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Consultation Response

Social cohesion

Equality and Social Justice Committee

February 2025

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Committee's consultation on social cohesion.

Social cohesion

In terms of social cohesion, we would highlight the importance of community design, ensuring that communities are accessible and inclusive, with places for people to meet.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 includes a set of national goals including 'A Wales of cohesive communities' described as 'attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities'.[1]

A key finding of EHRC's 2018 'Is Wales Fairer' report in relation to social and community cohesion was that loneliness, isolation and a reduced sense of belonging are some of the most significant issues facing particular groups, including older people, disabled people, carers, new parents, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people, and people from some ethnic minorities.[2]

The Welsh Government's Connected Communities strategy for tackling loneliness and isolation highlights the extent to which people interact is heavily influenced by their lived environment, and references the impact of good neighbourhood design on community cohesion.[3] The strategy highlights that poor design, barriers, poor

lighting, alleyways, the structures of buildings and streets, and an absence of good quality green spaces has been shown to inhibit individuals' use of space and can prevent people leaving their homes.[4] The strategy highlights that closures of places to meet, such as libraries, community centres, pubs and churches can make it more challenging for older people to develop and maintain social networks.

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[1] Welsh Government (2015) Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Essentials. https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-08/well-being-of-future-generations-wales-act-2015-the-essentials.pdf
[2] Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Is Wales Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2018. https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/is-britain-fairer-2018-is-wales-fairer.pdf
[3] Loneliness and social isolation (connected communities) | GOV.WALES

Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey[5] enabled older people in Wales to assess how age friendly their community is. An age friendly community is suitable and empowering for people of all ages, with facilities that help people to enjoy health, wellbeing and quality of life. The survey highlighted that many older people face considerable barriers in the built environment on a daily basis. Many older people told us about poor access to public toilets, uneven pavements, pavements obstructed by cars, and a lack of public seating in communities.

Safe and accessible streets, places to meet to socialise that are easily accessible by public and community transport, and adequate public seating, street lighting and public toilets in our communities may all help to facilitate social cohesion.

Anti-social behaviour in housing

An issue that we have been hearing about from older people relates to anti-social behaviour in housing. The number of enquiries to Age Cymru Advice from older people about anti-social behaviour/nuisance in housing in relation to neighbours are as follows:

Housing	Number of enquiries (date) 7/2/2024 – 7/2/2025	Number of enquiries (date) 7/2/2023 – 7/2/2824	Number of enquiries (date) 7/2/2022 – 7/2/2023
Anti-social behaviour/nuisance	50	37	39

We've been increasingly hearing about housing schemes that had been originally allocated to older people, where this is no longer the case. Other people have been moved in by the housing provider, and older people are telling us that there has been an increase in anti-social behaviour, including noise and drug use. Older people have told Age Cymru Advice that they're unhappy, their mental health is being affected, and that they don't feel safe and want to move.

Age Cymru's HOPE advocacy project (Helping Others Participate and Engage) has heard of instances where supported accommodation has been changed to the extent

of it no longer being for older people. Other people are being offered the accommodation which has led to over occupation of residences and anti-social behaviour complaints.

A HOPE client reported issues of people congregating in entrance areas to drink and take drugs. There is also rubbish being dumped and the situation is affecting the older residents on the block to the extent that they will not leave their homes unless they are being picked up.

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4 Ibid.

5 Age Cymru ¦ Community Calculator (ageuk.org.uk)

We note that this issue was raised recently in Plenary.[6]

Age Cymru has a factsheet 'Housing in Wales – anti-social behaviour and other neighbourhood issues'[7] about anti-social behaviour that takes place in the home or neighbourhood, which is primarily aimed at people experiencing anti-social behaviour.

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6   https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/14807#C646153

7 Age Cymru (November 2023) Factsheet FS9w 'Housing in Wales – anti-social behaviour and other neighbourhood issues'. Microsoft Word - FS9w - November 2023