

SSP 19

Ymgynghoriad ar flaenoriaethau'r Pwyllgor Llywodraeth Leol a Thai ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd

Consultation on the Local Government and Housing Committee's priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Ymateb gan: Sefydliad Tai Siartiedig Cymru

Response from: Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru

Priorities for the Local Government & Housing Committee

CIH Cymru consultation response

This is a response to the Senedd's Local Government and Housing (LG&H) committee's consultation which seeks views on potential priorities over the sixth Senedd.

Introduction

Housing, particularly social housing has featured heavily in the new Welsh Government's programme for government and has highlighted as an area where it is hoped progress in improving homes, more sustainable building and placemaking activities will together have a significant impact on addressing the climate emergency.

We strongly welcome this focus as we recognise that vital role housing does and must continue to play in meeting some of the most pressing challenges globally. The pandemic has had a huge impact on the work of our members and the communities they serve. Many of the housing related issues that existed long before the pandemic started such as homelessness, inadequate housing conditions and affordability will have been impacted by the conditions imposed on people's lives.

In the sections below we have included broad heading covering some key areas of housing policy/practice and highlighted issues the committee may wish to consider in its own scrutiny activity.

COVID-19 recovery and housing

Widening housing-related inequalities

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus what the impact of having an affordable, safe place to call homes can have on people's ability to remain safe and well. The pandemic has already highlighted the stark differences in people's experiences that find their roots in their housing circumstances. For some the pandemic has provided a chance to spend more time at home, save money, find a better work/life balance whilst enjoying a safe home environment. For others who live in poor housing conditions, in overcrowded homes or suffer domestic violence/abuse – being confined to their homes will have been a miserable experience, often making their circumstances even worse. We are pleased to be working with Public Health Wales on a Health Impact Assessment focusing on the

COVID-19 pandemic and housing insecurity – we look forward to sharing the findings of this work in the autumn.



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Affordability

The ability to meet housing costs during the pandemic has been under significant scrutiny with a sharp increase in the numbers of people seeking help to meet these costs. At March 2020 there were 154,948 UC claimants in Wales by May 2020 this had risen to 253,221 a 63% increase since March, far above the usual rate of organic growth in claimants¹. Coupled with this since March 2020, 26,000 fewer people are in paid employment and 280,000 people have fallen behind on household bills.² Between February 2020 and February 2021 the number of households in Wales receiving the UC housing costs element increased 59% from 80,772 to 128,701 comprising of a 45% increase in social tenants and a 77% increase in private tenants. The number of private tenants and social tenants on UC in Wales is now roughly in balance (64,000 and 65,000 respectively).

We are concerned that given the ending of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit, the temporary extension of the notice period for evictions ending on September 30th and the wrapping-up of the furlough scheme there is a real risk that financial hardship will increase, reliance on the welfare system will become greater and for many the struggle to meet housing and other general living costs will become more pronounced.

The availability, access to and readiness of housing-related advice and support services is of concern given the volume of households who may need to seek support in the run-up to and over the winter months.

Key questions

- **Reflecting on the evidence from the health impact assessment from Public Health Wales (when published) what steps can be taken to recognise and address the inequalities described?**
- **With a potential cliff-edge looming for many households are the resources available sufficient to meet a sharp rise in potential demand for housing related support, financial advice, legal aid and well-being support?**
- **In what ways does the experience of the pandemic re-frame the type of support people may require going forward and how can Welsh Government existing, and any future initiatives aim to meet this in practice?**

¹ <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml> (Accessed 04/08/21).

² <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Wales/Wales%20Policy%20and%20Campaigns/Benefits%20issues%20in%20Wales%20during%20CV-19.pdf> (Accessed 04/08/21).



A rights-based approach to housing

That these inequalities in what people experience may have become starker as a result of the pandemic should concern us all – but there is a real opportunity to use this as a platform to shape a fairer housing system for all. We believe a primary driver for this would be to enshrine a right to adequate housing into Welsh law.

Working with our partners Tai Pawb and Shelter Cymru and Dr Simon Hoffman of Swansea University our [Feasibility Study](#) outlined the opportunities to enshrine a right to adequate housing into Welsh law through a process of progressive realisation. Apart from greater consideration of housing at a cross-policy level, incorporation could help us:

- Tackle and aim to eradicate issues such as homelessness.
- Increase the security of tenure.
- Increase the availability of accessible homes.
- Address challenges some part of the population may have in accessing housing, like younger people.
- Maximise the impact providing good housing can have on lifting pressure on other public services, such as health and social care.
- Ensure tenants have ways to challenge and improve how accessing the right home works in Wales.
- Future-proof the status of housing as a top priority for any Welsh Government now and in the future.
- Tackle local as well as national housing challenges – such as rural housing supply and the impact of local housing market pressures on specific populations

Importantly, Wales already has legislation to incorporate human rights. The Child Rights Measure is one example of action going beyond rhetoric. Other progressive steps taken by Welsh Ministers include a Declaration of the Rights of Older People in Wales. We believe that a dual approach in incorporating a ‘right to adequate’ housing offers the greatest benefits.

Indirect incorporation	Direct incorporation
<p>Local Authorities and Minister would need to have ‘due regard’ in creating policy and delivering services in practice.</p> <p>Link between housing policy and rights of more disadvantaged groups would be strengthened.</p>	<p>Local authorities and Minister could not act in a way that is incompatible with a person’s right to adequate housing.</p> <p>Housing Act 2014 would need amending to include a right of action for individuals and specify solutions</p>



Housing Rights Scheme may need to be established to show how duty is being met	
The dual approach	
Provide a bridge between law and policy (via the indirect approach) but also ensure individual can challenges and enforce their individual right to adequate housing, with clarity in law on the response people can expect.	

In partnership with Tai Pawb and Shelter Cymru, we have been advocating for this approach through our [‘Back the Bill’ campaign](#). As we move through and on from the Covid-19 pandemic we believe the time is right to consider progressing the right to adequate housing – give its scope to begin addressing some of the most stubborn housing related issues facing Wales. We will soon begin a large-scale piece of research to provide a detailed and comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the approach which we look forward to sharing with the committee and representatives more widely.

Building environmentally friendly homes at pace and scale

Funding

Social housing providers require long-term certainty on funding to help organisations effectively manage resources, plan developments, raise additional investment and mitigate risks.

Additionally, anecdotal evidence from the sector suggests supply chain costs have increased considerably for some materials (such as timber) due to scarcity and rapid demand increases – placing additional pressure on budgets.

Within this same context, social housing providers are considering how to invest the levels needed to decarbonise existing homes and begin planning to adopt a new building safety regime (something that we strongly support). Investment in the sector would provide a stronger basis upon which to make progress in areas such as these. But the short-term nature of government funding at present can act to limit the ambition of the sector – greater long-term certainty on grant funding is needed

Infrastructure and skills

The Welsh Government’s recently announced 20,000 low carbon social housing target represents an ambitious step forward in the delivery of environmentally

friendly social homes. If the anticipated housing output for 2020/21 is achieved, that will see 4000 affordable homes delivered, a sharp uptick on the average annual output. Whilst being a mark of progress in itself, that puts into sharp focus the scale of the challenge with the new target demanding that achievement annually, and more narrowly including social housing, whereas the previous target has been supported by a large proportion of Help to Buy and homes built at intermediate rent.

Whilst we agreed with the renewed focus on social housing there are some significant questions that anchor the sector's ambition and ability to meet this in practice. We know that for example Modern Methods of Construction have a huge role to play and when implemented at scale could be transformative for the way we deliver energy efficient homes at scale, and have considerable benefits to the economic prospects of local areas. But with growth in the industries falling under the MMC banner – such as Off-Site Manufacturing still being in its infancy in Wales there is a lack of market competition (decreasing incentives to drive down costs and hindering greater economies of scale). In tandem there is further activity needed to reassure lenders investing in homes built through MMC, and the public as consumers over the efficiency, and overall quality of homes produced in this way if we are to see meaningful steps taken to change how we deliver and live in our homes.

The green skills gap also poses a huge challenge to the sector. At a time where the ambition is to increasingly build sustainably, using new technology/materials there is a shortage of skills needed to deliver, and service this activity – for both new and existing homes. Despite strong agreement with the vision set out in the programme for government, we do have concerns that a lack of information/data about the workforce (in its broadest sense, not only limited to construction), represents a significant challenge to the realisation of our housing ambition in Wales.

To address this we support the idea of a workforce strategy covering the social and affordable housing sector in Wales that we believe, should be government led. In our view, such a strategy should be underpinned by:

- **Early information:** Ensuring that schools, colleges and higher education institutions have the resources to provide younger people with clear options on routes into careers in the housing sector.
- **Robust data:** Data collected every two years mapping the housing workforce and highlighting where gaps exist.
- **Skill-mix:** Bridge the gap between our aspirations in areas like decarbonisation and how in practice the right talent, skills and expertise is grown in the sector.



- **Inclusive recruitment:** ensure the workforce truly reflects the diverse make-up of Welsh communities.
- **Public recognition:** recognise and value the huge contribution professionals make to the wellbeing of communities across Wales.

Key Questions

- **Is there sufficient certainty around having the right level and access to the skills needed to meet the low-carbon social housing target?**
- **Could a workforce strategy in the context described above provide the evidence base and strategic direction through which to better identify and get to grips with workforce related challenges that could impact the sector both now and in the years ahead?**

Addressing social housing stigma

Stigma directed towards social housing and people living in those homes is sadly still an issue in many areas across Wales. In our public opinion polling conducted in late 2020 we found that for the Welsh public:

- Housing is identified as a key policy priority for government in Wales by almost 20% of respondents – ahead of perennial concerns such as crime, education and defence
- 83% felt it was the Government's responsibility to provide housing to a decent standard for all
- Almost half 49% - felt that there should be more balance in public spending priorities with housing perhaps getting a more equal share of Senedd funding pot
- Focussing on perceptions of housing, almost half, 47% would want to see more social housing built near them, which represents a positive shift in views from the previous poll conducted in 2018 where only a third of respondents felt this way.
- Two thirds of respondents also felt that more affordable housing was needed in their local area.
- Sadly, the data also highlighted that negative views towards social housing persist, being seen as linked with higher rates of crime and anti-social behaviour and as a less desirable form of housing

Despite the complexity of public perception and how it is formed, we believe that a number of interventions at a local and national level would help to inform a more positive narrative, in line with the reality of the social housing story in Wales.



- Public facing campaigns highlighting the added value social housing provides to wider society
- Greater promotion of Wales as an ambitious leader in delivering social housing with a proven track-record, nurturing domestic and global perceptions of the sector
- Local resources aimed at supporting community groups and individuals to share and spread the message locally about the impact of social housing and amplify the voices of their own community
- Greater visibility of social housing as a key component of economic recovery and stimulus within the Welsh Government's ongoing and future plans

Key questions

- **What steps could be taken by the Welsh Government and on a cross-party basis to progress the understanding of the economic, social and environmental added value social housing represents to wider society?**
- **What does the impact of stigma have in practice on the delivery of additional social housing, and on housing related support services?**

Increasing choice and improving access

Having enough homes is one part of the puzzle, using that valuable resource effectively also needs careful consideration. Our [‘Time to Refocus?’](#) report focussing on social housing allocation systems found that:

- The variety of ways through which a person can seek to access social housing can cause confusion
- Some of the systems can place people with an unrealistic expectation of being allocated social housing
- There is a need to demonstrate the direct connection between Social Housing Grant and homes built to meet the needs of people in acute housing need

Our work in North Wales focussing on how housing providers can better help people who may be in homes that are too large or too small to meet the needs of their household echoed some of these challenges finding that:

- There is a tension in developing homes where less popular and desirable house types – such as flats – don't tend to be favoured by tenants, but play an important part in supporting a development's viability
- True housing need is often hidden by people not joining waiting lists due to the realities of waiting times of some properties that may be more desirable due to location, size (often larger family homes) or type (predominantly bungalows). When this demand does not present itself on housing need registers local authorities do not



have the data needed to take a full view of the type of homes/developments required in different areas

- Whilst there is not a strong push towards building single persons accommodation, this can play an important role in increasing housing mobility. There is a further need to link government-grant to activity that not only delivers more homes but contributes to increasing housing mobility amongst local populations.

Further to this we believe there is a real need to provide greater priority to 'accessible housing' recognising that for many households how a home is able to change and be adapted to meet their needs and maintain independent living is vital. In 2018, the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales released a report on the issue that demonstrated:

- Disabled people are too often demoralised and frustrated by the housing system
- There is a significant shortage of accessible homes
- Only 1 in 22 councils set a percentage target for accessible/ adaptable housing
- Only 15 percent of councils said they data they held on the housing requirements of disabled people was good

Key questions

- **How can we improve access to social housing so that local authorities can strike a balance between maintaining waiting lists that are truly reflective of housing need whilst providing the public with a realistic understanding of the prospects of meeting different housing ambitions?**
- **How do we ensure that the evidence, data and rationale underpinning local, regional and national approaches to planning and delivering homes are truly able to meet the equality and diversity needs of all people living in Wales?**
- **How do we ensure that the resources allocated towards delivering social housing both help boost the amount of new homes whilst in tandem increasing housing mobility for different households (recognising the need in some areas to build specific types/sizes of homes)?**

About CIH

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple – to provide housing professionals and their organisations with the advice, support, and knowledge they need to be brilliant. CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. This means that the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing sector. We have a diverse membership

of people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world. Further information is available at: www.cih.org.



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