

Community Housing Cymru



About CHC and HAs

Community Housing Cymru is the voice of housing associations in Wales. We represent and support 36 housing associations in Wales. Our members provide almost 165,000 homes to 10% of the Welsh population.

Sector engagement with Welsh government

As reports began to emerge regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Community Housing Cymru contacted the Home Office and Welsh government to offer sector engagement in providing homes for refugees.

Welsh government officials responded quickly, meeting with senior Housing associations leaders to brief them and engage them in scoping a wide range of housing options. Housing associations across Wales acted swiftly to nominate representatives to take part in Welsh government working groups. These groups designed the approach to ensuring that the homes offered to refugees from Ukraine were of sufficiently high quality and explored innovative solutions to increasing housing stock.

Existing challenges

During their initial briefing with housing association leaders, Welsh government officials acknowledged the huge challenges that the sector is already seeking to address. These challenges include:

- ongoing work to find homes for people that are currently in temporary accommodation in Wales;
- resettlement of refugees from Afghanistan that arrived in Wales last year; and
- the impact of the cost of living crisis and supply chain disruption on housing development.

The challenges in finding homes for people from Ukraine remain acute, but housing associations have shown that they can act quickly and with tenacity to find solutions and that they are committed to supporting Wales' approach as a Nation of Sanctuary.

Housing association involvement

This is not an exhaustive list of HA involvement in providing homes to people from Ukraine. It is an overview of the work that CHC is aware of at this time and is designed to give an indication of the type of support that housing associations have provided. As this work is still ongoing, CHC has not yet undertaken research to determine the full scale of the support provided. CHC would be happy to inform any further work by the Committee in future to understand the way in which housing has been provided to refugees, and how this is included within an overall strategy to tackle the housing crisis.

Increasing the supply of available housing

In order to help to provide housing for people travelling from Ukraine, housing associations mobilised to bring stock up to standard quickly and find innovative ways to develop new housing options. This has included re-development and conversion of properties to provide greater capacity, for example through loft extensions.

They have been supported in this by the Welsh government's Transitional Accommodation Capital Fund. This fund was launched at the end of April 2022 and is designed to provide funding to support the increase



of housing capacity, seeking through refurbishment or remodelling of void properties to support demands. The grant is conditional upon the property being used to support the movement of people from temporary accommodation and deliver Ukraine response.

Support for the development and delivery of the National Hosting Scheme

Housing associations also took part in Welsh government working groups which informed the approach taken in Wales to the National Hosting Scheme. It should be noted that this scheme in Wales, along with much of the work to welcome refugees from Ukraine in Wales, has been affected by the overall approach taken by the UK government. Now that the hosting scheme is in operation, Welsh government has worked with CHC to coordinate assistance from housing associations in Wales to support local authorities in specific areas in its delivery, for example through support for property checks for potential hosts.

Welcome Centres

In some cases, housing associations have been directly involved in the management of Welcome Centres. CHC is working with a housing association in North Wales to put together a case study, which will be submitted as Appendix A to this response.

We understand that one of the most acute challenges at this stage is to support people to match successfully and secure move on accommodation from the Welcome Centres. Housing associations have taken part in early discussions about increasing staff capacity at Centres in order to help match people from Ukraine to potential hosts.

Strategic priorities

It would be very valuable for Welsh government to ensure that learning from the challenges and innovations that have been identified during the current crisis is taken into account within their overarching strategy for ending homelessness and for increasing the supply of social housing.

It is critical that we explore the full range of options for increasing the supply of high quality, safe and affordable homes that are available to people in Wales, and to those seeking sanctuary. The Transitional Accommodation Capital Fund is a pragmatic response to the challenges we face. However, the approaches it develops may have wider applicability given ongoing pressures on temporary accommodation. Thought should be given to mainstreaming this approach to maximise the use of existing housing.

In such a fast moving and complex situation coordination and clarity is key. This is especially important for partners, such as housing associations who may be at the periphery of discussions. We have been grateful for the Welsh Government's willingness to engage with the sector and would encourage clear coordination and communication mechanisms throughout implementation.

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