed to improve access to housing in communities throughout Wales.
- Increased Social Housing Grant Investment, more effective use of the planning system and publicly owned land and changes to the regulatory environment of Housing Associations will be more effective in tackling the housing challenges in Wales along with greater support for the Homebuy scheme and Shared-Equity schemes in helping to increase supply and access to housing.

2. What are your views on the terms of the proposed Order? For example are they too narrowly or too broadly drawn?

- Community Housing Cymru believes that the terms of the proposed order are sufficiently broad to provide flexibility for solutions to be designed to support the housing needs in different regions of Wales. Whilst we accept that the main driver for this change relates to Right to Buy, it is important that the Assembly can react to other circumstances that impact on the strategic aim of improving housing provision in Wales.

3. Is it necessary to set out the meaning of social landlord in the proposed order? If so, in relation to the meaning of social landlord, is the list of legislative provisions correct, or should there be any additions or deletions?

- In the definition of “Social Landlord” there is no particular reference to the Community Housing Mutual (CHM) model. This potential problem could be overcome by replacing the term “Housing Association” in the Draft order

with “Registered Social Landlord” in accordance with the Housing Act 1996.

- Furthermore, in the interpretation of this field “social landlord” refers to both a county or borough council as well as a housing association. Community Housing Cymru members are concerned of what might happen in the unlikely scenario that the views of a Registered Social Landlord being at odds with that of the Local Authority over the suspension of the Right to Buy/Acquire.
- In the event of a transfer having taken place, where the Local Authority remains the Strategic Housing Authority but not a Social Landlord, it is important that Associations and Local Authorities consult when preparing a case for suspension of the Right-to-Buy. We are aware that some Transfer Associations have a clause in the transfer agreement with Local Authorities requiring consultation on the impact that the use of any new powers will have on the business plan of the individual Association. A shared view of the future of the Right-to-Buy/Acquire will influence not only Stock Transfer business plans but the vision stakeholders have of regeneration and of the development of mixed tenure communities.

Community Housing Cymru
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