

## ROCP 25, Community Housing Cymru

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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

### **Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith | Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee**

Adolygiad o flaenoriaethau'r Pwyllgor ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd | Review of the Committee's priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Ymateb gan Cartrefi Cymunedol Cymru | Evidence from Community Housing Cymru

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### **Your views**

#### **1. What are your views on the Committee's three strategic priorities: Climate Change; Sustainable Communities; and Protecting and enhancing the natural environment?**

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The Committee's three strategic priorities are reflected in housing association's own ambitions to:

- Provide low carbon homes and places where people want to live.
- Meet decarbonisation goals.
- Effectively manage environmental impacts of social housing developments.

#### **2. To what extent are the Committee's three strategic priorities still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?**

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Since the Committee first set their strategic priorities in 2021, housing associations have found themselves in the centre of two storms:

- A cost of living crisis, exacerbated by extreme geopolitical circumstances.
- A growing weight of systemic barriers that result from the desire to move forward with achieving the sector's ambitions in relation to climate change, environmental management and building new affordable homes simultaneously and at pace.

Housing association's have serious concerns about the cumulative impact of the barriers that they are experiencing. These barriers highlight the continued and

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increased relevance across all three of the Committees strategic priorities, and are outlined in further detail below.

### **3. What are your view on the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work for Years 3 to 5 of the Sixth Senedd (set out in its report, Priorities for the Sixth Senedd?)**

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#### Priority 1 - Climate change: Decarbonising housing

Housing associations have led the way in driving down carbon emissions of their homes, including through the Optimised Retrofit programme, and have significantly improved the quality of their homes through work to bring properties up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). However, housing associations are ambitious to go further and are committed to retrofitting existing homes to zero carbon standards.

Decarbonising housing should therefore remain high on the Committee's agenda as a detailed climate change priority.

We would like to see the Committee progress its work on the multi-phase inquiry into decarbonising housing by including a particular focus on funding as part of their longer-term programme of work. In 2021, a report by the Future Generations Commission estimated the cost of decarbonising the social housing sector to be in the region of £5.5bn. In the current economic climate, this figure could now be understated.

CHC has continued to call for a deliverable approach to retrofitting social homes to the highest possible standards. We welcome the commitment from the Welsh Government to explore a range of public and private financing models as an initial first step. It would be valuable for the Committee to scrutinise this work as it develops further, with a particular focus for enabling investment to stay in Wales. This will require a coordinated approach to building a clear awareness of the skills and key roles required to meet decarbonisation targets, as well as attracting and retaining the current and future workforce. With the Welsh Government's upcoming Net Zero Skills consultation, there is an opportunity to combine these objectives and align them to the Welsh Government's Net Zero Strategic Plan.

Priority 2 - Sustainable communities: Review of planning framework, including consideration of Future Wales and post-legislative scrutiny of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015.

We strongly agree that work to examine capacity and skills in the planning system

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remains relevant to ensure that we can get on with the important job of building more social homes as quickly as possible. We welcome the continued focus on placemaking in the round.

### Priority 3 - Protecting and enhancing the natural environment

Housing associations are committed to ensuring that their developments do not have a negative impact on the environment. However, they are also tasked with building new homes at pace in order to address the housing crisis in Wales. The increasing complexity of environmental management has continued to cause delays to social housing developments. Specifically, there are challenges surrounding sustainable drainage and phosphate levels in rivers.

The unintended consequence of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) advice to planning authorities to address concerns regarding levels of phosphorus in rivers across Wales is that it has effectively brought social housing development in some affected areas to a standstill. Insight from our members shows that nine housing associations were affected by phosphate issues to the end of May 2021, with 28 schemes due to deliver 1,046 affordable homes at a standstill.

Housing associations have acted swiftly to seek solutions to mitigate the impact of their developments on phosphorus levels and to negotiate a more nuanced approach to implementation of the planning advice that will allow progress to be made on development while phosphorus management systems are established. We are seeing some progress, but more is needed to ensure the homes people need can be built. We need to invest now in excellent long-term environmental management to support home building, and align decision making across housing environmental management and climate change to ensure that policy making in one area does not create a problem in another. We would therefore like to see this approach adopted to the Committee's work for the remainder of the Senedd term.

## **4. To what extent are the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?**

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### Priority 1 - Climate Change

Decarbonising housing

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Since the Committee first set their strategic priorities in 2021, the pace and scale required to reduce carbon emissions has not diminished. UK climate reports and temperature records continue to evidence the increased possibility of record high temperatures due to human induced climate change.

Whilst efforts are globally concerted, we know that Welsh homes account for approximately 11% of all greenhouse gas emissions in Wales. To add to this, 45% of households in Wales are estimated to be living in fuel poverty due to the rise in the price of energy over the past year. This has exacerbated the importance of increasing energy efficiency and decarbonising our homes.

Priorities 2 & 3 - Sustainable Communities: and Protecting and enhancing the natural environment

There remains a pressing need for more affordable housing in Wales. In reference to previous points, there needs to be better alignment between development and any possible environmental implications in order to unlock the barriers for increasing housing supply.

**5. Are there any other matters related to the Committee's priorities/work programme/ways of working that you would like to comment on?**

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No response.

**6. Other information**

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No response.

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