

Petition: The housing crisis

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 10 Ionawr 2022
Petitions Committee | 10 January 2022

Reference: SR21/1044-5

Petition Number: P-06-1204

Petition title: Protect the people of Wales - Take urgent action on the housing crisis now

Text of petition: Local people are being priced out of their own communities. This is destroying our culture and language. Simply building more houses is not enough.

We call for a fundamental rethink of policy to prioritise the social, cultural and economic needs of the people of Wales in line with Cymraeg 2050 and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Give people a say on solving our housing crisis: implement the eight demands of the Housing Justice Charter and set up a Citizens Assembly to drive change.

More details

Covid has shown the need for decisive Welsh Government action to deal with a major crisis. Urgent action is needed now to address our housing crisis, before local cultures and language are lost and an out of control housing market destroys urban and rural Welsh communities.



The Housing Justice Charter group is a non-party political collaboration from across Wales. We researched all the issues and solutions proposed by others and summed them up in eight achievable and positive areas for action.

Implement the Charter's demands; use a Citizens Assembly to drive the change:

1. Declare a housing emergency in Wales
- 2 Create a bill to address housing inequality.
3. Protect our communities; rural and urban.
4. Protect Welsh Language and culture.
5. Reform social housing provision.
- 6 Urgently address the pressing issue of second home ownership.
7. Reform planning laws to respond to local housing needs.
8. Create a citizens assembly on housing.

For more on each demand see siartercartrefi.org

1. Background

This petition raises a broad range of issues relating to housing, communities and the Welsh language.

A number of stakeholders have raised similar concerns to the petitioners, notably in the period leading up to the 2021 Senedd election.

The petitioners reference a bill to address housing inequality. A campaign for a right to adequate housing is being led by Tai Pawb, the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru and Shelter Cymru. That campaign is calling for the incorporation of the right to adequate housing (as outlined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) into Welsh law.

As part of the next five-year work programme for Cymraeg 2050, the national strategy to reach 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050, the Welsh Government has

said it will “create a Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan and use economic levers to strengthen Welsh speaking communities.”

The Minister for Climate Change has written to the Chair regarding this petition and outlined some of the actions the government is taking.

2. Welsh Government action

2.1. Programme for Government commitments

The Programme for Government was updated on 7 December to incorporate the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid. It makes a number of commitments relevant to this petition, including to:

- Build 20,000 new low carbon social homes for rent.
- Establish Unnos, a national construction company, to support councils and social landlords to improve the supply of social and affordable housing.
- Reform housing law and implement the Homelessness Action Group’s recommendation to fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing.
- Publish a White Paper to include proposals for a right to adequate housing including fair rents and new approaches to making homes affordable for those on local incomes.
- Take forward actions to cap the number of second homes, bring more homes into common ownership and licence holiday lets.
- Support cooperative housing, community-led initiatives, and community land trusts.
- Decarbonise more homes through retrofit, delivering quality jobs, training and innovation using local supply chains.
- Reform the current system of building safety, including a second phase of the Welsh Building Safety Fund, so that people feel safe and secure in their homes.
- Explore the feasibility of introducing local authority mortgages.

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- Implement the Renting Homes Act to give renters greater security and develop a national scheme restricting rent to local housing allowance levels for families and young people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness.
 - Create a Welsh language Communities Housing Plan.

2.2. Second homes

The impact of second homes on communities, and holiday homes more generally (including self-catering accommodation) has been the subject of much discussion in the Senedd in recent months.

Second Homes: developing new policies in Wales, by Dr Simon Brooks of Swansea University, was published in March 2021. The report made 12 recommendations for the Welsh Government and local authorities.

Recommendations included controlling the number of second homes, making full use of the powers to levy a council tax premium on second homes and changes to the planning system.

The Minister for Climate Change and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language wrote to Dr Brooks on 6 July 2021 responding to his report and outlined how his recommendations had informed the Welsh Government's proposed approach to this issue.

Also on 6 July 2021, the Minister for Climate Change made a statement to the Senedd on Affordability, Second Homes and the Welsh Language. The statement committed to "developing effective tax, planning and housing measures to ensure that the interests of local people are protected."

The Minister for Climate Change made a statement on second homes and affordability on 23 November 2021. The statement confirmed:

- Starting in January, a **phased pilot scheme** will be run in Dwyfor, Gwynedd to test a number of interventions. Phase 1 will include "a range of practical support to help people access affordable housing"; Phase 2 will look at the planning system;

- A consultation will seek views on whether local planning authorities should be able to require planning permission where a primary home changes to a second home or short-term holiday home;
- The Welsh Government is working with a contractor on the “feasibility and shape of a **statutory licensing or registration scheme** for all holiday accommodation”; it is proposed that a voluntary scheme will be established in the pilot area to inform a statutory scheme;
- Funding will be made available to a number of local authorities so **empty properties** can be purchased for social rent.

Following the Minister for Climate Change’s statement, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language made a statement on the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan. The statement outlined a range of measures that would be consulted on, including:

- support for community-led co-operative and social enterprises, and community-owned social businesses in the tourism sector;
- establishing an Estate Agent Steering Group to consider possible projects and research;
- establishing a voluntary “fair chance” scheme where properties are available to local people only for a limited time; and
- establishing a Commission on Welsh language communities to better understand the challenges facing Welsh-speaking communities.

2.3. Housing supply

The Minister for Climate Change issued a written statement on social housing in on 15 June 2021. The Minister noted that the 20,000 target in the Programme for Government was for affordable social homes for rent. However, the Minister also said “I believe in truly sustainable communities and to achieve this we must ensure communities are mixed tenure.”

Welsh Government housing supply statistics provide a range of estimates for the number of additional affordable and market homes needed each year in Wales.

3. Welsh Parliament action

In March 2021, the Senedd debated a petition that sought to give local authorities powers to control the housing market in rural and coastal areas of Wales.

On 16 June 2021, the newly elected Senedd debated a motion in the name of Sian Gwenllian that called “...on the Welsh Government to act immediately to address the housing crisis.” The motion was agreed by the Senedd without amendments.

The Senedd’s Local Government and Housing Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into second homes and has issued a call for evidence.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.