

Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru

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Evidence Submission to
The National Assembly for Wales
Public Accounts Committee

**The impact of welfare reform on social
housing tenants**

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 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

In Wales, we aim to provide a professional and impartial voice for housing across all sectors to emphasise the particular context of housing in Wales and to work with organisations to identify housing solutions.

For further information on this response please contact
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Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru agrees with the Auditor-General's report that the changes to Housing Benefit introduced by the welfare-reform programme are having a significant impact on Welsh Councils and housing associations. The impact will continue as further welfare reforms such as Universal Credit are rolled out. The recommendations in the report are clear and CIH members support the recommendations for improving strategic planning, governance, accountability and management of performance on welfare reform

Comments on the Report

1. Data Collection

Paragraph 18 states that there are limitations and quality and coverage of data currently collected to understand the impact of welfare reform on social housing. Some key data to measure the impact of the welfare reforms is not collected. CIH recommends that there is further data collection on a qualitative and quantitative basis. Real Life Reform (<http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/services/policy/welfare-reform-and-financial-inclusion/welfare-reform/real-life-reform/>) is a study being undertaken across 7 housing associations in the north of England to understand in detail the decisions made and the challenges faced by a range of tenants affected by welfare reform. Each participating organisation works with 10-15 households over a period of approximately 18 months, undertaking a survey/interview every three months using an agreed questionnaire being completed by trained staff. The questionnaire covers the under occupation deduction, applying for and receiving benefits, responding to non-benefit dependency, how they manage their finances now and when Universal Credit comes into play and generally how they cope.

2. Changes to the social housing stock

Paragraphs 22 and 23 states that there has been little change to the existing social housing stock and increased demand for smaller homes. It will take time to develop new housing stock and CIH is concerned that a rush to develop smaller properties could be detrimental in the long term if the removal of the spare room subsidy is overturned if there is a change of government. Political expediency is always a concern when looking at such long term decisions.

3. In addition the impact of the spare room subsidy removal is having an impact on social landlords. Evidence is emerging from local authorities and housing associations that there is an increase in voids, particularly in 3,4 and 5 bedroom homes. It is becoming increasingly difficult for social landlords to let these properties, which will have significant impacts on their operation and development plans.

4. Engagement with tenants

Recommendation 5 asks for improved engagement with tenants, including the provision of support to tenants specifically affected by the removal of the spare

room subsidy to participate in regional/national employment schemes. CIH led the development of the i2i programme, providing social landlords with a toolkit to improve the benefits to the community from their procurement spend, particularly focussing on employment opportunities. This toolkit is still relevant and many social landlords have improved the employment prospects for their tenants through the use of the can-do toolkit.