

## **Agenda – Local Government and Housing Committee**

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Meeting Venue:

Committee Rooms 1 and 2

Meeting date: 4 May 2023

Meeting time: 08.45

For further information contact:

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### **Pre-meeting (08.45 – 09.00)**

- 1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest**
  
- 2 The Right to Adequate Housing – evidence session 6 – Minister for Climate Change**  
(09.00 – 10.15) (Pages 1 – 22)  
Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change  
Sarah Rhodes, Interim Deputy Director Housing Policy, Welsh Government  
James Hooker, Head of Private Sector Housing Policy, Welsh Government
  
- 3 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from items 4 and 8 of the meeting and from the meeting on 11 May**
  
- 4 The Right to Adequate Housing – consideration of the evidence received under item 2**  
(10.15 – 10.30)

**Break (10.30 – 10.45)**



**5 Local Authority Library and Leisure Services – evidence session 5**  
(10.45 – 12.00) (Pages 23 – 56)

Amy Staniforth, Relationship Manager, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Wales

Nicola Pitman, Chair, Society of Chief Librarians Cymru

Chris Neath, Network Manager, Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network

**Lunch (12.00 – 13.00)**

**6 Local Authority Library and Leisure Services – evidence session 6**  
(13.00 – 14.30) (Pages 57 – 63)

Sharon Davies, Head of Education, Welsh Local Government Association

Councillor Carwyn Jones, Portfolio Holder – Corporate and Customer Experience, Isle of Anglesey County Council

**7 Papers to note** (Page 64)

**7.1 Letter from the Finance Committee: Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25 – Engagement**  
(Pages 65 – 67)

**7.2 Letter from the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales in relation to the Right to Adequate Housing**  
(Pages 68 – 72)

**7.3 Welsh Government response to the Committee's report on Homelessness**  
(Pages 73 – 87)

**8 Consideration of the evidence received under items 5 and 6**  
(14.30 – 14.45)

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## Local Government and Housing Committee – Right to Adequate Housing

### Context

1. Welsh Government has committed in our Programme for Government, and as part of the Co-Operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, to publish a White Paper in this Government Term (Summer 2024), which will set out proposals for a Right to Adequate Housing. The White Paper will also look at fair rents and new approaches to making homes affordable for those on local incomes.
2. As part of developing the evidence base to understand the potential impacts and consequences of the ways in which these proposals could be taken forward in Wales, we will shortly be launching a Green Paper (Call for Evidence) consultation. In order to support this work we have established a Stakeholder Advisory Group to ensure a collaborative approach and appropriate representation from organisations which represent tenants, landlords and local government. Many of those represented on the Advisory Group have already provided evidence to this inquiry.
3. I welcome the work the Committee is undertaking in this area, which will help to build a robust evidence base to inform the White Paper development.

### Housing Adequacy

4. The United Nations identifies seven criteria which must be met for accommodation to be considered as 'adequate housing'.
  - *Security of tenure*: housing is not adequate if its occupants do not have a degree of tenure security which guarantees legal protection against forced evictions, harassment and other threats.
  - *Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure*: housing is not adequate if its occupants do not have safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, energy for cooking, heating, lighting, food storage or refuse disposal.
  - *Affordability*: housing is not adequate if its cost threatens or compromises the occupants' enjoyment of other human rights (e.g. food).
  - *Habitability*: housing is not adequate if it does not guarantee physical safety or provide adequate space, as well as protection against the cold, damp, heat, rain, wind, other threats to health and structural hazards.
  - *Accessibility*: housing is not adequate if the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups are not taken into account.
  - *Location*: housing is not adequate if it is cut off from employment opportunities, health-care services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities, or if located in polluted or dangerous areas.

- *Cultural inadequacy*: housing is not adequate if it does not respect and take into account the expression of cultural identity.
5. Welsh Government's ambition is for every person in Wales to be able to secure a safe, and affordable home that meets their needs for the different stages in their lives. Whether it be traditional bricks and mortar houses in the social, private or owner occupied sector, or alternative accommodation such as a park home, caravan, or house boat. The ability to call somewhere home provides security, identity, and a sense of community belonging. Having this security allows people to put down roots, if they wish to do so, whether that be in terms of jobs, education, raising families, or re-locating following retirement.
  6. Across all of its housing related activities, the Welsh Government has already taken, and continues to take, significant steps forward towards meeting the criteria which deliver housing adequacy. One example is the introduction of the Renting Homes Act on 1<sup>st</sup> December last year. This has helped to give greater certainty to both landlords and tenants of their rights and responsibilities, ensuring everyone should have a contract setting out what is expected in terms of rents, notices, and period of tenure. We have also made inroads in seeking to improve the adequacy of accommodation through the introduction of the Fitness for Human Habitation Regulations.
  7. The table below provides some examples of how our policy interventions are already delivering against the 7 factors.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Measures in place</b>
<i>Security of tenure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Renting homes (Wales) Act extended no fault evictions to 6 months and requires the issuing of either standard or secure occupation contracts.</li> <li>• Social housing providers follow a policy of no evictions into homelessness.</li> <li>• Local authority homelessness services are funded to help prevent homelessness.</li> <li>• Tenancy information and advice – funding Shelter Cymru (through Homelessness Prevention Grant), Citizens Advice (through single advice fund).</li> </ul>
<i>Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building regulations require certain minimum standards for design, construction and alterations of dwellings.</li> <li>• Welsh Housing Quality Standards set a minimum standard for social housing to be met by December 2020. A consultation on proposals to update WHQS has been undertaken.</li> </ul>
<i>Affordability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual increases to social rents are set by Welsh Ministers.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private landlords are restricted in issuing rent notices to once in a 12 month period and must give 2 months notice.</li> <li>• Committing £30m into Leasing Scheme Wales to secure private rented property over the medium to long term to be offered at Local Housing Allowance rates.</li> </ul>
<i>Habitability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 places an obligation on landlords to ensure that a dwelling is in repair and fit for human habitation.</li> <li>• Welsh Housing Quality Standards set a minimum standard for social housing.</li> </ul>
<i>Accessibility</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Housing with Care Fund will provide £182 million to regional partnership boards to provide new housing with care, including accessible housing.</li> <li>• £3m capital funding to Care &amp; Repair agencies to provide Rapid Response adaptations,</li> <li>• £4.8m revenue funding to provide Home Improvement Agency services</li> <li>• £6m of grant to local authorities through the Enable Grant, and £10m to Registered Social Landlords through the Physical Adaptations Grant to provide adaptations for the most common types of adaptations including ramps and making doorways wheelchair accessible.</li> </ul>
<i>Location</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future Wales: The National Plan 2040, &amp; Planning Policy Wales provide the strategic framework to inform and influence local development plans, which sets out the location where homes will be required in future.</li> </ul>
<i>Cultural inadequacy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Housing Market Assessments Guidance which inform LDPs now requires consideration of the local needs of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people.</li> <li>• The Anti Racist Wales Action Plan outlines a number of actions to improve how housing policies and bodies respond to the needs of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people.</li> <li>• The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act requires consideration of the future consequences of current policy, as well as work towards a number of goals, such as a More Equal Wales, a Wales of Cohesive Communities and a Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language.</li> </ul>

## Key Challenges

8. The development of the evidence base also provides an opportunity to further understand a number of potential challenges and barriers, and how we might overcome them.

### *Robust and Timely Data*

9. It is important to be able to collate information across all housing tenures to establish both a baseline, and to be able to monitor delivery and progress towards fully realising the 7 factors identified by the United Nations that demonstrate that a right to adequate housing has been realised. We recognise that there are aspects of data which will need to be improved to enable this to take place. For example, Rent Officers have a duty to collate information on market rents in Wales, however there is no duty to respond to a Rent Officer with information, which could have an impact on the robustness of the data.
10. The timing of data collection is also another consideration, as we have a number of different sources of data, but not all are collected at the same time, or over the same period or geographical extent. Welsh Government already has work underway to try and better understand these issues.
11. For example, we have commissioned Alma Economics to examine the data currently available in respect of the rental market in Wales. As part of this research they have looked at 138 results across different types of indicators: socio-demographic conditions, housing quality, housing stock and construction, housing prices in the sales market, housing rents, homelessness, landlord possession actions and evictions, taxes, housing tenure, utility expenses, housing benefits, dwelling types, and landlord characteristics. Through this review they have identified a number of gaps and limitations including:
  - A lack of robust data on tenant characteristics.
  - Limited data on landlords, including those that leave the sector if they don't update Rent Smart Wales.
  - Geographically granular data (for Lower layer Super Output Areas) is not available for several indicators, including homelessness, energy and utility expenses.  
Income estimates at a geographical level below the Local Authority level are not up to date, impacting the robustness of the analysis on housing affordability.

Their full report will be published alongside the Green Paper consultation.

12. Welsh Government is also considering the case for an annual national housing survey that will consider if, and how, these data gaps can be addressed, and will update the Committee on the outcome of this work at the appropriate time.

### *Defining Minimum Core Criteria over time*

13. The United Nations recognises it is vital that effective monitoring is in place to measure the extent to which policy interventions are delivering against core minimum criteria to secure adequate housing. The first challenge that arises is there is no defined and commonly accepted set of standards for what constitutes

the minimum core for housing, and this would need to be established and agreed in order to determine the evidentiary tests for whether “adequacy” has been realised or not.

14. The United Nations recognises that the right to adequate housing is a progressive right that cannot be achieved immediately from the outset. However, as time passes, and technological changes and innovations take place it is likely that the expected minimum core will also change. For example, there was a time where an outside toilet was considered appropriate to meet sanitary standards. Any minimum core would therefore need to be able to respond to such technological advances.
15. It is also important to reflect that according to the 2021 Census 83.5% of households in Wales live in property that is in private ownership (either owned outright, mortgaged, or in the private rented sector). Therefore consideration would need to be given as to how implementation of a minimum core would apply across tenures and the implications for property owners of non-compliance.

#### *Non-devolved aspects*

16. Welsh Government is committed to using all the levers we have to help people in a sustainable manner to remain in their homes and avoid homelessness. However, we recognise that not all of the policy levers required to achieve this are devolved. One particularly important lever which is not devolved is Local Housing Allowance (LHA). The LHA is a vital means of support to lower income households to make renting in the private sector affordable, which is one of the factors for adequate housing. Welsh Government has repeatedly called on the UK Government to unfreeze and uplift the LHA from the 2020 rate to reflect the actual costs of renting property in Wales in 2023. However for 2023/2024 they have remained frozen and this is creating a growing gap in affordability and reducing the ability for lower income households to secure a home.
17. Research from the Bevan Foundation (set out in more detail below) has identified that in February this year the largest gap between the current LHA rate for a 4 bed property and the cheapest 4 bed property being advertised for rent was in Anglesey at over £850 per month.

#### *Risk of unintended/conflicting consequences*

18. Welsh Government recognises the importance of taking an evidence-based approach to mitigate the risk of unintended consequences. We are cognisant that all elements which go towards securing an adequate home are inter-related, and therefore it is important to understand the potential risks and impacts of making policy changes for one factor in the context of another. For example, measures to require a certain standard of energy performance (habitability) may



have a knock-on impact on demand, as tenants could save money on energy bills but in turn this may result in a higher rent being set, which could impact overall on affordability. Conversely the setting of energy performance standards in some areas may also see the supply of available property reduce if landlords choose to exit the market rather than invest in the property. Consideration of all potential implications is therefore important to ensure a coherent policy approach and package is developed to mitigate against potential unintended consequences.

### *Age of Housing Stock*

19. In considering the path towards a right to adequate housing Welsh Government recognises the need to reflect on the current age and quality of some of the existing housing stock in Wales, and therefore potential limitations and resource requirements that may be needed. For example, data from Rent Smart Wales shows that almost 80,000 rental properties (46%) in Wales pre-date 1929, and over 65% are below an EPC C energy rating.

### *Housing Supply*

20. There is a link between the availability of property and peoples' ability to secure adequate housing. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights identifies that the right to adequate housing must be about more than 'merely having a roof over one's head', but for example where the priority is to get any private rented accommodation in a competitive market with limited supply in a specific location, it is likely people will have to sacrifice other measures of adequacy along the way, either in terms of habitability or more probably affordability.
21. Welsh Government recognises the current pressures in the housing system in Wales and the importance of increasing the supply of good quality, affordable homes. This is why we are investing £330m in social housing in 2023/24 as part of our commitment to deliver 20,000 low carbon homes for rent in the social sector this Senedd term.
22. As outlined above, we recognise particular pressures in the private rented sector, which are exacerbated by the freeze on LHA rates. The Bevan foundation has published a report on the availability of accommodation at LHA rates for those reliant on housing related benefits.<sup>1</sup> LHA is set at the 30th percentile of rents in a Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA), and have been frozen since April 2020. During the 2 week period of the Bevan Foundation's research in February 2023, 32 properties across the whole of Wales were found to be available at LHA rates, equating to 1.2% of the available rental market; 16 local authorities did not have any property affordable within LHA.

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<sup>1</sup> [Wales-Housing-Crisis-Winter-2023.pdf \(bevanfoundation.org\)](https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wales-housing-crisis-winter-2023.pdf)

23. Data held by Rent Officers Wales for the year to the end of September 2022 indicates a shortfall between LHA rates and current rents being charged on an all-Wales basis of just under 9% (8.99%). However, this masks significant regional variations, with Newport and Monmouth showing the greatest differences of 20.20% and 17.55% respectively.
24. Anecdotal evidence from lettings agents suggests that there is fierce competition for properties new to the rental market, especially in 'hot-spot' areas which are in demand. Intense demand may also increase the price of accommodation<sup>2</sup>
25. ONS 2021 Census data shows that in inner city areas the proportion of households privately renting can be as high as 78% of the homes in an area, illustrating areas of high demand, and correspondingly high rental prices as additional supply is constrained.
26. In Wales we have a plan led approach which includes Future Wales: The National Plan 2040. This plan sits at the top of Development Plan hierarchy and gives a very clear steer to all partners that the planning system in Wales must help deliver the affordable homes we need. We are keen to support SME developers with incentives for developments being offered by the Wales Stalled Sites Scheme and Property Development Fund. Help to Buy in Wales is also continuing post 2023 and Planning Policy Wales is supporting SMEs by requiring Planning Authorities to include small sites in their Local Development Plans for SME development.

## **Conclusion**

27. Whilst there are a number of challenges to overcome, Welsh Government remains committed to our ambition that everyone in Wales has access to a safe, secure and affordable home. I look forward to continuing to work with the sector as we further develop the evidence base to inform and take forward this work.

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<sup>2</sup> [Welsh rents seeing record rises in busy letting market | Peter Alan Estate and Letting Agent](#)

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Ar gyfer gweithwyr llyfrgell  
a gwybodaeth **For library and  
information professionals**

## WRITTEN RESPONSE

### Responding to the Senedd's Local Authority Library and Leisure Services inquiry

27 March 2023

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 CILIP is the Chartered Institute for people working in knowledge, information management and libraries. We have operated under Royal Charter since 1898 with a remit that includes professional certification, training and development and advocacy.
- 1.2 CILIP Cymru Wales (CCW) represents CILIP in Wales. The elected CCW committee and CILIP staff advocate on behalf of the profession in Wales and support the professional development of CILIP members in Wales.
- 1.3 CILIP Cymru Wales represents a community of over 400 information professionals – people working in knowledge, information, data and libraries across the public, health, education, and private sectors.
- 1.4 Our members support information skills, access to trusted content, ethical practice and evidence-based decision making, with an increasing remit for supporting the data needs of the communities and organisations they serve.
- 1.5 We are pleased to have this opportunity to respond to this inquiry into local authority leisure and library services led by the Local Government and Housing Committee. Our response is submitted on behalf of the librarian and information professional workforce in Wales.
- 1.6 We would be glad to provide any further information or context in support of this submission.

#### 2 Key Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Welsh Government and local authorities in Wales capitalise on effective national networks such as the National Library of Wales and the Society of Chief Librarians, and provide capacity for them to contribute more fully and strategically to Welsh life.
- 2.2 That the Welsh Public Library Standards be used more effectively to measure, develop and promote public libraries in Wales via better dissemination and professional discussion.

- 2.3 That the Welsh Public Library Standards be used more effectively to measure the impact of budgetary cuts to services and to instigate meaningful feedback to local authorities addressing this impact.
- 2.4 That local authorities in Wales review their library organisational structures and roles in the context of the new definitions of 'professional' and professionalism' and use the opportunity to develop their 'Employer Deal'.
- 2.5 That local authorities in Wales consider commissioning a project like that recently undertaken in Ireland where the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) worked with CILIP to devise a skills audit of all 1,500 public library staff across the country.

## Summary response

### 3 Statutory Context

- 3.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 created a statutory duty for local authorities in England and Wales "to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons." (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75/section/7>)
- 3.2 This Act rightly makes librarians proud of their sector and offers wider library stakeholders (from local and national government, professional bodies like CILIP, allied organisations like schools and local health services, 'friends of library' groups and users in general) a solid base from which to defend library services from cuts and diminishing standards of service.
- 3.3 The Act and its guarantee to provide library services across Wales offers the Welsh Government a network of consistent service delivery at the heart of local authorities. As one of the most trusted professions, this library network is able to directly fulfil the Programme for Government. Public libraries develop literacy and digital skills, they nourish the Welsh language via collections and activities, they challenge loneliness, they work with health care professionals to deliver quality information, they assist users with council services, and they have been providing free warm spaces since 1964 – and before!
- 3.4 CILIP Cymru Wales has been able to highlight the potential that local library services offer in our responses to the Digital Strategy for Wales and the LGBTQ+ Action Plan – both of which were cross sectoral library and information responses that public libraries are at the centre of ([https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group\\_content\\_view.asp?group=200145&id=927821](https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=200145&id=927821) and [https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group\\_content\\_view.asp?group=200145&id=965906](https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=200145&id=965906)).
- 3.5 CILIP's current ARWAP funded project is working with public libraries in Wales to develop anti-racist library collection training. This is a project that demonstrates the power of librarianship and professional collection development training to deliver government policy in the heart of our communities: [https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group\\_content\\_view.asp?group=200145&id=1017109](https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=200145&id=1017109)
- 3.6 Between the National Library of Wales and the Society of Chief Librarians in Wales we have a national infrastructure that can deliver ambitious locally consumed services strategically and efficiently, as the national digital offer in Wales illustrates.

- 3.7 CILIP and CILIP Cymru Wales hope that the Culture Strategy for Wales will recognise and capitalise on these networks and provide capacity for them to contribute more fully and strategically to Welsh life.

#### **4 Service Delivery**

- 4.1 CILIP Cymru Wales is aware that local authorities across Wales deliver statutory library services in different ways. We believe that the key to understanding, developing and maintaining “comprehensive and efficient library services” is to promote and measure professional standards whether library services are traditionally delivered, partnered with other services, or community run.
- 4.2 Anecdotally, however, we have seen that alternative models are no cheaper to run or can attain the quality of local authority delivered services. The model only works in affluent areas where staffing levels remain stable and volunteers are plentiful. The greatest need for excellent public library services might arguably not be in these authorities.
- 4.3 In Wales, the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) put us in a strong position to promote and measure professional standards and CILIP believes that the WPLS should be seen as a route to ensure service delivery, professionalism and equity of service.
- 4.4 CILIP believes that WPLS can be used more effectively to measure, develop and promote public libraries in Wales. We would like to see more stakeholder conversations being instigated around the standards and a development and open sharing of the resulting data as this forms essential evidence for decision making and sector development more widely. We believe that with its WPLS and strong national infrastructure – which includes CILIP as the professional body – Wales has the opportunity to lead in the UK.

#### **5 Capacity**

- 5.1 CILIP is aware that the commitment that the 1964 Act requires of local government, the National Library, the Society of Chief Librarians, and of CILIP itself, to help develop excellent local authority library services in Wales is hampered by capacity. While resourcing is always difficult, we are facing a lack of qualified and experienced library staff who have the remit and time to work on local service infrastructure.
- 5.2 We know that the Welsh Government and Culture Division have funded and instigated important projects that will impact public library provision but these are rarely well disseminated, discussed and fed back on because the staffing of the division is so stretched.
- 5.3 CILIP also knows that the National Library of Wales has an ever increasing public remit without a commensurate increase in budget and staffing. We would like to see an acknowledgement of the important sectoral development influence the National Library has.
- 5.4 The Society of Chief Librarians forms an incredibly important part of the public library service in Wales but as the directors of service are pulled in different local authority directions it is difficult to disseminate this work appropriately and effectively. CILIP would like SCL's role in collaborating on the delivery of public library services to be acknowledged.

- 5.5 In addition, many local authority library services are at full stretch just to keep branches open. Anecdotally we know that organising rotas is becoming very difficult and one staff illness can mean lunch breaks can't be covered without closing. This is just to keep the doors open and means that any additional activity (children's activities, display creation, ordering, bibliographical work or stock development) becomes increasingly difficult.
- 5.6 Crucially, this also means that frontline staff who need training (for dealing with difficult situations, or in new software, for example) are struggling to find the time. When they do undertake training this is often online at the same time as dealing with a queue of people so staff are unable to network, share practice or fully engage in training. Several members of our Anti-Racist Library Collections Project Steering Group have been unable to attend training for these reasons.
- 5.7 CILIP is concerned that cuts to local authority library services across the whole of the country are happening piecemeal budget by budget, without supportive data and without a meaningful plan to expand when budgets are healthier. See our open letter on cuts to Cardiff Libraries posts:  
[https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group\\_content\\_view.asp?group=200145&id=1022207](https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=200145&id=1022207)
- 5.8 CILIP would like to see the WPLS being used effectively to measure the impact of budgetary cuts – on staffing, book budgets, opening hours, and usage – and to instigate meaningful feedback to local authorities on this impact.
- 5.9 CILIP would also like to welcome conversations and feedback on how we as the professional body for librarians can work with the sector in Wales to support public libraries.

## **6 Professionalism**

- 6.1 Routes into the library profession vary. CILIP's 2020 definition of "profession," "professional," and "professionalism" (after a consultation led by the British Library's Liz Jolly) accommodates the many and varied ways people enter the library and information profession and does not prescribe particular pathways. The definitions do, however, recognise that to be professional, librarians "need to evidence they have acquired a body of professional knowledge and are applying it in reflective practice. Whilst the definition is not prescriptive in how they do this, qualifications, membership of a professional association and Professional Registration, are excellent and advised ways of demonstrating this."  
<https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/CILIPProfessionalismDefinition>
- 6.2 The WPLS indicate a worrying decrease in professional librarians working in public libraries which may indicate a broader move towards more generic customer services staffing. There doesn't appear to be any research into the impact on services of losing information and literacy specific skills, a shift which is being resisted in evidence-based sectors such as the NHS library and information services in Wales and England.
- 6.3 The above trend in public libraries may in part be due to the different delivery of library services, via hub models, for example, but also perhaps highlights a decrease in local authority interest in and promotion of the library as a professional place of work.
- 6.4 The second Workforce Mapping survey report on the library and archives profession is due for release imminently and it indicates a strong professional commitment and stable sector

but public library employers have work to do to persuade staff that their professional development and career opportunities are important to the organisation. The full report should be available here shortly: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/Workforcemapping>

- 6.5 CILIP would like to recommend that local authorities in Wales review their library organisational structures and roles in the context of the new 'professional' definitions and use the opportunity to develop their 'Employer Deal'.

## **7 Best Practices**

- 7.1 It is important that the sector in Wales learns and benefits from best practice across the world. CILIP and other organisations can help local authorities discover more about initiatives like Sweden's open source staff platform Digiteket: <https://digiteket.se/>
- 7.2 Excellent research into and recommendations for public libraries have been made in the UK in the last decade so we don't need to invent the wheel to ensure the sustainability of our services. The Public Library Skills Strategy 2017-2030 has 9 recommendations that are still relevant today: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/PublicLibrarySkillsStrategy>
- 7.3 CILIP has been working on a number of the above recommendations with Arts Council England funding in its Future Skills Programme which can be adapted and translated for a Welsh audience if appropriate: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/RD#futureskills>
- 7.4 CILIP would like to recommend that local authorities in Wales consider commissioning a project like that recently undertaken in Ireland where the LGMA worked with CILIP to devise a skills audit of all 1,500 public library staff across the country. From this audit, it was able to determine the key skills gaps and to put in place a prioritised live, online training programme for the country's librarians. The LGMA will be working with CILIP again in 2023 to reassess the staff's skills.





## **Consultation response on behalf of the Society of Chief Librarians Cymru**

### **Local Authority Library and Leisure Services**

#### **SCL Cymru**

The Society of Chief Librarians (Wales) is an association made up of the head librarian (or equivalent) of each public library authority in Wales. As an organization we provide a professional viewpoint on key issues relating to public libraries in Wales. Our aim is “to influence the statutory, financial and the decisions which relate to the effectiveness of public library services, and take a leading role in the national development of public library services”

Additionally SCL Cymru work very collaboratively in Wales on joint projects for the benefit of all Welsh Citizens including a current live project which aims to deliver a Digital Library Eco system for Wales.

The SCL: group is made up of Lead officers from Authorities adopting varying approaches to models of delivery including Trusts, Co-located (Hub) models, Community Libraries and standalone library services. It is important to note however that all are subject to the same performance assessment process that is managed by Welsh Government. As below:-

#### **The Public Library Act and the Welsh Public Library Standards**

Each library authority in Wales has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to deliver a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ service to its residents. This can be measured in a number of ways, including feedback from library users – are they getting what they want, within a reasonable time, by the most suitable means and at convenient and accessible service points?

#### **The quality framework**

The Welsh Government has statutory responsibility for the public library service in Wales. It has been gathering information and monitoring performance since 2002, when it issued its first framework of Welsh public library standards. The framework aims to provide a more consistent level of service throughout Wales and identify user entitlements clearly. Regular reviews of the framework have been undertaken, and the quality indicators updated to reflect changes to the ways in which public library services are used and delivered.

Each library authority in Wales has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to deliver a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ service to its residents. This can be measured in a number of ways, including feedback from library users – are they getting what they want, within a reasonable time, by the most suitable means and at convenient and accessible service points? In

addition, local authorities and residents must ensure that they are getting good value for money from their services. This can be measured, for example, by comparing performances between authorities. Information such as the number of users and the number of loans, visits and requests made by members of the public is compared in relation to the level of investment made in the service by each local authority.

The quality framework The Welsh Government has statutory responsibility for the public library service in Wales. It has been gathering information and monitoring performance since 2002, when it issued its first framework of Welsh public library standards. The framework aims to provide a more consistent level of service throughout Wales and identify user entitlements clearly. Regular reviews of the framework have been undertaken, and the quality indicators updated to reflect changes to the ways in which public library services are used and delivered. The current framework which is the seventh has been extended due in part to the Pandemic as well as a consultation process aimed to transform quality measures.

Library services contribute to a range of Welsh Government outcomes such as literacy, skills and learning, digital inclusion, poverty, health and well-being. Library provision spans these outcomes, offering a range of services which often support two or more of the outcomes simultaneously. Library services also support the Welsh Government's four pillars: prosperous and secure; healthy and active; ambitious and learning; and united and connected. The desired outcome of the framework is that libraries offer all the services and facilities listed as core entitlements. In order to assess the quality The quality indicators have been defined using statistics already being collected as far as possible, and in accordance with international standards. In some cases (for example, the provision of up-to-date reading material), targets have been set, based on an appropriate comparative level of performance across Wales, which library authorities will be expected to achieve over a three year period. In others (for example, customer satisfaction), targets are not appropriate, and comparison to previous years will monitor improvements in services

Because library services are the responsibility of local authorities, they should reflect local priorities, even though they are delivered within a statutory context. Libraries will not necessarily be able to achieve the top levels of performance in all areas, but are expected to achieve as many of the targets as possible and to seek improvements in those areas where performances are weaker. Authorities should also compare their performances with others in Wales and share best practice in order to bring about improvements. In addition, local authorities are asked specifically to consider and ensure that their library services contribute fully to the achievement of overall corporate aims, and that they are always linked to various key local, regional and national policy agendas and work programmes. Where public library services are delivered by a trust or other similar body, ultimate responsibility remains with the local authority

Authorities are also required to submit at least four case studies that evidence the wellbeing impact that the Library Service has had on the lives of an individual or a group of individuals.

**The Welsh Public Library framework contributes to National wellbeing goals in the following way:**

**A Prosperous Wales** Development of a skilled and well educated population is a fundamental aspect of public libraries activity. Examples of how this is achieved include providing access to a world of lifelong learning through relevant book stock and online information, and the provision of free IT equipment, broadband and wi-fi, which supports education, small businesses and job seeking. Core

entitlements 2, 3, 6 and 7, and quality indicators 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13 and 15 all monitor aspects of public libraries contribution to this goal.

**A Resilient Wales** Social and economic resilience is supported by encouraging and promoting individual personal development, enabling people and society to adapt to changing circumstances. Regular consultation with users ensures that the services themselves are resilient and able to adapt to changing needs. Two core entitlements are particularly pertinent here, 3 and 11, together with quality indicators 4, 11 and 14. Examples of how this is achieved in practice include support for greater community involvement in running library services and book stock that encourages a more resilient lifestyle with access to IT so people can self-educate about the issues.

**A Healthier Wales** Physical and mental wellbeing is a key offer of public libraries, not only by providing information on which to base informed choices for the benefit of health in the future but also designated collections and schemes such as Book Prescription Wales titles loaned through libraries, which directly benefit individuals with health concerns. Relevant core entitlements for this goal are 3 and 4: quality indicators 1, 4 and 6 monitor activity.

**A More Equal Wales** Libraries are welcoming, inclusive and offer pro-active outreach and public engagement activities in deprived and socially excluded communities. Support for Government initiatives such as Universal JobMatch and Universal Credit enable those without IT skills or facilities fulfil their potential. Core entitlements 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 and quality indicators 3, 4, 11, 13 and 14, all monitor public libraries contribution to this goal.

**A Wales of Cohesive Communities** Libraries offer a safe neutral place within the community which provides opportunities for people to connect with each other. The one-stop shop or hub model being developed in many areas further connects local communities with the services they need. Other examples of support for community involvement through the process of provision of information about the local area. Core entitlements 1, 3 and 5 and quality indicators 1, 6, 13 and 16 monitor aspects of public libraries contribution to this goal.

**A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language** With explicit provision in the current framework covering the provision of material in the Welsh Language, libraries are well placed to contribute in this area. They promote and protect Welsh Culture and language, and encourage participation in the arts and recreation through the availability of a good range of stock in Welsh, and a host of cultural events and activities. Core entitlements include 2, 3, 6, 8, 9 and 10 and quality indicators 2, 6, 8, 9 and 10 are particularly relevant here.

**A Globally Responsible Wales** A commitment to make the most efficient use of resources is embodied in the quality indicators. The Culture division of Welsh Government works with the British Standards Institute and International Standards Organisation in developing and using quality indicators for Libraries that conform to ISO 11620. Further the borrowing of books is a great recycling tool, reducing the impact on the environment. Libraries in Wales work together in book purchasing consortia, digital e-book consortia and the All Wales Library Management system. Core entitlement 12 is directly related to global good practice, while quality indicators 14 and 15 are related to the balance and efficiency of service provision.

SCL would politely direct the Committee to the following reports

[Public library service annual reports 2019 to 2020 | GOV.WALES](#)

[Welsh Libraries report 2020 to 2021 \(gov.wales\)](#) – (collated report due to Pandemic)

The 2021-22 reports are due to be published shortly by the Culture Division of Welsh Government.

## **Local Authority Library and Leisure Services – Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network Response**

The Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network helps community managed libraries (CMLs) to run effectively and successfully by sharing ideas, learning, experiences and inspiration.

No one understands community managed libraries better than the people and communities who fought to retain their local libraries and related services their communities want and need. We are from the full spectrum of CMLs including independently funded to those who receive local authority support. Our primary members are trustees or people who work in community managed libraries but can also include those wishing to form a trust or community groups exploring the possibilities of CMLs.

We want community managed libraries to

- be aware of, and able to grasp opportunities such as funding and advice
- provide mutual support and learning
- operate as effectively as possible, to make them sustainable in the long term

To achieve this we want community managed libraries to:

- be aware of, and able to grasp opportunities such as funding and advice
- provide mutual support and learning
- operate as effectively as possible, to make them sustainable in the long term

### **The current state of local authority leisure and library service provision;**

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 gives local authorities a statutory duty “...to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”. As public sector budgets have been repeatedly cut, many local authorities have been unable to maintain their existing network of libraries and explored other ways of providing the service, using community-managed models.

Community managed models are varied, suiting the needs of the community and their relationship with the local authority and statutory service, but they are characterised by the level of volunteer involvement throughout all aspects of their delivery.

### **How local authorities use alternative models of service delivery in Wales, and the perceived benefits associated with them;**

CMLs are positive about playing a role as a community hub and see this as a natural fit with their community ethos. They provide a diverse range of activities, services, support and outreach which goes above and beyond what local authority library service provision is able to provide:

#### Activities

- Reading & writing groups
- Arts & cultural events from exhibitions to performances.

- Health and wellbeing: gardening; dementia groups; yoga; mindfulness sessions; weight-loss groups
- Lifelong learning: lectures; local history society meetings; crafts sessions; U3A groups Social: 'knit and natter' groups; Women's Institute groups, quiz nights; games nights

### Outreach

- ESOL groups
- Fuel poverty advice
- Foodbanks and community fridges
- Legal signposting
- Providing 'Warm Spaces'
- Projects and programmes delivered through grant funding initiatives.

### Retail & Hospitality

- Retail: second-hand book stores; selling artworks by local artists and books by local authors
- Hospitality: Cafes; hot drinks machine; bars

### Services

- IT & Digital support and equipment; laptop & device lending, providing data, support for job seekers
- Business support
- Mental health services
- Tuition
- Careers and welfare: work-finding skills; advice on benefits, housing and blue badge applications; Citizens Advice Bureau

There are nearly **20,000** volunteers supporting community libraries in England & Wales to grow and thrive. This not only benefits library service provision, embedding community voices throughout, but provides significant benefits and opportunities to the volunteers.

In 2011, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) did a review of some of the first community-managed libraries. They concluded that 'existing community libraries have achieved something over and above keeping the library open within their areas, offering new activities and social events, engaging their local communities and often exemplifying a beneficial effect on community cohesion' (Woolley 2011). In some cases, they noted that CMLs were also able to improve the service by increasing numbers of users and lengthening opening hours.

Community libraries delivered by charities, CICs, CIOs and parish councils allow for a flexible approach to fundraising, procurement and the development of services to the benefit of their specific community. It is however vital that community libraries are recognised for their efforts and successes and continue to be recognised as part of the provision of public libraries in England & Wales. It is clear that alternative models to delivering library services can provide a cheaper and more effective service, however to ensure that the service is sustainable in the long-term, it requires public investment.

**Good practice to ensure sustainability of local leisure and library services for future generations.**

Many local authority-run libraries have become community hubs through co-location with other services. These community hubs tend to be characterised by large buildings (either large library buildings in which other services are also offered, or large buildings offering a range of services, of which one is the library) and by a focus on alignment of a range of public services. Community-managed libraries may be in similar physical co-location arrangements but are mostly smaller, yet still able to offer space for groups and clubs, may have cafes or second hand bookstores, and may have relationships with local services to provide drop in 'surgeries' (e.g. the police, local MPs, or planning authorities).

The key indicator of successfully run library services, developing alternative models of delivery, is it's ability to diversify services while meeting the needs and expectations of their community. This can differ greatly from location to location, and demonstrates why change led by community engagement is so important to ensure sustainability.

**Welsh Parliament**  
Inquiry into Local Authority Library and Leisure Services

Sharon Davies, Head of Education

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Paper 5

## **Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils**

We are the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross-party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

**We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.**

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

**Our ultimate goal** is to promote, protect, support, and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

**We'll achieve our vision by**

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce.





## **Introduction**

This is a response from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

### **The current state of local authority leisure and library services.**

Within the 22 councils there are different arrangements in place for the management of their leisure and library services.

For leisure, there are eight council managed services; eleven managed by trusts; two councils have set up their own Local Authority Trading Companies (LATC), and one council has an arrangement with an operator.

For library, there are eighteen council managed services and four managed by trusts.

There are three trusts that manage both leisure and library services.

Most councils are reporting that there are no immediate major changes planned for their services, although many are facing increasing pressures.

Over the past 13 years, during a prolonged period of austerity, the library services across councils have reduced significantly, and undergone several reviews and restructures to try and find a sustainable model for the long term. For example, in one council, the revenue budget has halved, from £2.4 million in 2013 to £1.2 million today.

Good use is made of any grant funding opportunities in order to develop the service for residents. The support and funding from the Museums, Archives and Libraries division of Welsh Government was well received, particularly during the Covid recovery.

### **The financial and operational challenges facing local authorities to maintain these vital community services.**

Councils leisure and library services are facing increasing pressures. Post-Covid recovery, the cost-of-living crisis and staffing are the main pressures reported.

Most councils have indicated that there will be no closures to their leisure facilities, although many have sighted that their budgets are under severe pressures and are undertaking a review of their services in this financial year with all options being considered. This could lead to difficult decisions being taken in the next financial year.



Rising energy costs are putting significant pressures on revenue budgets.

Community trust operated pools are under increasing pressures due to rising costs and condition of buildings.

One council reported that they are noting the pressure on some of their transferred facilities and small venues where management committees are starting to fold and are impacting on their service delivery.

Many leisure facilities across councils are run by schools facilities. In one council, two swimming pools have now transferred from Education into Leisure facilities as many councils are rationalising across facilities and services.

Grant funding is an additional pressure on these services, as many of the grants (such as National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS)) have not increased their funding for many years (which means councils are picking up the shortfall), and now the additional costs of the current rise of inflation.

Many councils saw an exodus of experienced staff during Covid and Post-Covid. Although, many have recruited new staff, the cost of training new staff has added to the pressures on budgets.

The geographical size of some councils places significantly more challenge on maintaining provision across the council that for an urban borough with good transport links. In one council, the service has reduced so significantly to meet previous budgetary pressures, that it leaves no alternative now but the closure of service points to achieve any further financial reductions, with the loss of wide-ranging benefits to the public. Operationally, the staffing structure is so thin that service delivery is nearly at breaking point, and there is a high risk of temporary closures due to staff sickness. The period ahead will be extremely challenging, and it will be impossible to maintain the current level of service.

The library service suffers from the lack of clear strategy and role for a well-funded public library service at Welsh Government level, despite the invaluable support which public library staff provide for residents and the delivery of other services, in terms of literacy and learning, access to information and support, digital inclusion, access to cultural resources and activities, and critically, health and wellbeing. This lack of national strategy and priority on the benefits of the early preventative work and support provided by libraries to the residents of Wales is naturally carried through into local budgets and plans.

Some councils face huge challenges regarding any capital developments, for example, Ceredigion, due to phosphate levels and the draft TAN15 Flooding guidance.



**Local authority arrangements and exit strategies where delivery models utilised are unsuccessful.**

In one council, NPT, Celtic Leisure has historically had the management contract for the operation of six leisure centres together with the Gwyn Hall in Neath. The pandemic brought about financial pressures on the company, and they subsequently asked the council for significant financial assistance. As a company with a single operating contract the opportunities to defray some of the costs across multiple sites was not forthcoming, therefore increasing the financial impact beyond what it might have been. This exercise also unearthed some concerns about the Celtic Leisure operation and the council decided to seek market alternatives. Following a procurement exercise whereby a number of operators showed interest the Council determined the most effective way to manage the facilities and maximise the benefit for local people was to in-source, with a date of April 2023 initially being set.

The Ukraine war and subsequent dramatic hike in utility costs has meant this date has been put back to April 2024 with the extra year being used to bring down costs and aid the transition so the impact is lessened for service users and staff. Being ever conscious for Celtic Leisure to maintain its company independence the council will work with them to help manage costs, drive income and set the staffing and leadership structure needed.

In regard to library services, many councils with community libraries or community partnership arrangements which support local libraries see closures as the only option available if they could not find alternative partners to take them on. Their structures and budgets could not support taking delivery back into the service.

One council is currently responding to Audit Wales on their leisure provision and are considering an options appraisal for different operating models as well as the possibility of the service retuning in-house.

**How the provision of other services provided by local authorities interact with leisure and library services.**

Both the leisure and library facilities in councils interacts very well with a wide range of services on an operational level and works successfully in partnership to deliver many benefits to residents. Over the years, close links with local schools, educational settings and clubs and groups, have been well established in these service areas. The provision of adult learning, early years and most recently the warm hubs, have also enabled these services to remain a central part of the community provision within councils.



There are strong partnerships with local Health Boards for example, in Powys the library service is providing iPad loans to individuals to enable them to take part in health referrals and online therapy sessions with over 500 sessions enabled over the past 6 months.

The National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) is a Welsh Government funded scheme. The Scheme target clients aged 16 and over who have or are at risk of developing a chronic disease giving them access to high quality supervised exercise programme. It is locally managed and delivered by the leisure services across Wales and the success of the scheme is due to this service working in close partnership with health professionals including GP's, physiotherapists, dieticians, practice nurses and occupational therapists. The health professionals can refer their clients to a variety of programmes which are delivered in leisure facilities as well as out in the community.

Both leisure and library services have worked in collaboration for many years in councils, for example, to offer free family swim vouchers to all children completing the annual summer reading challenge; this is one of a number of joint promotions along the lines of 'healthy minds, healthy bodies'. This encourages residents to be more active mentally and physically.

Arts and culture activities are crucial in the aim of widening engagement within communities through the use of these services. Both leisure venues and libraries are supported by organisations and partners that present and exhibit the arts in all its forms. This support is funded through the Arts Council Wales.

Many facilities in both leisure and libraries have litter picking hubs within their communities, lending out kits to community groups. This is a partnership with Waste and Recycling services and Keep Wales Tidy.

These services host a wide range of displays and activities for other services, e.g., recent drop-in campaigns for Social Care colleagues to recruit carers.

These services also deliver face to face contact and access into council services. As council buildings closed in some towns over the years, libraries and leisure facilities have become the point of contact, especially since post-Covid and the virtual way of working.

However, the central role that these services play in facilitating all of the many provisions in council communities can be poorly recognised and undervalued at times by councils at council wide strategic level and also at a Welsh Government level.

**How local authorities use alternative models of service delivery in Wales, and the perceived benefits associated with them.**



As referenced earlier, within the 22 councils there are different arrangements in place for the management of their leisure and library services.

Most leisure and culture trusts are non-profit organisations with any profit made reinvested into the services. They are usually governed by Trustees from the local community which enables them to support their community.

For those councils with in-house services core staffing structures within these services are facing significant challenges due to lack of recruitment to vacant posts and the retention of key staff. As referenced, earlier, although, many have recruited new staff, the cost of training new staff has added to the pressures on budgets.

Most councils rely on volunteer opportunities to enable the delivery of more activities and gives the residents a chance to be active in their communities, give back, and possibly learn new skills. However, this is not always a free option, but requires a great deal of time and effort to offer rewarding experiences for volunteers. In some areas it is difficult to recruit volunteers due to volunteer fatigue which can result in a patchy and inequitable offer.

Community facilities run by volunteers enable the smallest of provisions to remain open, and this is especially the case for small libraries. They provide access to books and social interaction for their residents. The quality of the service is variable, and again the amount of training and support required from the library service makes this difficult to sustain.

Community partnerships have been successful and provide clear evidence of consultation and community engagement in co-producing solutions on a local level. Whilst the benefits are that these partnerships have enabled council run services to be retained in the communities, and groups have enhanced local facilities, they can be labour intensive in terms of relationship building and maintenance, monitoring, and reporting on terms of agreements, etc. They are also fragile and could also fold if the partners decide to pull out as they are dependent on individuals within the communities who drive forward the fundraising locally.

Practical partnerships allow councils to deliver more together.

**Good practice to ensure sustainability of local leisure and library services for future generations.**

Collaboration and joint procurement processes are seen as an effective and more successful way to provide more resources and facilities and has proven to be more sustainable. This is particularly the case when looking at library services. The library management system for Wales and the Welsh purchasing consortium for library stock and e-resources across the Welsh Library authorities has been highly



successful, due mainly to the hard work of the Society of Chief Librarians (Cymru). This has enabled Powys library service to provide more resources and facilities than they could afford. There is a clear argument for a Wales-wide public library service, similar to the Northern Ireland model, with a coherent strategy providing statutory legislation for public libraries, and adequate core funding for staff, training and delivery. Public libraries deliver so many benefits as outlined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, and these are currently in danger of being lost.

There is also a clear need for a robust framework to measure the social return on investment provided within leisure and library services, in terms of preventative and person-centred approaches and demand on higher cost services such as Social Care and Health services.

It is important to note that leisure and library services should be forward thinking, and looking to develop, rather than sustain, services. Work undertaken on the Cultural Services' Digital Strategy has highlighted the need for financial investment to support changing customer demands and access to lifelong learning in a digitally disrupted society. Priorities will include, (but are not limited to): engaging the public with, and instructing them on, evolving technologies, developing media literacy skills; integrating SMART technologies into buildings to improve access to services as well as making buildings more environmentally sustainable; and upskilling staff so they can harness these technologies to make more activities and services available online, (this is of particular importance in rural councils). A focus on workforce development, and improvements to digital infrastructure and equipment will be critical going forward, so that professional staff have the capabilities and resources to assist communities to live well and independently in the digital age.

# Agenda Item 7

Local Government and Housing Committee

4 May 2023 – papers to note cover sheet

<b>Paper no.</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Action point</b>
Paper 6	Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25	Finance Committee	To note
Paper 7	The Right to Adequate Housing	Future Generations Commissioner for Wales	To note
Paper 8	Homelessness	Welsh Government	To note

Chair, Children, Young People, and Education Committee

Chair, Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

Chair, Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International  
Relations Committee

Chair, Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

Chair, Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee

Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee

19 April 2023

Dear Committee Chairs,

### **Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25: Engagement**

At our meeting on 23 March 2023, the Finance Committee (the Committee) considered its programme of engagement for the forthcoming Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2024-25, ahead of the Committee's annual Plenary debate on spending priorities, provisionally scheduled for 12 July. I am writing to Chairs of subject committees to share our thinking. The Committee has agreed to undertake a number of engagement activities prior to the publication of the Draft Budget, in the autumn. These include, a stakeholder event, focus groups held with the general public, and a workshop with Members of the Welsh Youth Parliament.

### **Stakeholder Event: Wrexham**

This year's stakeholder event will take place at the Glyndwr University Campus (Catrin Finch Centre) in Wrexham on the morning of Thursday 15 June. This will be an opportunity for the Committee to hear directly from interested organisations/individuals on the expected draft budget proposals, as well as their views on the Welsh Government's approach to setting the budget and prioritising resources. As cross-Committee engagement with stakeholders on the budget is crucial to effective scrutiny, I would like to invite Committee Chairs or a Member of your Committee to join the event. If Chairs or



Members are interested in attending, please contact the clerking team [seneddfinance@senedd.wales](mailto:seneddfinance@senedd.wales) by 22 May.

### Citizen engagement focus groups with the Welsh public

On behalf of the Committee, the Senedd's Citizens Engagement Team will be holding a series of focus groups on the Draft Budget with the Welsh public. The team has undertaken similar exercises over the past few years and the aim of this work is to form a longitudinal study to allow the Committee to monitor perspectives and attitudes over time. Participants will be sourced through similar partner organisations to cover the same demographics as last year, and groups will be organised to focus on particular policy areas. The Citizens Engagement Team will circulate the dates of sessions to all Committees, should any Members wish to participate. This will allow an opportunity for Members to hear first-hand from the citizens of Wales where spending should be prioritised.

### Welsh Youth Parliament

Last year to further complement our engagement work, the Committee held a workshop with Members of the Youth Parliament. It was extremely informative to hear openly from these young Members about the issues concerning and directly affecting them. We are keen to continue building on this invaluable work and will be inviting the youth Members to participate in a workshop again this year.

### Finance Committee Plenary Debate on the Welsh Government spending priorities

As mentioned above, the Committee intends to hold a Plenary debate on Wednesday 12 July on the Welsh Government's spending priorities for 2024-25. The outcomes of our engagement work will inform and feed into this debate, which will provide the best opportunity to influence the Welsh Government spending priorities before the Draft Budget is formulated in the autumn. As ever, we would very much welcome the participation of Committee Chairs, as well as other Members, as part of this debate, to ensure that the Welsh Government's spending plans are informed by the views and priorities of Senedd Committees.

### Approach to budget scrutiny

I will shortly be writing to Chairs, with regard to the Committee's approach to budget scrutiny, including information on the consultation and timetable once the Trefnydd has notified the Business Committee of the Draft Budget publication dates.

The Finance Committee has tried to ensure that the profile and effectiveness of budget scrutiny in the Senedd is continually improved and that the Welsh public are able to engage fully with the process. As you are aware, we are currently discussing proposals with the Minister for Finance and Local Government to amend the [Budget Process Protocol](#), which sets out an understanding between the

Welsh Government and the Senedd on the administrative arrangements for the scrutiny of the annual draft budget and other related budgetary matters.

In addition, during last year's budget round the Committee agreed to consult with Committees on the documentation provided by the Welsh Government alongside its Draft Budget proposals, with a view to seeking improvements to the information provided. I wrote to [Chair on this issue on 8 March](#) and I am grateful to the Committees that have responded. As this work progresses, I will continue to provide updates to Committees on developments.

If you have any questions about any aspect of the Draft Budget process, please feel free to contact me or the Clerk to the Finance Committee, Owain Roberts, 0300 200 6388, [seneddfinance@senedd.wales](mailto:seneddfinance@senedd.wales).

Yours sincerely,



Peredur Owen Griffiths  
Chair, Finance Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Paper 7  
Agenda Item 7.2



Comisiynydd  
Cenedlaethau'r  
Dyfodol  
Cymru

Future  
Generations  
Commissioner  
for Wales

John Griffiths MS  
Chair of the Local Government and Housing Committee  
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Dear Chair

Thank you for the opportunity to add my perspective, as the new Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, to the Local Government and Housing Committee inquiry into the Right to Adequate Housing. I hope this letter will aid your discussions. A place to call home is a cornerstone to ensuring our well-being. Accessing adequate housing is about more than avoiding homelessness. It is about having a community, access to services and the prospect of creating a decent future life for us and our families where we can maximise our health opportunities and express our cultural identity.

In the [Future Generations Report](#) published in 2020, the Future Generations Commissioner called for the principles of the [United Nations enshrined Right to Adequate Housing](#) to be fully incorporated into Welsh housing policy. Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that:

*“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”*

The view we set out is that such a right underpins many of the wider benefits outlined throughout the Future Generations Report that bringing an end to homelessness would have, to health, to community cohesion, to equality and to prosperity. This call was echoed in our [Manifesto for the Future](#) ahead of the 2021 Senedd elections.

We welcome the commitment in the Co-operation Agreement to publish a White Paper to include proposals for a right to adequate housing. I would like to take this opportunity to set out how the Well-being of Future Generations Act can be applied to realise this.

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## The five Ways of Working

The Act sets out five Ways of Working which must be used by public bodies in its decision-making, for example, the development of policy.

### Integration

Reports by Alma Economics in [2021](#) and [2022](#) set out that the key components of the right to adequate housing are:

- (i) legal security of tenure: ensuring legal protection against arbitrary eviction, harassment and other threats;
- (ii) availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure: facilities necessary for health, security, comfort and nutrition (e.g., access to safe drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting);
- (iii) affordability: the housing costs are at such a level that does not compromise a household's ability to attain other basic life needs;
- (iv) habitability: guaranteeing adequate space and protection from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind or other threats to health, structural hazards and disease;
- (v) accessibility: considering the needs of disadvantaged groups;
- (vi) location: easy access to services (employment, healthcare, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities);
- (vii) cultural adequacy: enabling expression of cultural identity.

Achieving these will require an integrated approach across a range of policy areas the vast majority of which, if not all, fall under devolved Welsh policy.

Through integration, the Act requires that the development of policy in one area is not detrimental to policy development in another area where it is aligned with the advancement of a Well-being Goal and the sustainable development principle. Implicit in this, is that no policy should be developed which is detrimental to another area of policy which is supporting access to adequate housing. Positively, we are seeing this action in Wales across fields such as transport, decarbonisation, and planning which when taken together reinforce many of these components of adequate housing.

The Act prescribes that the Welsh Government should consider not only its own well-being objectives in understanding the impacts of its decisions, but also should consider the impact on the wellbeing objectives of all other public bodies which may be impacted by such decisions, such as local planning authorities and national park authorities.

### Collaboration

Working better and smarter with people, communities and within different parts of Welsh Government can help to realise the various aspects of the right to adequate housing. This includes avoiding duplication, unlocking synergies and identifying areas where they can work together and/or reinforce each other's work.

### Involvement

It is a requirement of the Act that those impacted by, or that have an interest in the delivery of a well-being goal are involved in the process of decision making. It requires organisations to be open to influence from citizens and stakeholders, moving to a culture of 'working with' rather than 'doing to'. In contrast to consultation, involvement approaches work with people at earlier stages, such as helping to identify issues and potential solutions, and being supported to remain involved right throughout design, implementation and evaluation processes. It is important to fully understand the different impacts that decisions could have on different communities, and why. Local area well-being plans will be a good starting point for understanding geographic differences.

In considering collaboration and involvement as a way of working, the 2020 Future Generations report recommended:

- Work with organisations and communities to set a vision and long-term strategy for the future of housing in Wales.
- As part of this vision and strategy implement the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Review, the Independent Review on Decarbonising Welsh Homes and the report from the Homelessness Action Group.

We welcome steps that have been taken since which will begin to realise this recommendation by the Welsh Government in partnership with Siarter Cartrefi and the Co-production Network Cymru including an event in Machynlleth in February this year. We look forward to learning more about the outcome of this work.

### Prevention

This calls on public bodies to act in a way which prevents problems from occurring or getting worse. A [standard definition of prevention](#) has been agreed with the Welsh Government. In taking this into consideration, the Welsh Government must ensure that housing policy prevents problems, or indeed costs, from stacking up in the future. For example, this could be due to factors such as the location of housing development and proximity to public transport and other services; future proofing developments for climate adaptation such as flood risk and coastal erosion; the quality of housing and the need to decarbonise at a rapid scale.

Our 2021 report [Homes fit for the Future: the Retrofit Challenge](#) sets out how housing decarbonisation can be addressed to meet Net Zero Wales carbon reduction targets.

### Long-term

This makes reference to the importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs (the sustainable development principle).

In considering preventative and long-term thinking, the 2020 Future Generations Report recommended:

- Within the next year, set out how a long-term plan on how they will fund the decarbonisation of homes in line with carbon emissions targets.
- Require all publicly funded housing developments to be carbon neutral and demonstrate how they are meeting the broader requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- Explore the use of financial levers through the Social Housing Grant and Innovative Housing Programme to encourage innovation in developing

intergenerational housing, and communities and use taxation levers to incentivise intergenerational house-sharing.

- Ensure that Design Quality Requirements should be updated to reflect the future in terms of smart-homes and assisted living technology.
- Support and scale-up the development of social enterprises to provide jobs and skills in new methods of construction based on models established by Down to Earth and Cartrefi Conwy.

Again, we welcome steps to increase the ambition in the draft Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023 and the revised Welsh Development Quality Requirements 2021. We would stress that more needs to be done in the private housing sector, in particular, addressing the challenges faced by those living in the private rented sector, the detail of which has recently been explored by the Senedd CCEI Committee.

Taken together, the five Ways of Working will ensure sustainable development with every effort made to ensure that no one is left behind either now or in future.

Yours sincerely,



Derek Walker

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

## Agenda Item 7.3

### Written response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Local Government and Housing Committee – Homelessness

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I would like to extend my thanks to the members of the Local Government and Housing Committee, and all those who took the time to provide evidence based on their experience and expertise, in order to inform the Committee's work on homelessness.

Welsh Government remains committed to our long term goal of ending homelessness, by making it rare, brief and unrepeatable, and I am grateful for the Committee's work in support of achieving this shared goal. This ambition is reflected in the Programme for Government, which contains a commitment to reform housing law and implement the Homelessness Action Group's recommendation to fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing.

As set out in my evidence to the Committee, our Ending Homelessness High Level Action plan sets out how we are taking forward this work, and the recommendations of the Committee very much align with this plan. No one tool or action alone will end homelessness. The breadth of the recommendations made by the Committee illustrate the ambitious cross sector and cross public service response required to both prevent homelessness in the first place and to make the transformational shift towards rapid rehousing.

Our plans and our delivery partners have inevitably had to adapt to respond to unanticipated pressures arising from the cost-of-living crisis and humanitarian crisis arising from the war in Ukraine. I continue to be grateful for the tremendous efforts of those working in the housing and homelessness sector in responding to these ongoing challenges and pressures. Whilst we continue to work closely with partners to tackle the immediate pressures in the system and ensure we are supporting those in housing need, it is also crucial we plan for the future and consider how we sustain and formalise the exceptional work undertaken by our delivery partners during the pandemic and beyond.

Reform of current housing legislation will be key to this, and I am pleased that work to develop these reforms is well underway. An Expert Review Panel, comprising membership from across the Housing sector is in place, and will deliver recommendations for reform in Summer 2023. A White Paper will follow later this year.



**Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:**

### **Recommendation 1**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The purpose of the relationship manager roles should be clarified and the Welsh Government should consider opportunities to enhance the roles to better support local authorities.**

**Response: Accept**

Welsh Government will continue to work closely with local authorities as we seek to strengthen and reform the policy and legislative framework to ensure it best supports local authorities in undertaking their statutory responsibilities in regard to housing and homelessness. We will also continuously assess and review our support and governance structures to ensure effective delivery of this agenda, including the relationship manager role. This role involves supporting the strategic and multi-agency approach required to take forward the transformation agenda, including the strategic planning needed to fully implement a rapid rehousing approach centred on prevention and sustainable long-term housing solutions. As this work develops across Wales, relationship managers will continue to work closely with local authorities, identifying and sharing models of best practice as part of a programme of continuous improvement.

**Financial implications: None**

### **Recommendation 2**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should identify and facilitate the sharing of best practice around modular builds for temporary accommodation.**

**Response: Accept**

Welsh Government will look to use the existing and well established networks to facilitate the sharing of best practice around modular builds for temporary accommodation. This includes the Innovative Housing – Community of Practice which meets bi-monthly to share learning and best practice from schemes funded under the Innovative Housing Programme. In addition, we will continue to encourage collaboration and learning via our regular meetings with Housing Leadership Cymru and joint meetings with Social Landlords across Wales.

**Financial implications: None**

### **Recommendation 3**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government explores opportunities for further funding for temporary and transitional accommodation, and evaluates the effectiveness of current funding, including the TACP.**

**Response: Accept**

The Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) is a new grant scheme established in the summer 2022 in response to the need to deliver more good quality longer term accommodation at pace, to support people to move on from temporary accommodation. As a new grant scheme, it will be reviewed after the end of the financial year to determine its effectiveness and any improvements that could be made to facilitate the delivery of more good quality accommodation. As TACP was established using existing Housing and Regeneration capital funding, and no specific additional funding for TACP was allocated within the 2023-24 Welsh Government budget, we will be considering how capital funding is used to continue to support the delivery of more homes, including transitional accommodation.

Within the package of funding to prevent homelessness, Welsh Government is making £15m available to local authorities in 2023-24 to support the provision of temporary accommodation. This funding has been allocated to local authorities on a formula basis to ensure a fair distribution which reflects where demand on temporary accommodation is the greatest. We will continue to monitor local authorities' claims for this funding during the year to inform whether allocated funding can be redistributed to where it is most needed, or whether there is demand for additional funding. Monitoring of funding will also include consideration of the types of temporary accommodation being funded and how this funding profile is changing over time to support move-on into more settled accommodation.

**Financial implications: None**

### **Recommendation 4**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should review how local authorities ensure people staying in temporary accommodation are kept informed of their ongoing housing status, including how long their stay is likely to be, and identify best practice in communicating this information. The Welsh Government should update the Committee on its findings urgently.**

**Response: Accept in principle**

We know that extended periods in temporary accommodation are likely to have a corrosive impact on those who are unable to swiftly move into settled accommodation and it is this fundamental concern which is the cornerstone to our ambition to transition to a rapid rehousing approach in Wales.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 was developed with the fundamental principle that, where possible, 'reasonable steps' are to be taken in partnership with the applicant

themselves. This means that where possible, some of the potential actions associated with finding suitable long-term accommodation may be undertaken by the applicant, but this should take into account the capacity of the applicant. Therefore, it is important that both the applicant and the key support worker maintain regular contact in order to ensure the Personal Housing Plan is kept up to date.

Welsh Government is aware that some local authority officers have higher than average caseloads and maintaining regular contact will continue to be challenging in some parts of Wales. Ideally, contact should take place as part of the Personal Housing Plan process where both parties partake in proactive discussions.

Increasing the pace of move on from temporary accommodation has been a priority in Wales for some time and was a catalyst for the introduction of the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) which is intended to bring accommodation into use quickly.

Welsh Government is developing a document aimed at disseminating good practice examples surrounding support and move on out of temporary accommodation which will highlight the importance of encouraging applicants to take a proactive approach to their own case with support from local authorities, as well as maintaining regular contact.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 5**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should improve the data and statistics on the people living in temporary accommodation with the aim of informing prevention work.**

**Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government currently collects and publishes data on households in temporary accommodation within the annual [Homelessness Statutory Data](#) collection and data on individuals placed in temporary accommodation within the monthly [Homelessness Accommodation provision and Rough Sleeping](#) management information.

Table 6 of the statutory data breaks down placements in temporary accommodation by household type, and length of time spent in temporary accommodation. Household type captures households that are couples with dependent children, and single parent and single person households (by gender of the main applicant). Within the management information, we currently collect information on type of temporary accommodation, previous status of individuals and certain age breakdowns. However, this information is not currently published due to quality assurance limitations.

The Welsh Government is currently engaging with local authorities about improving the quality of the management information in order for it to be published at a more-detailed level. We are also considering incorporating further breakdowns within this data collection to inform prevention activity, such as breakdowns in age, and more

insight into young persons' demographics. Engagement with local authorities on these planned improvements commenced in March 2023.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 6**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should urgently explore what can be done to monitor and improve standards in temporary accommodation and report back to the Committee. As part of this work, the Welsh Government should consider whether there is an opportunity to update the existing statutory guidance in a way that recognises the challenges currently faced by local authorities.**

**Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government is aware of the rising number of homeless presentations, and the increasing reliance on temporary accommodation in the absence of suitable long-term accommodation to meet this demand. In response to this growing demand, and the increasing number of people housed in temporary accommodation, we are currently exploring the options available to ease the situation including changes to legislation where necessary.

Local authorities must take certain matters into account when determining suitability, and the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2015, prescribes the circumstances in which accommodation is or is not regarded as suitable for a person. Welsh Government is considering the existing statutory guidance on this issue which includes a review of advice for local authorities delivering their duties in this challenging environment. Any proposed policy or legislative changes will also be captured in this statutory guidance.

Welsh Government is also considering other potential policy options to help reduce the reliance on temporary accommodation, including working with local authorities and Shelter Cymru to formalise the concept of 'Homelessness at Home' as an option when an individual presents as homeless. This could offer potential benefits for certain individuals who find themselves homeless, however it must be developed with care to ensure the policy supports both individuals in need and local authorities.

We are also working with local authorities to support the continued development of rapid rehousing plans, which requires a strategic assessment of housing need and should assist authorities in understanding and developing short, medium and long term plans to address some of these issues.

As these policy developments progress, the Welsh Government will provide the Senedd and the Committee with updates in due course.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 7**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should consider the opportunity to establish a homelessness regulator as part of its reform of homelessness legislation.**

**Response: Accept in principle**

Welsh Government fully recognises the need to increase the level of consistency of homelessness services across Wales. We strongly believe that working in partnership with local authorities and their representatives to understand and ameliorate the pressures that they face is the key to improving services.

Whilst we will consider mechanisms to promote consistency and improve service provision, including the role of regulation, it is also important to recognise the potential risks. Establishing an additional homelessness regulatory function would risk increasing the complexity of governance as well as administration costs and would not necessarily improve housing supply, or the causal factors of homelessness which are at the heart of the current crisis. Any such proposal would therefore need to be carefully assessed and we will give further consideration to this and other ways to promote consistency and best practice as we develop our policy and legislative proposals.

This consideration will also be informed by the work of the Expert Review Panel, who are considering regulation and enforcement as part of its work and will make recommendations to the Welsh Government in the Summer of 2023.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 8**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should outline what steps it is taking to prevent owner-occupiers becoming homeless. In particular, the Welsh Government should update the Committee on progress in developing mortgage rescue schemes as a matter of urgency.**

**Response: Accept**

Welsh Government is actively working with stakeholders and delivery partners to carefully consider the options available to support people who are struggling with financial pressures to stay in their homes. Financial Transactions Capital funding has been allocated over the next two financial years to help owner-occupiers remain in their homes. Further information on support will be provided in due course.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 9**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should take every opportunity, including through an updated Ending Homelessness Action Plan, to ensure all public services are working in partnership to prevent homelessness.**

**Response: Accept**

Welsh Government recognises that if we are to end homelessness, preventing it in the first place and making it a rarity is critical. As set out in the Ending Homelessness Action Plan, prevention is not simply about housing; it is about ensuring other services intervene to support people at an earlier stage in order to prevent them ever facing homelessness.

The forthcoming legislative reform will explore how wider public service responses to homelessness can be strengthened to better identify and prevent the risk of homelessness. This is key to delivering the transformational shift to prevention and rapid rehousing, and an integral part of the person centred approach local authorities aim to deliver.

As outlined in evidence to the Committee, Welsh Government will be updating the actions in our Ending Homelessness Action Plan this year. We anticipate a refreshed Action Plan to be published, with updated and new actions to be included at this point.

**Financial implications: None**

## **Recommendation 10**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government must increase the allocation for the Housing Support Grant at the earliest opportunity, taking into account the high level of inflation and the demand on homelessness services.**

**Response: Accept in principle**

Welsh Government recognises the budgetary pressures across a range of public services, including homelessness and housing support services. The 2023-24 budget was a budget delivered in a perfect storm of financial pressures, with our budget worth up to £1billion less next year than when it was originally announced, and we have done everything we can to maximise the impact of all our available resources and to prioritise those most in need. We will continue to take this approach if additional resources become available.

We recognise the significant pressures facing frontline housing support services and the importance of the work they provide in supporting people to live independently and to prevent homelessness. Despite the extraordinary budgetary pressures we face, we have maintained the £40m increase to the Housing Support Grant budget awarded in 2021-22 so that it remains at £166.763m.

In recognition of the wider pressures on homelessness services, the Homelessness Prevention Budget will increase by £15m in 2023-24, an additional £10m more than

previously planned. This takes our investment in homelessness and housing support services to over £210m next year.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 11**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should review its Housing Support Grant guidance to ensure funding is supporting the delivery of effective homelessness prevention services that are robustly monitored and evaluated.**

**Response: Accept in principle**

The Housing Support Grant (HSG) guidance sets out the legislative framework and the general principles in which local authorities must operate in the commissioning of services. It is regularly reviewed to ensure it sets out robust contract monitoring requirements which aims to facilitate the effective monitoring and evaluation of services. It also highlights the need for authorities to consider a preventative and prudent approach to commissioning, fair work practices and use of different contract forms and longer contract lengths (where appropriate) to create a flexible, sustainable, and stable environment to recruit and retain staff and to give certainty and consistency to people who use services. We will consider whether there are any elements that could be strengthened within the practice guidance related to the commissioning of services as part of our regular review process.

The issues highlighted by the Committee regarding staff pay and staff well-being in the commissioning of services have already been identified in the [Ending Homelessness in Wales Action Plan](#) and work is being taken forward by the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board's Workforce Task and Finish group. The overarching aim of the work is to ensure that the workforce is valued and supported. Five key areas have been identified around pay, skills and qualifications, support systems for staff, best practice in recruitment and commissioning. On completion of this work, where relevant, the HSG guidance will be reviewed to consider where good practice principles can be further enhanced to help facilitate this.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 12**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should provide an update to the Committee on the results of its campaign to recruit staff to work in the homelessness sector.**

**This should include an assessment of the effectiveness of the work, The Welsh Government should also explore how retention of staff can be improved and consider this when taking forward its Action Plan commitment to develop a resilient and valued workforce recognised for their expertise.**

**Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government homelessness and housing support recruitment campaign ended at the end of March 2023. Campaign materials remain available for use by local authorities and providers to signpost to job vacancies advertised on the Cymorth Cymru jobs site. An evaluation report will be produced by May 2023 to review the success of the campaign. This work aligns with that of the workforce task and finish group (mentioned in recommendation 11) and includes consideration of best practice models for the recruitment and retention of staff and how staff can be fully supported to develop a career in the sector.

**Financial implications:** None

### **Recommendation 13**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should take action to improve data on the private rented sector. This should include setting out what data could be collected, how the data could be collected and an update on plans previously discussed to take forward a business case for a Welsh Housing Survey.**

**Response: Accept**

Welsh Government is committed to strengthening the availability of data associated with the private rented sector (PRS). We have asked Rent Smart Wales to develop a dashboard for publication on their website which will show data on the PRS. Although still under development, it is expected that data will include the number of properties registered by month, by local authority area, and whether this is increasing or decreasing. Data will also be provided on the number of landlords registering with Rent Smart Wales each month, and of these, how many are new landlords and how many are renewals. Where Rent Smart Wales has been informed of landlords leaving the sector then this data can also be shown.

We propose to use the Green Paper on Fair Rents and a Right to Adequate Housing as a call for evidence on what data sources and questions should be captured in a Welsh Housing Survey as part of developing a business case. The Green Paper is due to be published in the Spring. The Committee will also wish to note that the National Survey for Wales will also include housing specific questions.

**Financial implications:** None. Any additional costs in developing the business case will be met from existing budgets.

### **Recommendation 14**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should ensure that Rent Smart Wales collects data on the number of private landlords leaving the sector and their reasons for doing so. This data should be published regularly.**

**Response: Accept in principle**



A condition of a landlord's licence is that they will report to Rent Smart Wales if they have chosen to leave the sector. However, in many instances landlords fail to do this at the time, allow their licence to lapse and do not renew it at the 5 year expiry date.

Rent Smart Wales is collecting data on those landlords who have not sought to renew their licence and also those landlords who have complied with licence conditions and informed Rent Smart Wales that they are no longer an active landlord in Wales. As highlighted above (in response to Recommendation 13) where this data is known, it will be published in due course as part of the wider suite of data on the private rented sector in Wales.

**Financial implications:** None.

## **Recommendation 15**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should set out how it is working with the private rented sector to improve the supply of quality, affordable homes. This should include what actions it has explored to incentivise landlords to stay in the private rented sector.**

**Response: Accept**

As part of a commitment to improve the supply of quality affordable homes, Welsh Government launched Leasing Scheme Wales in January 2022. Since then local authorities have been successful, through the ability to provide capital grants for property improvements, to secure empty properties which in turn is helping to increase the supply and quality of affordable homes as these are being leased at Local Housing Allowance rates. Over the next 5 years the objective is to secure over 1,500 properties through this initiative.

Data from Rent Smart Wales shows that new landlords are registering and rental properties have increased overall across Wales from 208,089 in August 2022 to 209,101 in January 2023, which indicates the majority of landlords are remaining in the sector.

We recognise, however, that there is less turnover in the sector as fewer people move either between properties or exit the PRS sector. This has resulted in fewer properties being available to rent, whilst demand to rent is still high. We will consider how we could further increase the supply of private rented property within the Green Paper on Fair Rents later in the Spring.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 16**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should set out what steps it is taking to influence the UK Government to increase the Local Housing Allowance rate to at least the 30th percentile of local market rents.**

**Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government fully recognises that private sector rents are rising at their fastest rate for over 13 years, causing a gap to widen between actual rents and the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate. This disparity is leaving many people with little option but to find the additional rent from the money they have remaining, placing considerable pressure on people at a time when the cost of living is so high. A change to the LHA rate would make a significant impact on the current pressure in the private rented sector which is why we have repeatedly called upon the UK Government to uplift the LHA rates and asked that benefits are based on the current rent levels. We have also requested that LHA rates be payable at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile, as was the case when LHAs were first introduced. Welsh Government will continue to highlight why the current policy needs to be re-evaluated and press for changes to the LHA rate that reflect the current environment.

We also note the Committee's support in urging the UK Government to make changes on this matter, especially in light of the increasing challenges around the cost of living.

**Financial implications:** None

**Recommendation 17**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should explore a role for Rent Smart Wales in improving the data on private rented sector rents and report its findings to the Committee.**

**Response: Accept in principle**

Consideration of mechanisms for improving rental data in Wales will be included within the Green Paper, and subsequent White Paper on Fair Rents, as part of developing the evidence base and understanding of the potential implications of various policy interventions.

**Financial implications:** None

**Recommendation 18**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should explore how it can review and amend Leasing Scheme Wales to make it more attractive to landlords. It should also set out how it will raise awareness of the scheme, in particular with letting and estate agents.**

**Response: Accept**

A number of enhancements have been made to LSW since its introduction, reflecting learning from early adopters and market changes. Most recently, through the Optimised Retrofit programme, Welsh Government has included the ability to secure an additional £5,000 grant to improve the energy performance of a property towards

meeting EPC C standards. This means that a total grant of £30,000 could be available to a landlord who signs up to Leasing Scheme Wales for 20 years.

From April we will also be extending the scheme to allow Houses in Multiple Occupation, that meet certain standards, to also be eligible to come onto Leasing Scheme Wales and benefit from grant funding for improvements. This will provide an opportunity to increase quality accommodation for single people, including young people who have struggled to secure suitable accommodation and are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Welsh Government will continue to engage with Propertymark and National Registered Landlords Association to promote Leasing Scheme Wales through these professional representative bodies. In addition, local authorities who are signed up to Leasing Scheme Wales have been engaging with their local landlord forums to promote sign-up and awareness of the scheme. We are also planning further communications later in the year, via Rent Smart Wales, to all landlords and agents signed up to the Rent Smart Wales Newsletter.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 19**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should explore all possible options for increasing the availability of one-bedroom accommodation, including options for ensuring the planning system actively encourages the delivery of more one-bedroom accommodation in the appropriate locations.**

**Response: Accept in principle**

It is the responsibility of local authorities to undertake periodic reviews of housing need, discharged through the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) process. This assessment in turn informs local authorities' Local Development Plans (LDPs) which include targets for the number of affordable homes the authority aims to deliver over the plan period. LDPs must also set out how and where the authority intends to provide the affordable homes to meet the target they have established.

A new approach to undertaking LMHAs was published on 31 March 2022. This new approach provides more consistency in how LHMA's are undertaken by providing a pre-populated tool and introduces a requirement for Welsh Government to review and sign-off LHMA's. All local authorities are required to rewrite or refresh their LHMA's by March 2024.

The new LHMA process calculates housing need on the basis of the household projections, and it includes the facility for local authorities to add in the existing unmet need for homes of each bedroom size. Once completed, the LHMA will estimate the number of social homes required of each bedroom size (including one bedrooms) in each housing market area within a local authority over a 15-year period. In turn, through their LDP, each local authority will be required to set out how they will deliver these homes.

Work has been undertaken to align the Social Housing Grant (SHG) funding process more closely with evidence of local housing need. Local authorities are required to produce a “prospectus” which outlines their strategic housing priorities for SHG, this information is also used to inform local authority rapid rehousing plans. Local authorities will also be encouraged to utilise evidence from their LHMA’s to inform their funding prospectus.

Local Authorities are responsible for allocating SHG to development schemes which meet their need and strategic priorities. Welsh Government will review local authority plans to ensure schemes funded meet the need identified in their prospectus. Where the schemes funded do not meet that need this will be challenged.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 20**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should set out how it is working with local authorities, housing associations and support services to increase the availability of high quality shared accommodation. This should include raising awareness of shared accommodation options and sharing good practice.**

**Response: Accept**

Welsh Government fully recognises the need to increase the availability of high quality shared accommodation. From April, we will extend Leasing Scheme Wales to allow Houses in Multiple Occupation that meet certain standards to be eligible to come onto the scheme, and benefit from grant funding for improvements. This will provide an opportunity to make available quality accommodation for single people, including young individuals who have struggled to secure suitable accommodation and are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Through the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TCAP) we are also funding shared accommodation, provided it meets the minimum standards set out in the TACP standards framework which is intended to ensure a flexible and responsive approach to bringing forward more good quality accommodation at pace.

Our regular Housing Leadership Cymru meetings and joint meetings with Social Landlords in Wales provide a forum through which we can discuss learning and identify good practice in the delivery and use of high quality shared accommodation.

**Financial implications:** None

## **Recommendation 21**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should work with social landlords to ensure that they fully utilise schemes to enable them to buy properties from private landlords, including tenanted properties. This should include awareness of what support**

**is available to bring those properties up to the relevant standards within an agreed timeframe.**

**Response: Accept**

The Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TCAP) was established in the summer 2022 in response to wider housing pressures and the need to prioritise move on from temporary accommodation. In the autumn, in view of cost-of-living pressures, the parameters of this scheme were expanded to include the purchase of properties, including tenanted properties, to prevent homelessness and improve the quality of housing. TACP funding can be used both to purchase properties and to undertake improvement works.

**Financial implications: None**

## **Recommendation 22**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should set out what data it collects on social housing vacancies, including the time taken to re-let properties when they become vacant, reasons why properties remain vacant and how it supports social landlords to ensure properties are available for letting.**

**Response: Accept in principle**

Welsh Government currently collect and publish a range of data in relation to social housing vacancies, which can be found at the following link: [Social housing vacancies \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/social-housing-vacancies). This publication includes whether a property has been vacant for more or less than 6 months, whether the property is currently available to let, location of the vacant properties and owner of the vacant properties.

The collection of real time social housing data is a matter under consideration, including the potential resource implications of such a collection.

**Financial implications: None**

## **Recommendation 23**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**We ask that the Welsh Government reports its findings on this matter to the Committee and ensures that all social landlord allocation policies are routinely published so they are open to public scrutiny.**

**Response: Accept in principle**

Welsh Government recognises that social housing allocations are a vital part of our toolkit to end homelessness across Wales. They play a key role in providing access to affordable accommodation, and it is essential those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless are able to access social housing, as well as the Private Rented Sector, as routes to sustainable and settled accommodation.

The current legislative framework allows for the operation of different allocation policies across local authorities and Registered Social Landlords in Wales. Individual local authorities do in some instances publish their social housing allocation policies online, but there is no legislative requirement to do so. The legislative and policy framework around social housing allocations, are being examined as part of the wider commitment to reform housing law to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing.

As outlined in my evidence to the Committee, a review of allocations policies across Wales is currently underway. This includes Wales wide research into social housing allocations involving Registered Social Landlords and local authorities, to gain an understanding of the policies that are in place, and how they include and allocate social housing to those most in need, those who are homeless, and people with protected characteristics. This will also look into why those most in need may not be accessing housing. This research will help inform potential policy and legislative reform.

**Financial implications:** None

#### **Recommendation 24**

**The Committee recommends that:**

**The Welsh Government should support local authorities to implement their rapid rehousing transition plans.**

**Response: Accept**

Rapid rehousing is an internationally recognised approach to ending homelessness which is why it is vital that every local authority develops a cogent plan that clarifies how rapid rehousing will be implemented. Welsh Government will continue to work with all local authorities, and their wider partners, to support the development and implementation of rapid rehousing transition plans. Successful implementation of rapid rehousing requires a whole systems approach where homelessness becomes everyone's responsibility. To support this, we have provided funding for a strategic co-ordination function in each local authority area, to support corporate ownership within an authority, as well as with multi-agency partners.

**Financial implications:** None