

SC 20

Ymateb gan: Tai Pawb

Response from: Tai Pawb

Who we are

Tai Pawb (housing for all) is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Our vision is a “Wales where everyone has the right to a good home.” We operate a membership system which is open to local authorities, registered social landlords, third (voluntary) sector organisations, other housing interests and individuals.

What we do

Tai Pawb works closely with the Welsh Government and other key partners on national housing strategies and key working groups, to ensure that equality is an inherent consideration in national strategic development and implementation. The organisation also provides practical advice and assistance to its members on a range of equality and diversity issues in housing and related services, including QED – the equality and diversity accreditation for the housing sector. We are also part of a coalition called “[Back the Bill](#)”, which seeks to establish the legal right to adequate housing for **all citizens** in Wales.

For further information visit: www.taipawb.org

Charity registration no. 1110078

Company No. 5282554

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Tai Pawb welcome the Equality and Social Justice Committee's review into 'Social Cohesion in Wales'. While Wales aspires to be a '[Nation of Sanctuary](#)', we are not immune to social unrest. While Wales may not have seen widespread rioting last summer following the Southport tragedy, there was an [increase in racist incidents](#). Our members told us some of their staff were reporting being afraid and anxious. Organisations were forced to consider the meetings staff attended, as well as the location, to identify if they were at risk of danger. Given the international events of the last year, and the toxification of some social media platforms – now is the right time to review how we ensure unity in society and safety for all.
- 1.2 Housing has historically proven a challenge for social cohesion. The perception of favouritism of certain groups, has led to unrest within the UK and Wales in the past. While riots may be an extreme indicator, they are not the only indicator of a lack of social cohesion.
- 1.3 This response will focus on social cohesion in Wales, with a particular focus on housing, race and hate crime. We share best practice, in particular generated through our [Anti-Racism](#) work and highlight guidance shared with members from last summer.
- 1.4 Lastly, we conclude by highlighting areas the Welsh Government may wish to consider in building social cohesion.

2. Community Cohesion in Wales

2.1 [Community cohesion](#) is about inclusion, making the effort to find out about others, treating each other with respect and building good relations between different parts of the community.

2.2 According to Safer Communities Wales, Community tensions can lead to [Anti-Social Behaviour](#), poor behaviour in [Public Spaces](#), [Hate Crimes](#), [Harassment](#), [Serious Violence](#), and [Extremism and Terrorism](#). It also frequently leads to a breakdown in relationships between people in communities and the Police, Local Authorities, or other public bodies.

“Wales’ communities are increasingly diverse and face challenges due to economic migration, deprivation and poverty, intergenerational differences, the rise of hate crime and the threat of extremism. Wales’ councillors and councils play a key community leadership role in encouraging integration and community cohesion.” [WLGA](#)

2.3 Cohesive communities that are well connected are more resilient to change, and people are kinder to each other. It leads to individuals and communities being trusted and empowered to do the things that matter, and they have good access to public bodies involved in Health, Education, Housing and Community Safety. Community cohesion describes the ability of all communities to function and grow in harmony together rather than in conflict.

2.4 In recent years, there have been challenges to community cohesion linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Brexit vote. There have also been economic challenges around the cost-of-living crisis and a prolonged period of austerity, which have led to some services previously delivered in the community be reduced or cut. While these may not always have community cohesion as primary outcome, it was a secondary benefit.

2.5 Our Members have also told us media concern over immigration, as well as the increasing challenges around some social media platforms have

impacted community cohesion in Wales – in particular for Black and minoritized communities. While these may happen at a national level or internationally, they impact communities and individuals in a very personal way.

3 Housing and community cohesion

- 3.1 Historically, housing can be a source of division amongst communities and perception has the potential to undermine community cohesion. It's well established that Wales is experiencing a housing crisis. We currently have a lack of social housing with around 100,000 households on the waiting list and an incredibly [competitive Private Rental Sector](#). This means some communities and individuals are facing pressure to access housing – whether that is due to lack of income, discrimination, or limited suitable housing to meet their needs. There is a real danger this could contribute to wider social division in the future with some communities fearing that 'others' are getting preferential treatment.
- 3.2 Housing policy changes, either by the UK or Welsh Government, have the potential to affect community cohesion. For instance, the UK Government has recently changed its approach to dispersal areas, meaning Asylum Seekers are spread across all Local Authorities rather than just four. This means there are more visible signs of diversity in communities that traditionally may have had less. When housing is already in short supply, this can increase tensions – thus it's important to plan.
- 3.3 Homelessness policy at a devolved level can also be a factor of increased tension. Good practice suggests that when re-homing people, factors like location to community and social networks, as well as culturally sensitive services can lead to more secure tenancies, with benefits to the individual household and savings to the state. Principles recognised by some of the changes proposed in the Welsh Governments White Paper on Ending Homelessness. However, this may lead to accusations of some communities receiving priority over others in relation to housing.

3.4 Our [Gwent Boost](#) project works to increase access to the Private Rented Sector. It has highlighted certain communities are more affected by housing disadvantage including lone parents, Black and minoritized communities and people on benefits. This experience suggests while housing can be a factor in causing disunity and undermining social cohesion - the perception that some communities and individuals enjoy preferential access is not representative of experiences. The groups often targeted are amongst those more likely to struggle to access good housing.

4. **Hate Crime**

4.1 Hate Crime may be seen as a challenge to social cohesion, an indicator of wider prejudice but also dissatisfaction within communities. The past 12 months has seen an increase in protests and polarisation around social and racial issues. Hate crimes including, [antisemitic](#), [sexual orientation](#) and [anti-Muslim](#) have been on the rise. There is also likely to be under-reporting of hate crime for reasons which are obvious, including the potential for back-lash and mis-trust in agencies.

4.2 A hate incident is any incident, perceived by the victim or any other person, as being motivated by prejudice or hostility towards specific personal characteristics:

- *Disability*
- *Race*
- *Religion*
- *Sexual orientation*
- *Transgender identity*

4.3 Negative rhetoric on social media further exacerbates this hostility, highlighting a need for targeted interventions. Online platforms continue to spread misinformation and harmful stereotypes about migrants and ethnic minorities, fuelling division. Measures to counter digital hate speech must be a priority for promoting social cohesion.

- 4.4 [The biggest study](#) of hate crime in Wales shows that it is highly likely to happen in and around people's homes. **Social and private tenants** are one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of impacts and effects of experiencing hate crime.
- 4.4 It is good practice for all housing organisations to develop hate crime policies. Our [Hate Crime and Housing Toolkit](#) outlines how housing organisations can tackle hate crime through awareness, prevention, increasing reporting, supporting victims, working with perpetrators, and tenant engagement. Moreover, there are clear expectations placed on housing providers as part of the Anti Racist-Wales Action Plan to support tenants with information on how to report a hate crime.
5. **Good Practice in addressing hate crime**
- 5.1 This section highlights good practice in relation to building stronger communities and addressing hate crime.

Prevention

- 5.2 There is a need to shift the emphasis from intervention to prevention when addressing the rising tensions and worsening community relations; a precursor for hate crime. These issues may be fuelled by various factors, such as negative media (and social media) coverage of topics like immigration, poverty, social housing, and disability. To proactively address this challenge, housing organisations can adopt strategies outlined in our [Toolkit](#).

Raising awareness and reporting

- 5.3 It is estimated around 70% of hate crime goes unreported. Victims do not report for a variety of reasons, including lack of belief that anything would be done about their report, fear of further victimisation and simply lack of awareness around hate crime. Increasing awareness of hate crime and reporting mechanisms, amongst staff and tenants/clients can address this.

Tools to raise awareness include:

- hate crime training, awareness sessions for trade staff/contractors
- Taking part in [hate crime Awareness Week](#) Wales coordinated by Victim Support, who provides [partner packs](#), [newsletter with ideas and calendar of events](#)
- Sign up to [Victim Support hate crime charter](#) and get accredited by Victim Support Wales

People can experience a wide range of barriers to reporting hate incidents directly to the police. On these occasions, Third Party Reporting Centres can function as an ‘in-between,’ that specialist link between the victim, the police and housing provider. Wales’ major hate crime third party reporting centre is the [Wales Hate Support Centre \(WHSC\)](#).

Working with Perpetrators: trauma-informed approach

- 5.4 At times, perpetrators of hate crime, just like those perpetrating Anti-Social-Behaviour, may be dealing with unmet support needs which exacerbate or cause the hate incidents to occur. These may be mental health issues or distress, drug/alcohol dependency, learning difficulties, domestic abuse, and other well-being issues.
- 5.5 Trauma informed approaches, as advocated by [Shelter Cymru](#), recognises the need to safeguard the health, safety and rights of victims while recognising and understanding that many of the people perpetrating hate crime can also be vulnerable. This [blog](#) by Restorative Justice outlines further trauma-informed ways of working.
- 5.6 POBL have signed up to the Victim Support Cymru Hate Crime Charter and are now collaborating with Victim Support Cymru to secure the trust mark. POBL are also developing toolbox talks for maintenance teams focusing on educating teams on how to recognise signs of hate crime when they are working out in communities and in customers’ homes and what they should do if they suspect someone may be a victim of hate

crime. In the future, this training will be extended to POBL's customer services teams.

6. Considerations for Welsh Government

More proactive Commitment/Actions to protect diverse communities and provide a safe environment for all:

- 6.1 The Welsh Government has a duty to protect all communities from hate crimes and discrimination, ensuring that Wales remains a true Nation of Sanctuary. Targeted hate crimes against migrants and ethnic minorities undermine social cohesion and create fear within communities.

Sanctioning Hate Crimes and Promoting Safety should be a core focus area for the government.

- 6.2 Enforce strict sanctions against hate crimes and provide adequate support for victims. Robust enforcement not only holds perpetrators accountable but also reassures vulnerable communities of their safety and rights. The communities facing these difficulties are desperate for this change now and should be reassured of the Welsh Government's commitment to inclusivity and a sense of belonging.

Active Countermeasures and Visible Action is needed:

- 6.3 To combat harmful narratives and rising hate crimes, the government should:
- Increase support for third-party hate crime reporting centres.
 - Provide clear, public commitments against hate crimes – send out communications more effectively to media outlets that keep publishing the negative rhetorics against migrant and ethnically diverse communities.
 - Collaborate with social media platforms to reduce online hate speech – showcase positive work and contributions of migrants and people from

ethnically diverse communities. Let the public know that they are adding value to the growth of the society.

- Hold perpetrators accountable to deter continuous advancement of such actions.

Affirming Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary:

6.4 Through decisive action and transparent communication, the Welsh Government can demonstrate its unwavering support for diverse communities. This commitment is essential to uphold the values of equality, inclusion, and sanctuary that Wales aspires to represent.

Incorporation of the right to adequate housing

6.5 Incorporation of human rights legislation is a way to build standards and rights for everyone in society. Having universal rights highlights that everyone is the same. Tai Pawb are part of the [Back the Bill](#) campaign which seeks the incorporation of the right to adequate housing in Wales. Wales is experiencing a Housing Crisis, which has the potential to fuel inequalities, undermine community cohesion and promote disorder. Incorporation of the right to adequate housing can address all of these issues, whilst also improving lives and [saving money](#).

Accelerate progress on anti-racism

6.6 Following the events of the George Floyd murder, the inequalities highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, the Welsh Government committed to an ambitious Anti-Racist Plan with the goal of having an Anti-Racist Wales by 2030. The direction of travel and goals of this plan matched the appetite shared by the desire to make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary. However, limited progress has been made in some of these areas. Last year the Welsh Government undertook actions to make accountability clearer through streamlining and combining the ARWAP and Nation of Sanctuary plan. Given the rise of far-right populism internationally and the toxification of

some social media platforms, now is the time to accelerate progress rather than stall.

Clear communication and guidance on Housing

6.7 Raising understanding of eligibility of social housing and allocation processes can help address misunderstanding and perceptions of bias for some communities. Given the danger of misinformation, this is particularly important for social cohesion. The volunteers who work with our Gwent BOOST project (all of whom have lived experience of homelessness) now attend a 3-hour Nation of Sanctuary workshop entitled 'Understanding Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Wales'. This session, hosted by EYST, teaches our volunteers about the journey and experience of those seeking sanctuary in Wales. It is vital that all our volunteers understand this. The demonisation and scapegoating of Refugees and migrants is one of the most deeply embedded and pernicious narratives of our time. But for many who have experienced homelessness and feel let down by a system unable to adequately support them, understanding this narrative and extending compassion to another vulnerable group can be difficult. This session addresses this challenge in a safe, non-judgmental and trauma-informed way. Learners can talk about things they have seen / heard on social media and in the press and get answers and clarification without fear of being humiliated or patronised. We correct common myths such as:

"There isn't enough housing because there are too many illegal immigrants"

"People come to the UK just to claim benefits"

"We'd be a richer country without immigration"

"Migrants don't try to integrate with us"

6.8 The workshop has a very high success rate in changing the perspectives of attendees. Those who complete the workshop show an increased level of compassion towards those seeking sanctuary and a better

understanding of misinformation, fake news and inflammatory headlines. This compassion and understanding are the prerequisites to improved behaviour, words and actions - which, in turn, contribute to a true nation of sanctuary. We would call on Welsh Government to fund more activities like this to promote community cohesion.

Role of Lived Experience

- 6.9 We believe there is a continued need to promote lived experience across all work that is funded or delivered by the Welsh Government. Doing this can give people an opportunity to share their experiences, have a voice and understand the experiences of others. This is a precursor to having social cohesion. It's also vital that, having shared those experiences, there is a feed-back mechanism in order that sharing has been worthwhile – i.e. how has that information, that story, been used to shape policy or change outcomes.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Wales has in recent years set ambitious goals and targets around anti-racism. Achieving this is essential to ensure a fairer and more equal society. It's difficult to see how we can have community cohesion, until these levels of inequality are addressed.
- 7.2 Our response has highlighted the importance to housing of community cohesion and tension. We believe the best way to address this is to return housing to a key mission of government through the incorporation of a right to adequate housing. Through making a good home a legal right for all, this source of tension can be reduced and can highlight we are all equal.
- 7.3 Lastly, it's important to continue to fund activities that bring people together, including where there is the opportunity to share experiences and raise understanding about differences and similarities, allowing people to understand other individuals and communities lived experiences.