



Care & Repair Cymru

*Gwella cartrefi, newid bywydau
Improving homes, changing lives*

Barriers to Implementing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Introduction to Care & Repair Cymru November: 2020

Care & Repair has been providing information, advice and practical housing solutions directly into older people's homes for 30 years. Our vision is a Wales in which all older people can live independently in safe, warm, accessible homes.

Our network of 13 local agencies delivers trusted, practical, frontline services throughout Wales. A unique combination of person-centred, home-visiting casework and technical housing expertise makes the Care & Repair service unique.

Last year in Wales, we:

- advised over 47,000 older people;
- increased clients' benefit income by £9.4 million;
- delivered £14.5 million's worth of physical alterations and adaptations
- facilitated 2,555 NHS patients with safe hospital discharge
- provided 1,793 interventions to help older people living with sensory loss.

Care & Repair Cymru is the national charity at the centre of the movement. We support local service quality, innovation and collaborative working. We capture performance data and evidence from agencies' frontline teams, working across housing, health and social care to support integrated policy thinking and service commissioning that will enable everyone in Wales to age with dignity in the homes and communities of their choosing

1. Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications

- 1.1 We believe that the Act is sometimes interpreted as heavily focusing on young people of Wales as the future. However, to truly meet the aims of the Act its implementation must be cross-generational to protect Wales today and in the future. Wales has one of the oldest populations in Europe: the number of people aged 65 and over is set to increase by nearly 40% by 2039.¹ An

¹ WG Expert Group on Housing an Ageing Population, January 2017, [Our Housing AGEnda: meeting the aspirations of older people in Wales](#), p. 10

ageing population does not have to be a barrier to successful implementation of the Act – but it does present challenges and opportunities to be aware of that should be explicitly considered by Public Service Boards. Older people are worth over £2bn to the Welsh economy annually through employment, volunteering, and caring responsibilities amongst others² and are a worthy and essential factor when considering how Wales can best meet its wellbeing goals.

2. The resources available to public bodies to implement the Act and how effectively they have been deployed

- 2.1 Planning for the long-term is at the heart of the Act, yet public bodies including third sector organisations are constantly met with a lack of long-term funding. This contradiction stops public bodies being able to set a long-term plan needed to meet the wellbeing goals. It is hard to balance what we must achieve now with the resource we have, versus what we want to achieve in the longer term. Without long-term resources it is hard to make the shift from long-term thinking to long-term planning.
- 2.2 The constant uncertainty over funding and long-term future is a barrier to long-term planning and collaboration between public sector organisations, and especially in the third sector – many of whom are effectively ‘in competition’ from the same funding pots. We acknowledge the assertion made by the Auditor General for Wales that integration is not the same as joint-working, however competition for funding is a barrier to more integrated ways of working between third sector organisations in Wales.

4. The leadership role of the Welsh Government.

- 4.1 The complex landscape of partnership governance is difficult to navigate. This makes it hard to work collaboratively and engage with public sector bodies. There is general confusion amongst many of our agencies as to how various strategic partnership arrangements such as Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) and Public Service Boards (PSBs) interact and make decisions with the third sector. There is an opinion that decision making in strategic partnerships, like RPBs, is often contrary to the principles of coproduction with a small number of public sector representatives dominating. Simplification of complex reporting requirements so that public services/sector bodies do not get overwhelmed would enable more integration of the wellbeing goals into planning.

5. Any other barriers to successful implementation of the Act e.g. Covid-19/Brexit

² CHEME, Bangor University, [Living well for longer: The economic argument for investing in the health and wellbeing of older people in Wales](#) p.6

- 5.1 Older people have been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic due to the call for them to shield. This has been a barrier to entering and taking part in their communities, and often a barrier to accessing the help they need. Older people during this time have reported increased isolation with increasing examples of loneliness. Going forward, there must be a more integrated, cross-sector approach that understands the wider determinants of health, including housing, mental wellbeing and loneliness, community participation – all of which have been negatively affected, especially for older people, during the Covid-19 pandemic. A Public Health Wales report on Winter Pressures³ acknowledges how statutory and public bodies are locked into short term, reactive initiatives in order to address cyclical pressures on services, without fully grasping a long-view of prevention and addressing issues of systemic resilience as a regular, mainstreamed approach to shrinking pressures on services that address wellbeing.
- 5.2 During the strictest periods of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic, only those works deemed essential could take place in older people’s homes. Owing to this, a huge amount of need has gone unmet. Covid-19 has exacerbated housing inequalities, and poor housing conditions have gone unresolved. The financial and health impact of this will only add more pressure on housing and health and social care systems going forward, adding to an already struggling sector. Our experience of the pandemic is that the ‘Stay at Home’ mantra addressed one public health risk, only to exacerbate another – the risks associated with poor, unsuitable homes. If we focus on the citizen, good housing is fundamental to health and wellbeing, and appropriate housing for an ageing society is as much a public health issue as it is a housing planning issue.
- 5.3 Even before Covid-19, older people lived and continue to live in housing that is unfit and unsuitable to their needs. 18% of houses in Wales pose an unacceptable risk to health, which costs the Welsh NHS in excess of £95 million every year⁴. However, with 19% of pensioners in Wales in poverty many older people cannot afford to complete repairs⁵. The impact of this on older people and wider public sector bodies is clear. Poor housing conditions lead to increased risk of respiratory and circulatory problems from living in cold, damp homes. In fact 75% of all excess winter deaths in Wales are people aged over 75.⁶ Similarly, our experience of delivering our Hospital to a Healthier Home service under the National Programme for Unscheduled Care addresses an increased incidence of trips and falls amongst older people resulting in hospital admission, exacerbated by unsuitable homes. Currently 122,000 older people will fall more than once in their homes, resulting in

³ Public Health Wales, 2019. Winter Health Report. p.8

⁴ Public Health Wales, 2019. The Full Cost of Poor Housing in Wales. p.ii

⁵ Welsh Government, StatsWales, March 2020. Pensioners in Relative Income Poverty by Family Type.

⁶ Public Health Wales, 2019. Winter Health Report p.4

11,000 hospitalisations.⁷ Public Health Wales epidemiology suggests that by 2021, 132,000 older people will fall more than once in their home, with 7,500 being hospitalised as a result.⁸ Improving housing conditions is an essential component to wider policy aims around health, wellbeing, and prevention. It will ensure that older people can continue to take part in their communities; and live with dignity and independence in their own homes now and in the future.

- 5.4 The Commissioner's Report encourages further digital integration. However, the shift to digital may exclude older people: while 89% of adults in Wales use the internet, only 49% of those aged 75% or older do so.⁹ There is a risk of inequity of access to the resources that will shift online if older people continue to be left out of the digital conversation. In scaling up the role of digital technology in public sector services, there is a risk that those without the means to access the internet will be left behind. Equally, skills, digital confidence, and fear of being exploited online are a barrier for generations that were not brought up in the digital age or with access from an earlier point in life.
- 5.5 Increased infrastructure and upskilling is required to ensure an equal and resilient Wales when it comes to digital technology usage. However, it is worth noting that this is more than just a skills issue. Reliable digital and internet connectivity is essential for a Prosperous Wales, but the proposals seen so far do not take into account those on lower or static incomes – like pensioners – for whom internet connection would be another expense. Likewise, in rural Wales, where more drastic investment to digital infrastructures is required, has a proportionally older population. There is a risk that older people will not have equal access to services or participation as Welsh citizens if these issues remain unaddressed.

6. How to ensure the Act is implemented successfully in the future

- 6.1 Long term funding to facilitate scale and pace, would enable organisations to properly plan for prevention, rather than resort to firefighting. We understand the need for prevention, but short-term funding granted within tight parameters is not conducive to development and implementation of a holistic preventative approach.
- 6.2 Foster a more equal relationship within Regional Partnership Boards between public sector bodies and the third sector by building on relationships that have been developed in trust during the pandemic. There is now opportunity to

⁷ Government Office for Science, 2016, Future of an Ageing Population, p.7

⁸ Presentation given by Dr Sarah Jones to the National Prudent Healthcare Falls Prevention Taskforce, 2017. "What's the point of falls prevention?"

⁹ Welsh Government Statistical Bulletin, 2019. National Survey for Wales, 2019-19: Internet Use and Digital Skills p.1

build on and utilise partnership responses brought on by Covid-19, and evaluating how they have impacted, seek to sustain and mainstream them as we reset community cohesion and resilience post-Covid19 and into the future. A more equal relationship will result in better collaboration

- 6.3 Enshrining the right to good housing in Wales in law is crucial in providing the impetus for further action on the knowledge that housing is a wider determinant of health. This will lead to investment in more services to find a balance between keeping people well so that older people can thrive rather than just survive. Good housing is essential for health, wellbeing, and community participation. This will not only necessitate investment in improving poor homes, but also enabling a wider market for older people to move to alternative homes where that is the right option for them, rather than relying on outdated notions of ageing in place. A moving through choice approach would involve coproducing the right models of accommodation for people as they age, creating more market response within building supply, and more flexible financial packages and service support for later life movers.
- 6.4 However, we recognise that the majority of older people would still choose to remain living independently in their own home. Therefore, to achieve 'good' housing, there should be easier access to help and resources for older owner-occupiers and private tenants improve the conditions in which they live. This includes a more joined-up approach to housing adaptations so that people across Wales can access adaptations equally; and setting a clear minimum standard for private sector housing, and timescale to meet this standard, which includes updated quality requirements for assisted living and SMART technology.
- 6.5 Similarly, a national decarbonisation programme that encompasses owner-occupied homes as well as social housing will lead to more energy efficient homes, lift people out of fuel poverty and lead to a greener, resilient Wales today and tomorrow. Welsh Government should set out a long-term plan on funding decarbonisation. This should involve not only financial support for those in proven need, but also good quality safe advice to encourage personal investment and long-term positive behaviour change. The market for retrofit and new-age installation should be enabled by advisors, contractors and installers that have a recognised accreditation, and a proven track record for customer care.
- 6.4 We must develop a clearer idea of how older people fit into the vision of digital innovation. We must work with older people to better understand the barriers to uptake of technology. To do this, Wales needs a workforce that is ready to engage with digital technologies and trained to work digitally with older people. From Covid19, we have learned that digital can be taken up rapidly, especially in the health sector – now need to extend this to rural Wales, which has a proportionately higher older population, continuing the progress to full connectivity by using Welsh businesses to build digital infrastructure to consolidate a prosperous Wales.

7. Today's Older People and Tomorrow's Ageing Society

- 7.1 We recognise that the current pandemic has brought out the best and the worst features of humanity. Alongside inspiring examples of self-sacrifice, there have been worrying signs of how older people have been labelled and treated. A starting point for us must be the way we value older people in society and create opportunities for healthy ageing, as well as incorporating older people consistently into civil life.
- 7.2 Recognition and investment in older people as a diverse group with much to contribute will ensure that ageing across the life course into the future will produce greater returns from wellbeing, free from the limiting impacts of cultural ageism. We are living longer and to a greater age: we should incentivise and enable older people to participate more and add value from years to intergenerational society.
- 7.3 It is important to recognise not only the net benefit that older people currently bring to our economy in Wales, but also the unlocked potential that is restricted by social stigma, loneliness and isolation, poor health opportunity, poor housing and technological exclusion. It is critical to the wellbeing of future generations that, as we invest in the new and evolving skills necessary for younger people to work and live in a modern society, that we invest also in the skill-set of our ageing population. The full potential of incorporating older people into governance, mentoring, business development, education and community development, has yet to be truly realised.