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Consultation on homelessness – Autumn 2022

Ymateb gan: Cyfiawnder Tai Cymru

Response from: Housing Justice Cymru

Briefing for the Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee

Subject: Rapid Rehousing and the Citadel Model

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### **Context: The role and involvement of Housing Justice Cymru**

[Housing Justice Cymru](#) is a national homelessness and housing need charity, working across England and Wales, with a vision of a society where everyone has access to a home that truly meets their needs. In Wales we run projects which help to end homelessness at an individual level by working with those in crisis and at a local and national level by increasing the supply of truly affordable homes. Our main three workstreams are:

**Citadel: A Rapid Rehousing Model:** A successful, volunteer-led, rapid rehousing and tenancy sustainment project, which uses trained volunteers to support people experiencing homelessness to find and sustain a home. Citadel is a homelessness prevention project, utilizing time, generosity, and commitment of volunteers, to support people at risk of experiencing homelessness, to find and/or sustain tenancies through building resilience, confidence, and positive social connections.

### **Background and Success: Citadel in Wales**

Citadel was launched as a response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and subsequent “Everyone In” Policy. The project was presented as an example of best practice at an online National conference for all Local Authorities, hosted by the Minister for Climate Change. Citadel is currently operating in Swansea, Neath Port-Talbot, and Wrexham where extensive development and resultant success has been achieved. The project emphasises that whilst it is vital to move everyone on from temporary accommodation, sustainment of tenancies is pivotal in combating homelessness across Wales. Housing Justice Cymru have identified that for individuals to sustain their tenancies, it is essential their house is made a home, providing safety and security, enabling them to flourish.

An example of the emphatic success the project has already achieved is in Swansea. Since October 2020, thirty-seven individuals have been referred to the project through rapid rehousing. Of these thirty-seven, thirty-three have sustained their tenancy for more than six months (twenty has sustained tenancies for more than twelve months, the remainder have not been in their tenancies for 12 months). Service engagement rates and tenancy sustainment rates have traditionally proved to be a challenge across Wales; however, the Citadel model has consistently demonstrated high engagement and tenancy sustainment rates. The rate of success of tenancy sustainment is a result of the careful considerations when matching volunteers with a supported individual. The matching process allows volunteers and the people they support to develop a supportive relationship, guiding

them in the process of finding a tenancy and turning it into a home. Alongside the initial phases of acquiring a tenancy, the volunteer provides prolonged assistance and direction in aspects such as setting up bill payments, changing address with necessary organisations and services, and registering with a GP. The developed positive relationship between the volunteer and the person they support aids in building confidence and promotes positive social cohesion. The extremely positive outcomes are driven by just one paid worker (Citadel Co-ordinator), resulting in a cheaper and potentially more effective service.

The Citadel Project is highly effective due to the nature of the support provided through volunteers, dedicating their time to support people experiencing homelessness. This has proved to be invaluable. In September 2021, Housing Justice Cymru commissioned an independent academic evaluator from Cardiff Metropolitan University to gather information from both individuals supported by Citadel and volunteers who support the project about if and how the Citadel programme helps people stay in their homes.

The key findings:

- People supported all highlighted the impact of the practical support they received. The support given around navigating housing search processes and being signposted to different organisations or properties available was highly valued. Individuals highlighted being able to get furniture from affordable organisations or having support for looking for appropriate furniture.
- All people supported spoke very positively about the social and emotional support they received from the Citadel volunteers. The key element here was that it was an authentic social relationship that did not just focus on providing time-limited support but encompassed broader elements such as mutual hobbies.
- Individuals supported welcomed the opportunity to meet others who were receiving support, particularly those who were further along in their rehousing journey. They found it useful to meet individuals who had experienced similar issues and had now put these behind them.
- Those supported were positive around the volunteer-led nature of the project. They highlighted that they felt that the volunteers were giving up their time for them as individuals, and this helped with the authenticity of the relationship.
- Volunteers asserted that having support enabled individuals to grow in confidence around sorting out issues related to their housing. This allowed individuals to more easily navigate processes and address problems that might have felt impossible previously.
- A key impact of the support as highlighted by volunteers was that individuals were able or encouraged to feel that they had value and were important, something that they might have lacked previously. This was linked to the volunteer-led nature of the project; that the supporters were giving up their time to build a relationship with individuals being supported.

The key link between all these elements of support was that the people supported did not feel alone. They had people to support them in their rehousing journey who they could call on for support. The support outlined here combatted feelings of loneliness and isolation which often linked to feelings of not being able to cope alone with changes that individuals were experiencing.

**Key Considerations - Implementing Ending Homelessness in Wales: A High Level Action Plan 2021-2026**

***“True prevention requires a holistic response from Government” – Strategy For Preventing and Ending Homelessness (Oct, 2019, [Homelessness strategy \(gov.wales\)](#))***

***“Unrepeated’ – Ensuring we have a system which places the right people in the right homes in the right communities with the right support, in order for people to succeed and thrive.” – Ending Homelessness in Wales: A High Level Action Plane 2021-2026 (2021, [Ending homelessness in Wales: a high level action plan 2021 to 2026 \(gov.wales\)](#))***

Welsh Governments vision is to ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and unrepeated. Welsh Government asked Local Authorities to develop rapid rehousing plans utilizing communities and volunteers, and states “the benefits of secure, settled, and self-contained housing for people who have experienced or been at risk of homelessness should not be underestimated.” The Citadel model not only ensures this, but it also helps ensure tenancies are sustained (whether they are newly acquired or existing), to progress towards the vision of homelessness being unrepeated. People who have experienced homelessness need support accessing white goods, carpets, and furniture to enable them to create a house that is a home. Rapid rehousing is based upon a systemic approach to understanding what housing is needed. Through the supportive process of identifying potential homes for the people supported through Citadel, individuals can locate and develop houses, appropriate for them where they can build to flourish and thrive.

The High-Level Action plan also states that “we must harness both the third sector and unpaid volunteers who provide services that support and help tenants build confidence and a connection with the community.” Citadel is a project, utilising good faith and compassion of a volunteer network to provide this, and has already proved to be invaluable and a pivotal force in tenancy acquisition and sustainment. Although there several organisations tackling the issue of homelessness, there are very few volunteer-led projects across Wales that work directly with people who are experiencing homelessness. Research by Johns Hopkins University provides a useful framework to help improve understanding of the voluntary sector’s different contributions to society. The research states that; “The involvement of service users and volunteers in the design and delivery of services is frequently highlighted as contributing to high quality outcomes” and voluntary organisations encourage social interactions and therefore foster feelings of belonging, trust, and reciprocity.

Due to capacity and the high demand for support for people experiencing homelessness, paid staff members of organisations often have time-limited support in which they can offer, often leaving individuals isolated transitioning into the initial phases of their newly acquired tenancy. Citadel, however, focuses on holistic support, tailored to the needs of the individual, for a period that is not restricted. Volunteers support the individual they are matched to until confidence in managing their tenancy, home, and social connections has been built. The individuals supported feel they are given support and direction throughout and after acquiring their tenancies, leading to a high success rate of tenancy sustainment. This is a fundamental stage as people supported know they have someone to talk to, ask for guidance and support, and build confidence connecting with the community.

Citadel utilises a strength-based approach. The approach looks at each individual as someone with power and the ability to change their own circumstances recognising that every person has strengths and abilities and looks to see how those skills can be enhanced. Citadel is about helping a person to become the best version of themselves possible through the consistent support of one key volunteer, rather than different paid employees.

The Citadel model ensures safety for volunteers and people supported. A key requirement is a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check for each volunteer and a risk assessment for each person

supported. People experiencing homelessness can often present with elements of trauma, adverse childhood experiences, and mental health and wellbeing issues resulting in some possible vulnerabilities. Ensuring DBS checks, risk assessments, and carefully considered volunteer to supported individual matching, minimises the risk of relationships breaking down, safeguarding incidents and concerns, and reduces overall risk.

#### **Potential Areas for Scrutiny: Local Authorities responses to High Level Action Plans 2021-2026**

- While we need to provide housing at pace to accommodate people experiencing homelessness, we need to ensure we maintain the element of personal choice expressed as “paramount importance” in both Housing First and Rapid Rehousing. Therefore, what measures have Local Authorities taken to ensure personal choice of how and where people are accommodated is considered?
- It is vital for Local Authorities to work with existing, frontline organisations and volunteers to address homelessness. Can they demonstrate how they are using the experience and resources of volunteers to enhance their response to ending homeless in Wales?
- There is significant pressure in Wales to move people on from temporary accommodation. Services are using a variety of models to accommodate people experiencing (or at risk of) homelessness across Wales. In some areas there are multiple different models of rapid rehousing commissioned by the Local Authority. How do Welsh Government and Local Government know which are the most effective? How is data collated to provide evidence of the success of different models, and how is this utilised to inform commissioning of services?
- What is the mechanism of identifying best practice among homelessness services? How are Local Authorities ensuring this is considered when deciding what services to commission? How are Local Authorities ensuring that best practice is embedded in the services they commission?