

SP 08

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,

Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau

Priorities for the Equality,

Local Government and Communities Committee

Ymateb gan: Cartrefi Cymunedol Cymru

Response from: Community Housing Cymru



## *CHC's Response*

### Consultation - Priorities for the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

#### About Us

**Community Housing Cymru (CHC)** is the representative body for housing associations and community mutuels in Wales, which are all not-for profit organisations. Our members provide over 158,000 homes and related housing services across Wales. In 2014/15, our members directly employed 8,800 people and spent over £2bn (directly and indirectly) in the economy, with 79% of this spend retained in Wales. Our members work closely with local government, third sector organisations and the Welsh Government to provide a range of services in communities across Wales.

#### Our objectives are to:

- Be the leading voice of the social housing sector.
- Promote the social housing sector in Wales.
- Promote the relief of financial hardship through the sector's provision of low cost social housing.
- Provide services, education, training, information, advice and support to members.
- Encourage and facilitate the provision, construction, improvement and management of low cost social housing by housing associations in Wales.

#### Our vision is to be:

1. A dynamic, action-based advocate for the not-for-profit housing sector.
2. A 'member centred' support provider, adding value to our members' activities by delivering the services and advice that they need in order to provide social housing, regeneration and care services.
3. A knowledge-based social enterprise.



## Response

CHC welcomes the opportunity to give our views on the future priorities of the new Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee; this committee will be vital in shaping the future direction of some of the most important areas of devolved policy, including housing and tackling poverty.

The initial priorities outlined in the consultation document seem like a good starting point for discussions on the long term work programme. We have commented further on these areas, and others that we believe should be a priority for the committee.

### **1. The supply of affordable housing**

Housing supply is mentioned in the Committee's consultation document, but we believe that this should be a wide ranging inquiry into how we meet the housing needs of the Welsh population, building on the short inquiry carried out by the previous CELG committee, but going much further in its scope.

The Homes for Wales campaign, which was co-ordinated by CHC and supported by a wide range of private and third sector organisations in the run up to this year's election, highlighted the need to tackle Wales' housing crisis, and gained the support of all five parties elected to the Assembly. The campaign highlighted that Wales is currently only building around 6,000 of the 12,000 homes it needs each year<sup>1</sup>, and gained widespread public support calling on this Welsh Government to end the housing supply crisis.

As well as issues such as empty properties, and the forthcoming legislation to end the Right to Buy in Wales, there is a pressing need to consider a number of other policies in relation to the supply of housing. These include:

- The policies, funding mechanisms and any legislation that will be required to deliver the Welsh Government's ambitious target of 20,000 affordable homes in this Assembly term
- The impact of standards such as Development Quality Requirements (DQR) on the development of affordable housing
- How to continue to provide affordable housing for people under the age of 35 in light of the restrictions created by the UK Government's welfare changes, including the benefit cap, limited access to housing benefit for young people, and the capping of housing benefit at Local Housing Allowance rate
- The supply of affordable land, including access to relevant public sector sites

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<sup>1</sup> [http://homesfor.wales/downloads/Explainer\\_ENG-Web.pdf](http://homesfor.wales/downloads/Explainer_ENG-Web.pdf)



- The planning system and how this impacts upon the development of affordable homes
- Developing homes in rural Wales

## **2. Poverty and welfare reform**

We welcome the committee's intention to once again look at welfare reform and its impact on poverty in Wales, and we believe the committee should explore these issues in real depth. However, it may be worth considering more than one inquiry into the area of welfare reform.

Policies such as the 'Bedroom Tax', Personal Independence Payments, the Benefit Cap and other measures introduced by The Welfare Reform Act 2012 continue to present huge challenges for housing associations and their tenants. Many of these issues were explored in great depth in the Fourth Assembly, but the long term impact of these policies on poverty will become more apparent as this Assembly term goes on, and should be considered by the Committee.

One particular policy area which should be explored further is the Benefit Cap, which affected a relatively small number of people in Wales upon its initial introduction, but the lowering of the cap to £20,000 for families and £13,400 for single claimants is likely to affect poverty levels in Wales.

Alongside this, the headline policy of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 – Universal Credit – continues to be rolled out across Wales, and the committee should be aware of ongoing developments in the roll out.

However, one of the most significant welfare reforms announced in recent years will be the decision by UK Government to cap housing benefit at the relevant Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate. The two briefings below give further details on how this will impact the housing sector, but similar to the 'Bedroom Tax', the change will see huge numbers of tenants face a reduction in the housing benefit they receive from April 2018, and will present substantial challenges for housing associations in the provision of housing to young people, and also in the future provision of supported, sheltered and extra care accommodation to some of their most vulnerable tenants. The committee should consider how it can help to shape the response of the Welsh Government, the housing sector and those impacted by this change as a matter of urgency.

- [January 2016 Briefing](#)
- [April 2016 Briefing](#)



### **3. EU funding of tackling poverty programmes**

The decision taken by voters in June to leave the EU has already caused economic instability, and is likely to cause further instability for the housing sector and for those who work to tackle poverty across Wales. CHC's pre and post referendum briefings, below, give further detail on some of the particular concerns of the sector.

- [Pre-referendum Briefing](#)
- [Post-referendum Briefing](#)

CHC believes that the response to the referendum result and the instability it will cause needs to be joined up, and the way in which the Assembly's committees deal with it should be so too. 'Brexit' will touch a huge range of policy areas, and we believe that the establishment of an External Affairs Committee in the Assembly gives a unique opportunity for one committee to take ownership of, and a lead on 'Brexit' related issues, such as funding, trade and our future relationship with Europe, and seek to influence both the Welsh and UK Government on this vital issue.

As such, we believe that the discussion on the funding of future tackling poverty programmes should not be framed purely through the lens of the decision to leave the European Union. We believe the future funding and operation of tackling poverty programmes in Wales is a vital area that should be explored more fully.

The Inquiry into Poverty by the CELG Committee in the Fourth Assembly touched on some of these issues, but with EU funding coming to an end, and the committee stating its intention to consider the effectiveness of Communities First, now seems and opportune time for a forward look at tackling poverty funding and approaches.

### **4. In-work poverty**

We fully welcome the Committee's intention to look at in-work poverty during this Assembly term. The growth of in-work poverty in Wales is a hugely worrying trend, and working families are now at greater risk of being in poverty than they were ten years ago.<sup>2</sup> It is vital that the committee consider this issue, and CHC looks forward to being part of the conversation.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/work-poverty-keeping-poverty-rates-wales-high>



#### **5. Post-legislative scrutiny of the new homelessness duties imposed by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014**

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 made significant changes to the way in which we tackle homelessness in Wales, placing far more emphasis on the prevention agenda. We agree with the Committee that it would be sensible to consider the effectiveness of the new approach; there is already an evidence base building about the new approaches being taken, and with funding to help Local Authorities transition to the new approach ending in April 2018, it would seem an opportune time to consider the impact over the next couple of years.

#### **6. Local Government commissioning of care and support services**

CHC believes there is a need for the committee to consider Local Government approaches to the commissioning of care and support services across Wales, in order to ensure there is a co-ordinated approach to supporting some of the most vulnerable in society.

Our members have identified issues across a number of areas in the commission procedures in relation to both social care and support e.g. the Supporting People Programme, and there is a small amount of work already going on in this area. However, CHC believes there is a more co-ordinated approach needed to collect the huge range of evidence available, and we believe that this committee could lead on the issue, working closely with the Health & Social Care Committee and its Chair to look at commission in the round.

#### **7. Health & Housing**

Another area which we believe the committee could work closely with the Health & Social Care committee on is the integration of health and housing. Homes are a place where people live, relax and socialise, and they have important impact on health and wellbeing.

Poor quality housing is linked to a range of negative physical and mental health outcomes, as well as being associated with higher crime and unemployment, and there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the impact of housing on health and health services. CHC and Public Health Wales are working closely together, through our Memorandum of Understanding<sup>3</sup> and joint Policy Officer post, to build on this evidence and ensure that the evidence is met with action to improve health outcomes for people in Wales.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://chcymru.org.uk/en/policy/health-and-housing/community-housing-cymru-and-public-health-wales-memorandum-of-understanding/>



With integration high on the political agenda following the passage of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act, we believe now would be a good time to consider the relationship between health and housing.

The Committee could consider, for example, how housing can be better involved in the integration agenda, housing's role in the prevention of ill health, falls prevention, reducing delayed transfers of care, housing and end of life care, and how joint health and housing projects are funded.

### **8. Community Cohesion**

The Committee is already aware of many of the issues facing the country in light of the decision to leave the European Union, including the strain the referendum campaigns and the subsequent result has placed on community relations in some areas.

Social landlords are extensively involved in programmes to improve community cohesion and breakdown barriers that exist in some communities. A number of our members have reacted with some concern to reports of the increase in racial discrimination and hate crimes in some parts of the UK since the end of June, with many issuing statements such as [this](#). We believe it would be worthy of some committee time to consider the issue of community cohesion and how we can tackle and prevent any further increases of these incidences.

### **9. Other areas of interest**

CHC welcomes the committee's intention to explore the issues of **Local Government Re-organisation & Reform**, and we believe in doing so, they should place some specific focus on its impact on housing, homelessness and planning in particular.

As stated earlier, we believe there is value in the committee exploring the **Effectiveness of Communities First**, but it makes sense to consider all tackling poverty programmes and funding in the round.