

CARTREF YW POPETH HOME IS EVERYTHING



About Shelter Cymru

We exist to defend the right to a safe home because **home is everything**. We help thousands of people across all of Wales every year who have been affected by the housing emergency by offering free, confidential, and independent advice. When necessary, we constructively challenge on behalf of people to ensure they are properly assisted and to improve practice and learning.

We work with people who use our services as equals. We provide information, advice, and support to help people identify the best options to prevent homelessness, to find and keep a home and to help them take back control of their own lives.

We fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on our people and communities with campaigning, advice, and support – and we never give up.

Our Response

1. On 29th April 2019 the then Minister for the Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, declared a climate emergency in the Senedd.¹ In February 2021, the Welsh Government then committed to achieving net-zero by 2050, but with “ambitions to get there sooner.” This recognition demonstrated the Senedd’s and Welsh Government’s commitment to tackle climate change.
2. It is widely known that in Wales, our older housing stock is a significant contributor to energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.² That is why we welcome the initiatives thus far to help rectify this issue, such as the Welsh Government’s commitment to build 20,000 new, low-carbon social homes³ and various retrofit initiatives such as the Nest⁴, Arbed Am Byth⁵ and Empty Homes Grant⁶ schemes.

¹ <https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/wales-declares-a-climate-emergency/>

² <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/independent-review-on-decarbonising-welsh-homes-report.pdf>

³ <https://gov.wales/250-million-towards-20000-low-carbon-homes-rent>

⁴ <https://nest.gov.wales/en/>

⁵ <https://www.arbedambyth.wales/eng/home.html>

⁶ <https://gov.wales/valleys-taskforce-empty-homes>

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3. We also know that people's homes play a significant role in both combatting and causing poverty. Our research showed that one in three people in Wales were affected by the housing emergency⁷, with over a quarter of a million people having had to cut spending on essentials such as food or heating to afford rent or mortgage payments. Shelter Cymru's figures demonstrated that one in six people in Wales say they cannot keep their homes warm in the winter.
4. Research by Citizens Advice Cymru showed that in the summer of 2020 an estimated 66,000 households across Wales had already fallen behind on fuel bills.⁸ Citizens Advice Cymru's research also found that 44% of people that had been disconnected (from one or more of their utilities) reported they did not have enough money to pay the bills because of the pandemic.⁹
5. The Senedd and Welsh Government's response to climate change is one of the key issues of our time. It also poses a unique opportunity to address fuel poverty across Wales. We believe more needs to be done to improve the quality and energy efficiency of our current housing stock, whilst building additional homes fit for the future – high quality and low carbon. This is a crucial opportunity we cannot afford to waste, especially when our research shows that people in Wales are twice as likely than the rest of Britain to say they lived with damp and mould.¹⁰
6. **Over the next 12 months, we believe the committee should focus its work in the following areas:**
 - a. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Empty Homes Grant and explore the reintroduction of the grant. We believe the committee should investigate expanding the grant to other areas across Wales such as Carmarthenshire, which has the highest number of empty homes in Wales.¹¹ There is a real benefit to the reintroduction of the scheme as it offers a solution to both the climate and housing emergencies. The grant does this by encouraging the redevelopment of empty homes, bringing them back into

⁷ <https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2021-05-26/shocking-new-figures-demonstrate-scale-of-housing-crisis-in-wales-amidst-calls-for-immediate-welsh-government-action>

⁸ [https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Wales/Energy%20briefing%20v1%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Wales/Energy%20briefing%20v1%20(1).pdf)

⁹ <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Fuel-Poverty-Consultation-Response.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://sheltercymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Living-Home-Standard-Wales-FINAL-ENG.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/homes-property/part-wales-highest-number-empty-21360295>

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stock and improving their energy efficiency and green credentials. By bringing some of the over 27,000 empty homes back into stock and improving their green credentials, we can also make a significant inroad into responding to the huge demand for homes in Wales. There are around 67,000 households on waiting lists for a social home¹² and around 6,400 people in temporary accommodation in Wales.¹³ We recommend that the committee works with the Local Government and Housing Committee on this area.

- b. We recommend the committee examines the effectiveness and scope of the Nest and Arbed schemes to widen eligibility criteria across Wales. Wales has a greater number of older, bigger, and more rural homes than the UK average.¹⁴ Research by the Future Generations Commissioner shows that a £15bn investment plan for housing to retrofit homes to reduce heating and energy demand would create 26,500 jobs by 2030, save hundreds of millions of pounds on fuel bills each year, while contributing significantly to existing targets and objectives around combatting climate change.¹⁵ By increasing the scope of the schemes we can reduce emissions from one of Wales's biggest polluters, reducing the carbon footprint of housing stock and contributing to the target of net zero by 2050. This goal will work in tandem with enhancing the quality of homes putting pounds in people's pockets by making more energy efficient homes, which save money on utility bills.

7. Throughout the sixth Senedd, we believe the committee should be focussed on the following:

- a. We believe that the committee should seek to co-work with the Local Government and Housing Committee, to continue scrutiny of the Welsh Government's decarbonisation agenda. From the delivery of the 20,000 new, low-carbon social homes, to the retrofit programme which could save up to £8.3bn in energy bills by 2040.¹⁶ The committee

¹² <https://sheltercymru.org.uk/what-is-social-housing-and-why-do-we-all-need-more-of-it/>

¹³ <https://gov.wales/homelessness-accommodation-provision-and-rough-sleeping>

¹⁴ https://files.bregroup.com/bretrust/The-Housing-Stock-of-the-United-Kingdom_Report_BRE-Trust.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/news/we-can-end-fuel-poverty-with-15bn-retrofit-investment-plan-for-our-homes-says-future-generations-commissioner-for-wales/>

¹⁶ <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/news/we-can-end-fuel-poverty-with-15bn-retrofit-investment-plan-for-our-homes-says-future-generations-commissioner-for-wales/>

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should examine the built environment's impact on climate change and the contribution it needs to make to help Wales tackle our climate emergency.

- b. We also recommend the committee works with the Equalities and Social Justice Committee to explore the impact of climate change and fuel poverty on minority groups. Research by Care and Repair Wales shows that up to 30% of excess deaths in Wales during the winter are due to cold homes with 75% of deaths coming from people aged over 75%.¹⁷ We know that the climate crisis is not just an issue pertaining to the natural environment and biodiversity. It is a human rights and social justice issue¹⁸, both in less economically developed countries across the world but also here in Wales. This is why we believe that the committee should work with its counterparts in the Senedd, to tackle issues in a manner that is joined up and reflects the scale of the challenges that we face as a nation and as a planet.
- c. We recommend the committee examines flooding and its impact on communities. Climate change will see sea levels rise by at least 1.3 – 2.6 feet by 2100.¹⁹ Climate change in turn will also likely increase the frequency of extreme storms by as much as 60%.²⁰ We know from research in the USA that flooding further exacerbates social and racial inequality.²¹ Shelter Cymru believes everyone has the right to adequate housing.²² Unless our new and existing housing stock can withstand the pressures of extreme storms, the housing crisis will only become further entrenched by climate change.

¹⁷ <https://www.careandrepair.org.uk/en/news/improving-homes-change-lives-our-2021-manifesto/>

¹⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/COP21.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/climate-change-evidence-causes/question-14/>

²⁰ <https://climate.nasa.gov/news/2837/warming-seas-may-increase-frequency-of-extreme-storms/>

²¹ [J. Howell and J. Elliot \(2018\) Damages Done: The Longitudinal Impacts of Natural Hazards on Wealth Inequality in the United States. University of Pittsburgh. p457.](#)

²² <https://sheltercymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/RightToHousing-Full-ENG.pdf>