

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cyllid](#) ar [Cyllideb Ddrafft Llywodraeth Cymru 2024-25](#).

This response was submitted to the [Finance Committee](#) consultation on the [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25](#).

WGDB\_24-25 36: Ymateb gan: unigolyn (Saesneg yn unig) | Response from: An Individual (English Only)

"(Respondent has asked that their contact details are not published. Identifying details including names, dates and locations have therefore been redacted from the published version of this response)"

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# Senedd Finance Committee consultation: Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25

## Introduction

- I am responding in a personal capacity to the consultation on the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25 but have experience of working and volunteering in advice and housing services, which has informed this response.
- I am focusing on housing and support for people at risk of homelessness because I have seen how homelessness affects all the other areas of people's lives. A good quality home is primarily the foundation for people's wellbeing. However, unaffordability and unavailability of a home has a negative impact on wellbeing and affects people's ability to access other support that is available. In the last 8 years, I have directly provided housing advice to people experiencing homelessness, eviction, sofa surfing and losing their homes because they are unable to afford to rent privately. The cost-of-living crisis has increased the numbers in the last 3 years as families and individuals are increasingly having to choose between eating, heating, and paying rent.
- I am aware that too many people are experiencing homelessness and struggling to find an affordable, decent quality home. According to the most recent Welsh Government [statistics](#), over 11,000 people are in temporary accommodation and 167 people are sleeping rough.
- The Welsh Government budget needs to address this issue and put more investment into reducing homelessness and ensuring people in Wales can access a home and other support that comes with social housing.

## Social Housing

- We do not have enough social housing in Wales. Tens of thousands of people are on social housing waiting lists and we need to improve the supply of social housing.
- The cost of building has increased over the last few years and it is vital that the appropriate level of funding is made available to cover these costs and deliver the social housing that people need.
- I, alongside others within the housing sector, welcome the record investment in social housing grant over the last two years but it is important this is sustained into 2024/25 at the levels in the indicative [budget](#) last year in order to build much needed social homes.

## Temporary accommodation

- Currently there are [over 11,000](#) people in temporary accommodation much of which is unsuitable. Some local councils have seen almost a 4,000% increase in the cost of providing temporary accommodation from 4 years ago.
- There is need to improve the quality of temporary accommodation and move people more quickly into long term homes.
- Most people experiencing homelessness are vulnerable people, including people with particular health or support needs that cannot be catered in temporary accommodation. I have experience of advising and supporting people in this situation and include some examples below.
- Most temporary accommodation is not adapted or adaptable. People with health conditions such as arthritis or scoliosis needing lower toilets or grip bars have to resort to constantly using sanitary pads because they cannot use the facilities available. I had a client who had a terminal disease and had to adhere to a restricted diet. This client was made homeless and the

temporary accommodation was not fit for purpose because he needed to have special cooked meals. His situation was also very scary for his wife because she did not want her husband dying and spending his last days in a strange hotel.

- Pets are not allowed in temporary accommodation. This further affects the mental health of their owners as these pets are usually the one constant thing they still have available. An elderly woman who refused temporary accommodation and preferred to sleep in a tent in the fields during winter so she could keep her dogs with her.
- The Welsh Government's recently published White Paper outlines plans to improve temporary accommodation but it needs investment and adequate budgetary allocation.
- The Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme was introduced in 2022 to support local authorities and Registered Social Landlords with £76.4million to bring forward 936 more homes to help move people from temporary accommodation into longer term homes where they can settle.
- It has been [extended](#) to 2023/24 and is an important funding stream to enable homes to be made available more quickly, while we wait for longer term social housing to be built. This has included bringing long terms voids back into use, refurbishment to change the use or quality of properties, and acquisitions of properties.
- It is necessary that The Welsh Government should continue to provide funding for this scheme in 2024/25.

### **Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS 2023)**

- The Welsh Government has recently [published](#) its new Welsh Housing Quality Standards, which aim to continue to drive up and maintain the quality of social housing in Wales and help to decarbonise social homes in Wales.
- It is important for keeping people warm and reduce energy bills, particularly for people on low incomes as it makes a difference too their overheads. The number of people accessing energy vouchers or who constantly have to choose between eating food and heating their homes has been on the rise as the cost of energy increases
- The Welsh Government therefore needs to ensure appropriate funding for housing associations in order to enable them to deliver the new standards.

### **Housing Support Grant**

- It is one thing putting a roof over someone's head, but lots of people need support.
- This support helps to prevent reoccurring homelessness by providing support to prevent risk of evictions. I would like to see fewer people being evicted – but landlords need support services to be readily available to support people to overcome their challenges
- More supported accommodation to help people out of homelessness is desperately needed. Even where we have less people being homeless, the ability to retain / remain in these homes will depend on varying needs and the availability of this support.
- For example, Post COVID Wales is facing an unprecedented rise in people having mental health issues and substance use problems and a general decline in physical health.
- The recent [report](#) by Cymorth Cymru shows:
  - Increased demand for homelessness services and greater complexity of support needs means that the support services are being stretched thin
  - No increase in the Housing Support Grant this year has led to reduced service capacity.
  - No increase next year will lead to organisations reducing capacity further, handing back contracts, and not bidding for new contracts.
  - Staff pay is poor compared to huge workload and complexity of work.

- It is therefore vitally important that the Housing Support Grant is increased next year so that services can meet people's support needs and continue to prevent and alleviate homelessness.

### **Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF)**

- The DAF makes the difference between a house and home for most people within the welfare system who cannot get credit or afford white goods and essential furnishing.
- It enables people get essential items without incurring more debts.
- It pays for critical things like ovens and is particularly important for families with children as they are able to eat well and live healthy lives with the commodities provided for through DAF.

### **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude by stating that it is obvious that the housing sector is facing a crisis which the Welsh Government is aware of. The steps being taken to address and solve the arising issues (e.g. the Climate Change Minister's White paper on Ending Homelessness) is also acknowledged.

It is necessary that to support this laudable initiative of the government, the required resources and finances are allocated (either increased or maintained per the 3 year budget plan) to show the Welsh Government's true commitment to make a difference in the housing sector.

I am requesting that the Housing Support Grant is increased so that we do not lose the momentum we have gained so far and finally break the cycle of homelessness. Also, that more investment is made in the Social Housing Grant to enable the Registered Social Landlords to build more houses in line with the WHQS 2023. This would ensure a quicker transition from temporary accommodation to affordable social housing and reduce the cost of providing temporary accommodation.

Finally, more funding of the DAF will enable more people have access to high-cost living essentials.