

We would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to give evidence. We would like to take this additional opportunity to provide further clarification and information on a number of our points.

Tenancy support for autistic and neurodiverse people

Dr Henley explained that they felt that providing routine support for tenants who believe themselves to be neurodivergent would be beneficial in helping this group to enter and remain in the sector.

To address the data gaps in terms of the needs, including support needs, of autistic people in the PRS, we are currently conducting research, which we would be happy to share on completion.

Longer term financial support for those who have experienced abuse, to enable them to enter and remain in the private rented sector.

Domestic abuse is well recognised as a leading cause of women's homelessness. In 2018-19, among those households found to be subject to a s73 duty to help secure accommodation under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, 18% of single female and 28% of female lone parents gave their main reason for loss of previous accommodation as violent relationship breakdown, representing 10% of applications at this stage (figures from StatsWales).

Economic abuse is identified as a category of abuse within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. It can operate through housing – for instance, creating rent arrears – or to force or coerce someone into debt. Economic abuse can affect individuals even after they have left an abuser – for instance directly through control over child support or mortgage payment, or indirectly through a poor credit rating due to previous financial control.

We would like to stress the importance of long-term, potentially lifetime, support for those who have experienced abuse, especially economic abuse, to enable them to enter and remain in the PRS. We suggest that identified or suspected economic abuse should entitle an individual to access to interventions intended to reduce the impact of poor credit histories upon ability to secure affordable PRS accommodation (e.g. bond and first month's rent). These should be available without requiring individuals to go through a homelessness application. This is especially important given that other protections, e.g. within Universal Credit, are time-limited.

The 'vision' for the PRS needs to be considered and integrated alongside broader 'visions' for Welsh society.

We feel strongly that discussion around the role of the private rented sector (for instance, the question of supply) needs to consider wider questions of housing adequacy, which (following Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) includes affordability, tenure security and quality standards.

We especially highlight the importance of considering quality. No national minimum standards apply to the private rented sector in Wales. In contrast, those renting from social landlords benefit from the Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023, which requires social housing in Wales to reach a minimum quality threshold. Those in the PRS have limited avenues for redress if their homes are not of a reasonable standard, primarily through potential costly and extended court action. We suggest that this could be addressed through the introduction of a Housing and Property Tribunal, drawing on some features of the approach in Scotland, but with a greater emphasis on Alternate Dispute Resolution, which has been shown to be successful in resolving disputes within the private rented sector effectively (see Harris, 2020 for a more detailed discussion).

Instability

We feel that the impact on children and families of tenure insecurity in the PRS are often overlooked. We are conducting research to address this gap, which we would be happy to share on completion. In the interim: census figures suggest that around a fifth (21%) of those living in the PRS in Wales have dependent children. We have also found that children in the Welsh PRS are more likely than those in other tenures to have moved at least once in the last 5 years, with their parents more likely to anticipate moving again within the next year. Preece and Bimpson have also highlighted that housing insecurity and unaffordability are frequently cited by those experiencing poor mental health as a causal factor (Preece, Jenny; Bimpson, 2019).

Hazards

Category 1 hazards are those that are or are likely to impact health, wellbeing and/or personal safety. Based on figures from the Welsh Housing Conditions Survey 2017-18, just under a quarter (23.6%) of Welsh private rented sector homes contain at least one Category 1 hazard (Based on Nichol, Garrett, Woodfine, Watkins and Woodham's (2019) figures for the costs of poor housing to society in general and the NHS specifically, poor housing costs Wales an estimated £178 million a year, with a cost to the NHS of just under eighteen million.

We also note that there exists no quality standards with respect to the private rented sector, unlike the social rented sector. Yet, following the logic of Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, there is no logical reason why private renters should be excluded from rights enjoyed by social renters. We suggest that a Wales-wide quality standard (similar to, or extending, the Welsh Housing Quality Standard for social housing) should be introduced to cover private rented housing.

Data gaps

As mentioned previously, we feel there to be two significant gaps. First, around quality within the Private Rented Sector. It would be very helpful to have a survey similar to the English Household Survey to assess the quality of Welsh housing across different tenures. Crucially, this would enable understanding of the differential impact of PRS accommodation (and differing experiences of the PRS) on different groups in Wales.

Second, we highlighted the importance of data to capture flows into and out of the PRS, particularly the relationship between the PRS and homelessness. The current StatsWales record has records of cause of loss of prior housing up to 2018/19; having this regularly updated, and with details (e.g. age, gender, working status ethnicity, etc) to enable targeted interventions.

We spoke about the importance of access to administrative justice mechanisms (e.g. a dedicated tribunal system). If this were introduced, it would also offer more data on the extent of existing issues and challenges within the sector. For instance, it would give additional detail as to the nature and prevalence of disrepair, rental increases, and unlawful property entry by landlords. Dr Edith England (Senior Lecturer in Social Policy and Practice, Cardiff Metropolitan University) Dr Josie Henley (Lecturer in Social Psychology, Cardiff University)