

WHQ

WELSH HOUSING QUARTERLY

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INSIDE

INTERVIEW with Wales' new Housing Minister
PLUS Election reaction

How tenants are finding their voice

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MORE HOUSING AND
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EDITORIAL



Welcome to the future

Welcome to my first issue of WHQ - it's been a joyous learning curve to get to grips with what's going on in Welsh housing. Our readers will not need telling that it's a lot, from the seismic election of a Plaid government in Wales, to the passing of groundbreaking homelessness legislation.

Inevitably, this issue takes a good look at what happened and what comes next. A swathe of organisations tell us about their hopes and fears for the new administration (p.12-14), while Amy Bainton writes on what enshrining the right to adequate housing into legislation means for Wales (p.24). Tazu Walden offers a fascinating look

at how rent controls, one of Plaid's key election pledges, can look and what has worked elsewhere (p.18-19). And we talk directly to the new housing minister, Sian Gwenllian (p.20-23), while she also offers her own introductory remarks to the sector (p.17).

Even the UK-wide picture is changing, with Andy Burnham looking likely to be the next prime minister sooner rather than later. But, while the winds of change are in the air, the Welsh housing sector is, as ever, busy getting on with the business of making sure the people of Wales have somewhere decent to live.

In this issue, we're also taking a special look at the environment and

how the challenges of protecting it put more pressure on the race to deliver more homes, from Wendy Dearden on decarbonisation (p.40-41) to Hayley Eastment on the problem of marine nitrates (p.34-37) and Justin Griffiths on the need for sustainable drainage (p.43-44), and more.

Alongside all the regular content, from thoughts from our sponsors to our regular update sections, we've introduced a new column on the Homeless Act, so we can keep you all up to date on the implementation of this hugely important legislation (p.47).

SALLY HALES *Editor, WHQ*



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WELSH HOUSING: READY TO DELIVER

WHQ's new editor, **Sally Hales**, shares her first impression and thoughts on the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru's conference in April and the challenges facing the sector that it highlights



As WHQ's new editor and diving straight into the intricacies of this sector, it was clear that this year's TAI conference was defined by the forthcoming May Senedd election.

The sector was acutely aware that Welsh politics was facing a new dawn, with the race to form the next government seemingly neck-and-neck between Plaid and Reform.

Fittingly, the day one keynote, "The Senedd Election – What Will the Outcome Mean for Housing?", set the tone. Will Hayward, a journalist well known for his tenacious approach to holding Welsh politicians to account, delivered a breakneck deep dive into election prospects. His analysis was a welcome reality check, particularly his critique of manifesto commitments – pointing out that Plaid's manifesto pledges were uncoded. Haywood also highlighted that, regardless of the victor, the expanded 96 Senedd members would be navigating new roles, many without previous political experience.

"WAIT-AND-SEE" APPROACH

Yet, having since spoken with the new housing minister, Sian Gwenllian,

there is reason for cautious optimism. The initial "wait-and-see" approach seems a pragmatic understanding that while the rhetoric around housing – tackling homelessness, supply, and affordability – remains consistent, the implementation pathway needs to be written in collaboration with those on the ground. Plaid's housing plans seemed to be broadly welcomed, provided they are matched by necessary resources, political clarity and, importantly, realism.

What became strikingly clear to me as a newcomer to TAI is that while Wales boasts groundbreaking and much-welcomed legislation, the sheer volume of it places a huge burden on an

undervalued and underfunded workforce. This was evident in the deep dive sessions, ranging from the implementation of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2 (WHQS 2) to the complex requirements of the new Building Safety (Wales) Bill. The latter, in particular, marks a major shift in how multi-occupied residential buildings are managed, demanding a skilled, prepared workforce to handle new fire and structural risk assessments.

Add to that the Homelessness Act, tackled in the Homeless Gearing Up for New Homelessness Legislation, the implementation of which will be a huge task.

RESILIENT HOPE

But my key takeaway from TAI is one of resilient hope. Whether through the focus on worker welfare to attracting brilliant young talent, as highlighted by the CIH Rising Stars award – won by the wonderful Katie (see our Q&A with her on page 25), the sector is more unified, supportive and committed than any other I have encountered.

There is a clear appetite to make things better for everyone in Wales. The sector is ready to deliver.



POLICY UPDATE

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE UK

ENGLAND & WALES

Benefits and children cannot be grounds for rejecting tenants under new rules

From 1 June, landlords and letting agents in England and Wales can no longer refuse prospective tenants because they receive benefits or have children, with blanket “No DSS” and “No Children” policies made unlawful under the Renters’ Rights Act.

The anti-discrimination measures have been added as fundamental terms in most occupation contracts, requiring landlords to provide updated written statements to contract holders.

Guidance says landlords must not prevent tenants from claiming benefits or restrict children living in or visiting a property unless there is a legitimate and proportionate reason. Updated contract variations were required by 14 June.

Rough sleeping and begging decriminalised after repeal of Vagrancy Act

Rough sleeping and begging have been decriminalised in England and Wales following the repeal of the 202-year-old Vagrancy Act, which campaigners said had unfairly criminalised homelessness.

Ministers said existing powers would remain to tackle antisocial behaviour, while new offences would target organised begging and people exploiting vulnerable individuals.

Housing secretary Steve Reed said: “Homeless people are not criminals, they are people who need help.”

Matt Downie, chief executive of Crisis, described the repeal as a “watershed

moment”, marking “the end of a deeply cruel policy of criminalising people because they are homeless”.

ENGLAND

Councils gain powers to fine landlords £7,000 for unsafe homes

Councils in England can now fine landlords up to £7,000 for failing to fix serious hazards including damp, mould, dangerous electrics and fire risks.

The penalties, introduced through the Renters’ Rights Act and coming into force on 22 June, apply to the most serious category of the 21 hazards covered by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

The government said the measure would speed up repairs alongside existing enforcement powers, including requiring landlords to carry out works. Housing secretary Steve Reed urged councils to use the new powers to protect tenants from unsafe homes.

Ben Twomey, chief executive of Generation Rent, said: “Homes are the foundations of our lives, and no renter should have to live alongside mould, dampness and other risks to our health.”

He said the fines were “an essential step” towards improving standards in the private rented sector but warned councils needed to identify and act against landlords ignoring unsafe conditions.

Right to Buy reforms aim to protect social housing stock

The government has unveiled reforms to England’s Right to Buy scheme aimed at protecting the supply of social housing.

Under proposals in the Social Housing Bill, tenants would need to have lived in their home for 10 years before becoming eligible to buy, up from the current three-year qualifying period.

Newly built social homes would be protected from Right to Buy for 35 years, while hard-to-replace rural properties

would be exempt.

Councils would also gain stronger powers to buy back former council homes, with ministers saying the changes would help preserve affordable housing and reduce pressure on waiting lists.

SCOTLAND

Scotland consults on higher council tax for homes worth more than £1m

The Scottish government has launched a consultation on proposals to introduce two new council tax bands for homes valued at more than £1m.

Ministers said the changes would make council tax fairer by requiring owners of higher-value properties to contribute more towards local services.

Under the proposals, homes worth more than £2m could face an annual council tax increase of about £3,600, while properties valued between £1m and £2m could see bills rise by around £720.

The Scottish government estimates the new bands would affect about 15,000 properties, around 1% of the country’s housing stock.

The consultation forms part of wider plans to reform local taxation and increase funding for councils. Critics have warned the changes could affect the housing market and increase costs for homeowners.

NORTHERN IRELAND

New rules proposed to recover homes lost to tenancy fraud

Northern Ireland’s communities minister, Gordon Lyons, has launched a consultation on stronger powers to tackle tenancy fraud in the social housing sector.

The 14-week consultation includes proposals for new investigative powers, improved data sharing between public



bodies and stronger action to recover homes that are unlawfully occupied or illegally sublet.

The Department for Communities estimates tenancy fraud costs almost £10m a year, with 1,437 social homes recovered through investigations between 2020 and 2025.

Lyons said the reforms would help ensure scarce social housing was protected for those who needed it most.

The consultation comes as housing providers face increasing pressure to make the best use of limited social housing stock amid high demand.

Consultation opens on Warm Healthy Homes Fund

Northern Ireland has launched a consultation on plans for a new Warm Healthy Homes Fund aimed at improving the energy efficiency, warmth and health of homes across the country.

Opened by the Department for Communities on 27 May, the consultation seeks views on proposals for a dedicated fund to support energy efficiency upgrades, tackle fuel poverty and improve housing conditions for vulnerable households.

The proposed scheme would help finance measures such as better insulation and heating improvements, with the aim of creating warmer, healthier homes while reducing energy costs for residents.

The consultation marks one of the most significant housing policy developments in Northern Ireland this year, bringing together objectives on housing quality, public health and decarbonisation under a single programme.

If introduced, the fund could play a key role in improving the condition of existing homes and supporting the transition to lower-carbon housing, while helping households struggling with high energy bills.

The Department for Communities is inviting responses from housing providers, local authorities, charities, industry bodies and residents before finalising the proposals. The outcome of the consultation will help shape the design of the fund and determine how future investment is targeted to maximise benefits for households most in need.

WELSH GOVERNMENT

Wales enshrines legal right to adequate housing as minister unveils housing agenda

The Welsh government has set out plans to make access to a safe, warm and affordable home a legal right as part of a wider package of housing reforms.

Minister for local government, housing and planning Siân Gwenllïan said legislation would be introduced to establish a Right to Adequate Housing in Welsh law, a move welcomed by campaign groups including Cymdeithas yr Iaith and the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru.



The proposals aim to tackle homelessness, improve affordability and strengthen protections for renters. Gwenllïan said a shortage of homes was at the heart of Wales's housing pressures, driving rising rents and leaving many families in unsuitable accommodation.

The government also confirmed the creation of Unnos, an arm's-length development body designed to accelerate social housing delivery through land assembly, faster planning processes and stronger supply chains.

Ministers reiterated their commitment to delivering 20,000 new social homes by 2030, with Gwenllïan saying they would be "high-quality and energy-efficient".

Other measures include plans for rent controls, a Community Right to Buy, new measures on fair rents and a Town Centre Taskforce to support housing development.

The government will also review the Warm Homes Programme to address fuel poverty and examine the impact of second homes and short-term lets on communities. Gwenllïan said the reforms aimed to create "a fairer Wales where everyone has security, opportunity, and a roof above their heads".

Wales sets out building safety reforms to protect leaseholders

The Welsh government has launched a consultation on implementing the Building Safety (Wales) Act 2026, setting out proposals for the next stage of the country's building safety regime.

The consultation covers protections for leaseholders from historic building safety costs, a new tribunal process for remediation and contribution orders, and a standard approach to measuring the height of regulated buildings.

Housing minister Siân Gwenllïan said the government was committed to ensuring leaseholders did not pay for safety failures they did not cause.

"No leaseholder in Wales should pay for building safety failures they did not cause," she said.

The consultation follows the passage of the legislation, which ministers said would introduce stronger protections for residents following the lessons of the Grenfell Tower fire.

First minister Rhun ap Iorwerth said the government was moving quickly to deliver protections for Welsh leaseholders.

The consultation is open until 7 September

Wales announces £20m boost for social housing supply

The Welsh government has announced an additional £20m investment to increase the supply of social housing and help move people from temporary accommodation into permanent homes.

The funding, announced through the government's supplementary budget, will be allocated to the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme, subject to Senedd approval.

The programme supports projects including buying existing properties, converting buildings and bringing empty homes back into use.

Housing minister Siân Gwenllïan said the investment would help more people move into "safe, stable homes" more quickly.

"Everyone in Wales deserves a safe, stable home," she said.

The funding was welcomed by homelessness charity Crisis Cymru. Debbie Thomas, head of policy in Wales, said thousands of people were

experiencing homelessness and that increasing the supply of genuinely affordable homes was essential.

The investment forms part of the Welsh government's ambition to deliver 20,000 new social homes by 2030.

Wales issues updated guidance on rental contract changes

The Welsh government has published updated guidance for landlords, letting agents and housing advisers following changes to standard occupation contracts under the Renting Homes framework.

The guidance explains technical amendments introduced through the Renting Homes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Wales) Regulations 2026 and provides advice on implementing changes to existing agreements.

Officials said the update was intended to improve understanding of legal requirements and help landlords comply with their obligations.

The guidance includes information on contract requirements, tenant notices and administrative changes affecting rental agreements.

Housing providers have been urged to review the updated requirements to ensure their procedures remain compliant.

Welsh housing associations face tougher financial reporting rules

The Welsh government has introduced updated financial and governance requirements for registered social landlords, aimed at strengthening transparency and resilience across the housing association sector.

The revised Accounting Requirements for Registered Social Landlords General Determination (Wales) 2026 introduces stricter rules on financial reporting, corporate governance, annual accounts and regulatory compliance.

The government said the changes would improve oversight of public funding and rental income while helping identify potential risks earlier.

Housing associations, boards and auditors have been urged to review their procedures to ensure they meet the new requirements before the next regulatory cycle.

WALES

New-build completions rise sharply as Cardiff development lifts figures

New-build housing completions in Wales reached their highest quarterly level in eight years at the end of 2025, according to official figures.

A total of 1,811 homes were completed between October and December, a 42% increase on the same period a year earlier and the highest quarterly figure since 2017.

The rise was largely driven by a major apartment development in Cardiff, which contributed significantly to the increase.

The figures come as the Welsh government continues to focus on increasing housing supply, including its target to deliver 20,000 social homes by 2030.

Housing organisations said Wales still faced significant pressure to deliver more affordable and social housing as demand continued to outstrip supply.

More housebuilding in Wales could unlock £650m for public services, report says

Increasing the supply of private housing in Wales could unlock hundreds of millions of pounds for communities, create thousands of jobs and help deliver more affordable homes, according to a new report.

The report, The Social and Economic Impact of Home Building in Wales, from the Home Builders Federation, comes as the Welsh government commits to ensuring everyone has "the right to a safe home at a cost they can afford".

While ministers have set a target of delivering 20,000 new social homes by 2030, the HBF said Wales also needs an additional 23,000 market homes during the current Senedd term to meet housing demand.

The report estimates that delivering those homes could generate £200m of private investment in affordable housing through Section 106 agreements, provide around 3,700 school places, fund £21m of community facilities and generate about £650m in additional tax revenue.

The HBF said private developments currently deliver around a third of

affordable homes in Wales through Section 106 agreements, meaning a slowdown in market housing could reduce the supply of lower-cost homes.

The housebuilding sector currently supports around 17,500 jobs across construction and supply chains and contributes £1.1bn in economic output each year. The additional 23,000 homes could create a further 12,000 jobs, according to the report.

Neil Jefferson, chief executive of the Home Builders Federation, said the benefits of housebuilding extended beyond increasing supply.

"Home building creates jobs, supports local businesses, delivers vital community infrastructure, generates significant tax revenues and helps provide the affordable homes that Wales needs," he said.

The HBF said increasing new-build supply could also support climate goals, with around 90% of new homes achieving EPC A or B ratings and producing significantly lower carbon emissions than older properties.

First self-delivery housing scheme completed in Carmarthenshire

A housing association has completed its first self-delivery development, delivering 47 affordable homes in Carmarthenshire as demand for lower-cost housing continues to grow.

The Beacon Cymru has completed its first self-delivery development delivering 47 affordable homes in the Carmarthenshire village of Lannon. The mix of two, three and four-bedroom houses, alongside bungalows has been built to Welsh Government standards and achieves the highest EPC A energy rating. The development was supported by Welsh Government Social Housing Grant funding.

The housing association said its



self-delivery approach provided greater control over design, quality and programme management, while allowing it to maximise the involvement of local contractors and suppliers.

Rhianydd Jenkins, executive director of development and growth at Beacon, said the project represented a major milestone for the organisation.

"Delivering our first self-managed development demonstrates the strengths of this approach and our commitment to high-quality, affordable homes," she said.

Beacon said the experience would help shape future developments as it continues to increase affordable housing delivery across Wales.

Welsh council homes lead Britain on solar rollout, new figures show

Council homes in Wales are being fitted with solar panels at a faster rate than anywhere else in Britain, with new figures highlighting the sector's growing role in the transition to low-carbon housing.

Research based on Freedom of

Information requests to local authorities found that 10% of council homes in Wales now have rooftop solar panels, up from 8.4% a year ago. The figure is higher than in Scotland (8.6%) and almost double the rate in England, where 5.1% of council homes have solar installations.

The data, compiled by energy company Gryd, found that 112,865 council homes across the UK now have solar panels, representing 5.8% of the national council housing stock. In Wales and Scotland, council housing has overtaken the private sector for solar uptake, bucking the wider UK trend.

North West Wales recorded the highest proportion of council homes with solar panels anywhere in Britain, with 33.8% of properties equipped with rooftop systems. North East Wales followed with 21.7%.

Southern Wales saw one of the sharpest year-on-year improvements, rising from just 0.3% of council homes fitted with solar panels to 8.1%. However, South East Wales and South West Wales continue to lag behind, with installation rates of 2.8% and 2.9% respectively.

In total, Welsh councils installed solar panels on 1,520 homes over the past year, bringing the national total to 6,309. While England completed far more installations in absolute terms because of its much larger housing stock, Wales remains the UK leader proportionally.

Mohamed Gaafar, Gryd's chief executive and co-founder, said upcoming investment through the Warm Homes Fund could enable councils to move even further ahead of the private market. However, he warned that reliance on government funding cycles created inconsistent progress and argued that greater use of private investment could accelerate deployment.

The findings come as the housing sector awaits changes to solar policy. Industry bodies have warned that proposed fire safety guidance could make rooftop solar more difficult to install on smaller and terraced homes, while the UK government has launched a call for evidence aimed at tackling the lower uptake of solar panels on flats.

10 PUBLICATIONS TO LOOK OUT FOR

1 What you need to know about the Building Safety (Wales) Act 2026

Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, 2026

<https://www.cih.org/publications/wyntk-about-the-building-safety-wales-act-2026/>

2 Social and public housing in the EU and UK: Wales

UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, July 2026

housingevidence.ac.uk/project/social-and-public-housing-in-the-eu-and-uk-wales

3 The Social and Economic Impact of Home Building in Wales

Home Builders Federation Wales, June 2026

<https://thinkhouse.org.uk/site/assets/files/3405/hbf0626.pdf>

4 Affordable Housing Review

UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, July 2026

housingevidence.ac.uk/project/affordable-housing-review

5 Housing Conditions in the Private Rented Sector

Parliamentary Committee Publication (Document 300931), UK Parliament, July 2026

committees.parliament.uk/publications/53987/documents/300931/default

6 A Place to Thrive: Creating Healthier Homes for Children and Families in Wales

Public Health Wales WHO Collaborating Centre,

April 2026

<https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/A-Place-to-Thrive.pdf>

7 Quick Wins: Building More Homes in the Communities that Need Them

Fabian Research, July 2026

<https://thinkhouse.org.uk/site/assets/files/3419/fab0726.pdf>

8 Out of area, out of mind: how thousands of homeless households went missing in the system

Inside Housing, 2026

insidehousing.co.uk/insight/out-of-area-out-of-mind-how-thousands-of-homeless-households-went-missing-in-the-system-97683

9 High housing costs in the PRS

Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), May 2026

ippr-org.files.svdcn.com/production/Downloads/High-housing_costs_in_the_PRS_May26.pdf

10 More than Bricks: Stories of Home

Shelter, July 2026

thinkhouse.org.uk/site/assets/files/3423/shelb0726.pdf

Time to deliver

Plaid Cymru's win in the Senedd election was a monumental moment for Welsh politics. For the first time since devolution, Labour lost power. WHQ asks prominent figures in the housing sector about their hopes and fears for housing under a Plaid Government

**MABLI SIRIOL JONES,
HEAD OF POLICY (POVERTY),
BEVAN FOUNDATION**

The Bevan Foundation believes that Wales's housing crisis cannot be solved without significantly, and rapidly, increasing the supply of social homes in Wales. While the new Government's target of 20,000 new social homes by 2030 is highly ambitious (given the previous government's difficulties in meeting the same target in a five-year period) we believe that it is deliverable with the right actions, and the role of Unnos as a national development body for social housing will be key to this.



Crucially, given the rising costs and practical difficulties in building from new, we believe there should be a focus on bringing more of our existing housing stock into use as social homes, via buy-backs of ex-council houses, purchasing on the open market and utilising empty dwellings and buildings.

Making this happen at the scale that's needed however will require a more pragmatic approach to social housing standards. As well as increasing the supply of social homes, issues in the private rented sector such as high rents, insecure tenancies and poor conditions also need to be tackled. The intention to explore rent controls is welcome, but the Government must ensure that the model adopted is one that works for Wales, and is accompanied

by stronger protections for renters, including a ban on no-fault evictions.

The Bevan Foundation was pleased to see the focus on housing in Plaid Cymru's manifesto, as well as in other parties' pledges ahead of the election. With the realities of minority government, cooperation in the Senedd will be key, and we hope that housing is an area where agreement can be reached to take the steps needed to ensure that everyone in Wales has a suitable place to call home.

**RHEA STEVENS, HEAD OF POLICY
AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
COMMUNITY HOUSING CYMRU**

The new Welsh Government has an opportunity to move Wales from housing emergency to housing recovery: building more homes, improving existing homes and creating healthier, fairer places.



The Plaid Cymru manifesto recognises housing is Wales' primary prevention infrastructure. Housing Associations stand ready to deliver, having built 75% of new social homes last term, with affordable housing delivery up 35% since 2021. Research indicates that 20,000 new social homes would create more than 14,000 jobs, 2,000 apprenticeships and deliver significant savings to the NHS and public services by keeping people healthier and out of temporary accommodation.

The challenge is not whether we can

end the housing emergency, it is not inevitable, but rather how to sustain our momentum. Amid rising needs and constrained finances, we must prioritise actions that make the greatest difference.

Maintaining progress requires certainty and stability. We need a long-term strategic plan that positions housing as essential national infrastructure, central to social and economic renewal. Legislating for the right to adequate housing can allow us to define the housing system Wales needs and deserves, while empowering Unnos could accelerate development and boost local economies. Both key ingredients but neither alone provide the joined-up and systematic plan that charts our course to recovery.

To move into a housing recovery we need to shift towards a long-term strategic plan that treats housing as essential national prevention infrastructure and is placed at the heart of Government's plans for social and economic renewal.

Now is the time to make choices that shape Wales' future.

**KATIE DALTON, DIRECTOR,
CYMORTH CYMRU**

At Plaid Cymru's conference in February, I was struck by the excitement buzzing around the venue. However, there were also some serious expressions on the faces of those expected to fill Cabinet



positions. Countless challenges await this new Government, not least the need to tackle homelessness, with 10,600 people in temporary accommodation and 94,000 households on social housing waiting lists.

One of the big tasks for the new Cabinet Minister is implementation of the Homelessness Act. As someone who played a key role in its legislative journey, Siân Gwenllïan understands the challenges of implementation, but also the huge opportunities if we get this right.

Plaid's pledge to deliver at least 20,000 new social homes will also be critical, but this target was a stretch for the last government, despite record investment, so financial and policy levers will need to be maximised. And providing people with the right support is equally important as putting a roof over someone's head, so we welcome Plaid's commitment to a Housing First, trauma-informed and person-centred approach. The first test of this will be increased funding for the Housing Support and Homelessness Prevention Grants.

Fair work was also a Plaid manifesto commitment, and the Workforce Task and Finish Group report is on the Minister's desk, with important recommendations to improve pay and support for frontline workers. It's time to ensure they get the recognition and reward they deserve.

The new Government also has an opportunity to make inclusion health a priority, and improve health outcomes for marginalised groups. Let's act to change the appalling statistic that people experiencing homelessness die 30 years earlier than the general population.

KEITH EDWARDS, HOUSING LEAD, FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY ALLIANCE

Since devolution Wales has had a number of major housing successes it can point to. The £5bn-plus investment in Welsh Housing Quality Standard and the additional money consistently invested in new social housing are stand outs for me. The positive impacts both have had on health and wellbeing, local jobs and the wider foundational economy are clear.

But let's be honest. There are also many examples of "government by



proclamation" – passing laws and introducing strategies without the resources to deliver. "Let it be so" is simply not enough.

Take homelessness. We have had half a dozen strategies to end it in the past 27 years. Yet in October 2025 10,818 people were still living in temporary accommodation across Wales, 2,503 of whom were children.

The ambitions of the new Plaid Cymru administration are laudable, particularly their commitment that "everybody in Wales should have the right to a safe home at a cost they can afford". And there is other good stuff in their programme too around action on rent affordability as well as fuel poverty through better quality housing.

My hope is that Plaid will learn from the past. The key to not over promising and under delivering is resources. We know in the long-term investing in good quality homes pays itself back, and some. If we want to achieve grand and noble ambitions, it's time for significantly more upfront funding to make a decent home for all a reality.

STEVE BLETSON, HEAD OF REGIONAL BUSINESS, NATIONAL RESIDENTIAL LANDLORDS ASSOCIATION

Plenty of ink has been spilled by pundits eager to drill down into what the outcome of the Senedd elections will mean for Welsh housing. But what does the vote mean specifically for Welsh private landlords?



At the top of any landlords' list of concerns linked to Plaid's reforms is rent controls. The suggestion that Plaid will introduce them to the Welsh private rented sector (PRS) presents a major problem for those landlords keen to stay in the rental market.

We await further detail at the time of writing on what the new Welsh Government's proposals will look like in practice. But the party's manifesto suggests a strong commitment to intervene in the market in a way that could worsen the Welsh PRS' supply and demand crisis.

Those with an interest in the PRS need not look far for an example of

rent controls going wrong. Research by Hamptons found that, after the introduction of controls in Scotland, 67% of Scottish landlords increased rents in 2025 – a common outcome wherever rent controls are introduced.

Before any firm strategy can be drawn up, the Welsh Government needs the ability to make decisions based on an accurate assessment of the Welsh market. Launching a Welsh Housing Survey – similar in scope to its English equivalent – must be a priority for the new administration, and the NRLA will be pushing hard to make that happen.

In terms of next steps, 2026 will likely usher in big changes in the PRS across the UK. Whatever form these take, the Welsh Government must encourage the growth of a rental market that is fair and which works in the interests of both landlords and tenants.

RUTH POWER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE SHELTER CYMRU

Shelter Cymru was pleased to see Plaid Cymru make housing a central part of their manifesto, and for the recognition they have given to suitable homes being pivotal to tackling the persistent challenges of health, poverty and inequality in Wales.



Last year, Shelter Cymru provided advice and advocacy to more than 12,000 households in Wales, almost half of which were private renters, a share of our caseload that has been consistent for a number of years. Despite this, and despite the clear issues with affordability, security of tenure and quality that are pervasive within private renting, our housing system continues to often view it as a solution to homelessness rather than a cause.

In reality, the private rented sector in Wales has long ceased to be fit for purpose in its current form. Which is why we were also pleased to see the Plaid Cymru manifesto commit to much needed changes. Not least the end of no-fault evictions and introduction of rent controls.

On their own these changes are, of course, not a total solution to the housing emergency, but we do believe they have a role to play as part of a wider package that includes legislating for a right to

adequate housing, expanding the delivery of social rent homes and implementing the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocations Act. This is why we urge the new Cabinet Minister to urgently bring together organisations that work closely with private renters, and private renters themselves, to begin the shift from commitment to delivery.

ALICJA ZALESINSKA, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, TAI PAWB

The formation of a new Welsh Government marks an important moment for housing in Wales. For Tai Pawb, the question now is how this new political chapter can help build the foundations of a fairer, healthier and more cohesive nation.



Homes must sit at the heart of that work. Across Wales, too many people are working hard simply to stand still: disabled people waiting years for an accessible home; children growing up in cold, damp or overcrowded housing; people living in temporary accommodation or facing homelessness, trying to hold on to dignity, safety and hope while waiting for a settled home; and communities anxious about whether young people can remain rooted in the places they call home.

That is why Tai Pawb welcomes commitments on standards, tenants' rights, damp and mould, warmer homes, community ownership, social housing delivery, homelessness prevention and the right to a good home. For Tai Pawb, the Right to a Good Home is our central priority and should be the framework that brings these ambitions together: a way of driving the whole housing system towards homes that are affordable, accessible, safe, secure and suitable for the diversity of people's lives. It also gives Wales a clear, shared principle for resisting narratives that use housing insecurity to divide communities or scapegoat people seeking safety, stability and belonging.

Our hope is that the new Government treats housing not only as supply or infrastructure, but as the foundation for health, dignity, equality and belonging. Success should be measured not only in numbers, but in whether homes are

genuinely affordable, accessible, secure, energy efficient and suitable for the diversity of people's lives.

Tai Pawb will continue to play our part: supporting, convening and, where needed, challenging, so that Wales builds not only more homes, but stronger foundations for dignity, equality and belonging.

KIERON GREGSON, ASSOCIATE DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR (SOUTH), LOVELL STRATEGIC LAND

As Plaid Cymru forms a new government in Wales, the party is tasked with shifting the trajectory of housing delivery in the country. As a strategic land developer, my hope is that the party realises the answer to building more homes alongside meeting the requisite need over the next decade lies in unlocking more deliverable land in the short, medium and long-term. Therefore, looking afresh at spatial planning is one of the main levers the government can pull to unlock this land.



Of course, Siân Gwenllïan needs to get her feet under the desk, but the first step to take – in my mind – is to review the three-tier planning system and consider if Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) are doing the job they should be doing.

There would be merit in consolidating SDPs to cover smaller areas – more similar to Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) in England – to make them more deliverable and speed things up. These plans should also be reviewed regularly and adapted to suit local needs. There should be scope to deliver housing outside of the plans if the demand is there and a suitable site is presented in accordance with planning policy.

The Housing Minister has said tackling the housing crisis requires “urgency, energy and action”. What's next is to ensure she and the government focuses this rhetoric where it's needed most.

Of course, the land it unlocks needs to be the right land. Against the backdrop of growing waiting lists for social housing and a gap between supply and demand, the Government has promised to build 20,000 social homes in just three years. To drive this pledge forward, Plaid has

set up a national development agency – Unnos – to identify suitable sites for social homes.

This is a welcome move for the development industry which understands the critical link between strategic land and social housing. The more housing development consented and delivered, the more social housing can be built by the private sector. Unnos should work with us to ensure the sites it identifies are deliverable by being suitable, available, achievable and viable.

EMMA NICHOLAS, CO- ORDINATOR NATIONAL INDEPENDENT TENANT VOICE CYMRU

NITVC Tenants are fully committed to working with the new Welsh Government and helping them achieve their housing ambitions.



We know that they and their landlord partners face tough choices including how they find the money to build new homes and provide good services to their current tenants. Tenants are realistic about this, so it's important that our wants and needs, and the impacts on us, are considered before difficult decisions are made.

We were never asked about new housing standards and, if we had been, we would have challenged several of them. We want to be fully included in any future reviews.

We want help for communities by reviewing the process of housing allocations. This would mean, for example, sensitive lettings especially for one-bedroom properties.

We want a long-term approach to investing in homes and no more “sticking plasters” that cost a lot more than sorting things correctly the first time.

We want real involvement with our landlords, not just lip service. That means more tenant-led scrutiny.

We want value for money to be replaced by value for tenants and warm homes to be replaced by comfortable homes.

However well-intentioned landlords and support organisations are, they can't speak for tenants. So, most of all we want recognition that tenants need to have their independent voices heard at all levels.

The new First Minister Rhun ap Iorwerth speaks during a plenary session



A new dawn?

Matt Dicks reflects on the impact Plaid Cymru's First 100 Days priorities could have on housing professionals

The new housing minister, Sian Gwenllian, said in her statement to the now 96 Senedd members in June that: "A safe, warm, affordable home is something that everyone in Wales should have. Home is the foundation for our health and wellbeing, our connection to our communities and our ability to learn and to work."

Ergo a central mission of government, right? But then I close my eyes and I hear the echo of voices from the past – Jane Bryant, Julie James, Rebecca Evans, Carl Sergeant, Jocelyn Davies – narrating that same commitment.

Yet here we are, 27 years deep into devolution with a structural undersupply of affordable homes seemingly hardwired into our public policy landscape like a hardy perennial, much like NHS waiting times, crumbling school buildings and the ongoing saga that is the Brynglas tunnels.

A RADICAL SHIFT IN POWER

The Senedd election in May was fought very much on a change narrative, and a radical shift in power was delivered by Welsh voters. But will this new government, operating in a minority capacity, be able to deliver the radical shift that voters want to see – not least delivering the affordable homes that so many are crying out for?

The first thing to say is that the minister's portfolio has retained planning – which hasn't always been the case in previous Welsh governments.

It is a big cabinet portfolio, and there'll be a lot in Sian Gwenllian's in-tray, but it was positive to hear her statement of priorities generally focusing on the housing brief – a tacit recognition of the scale of the challenge.

Top of the to-do list is to build more affordable homes – 20,000, in fact, at social rent. While that appears to set the same level of ambition as the previous government, the minister was at pains to

emphasise that these will be "new homes".

CIH Cymru, and much of the sector, agrees that's a realistic target, as long as we address the barriers and gaps in planning, supply chains and skills – and there is a clear commitment from the minister to add the resource required to the planning system.

SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

With supply top of the to-do list, it was positive to hear that the intention is to set up an arm's length development entity called Unnos, to scale up the development of social housing. The devil will of course be in the detail, but will it be the full development package similar to Homes England or a smaller compact hub focused on public land assembly, the model recommended by the Lynne Pamment review in 2019.

Again, there is broad support across the sector for something to be created in this space – the housing crisis is deep and

structural, so is it time to consider the more radical option?

There are wide concerns however, about plans referenced around fair rents, with the minister announcing her intention to legislate in this area.

But while CIH Cymru recognises, and shares the desire to address affordability, we urge caution when considering any form of rent controls. While it may offer short-term relief for tenants, there is a risk of unintended consequences – particularly reducing supply and distorting the market over time.

Any intervention needs to be carefully designed as part of a balanced, long-term approach that tackles the underlying drivers of unaffordability, including housing supply, investment and market stability.

Rent control should not be seen as a substitute for increasing the supply of homes, which remains the most effective way to improve affordability over the medium to long term.

A RIGHT IN LAW

But I guess the radical departure in the minister's statement was a tacit commitment to change the paradigm; to, through legislation, turn into action that well-worn rhetoric about "A safe, warm, affordable home [being] something that everyone in Wales should have", by committing to making it a right in law.

In June 2019 the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Cymru, Tai Pawb and Shelter Cymru, in partnership with Dr Simon Hoffman of Swansea University, published a report entitled, *The Right to Adequate Housing in Wales: Feasibility Study*, which outlined why and how the right could be fully incorporated into Welsh law.

We, the three housing organisations that have led this campaign, believe our feasibility study made a compelling case for the incorporation of the Right to Adequate Housing as set out in ICESCR (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) into Welsh law, while also clearly setting out the route map for how we get there.

Since 2019, the campaign has commissioned an international study comparison collating evidence from across the world where the right has been implemented, as well as commissioning a cost-benefit analysis from internationally renowned economists Alma Economics, which found that implementing the right



in Wales would generate an £11bn saving to the public purse over a 30-year period with an upfront investment of £5bn.

ECONOMICALLY SENSIBLE

We have created the evidence base that clearly demonstrates a rights-based approach is not only the morally right thing to do, but the economically sensible approach as well – is now the time we see movement on this?

We had two pieces of legislation added to the statute book at the end of the last Senedd which have heaped even more pressure on the already overstretched

housing workforce, but we've yet to hear whether the additional resource will come to support housing professionals in meeting that ambition.

A commitment, made in legislation, to fundamentally change that paradigm, and make housing a foundation mission of government is a radical step, and that can only be welcomed. Now we turn our attention to playing our role, as housing professionals, in supporting the delivery of that ambition.

Matt Dicks the Director of
CIH Cymru





'I believe housing is not a luxury but a right'

The new Cabinet Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning, Siân Gwenllian, sets out her ambitions for tackling Wales' housing crisis

A safe, warm and affordable home is something that everyone in Wales deserves – and as the new Cabinet Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning, making this a reality is what drives me every single day.

Housing is also rooted in my past. My father worked for the former Dwyfor District Council, overseeing its council housing at the time, while my grandfather was among those who built homes in Liverpool. I suspect many of us carry similar stories of connection to the housing sector.

Across Wales, too many families are struggling under the weight of housing costs. The pressure is real and the consequences go far beyond finances – it drives people into poverty, takes a toll on their health and narrows the opportunities available to their families. Through my years as a councillor and in local government, I've sat across the table from people who couldn't access a safe, secure home and I've seen what that does to a family, and I am determined to tackle this head on.

Home is where our health and relationships are rooted and inadequate housing supply, rising house prices and increasing rents are creating a housing crisis, forcing families into unsuitable accommodation and pushing people out of the communities they love.

Increasing the supply of social homes is my top priority this Senedd term. Working with our social landlords and the private sector, we will deliver 20,000 high-quality, energy-efficient social homes by 2030. These are not just numbers on a page – they represent real families who will have the security and stability that a good home brings.

SPEED UP THE SUPPLY

To support this ambition, we will establish Unnos, a national development body that will work in partnership with local

authorities and housing associations to speed up the supply of new social homes for the long term.

More than 18,000 private sector homes were completed across Wales during the last Senedd term and I will meet with housebuilders to hear more about their ambitions and how this Welsh Government can support them.

One in six households in Wales now privately rents, and while many landlords provide excellent accommodation, too many renters still face insecurity or live in poor conditions. I will work to implement a package of measures to protect renters and progress fair rent-setting, so that the cost of renting better reflects what people can genuinely afford.

RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING

I believe housing is not a luxury but a right and so I also want to bring forward proposals to legislate for the Right to Adequate Housing for all. Policy will

Increasing the supply of social homes is my top priority this Senedd term

progressively deliver on this, addressing homelessness, ensuring housing costs better reflect local incomes, supporting community ownership, promoting Welsh language and culture and helping young people stay in the communities where they grew up.

Fuel poverty is another issue I feel very strongly about. A quarter of households in Wales are struggling to heat their homes. I will step up our efforts to improve energy efficiency, explore ways to go further and faster on tackling fuel poverty and review the Warm Homes Programme to make sure it is delivering real, meaningful support to the people who need it most.

I am also determined to make better use of the housing we already have. I know how deeply the concentration of second homes and short-term holiday lets affects communities across Wales by pricing out local families and eroding the social fabric that makes those places special. I will work with local authorities to find practical solutions.

PACE AND AMBITION

I am proud to have played a key role in supporting two significant pieces of legislation; the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Act 2026 and the Building Safety (Wales) Act 2026. I will maintain the pace and ambition that saw these pieces of legislation pass through the Senedd with unanimous support.

Thriving communities matter enormously to me, and that is why I will bring forward a Community Right to Buy Bill, making it easier for communities to take ownership of valued local assets, including land and buildings for housing. Within our first 100 days, I will also establish a Town Centre Taskforce to develop the role of residential properties in our town centres, so that more people can live in, support and enjoy them.

An effective, community-centred planning system underpins all of this, and I will take further steps to reform and simplify our planning framework so that it serves people and places better. We will turn ambition into action and deliver the homes people need alongside the strong public services that communities rely on. Together, we will build a fairer Wales where everyone has security, opportunity and a genuine place to belong.

Siân Gwenllian has been a Member of the Senedd since 2016, representing Gwynedd Maldwyn since 2026 and previously Arfon



Taking control

Tazu Walden explores how rent controls have worked – or not – in other countries, and asks what might be right for Wales

In the run-up to last month's Senedd election, rent controls were front and centre in the battle between Plaid and the Greens on the left of Welsh politics. Since gaining power, Plaid have announced that action on rent controls will feature in a package on housing implemented in the first 100 days of government. The question now facing policymakers is how to design them.

While the Greens' call for a strict freeze, Plaid argued for a more moderate system of "fair rent-setting", limiting annual rent increases to the lower of wage growth and an inflation metric. In May, Institute for Public Policy Research put forward a similar proposal for rent controls: a "double-lock" linked to the lower of wage growth and inflation, applied nationally, both within and between tenancies.

Opponents of rent controls point to a long history which is littered with cases – New York, Berlin, Massachusetts, Stockholm – where poorly designed systems have reduced the number of rental properties available, reduced the quality of properties and made it difficult for new tenants to find a place to live.

Our research argues that these high-profile cases ignore the success of milder rent controls adopted across Europe, some of which have been in place for decades, such as in France, Spain and Ireland. Newer rent controls such as those implemented last year in Scotland show how a system designed with past failings can mitigate risks.

So what are the options available to the Senedd when it comes to design, and what can previous attempts teach us about what to do, and what not to do?

WHAT ARE RENT CONTROLS?

Simply put, rent controls tackle the frequency and extent to which landlords can increase rents. If we look internationally, rent controls are not an unusual policy tool. A 2024 study found that 14 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries

regulate how much rent can be charged outright, and 24 regulate how much rent can rise by.

In Wales, a mild form of rent control – known as "third generation" – already exists, which limits how often a landlord can raise the rent to once a year. Plaid's manifesto commitment to a rent control system tied to inflation and wages goes beyond regulating the frequency of rent increases to regulating their size.

The most well-known form of rent control is a rent freeze. However, rent controls are a broad umbrella, and governments have a series of options when designing policy to determine their strength and breadth.

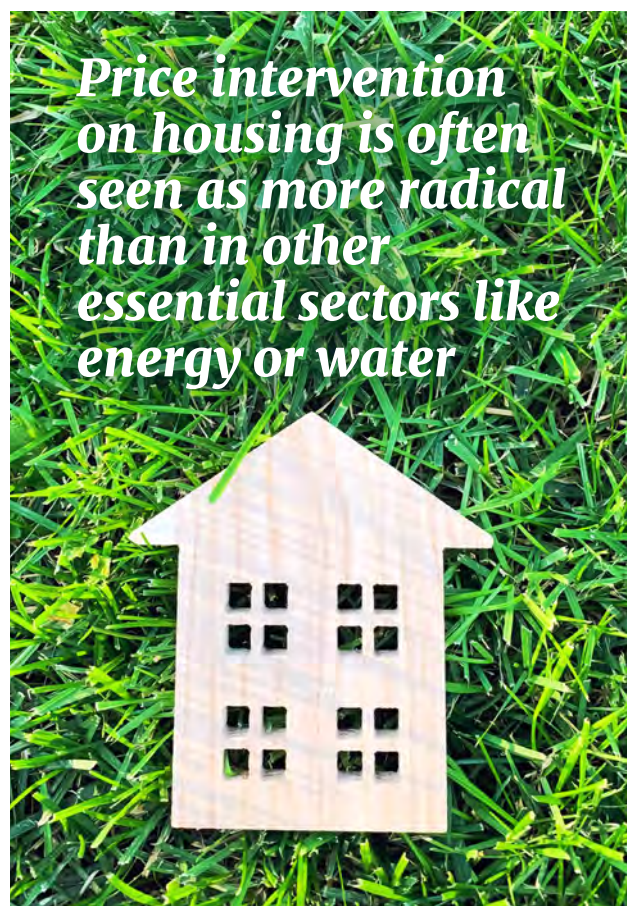
For example, what is the cap on the amount landlords can raise rent? A strict freeze might be best for tenant affordability, but most modern regimes tend to allow some increases to keep landlords in the market. Are rent rises limited when you move house or only within an existing tenancy? The first option doesn't disadvantage movers, but the second gives landlords more flexibility to recoup costs. Are measures limited to a single city to tackle particularly inflated urban rental markets, or applied uniformly across the country? The former is more targeted, but the latter is easier to implement and prevents price rises outside of the city.

DO RENT CONTROLS WORK?

Rent controls are effective at reducing the rents of controlled units. The most

comprehensive review found that rent controls reduced rents by an average of 9.4%. In Paris, regulated rents were 5.2% lower than forecast to be between 2019 and 2024, and up to 8% lower in more recent years. This corresponds to an estimated saving of 1,700 euros for the average Parisian in a rent-controlled property.

In spite of this, rent controls are politically contentious. Price intervention



on housing is often seen as more radical than in other essential sectors like energy or water. Our research shows that well-designed rent control policy can mitigate risks to quality, landlord exit and new housebuilding. An eye to what has worked elsewhere and why will be essential if the Welsh Government is going to get it right.

Natalie Chaney
via Unsplash

Femi Oyekoya via Unsplash

Tania Mousirho
via Unsplash

SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco is commonly cited as having a failed rent control system: rental supply shrank by 15% and rents increased by about 5% in rental properties not covered by controls. Critics argue this reflects a classic supply problem: if rent caps make letting less profitable, some landlords may sell, convert or withdraw properties from the regulated market. That can reduce availability and push up rents for tenants left searching in the uncontrolled sector.

But if we look closer, easy exit routes or major carve-outs for landlords are at the root. The regulation only applied to a limited subset of properties, meaning landlords could easily sidestep the rules by converting their properties. Similarly, in Spain, an initial exemption for short-term lets of up to 11 months led to a wave of conversions out of the private rented sector. The government closed this loophole a year later, and evidence suggests Spanish housing supply has remained stable.

BERLIN

Berlin is often cited as an example where the introduction of a strict rent freeze in 2020 scared investors and dampened

new construction rates. Building permit issuance fell from about 2,000 a month in mid-2019 to approximately 1,180 a month. However, the policy was subject to legal problems from the outset, which impacted investor certainty, and the law was struck down within a year as unconstitutional.

Under the milder rent control system that applies across Germany, build-rates have recovered following the downturn caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The state has played a crucial role in this turnaround, with Berlin having multiple state-owned companies providing project development financing. The system in Berlin also has strong quality standards for privately rented properties, making investment in properties a legal requirement for landlords. The landmark new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) passed by the UK Government and Wales' own minimum standards in place since 2016 should provide the same protections.

However, Germany's milder policy is not without flaws and has been criticised for its extensive exemptions for new builds, furnished properties and substantial renovation, which have created a significant price gap between

regulated and unregulated properties and reduced people's willingness to move.

SPAIN

The situation for renters in Spain shows the size of the prize if rent controls are designed well. Rents in Spain have been capped broadly since March 2022, and official data shows that rents in Spain rose by 2.7 and 2.6% in 2022 and 2023 respectively, compared with 4.4% and 9% in the UK when faced with similar pressures. In Catalonia, which has had rent controls since 2020, rents actually decreased by 4% to 6% in controlled properties. There is no clear trend of landlords leaving the market in large numbers, and no evidence of a lasting hit to housebuilding. In 2025 the Spanish government confirmed the highest rate of new-build housing in 12 years, with a strong development pipeline for 2026.

The Spanish government has accompanied a new, smoothed inflation index with policy to promote mobility, state support for housebuilding and incentives to prevent landlords from raising the rent between tenancies. The Catalan government has also taken a strong line on short-term letting to encourage a stable supply in the long-term rental market.

DESIGNING A RENT CONTROL SYSTEM FOR WALES

The most successful systems combine moderate limits on rent increases with measures to maintain housing supply, support new development, enforce quality standards and close potential loopholes. The least successful tend

to be those that create uncertainty, contain large exemptions or allow landlords to sidestep regulation altogether. For the Welsh Government, the challenge is how to build a system that delivers affordability without undermining the long-term health of the rental market. Learning from

others will be a key step, and there are positive signs, with Plaid already looking to Scotland, where rent controls have clearly been designed with past failings in mind.

Tazu Walden is Researcher at the Institute for Public Policy Research

A historic change in Welsh politics has brought Plaid Cymru into government for the first time, with housing placed firmly at the heart of its national programme. The Cabinet Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning, Siân Gwenllian, talks to WHQ editor Sally Hales about collaboration, new approaches and thinking beyond the short term.

THE

BIG

INTERVIEW



'We need to unblock the barriers'

Wales' new housing minister sets out her vision

The Welsh Government has set out a packed housing programme for this Senedd term: 20,000 extra social homes, major changes to homelessness services, fairer rents in the private rented sector and continued work to upgrade the energy performance of some of Europe's oldest homes.

The sector has broadly welcomed the ambition. Yet the reality is that housing is one of those problems that refuses to be solved by a single promise or a single policy. Costs keep climbing. The planning system remains slow. Skills gaps are felt everywhere, from site trades to professional roles. Budgets are tight, and environmental requirements, necessary as they are, add further strain to an already difficult challenge.

VIEW



So the obvious question follows: can these obstacles actually be shifted in time to meet the scale of the pledge?

Siân Gwenllïan, newly appointed as Wales' housing minister, does not pretend there is an easy route through it.

I want to be talking to people in the sector, in the RSLs and in the local authorities about what they think the remit should be. It's not just about me saying, 'This is what it will do.' I've always worked in that way.

What she returns to, again and again, is the need for a joined-up effort, councils, housing associations and wider partners working in the same direction.

That approach sits behind Plaid Cymru's plan for Unnos, a new arm's-length development body. The hope is that it becomes a practical tool for housing delivery, and a way to open up options that currently feel blocked.

"As I see it, it [Unnos] is a social housing enabler to unblock some of the major problems that we've identified," she says. "There are problems in

planning. There are problems in finance. We need to look at innovative ways of raising finance for building more homes or acquiring more homes."

Before taking the housing brief, Gwenllïan, the MS for Arfon in north

saying, 'This is what it will do.' I've always worked in that way."

FUNDING

Devolution gives Wales control over housing policy, but not over many of the financial decisions that sit behind it. Funding still depends heavily on Westminster, and the Barnett formula has long drawn criticism for failing to reflect Wales' socio-economic needs.

Gwenllïan says negotiations with Westminster will sit with the first minister, Rhun ap Iorwerth. Even so, she is clear that a bigger settlement from the UK Government, while welcome, will not on its own fix the housing emergency.

"It's not all about government money," she says. For her, Unnos is partly about widening the range of tools available, especially now that Brexit has shut off one route to long-term borrowing and investment.

"I'm eager to emphasise this, and that's why the new body we are setting up will have the role of looking at finance," she says. "Unfortunately, because we're not in the European Union, we don't have access to the European Investment Bank, which many European countries have taken advantage of. So we have to find alternative ways of financing, and I am sure there are opportunities out there."

Wales, produced a series of policy papers that ranged across the right to adequate housing, renters' protections, boosting supply and improving the energy efficiency of Welsh homes.

But it is the way decisions are made that matters to her as much as the headline commitments. She wants Unnos to be shaped with the sector, not presented to it.

"I want to be talking to people in the sector, in the RSLs and in the local authorities about what they think the remit should be. It's not just about me

What those alternatives will be is still to be worked through. She does, however, want any model developed alongside the organisations that will be expected to deliver new homes.

"We'll be looking at that in terms of the body's purpose, structure and remit. I want to hear what people in the sector think."

DELIVERING NET ZERO

Housing associations are already living with the tension between pace and standards: building enough homes, quickly enough, while also meeting decarbonisation targets and keeping schemes affordable.

Gwenllian argues Wales is not starting from scratch. "The Warm Homes programme has been fairly successful," she says. For her, the next step is deciding what comes after, and how it is designed.

Rather than treating each property as a separate project, she wants to look at a broader approach that works

"I want to understand how Ed Miliband's plans will dovetail with what we're doing in Wales, identifying where they differ and what consequentials we can achieve."

Recent heatwaves have also shifted the way many people think about housing quality. Insulation is no longer only a winter conversation. "It's going back to basics really about insulation," she says. "We're not only thinking about keeping homes warm in winter now, but how we keep them cool in summer as well."

RENT CONTROLS

Rent controls remain one of the most divisive housing debates, and Plaid committed in its manifesto to investigate options. The subject comes with warnings about unintended impacts, from landlords quitting the market to knock-on effects for RSL finances, and a potential slowing in social housebuilding.

"I'm very aware of the concerns around this area," Gwenllian says. But she also links the issue directly to homelessness pressures. "Unaffordable rents in the private sector do lead to homelessness in a lot of situations."

She insists ministers will not rush into a model before examining the evidence. Work will include looking at approaches elsewhere, including Scotland, and speaking with landlords early rather than late.

"We're not going to rush this. Many landlords are okay about this so long as they're involved from the

beginning. There is a lot of work to be done on this, and it will be evidence-based."

HOMELESSNESS

The new Homelessness Act is one of the most significant changes to Welsh housing law in years, shifting the centre of gravity towards prevention, stopping crises before they happen.

Gwenllian sees that as the point. "I was really happy to be involved in the Homelessness Act because the preventative side is what it's all about."

Officials have already begun the work of translating the legislation into services

WHO IS SIÂN GWENLLIAN?

Siân Gwenllian has represented Arfon in the Senedd for Plaid Cymru since 2016.

Before entering the Senedd, Gwenllian built a career in journalism, working for the BBC, HTV and *Golwg*, before moving into public relations, including a role as press officer for Gwynedd Council.

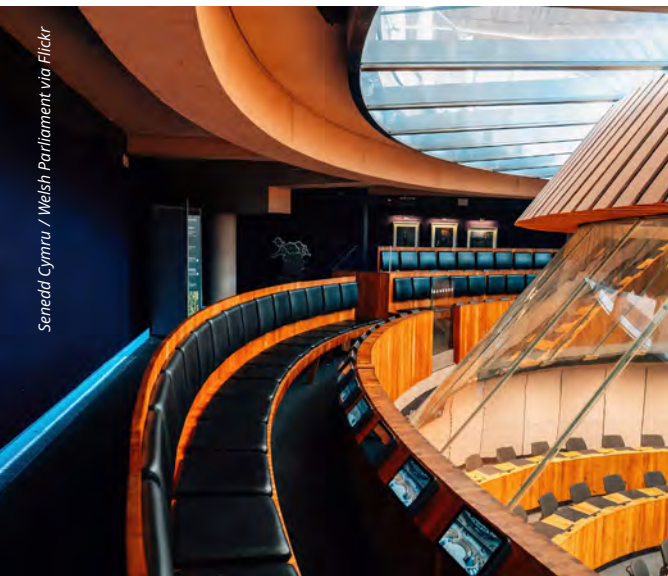
She was educated at Ysgol Friars in Bangor before studying at Aberystwyth and Cardiff universities. She has campaigned for women's equality and the Welsh language for more than four decades.

Gwenllian served as a Gwynedd councillor between 2008 and 2016, representing her home village of Y Felinheli. Since entering the Senedd, she has held a number of senior positions within Plaid Cymru, including deputy leader in the Senedd, chief whip, Trefnydd and Senedd commissioner.

Between 2021 and 2024, she was Plaid Cymru's lead designated member overseeing the party's Co-operation Agreement with the Welsh Labour government. During the fourth and fifth Senedd terms she also held portfolios covering education, local government, planning, the Welsh language and culture.

Since 2024, Gwenllian has led Plaid Cymru's housing and planning brief, with responsibility for scrutinising Welsh Government policy on housing supply, planning reform, affordability and the delivery of new homes.

Outside politics, her interests include theatre, the arts, Welsh music, football and rugby.



Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament via Flickr

across neighbourhoods and tenure types. "I'm eager to look at area-based and tenure-neutral solutions." Done well, improving whole communities could bring efficiencies, and it could mean the benefits extend beyond one group, reaching owner-occupiers, council tenants, housing association residents and private renters alike.

She is also keeping an eye on what is coming from Westminster. The UK Government has announced further proposals on domestic energy efficiency, and she wants clarity on how these plans will align with existing Welsh programmes.

on the ground, and she expects it to push Wales further towards approaches rooted in Housing First and trauma-informed practice. "I think that will help us move on to more of a Housing First and trauma-informed basis."

None of this comes with neat solutions. Wales is trying to expand social housing supply at scale while changing the rules on renting, decarbonising homes and reshaping homelessness services. Doing all of that will take political resolve.



Making it right

As Wales' Housing Minister confirms plans to incorporate Right to Adequate Housing into Welsh law, **Amy Bainton** explores where we are and what it means for Wales

As the recently elected Plaid Cymru-led Government ushers us into a new era for Wales, we are all looking at what this means for housing.

One of the most innovative commitments in Plaid Cymru's manifesto and first 100 days plan was the pledge to introduce legislation on the Right to Adequate Housing (RTAH). As members of the Back the Bill coalition, Tai Pawb, alongside our colleagues in CIH Cymru and Shelter Cymru, has campaigned for the Right to Adequate Housing over several years and we were delighted to see its inclusion.

Launched in 2019, the Back the Bill campaign was our collective response to the tragedy of the Grenfell fire which killed 72 people in 2017, 61 of whom were from Black and minority communities. Grenfell showed the human cost of failing to listen to residents about safety concerns and has come to symbolise many of the systemic issues in housing.

THE HOUSING EMERGENCY

Alongside this, our campaign is motivated by the fact that we continue to confront a deep and destructive housing emergency in Wales and the UK. Home should represent peace, security and comfort, but thousands of people in Wales cannot access that basic right. Whether that's because they are one of 11,000 people (2000 children) living in temporary accommodation, living in a home that is not adapted to their needs, managing the health consequences of damp and mould, or facing abuse and threat at home, which fundamentally strips a person of the core belief that home is a place of safety. Added to this is the huge issue of people struggling to afford their home due to the ongoing pressures of the cost of living and our decades-long struggle to meaningfully tackle poverty.

The campaign advocates for the incorporation of the international right based on the UN International Covenant

on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: right to an adequate standard of living.

THE RIGHT

There are seven components to RTAH as outlined by the UN:

- Availability of certain facilities essential for health, security, comfort and nutrition.
- Affordability.
- Accessibility.
- Habitability.
- Legal security of tenure.
- Location.
- Cultural adequacy.

Key to the development of the right in Wales will be progressive realisation, which requires governments to take steps over time to realise the right. Passing legislation is the beginning of a gear shift in how we prioritise and deal with housing in Wales. It is the beginning of the journey, not the end.

Also, governments are required to use the maximum available resources to achieve this goal. It will require a rewire of the Welsh Government's budget, and for other government financial decisions to consider how they are contributing towards realising the right.

As we've seen through the partial incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, creating a system whereby the government must give time, thought and resources to issues can completely change the game in terms of how we tackle some of the most pervasive issues in our society. We believe that there is a huge opportunity in creating these conditions in housing.

This also can have significant long-term consequences. We live in a political system that is rapidly changing, but implementing these measures with a commitment to long-term investment can provide protections for residents and stability for local authorities for years to come regardless of the make-up of the government in Wales and the UK.

THE ECONOMIC CASE

But more than that, the advantages of RTAH are both moral and economic.

Poor housing has a huge cost. There is the immense, immeasurable cost to people's mental health and wellbeing as they try to live in conditions that are unsafe or unsuitable, alongside a massive financial and resource cost to local authorities and Welsh Government. For example, Alma Economics undertook an independent review of the potential impact of RTAH in Wales and found that £90m is spent every year by the NHS on the consequences of poor housing, whether that's on people spending longer in hospital because their home isn't suitable for them to be discharged to, or from people needing medical treatment due to poor housing and homelessness.

Alma Economics also found that for every £1 spent on RTAH, £2.30 could be accrued from savings to government spending elsewhere due to improved health outcomes, fewer interactions with mental health services and reduced spending on emergency measures such as temporary accommodation.

THE PATH AHEAD

There is still some way to go before we can hope to achieve legislation for Wales. There will be hurdles along the way. But our core belief is this: RTAH legislation could have huge and tangible outcomes for individuals and families, local authorities, housing associations and the Welsh Government. It is a pragmatic and practical solution to a problem that has been persistent for decades, and the truth is that we simply cannot continue to take the same actions and expect a different result. While the challenges in housing in Wales are stark, the opportunity for real change is also within grasping distance.

Amy Bainton is Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Tai Pawb



Understanding affordability

Elen Grantham reports on how Shelter is challenging outdated affordability metrics to better reflect the real struggles of Welsh private renters

We've been talking about the housing emergency in Wales for what can sometimes feel like a very long time at Shelter Cymru. The previous Welsh Government and MSs officially recognised a housing crisis in June 2021, 15 months after the first Covid lockdown – those surreal experiences certainly feel like a lifetime ago. The point is they knew about and recognised the issue a long, long time ago.

The consequential 2021-26 Housing Action Plan, Homelessness legislation reforms and the 20,000 new social homes target were all responses to this official recognition by the then Welsh Government. Yet, despite it having been five years (or a full Senedd term) since this recognition and the obvious reality that the private rented sector is fundamentally broken and people are struggling to access and afford it, Welsh Government officials continued to bury their heads in the sand where private rent levels were concerned. During the last



rhetoric that a lack of evidence meant that nothing could be done.

CHALLENGING AFFORDABILITY METRICS

In April, Shelter Cymru launched its new report Understanding Affordability: Who does the private rented sector in Wales

for National Statistics) assumption that affordability equates to a private renting household spending less than 30% of their total gross income on rent. Shelter Cymru has challenged this assumption as we believe it does a disservice to private renters in Wales, failing to reflect the real-world pressures that they are facing. It also fails to reflect different household types across Wales.

Seventeen per cent of all homes in Wales are rented privately. The PRS is the second largest tenure following owner occupation in Wales. Every week, between 40-50% of the casework undertaken at Shelter Cymru comes from people who are privately renting – a significant part of our work. The people who come to us are often struggling with affordability. Many are at risk of homelessness or have already become homeless because of affordability. It affects all types of households across the whole of Wales. However, official ONS data tells us that private renting is unaffordable in only two local authority areas in Wales: Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. There is a real disconnect between the ONS data and what Shelter Cymru is seeing on the ground.

Alongside complex data analysis, we

There is a real disconnect between the ONS data and what Shelter Cymru is seeing on the ground

Senedd term, monthly private rents in Wales shot up by 35%.

THE GOVERNMENT STANCE

In the 2024 White Paper, Welsh Government rejected the need for formal rent controls in the private rent sector, stating the need for a data-driven approach. While people renting privately have struggled to cope with drastic rental charges or live in fear of such increases, Welsh Government officials stuck to their

work for? And how do we change it? The report looks into the affordability of renting a home privately in Wales and challenges the existing model of "affordability".

Our research determined that part of the problem when recognising and measuring the affordability of private renting is the methodology itself. The current, generally accepted model of affordability Welsh Government relies upon is based upon the ONS (Office

worked with our Private Renters Advisory Group – people with real lived experience of affordability issues in the PRS, and are now proposing a new model of affordability; one that better reflects and better serves the hundreds of thousands of households privately renting in Wales. Our new model of affordability is rooted in the real experiences of private renters in Wales. The new model is based upon net rather than gross incomes and includes rent and other essential household costs such as council tax, water charges and energy charges. We have looked at a range of different households and incomes, and also gathered extensive data on private rental charges.

THE REALITY FOR RENTERS

Unsurprisingly, our research showed us that private renting isn't a viable, sustainable option for thousands of people living in Wales. It is too expensive compared with people's actual incomes. Renting privately is unaffordable across the whole of Wales and to people of all ages. Households of all makeups are struggling under the weight of continuing to afford their privately rented homes. Everyone is affected, but single people, especially those on low incomes, more so, as there are no viable options for them. At no point in someone's life is it financially viable to be a single-income household privately renting in Wales.

Many of the people we spoke to told us they felt "trapped" living in their

privately rented home as there was nowhere else they could go. One person described living in fear of their landlord increasing their rents and being afraid another landlord might be worse, a situation of "better the devil you know".

The private rented sector now only offers sustainable homes for a very narrow window of renters. These being households with two full-time earners, with no or less than two children and living in mid-Wales.

People are forced to rent privately because of a lack of alternative options. The reality is that renting a home privately is the only option available to many in a failing housing system. Despite private renting being the tenure of last resort, it's a section of our housing system that continues to grow. Over two decades, the number of private renters has almost doubled and there are now over 230,000 households in Wales who are privately renting.

A CALL FOR CHANGE

It is thus inconceivable the new Welsh Government adheres to the status quo of the previous government and continues to ignore the reality of unaffordable private rents in Wales. The first change in government in Wales since devolution almost 30 years ago presents a new chapter with a real opportunity for change. With the PRS being the second largest tenure in Wales, too many people are struggling

and they deserve better. Unaffordable renting increases homelessness, impacts people's health, has serious financial implications for households and public spending. It traps people in a system that isn't working for them and it's time that Welsh Government stepped up and acknowledged the reality of private renters in Wales and acted for them.

Shelter Cymru has had very positive responses to the report from others working in the housing and homelessness sector and beyond. While there was some surprise at the boldness of challenging the ONS model of affordability there has been strong support for the new model, with many organisations saying they would adopt and use it. Shelter Cymru is encouraging all our professional partners and sector friends to refer to the report when challenging affordability in order to strengthen the case for a long overdue overhaul of the PRS in Wales.

Fixing the private rented sector in Wales is possible with the right political will, the right policies and the necessary urgency. There is no quick fix but there is an evidence-backed roadmap to making sure that everyone in Wales has the safe, secure, genuinely affordable home that they need.

June 2021 was a long time ago... let's not allow another Senedd term to pass us by.

Elen Grantham is policy and research officer at Shelter Cymru





KATIE JOHN

The winner of the 2026 CIH Cymru Rising Star award answers WHQ's questions

How did you get into housing (and your current role)?

Like most people, I sort of fell into the sector. I always wanted to help people but lacked the stomach for medicine or the calling for teaching. I worked in social value roles, championing community benefits, before finding my way to Tai Tarian. Housing was never presented as a career option for me, but it has finally allowed me to deliver on that early childhood hope of making a real impact. I started in a maternity cover role in the Customer and Community team, but when my current position was advertised a few weeks later, encouragement from my brother-in-law helped me take the leap. It's the best career decision I've ever made.

Tell us a bit about your role and why you love it.

As Tenant Engagement Officer, I ensure tenant voices are acted upon at every level of the organisation. My role was created in 2024 to strengthen that voice, moving us from a single panel to a framework built on three pillars: Inform, Involve, and Influence. It allows flexibility for tenants to engage in ways that work for them. My job is to ensure the business uses this framework – whether consulting on complaints or solar panel installations. I tell colleagues that engagement isn't scary; it starts with a simple conversation. The most rewarding part is seeing the transformation in tenants: people who felt isolated finding their voice and confidence.

What are your career ambitions?

My ambition is to keep making a difference to tenants. I don't know if I'll aim for a Director or Chief Executive role, as I've only been in the sector two years, but I certainly want to progress into management to help drive the change I want to see. I've built a foundation of trust with our tenants, and a senior role would allow me to shape how that



improves our organisation. Housing is an incredibly supportive sector with no shortage of opportunities and I'm looking forward to discovering everything that is has to offer!

What achievements are you most proud of?

Winning the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru Rising Star Award is my proudest achievement, especially since it was a nomination from my colleagues. I am also incredibly proud of our new tenant engagement framework. It launched recently, but the uptake across the business is fantastic. I'm also proud of the Swansea University research project on new housing standards; seeing a tenant advocate for solar panels after understanding the complexities behind the scenes was a major highlight. But ultimately, it's seeing the personal growth in the tenants I work with – watching strangers become friends – that I find most rewarding.

What are the main challenges of the sector?

Uncertainty. With a minority government in Wales, there is an implementation gap between legislators and operators. We need a cohesive, long-term approach to funding and housing supply. We face a massive housing crisis – thousands are on waiting lists – and we cannot just build our way out of it. We must ensure new developments provide access to resources and transport. Decarbonisation

is also critical, but it must be done with tenants, not to them. If we ignore tenant voices, we risk deepening mistrust.

What's one thing in housing in Wales would you like to change?

Wales needs a single, clear, coherent strategic vision for housing that encapsulates all of it. Aneurin Bevan's vision of quality housing integrated into mixed-income communities

is as relevant today as it was in 1945. If we want to tackle the stigma of social housing, we must return to the idea that homes should be for everyone. We need to define success not just by the number of homes built, but by the impact those homes have on generations.

What are your hopes and fears?

My hope is that politicians have the courage to treat housing as a fundamental priority, rather than a small percentage of government spend. We need to end homelessness and stop the "that will do" mentality regarding social housing. My fear is that without genuine, systemic change and a commitment to tackling stigma, the situation will worsen. We need to work with tenants to champion their skills and compassion.

What does winning the Rising Star award mean to you?

It's a huge honour. Presenting at TAI2026 allowed me to share my grandparents' story, which resonated with many delegates. It proved how important a home is – a foundation that changed the trajectory of their lives. I am grateful to my colleagues for their support and to be recognised by peers as someone making a contribution. I hope to live up to the expectations this award sets and become a trusted advocate for tenants in Wales.

Katie John is Tenant Engagement Office at Tai Tarian



MOVING ON

When a refugee gets good news, why are we making their life harder, asks **Stan Senior**

A refugee receives the news they've been waiting months, sometimes years, to hear.

They've been granted permission to stay in the UK. It should be the start of a new chapter and an opportunity to finally rebuild their lives. Instead, for many people, it's the start of a race against time.

The UK Government says it wants refugees to "integrate more fully into the communities providing them sanctuary". But its latest decision tells a different story.

From March 2026, newly recognised refugees will have 42 days to leave asylum accommodation and begin rebuilding their lives. That is an improvement on the previous 28-day system.

But it falls short of the 56-day move-on period that charities, councils and housing organisations have consistently called for. Frustratingly, the UK Government had twice extended the trial of a 56-day move-on period in recognition that it was needed to prevent the worst cases of homelessness and destitution.

And crucially, the UK Government has not explained why it thinks that 42 days is enough.

If the goal is integration, the evidence suggests we should be moving in the opposite direction.

SO, IS 42 DAYS ACTUALLY BETTER?

The honest answer is: yes, but not by much. Moving on from asylum support is rarely straightforward. People don't simply receive refugee status one day and move into a home the next.

There are forms to complete, bank accounts to open, benefits to apply for and housing to find. During this period, refugees receive several different letters and documents from the Home Office.

These include:

- A decision letter confirming refugee status.
- Information about accessing their eVisa



and National Insurance number.

- A letter confirming when support will end.
- A notice telling them when they must leave their accommodation.

All of which can be very difficult to read in a language they may struggle to understand.

Under the new system, some of these steps are compressed into a shorter timeframe. That means less time to prepare, less time to find housing and less time to avoid a crisis.

even a modest reduction in time can mean more emergency presentations, more pressure on already stretched teams and fewer opportunities to resolve problems before they become crises.

WHY 56 DAYS MATTERS

The strongest case for a 56-day move-on period is simple. It gives newly granted refugees a much more realistic chance to avoid homelessness and destitution.

It would also bring timelines for refugee move-on in line with

It's difficult to understand how reducing the timeline will improve people's chances of a successful move-on

And because the Home Office has not published the evidence behind its decision, it's difficult to understand how reducing the timeline will improve people's chances of a successful move-on.

Early narratives from local authorities, however, suggest that the positive impact will remain limited. For frontline services,

homelessness prevention duty timelines currently being used in Wales and England (Though Wales's prevention duty timeline will soon be extended to six months).

This isn't about giving refugees special treatment.

It's about giving people a fair chance

to secure housing, income and stability before support ends.

Research from the Local Government Association found that aligning these systems was one of the most effective ways to reduce homelessness and destitution among refugees, as well as costs to local councils. In its 2024 report, the Local Government Association found that asylum dispersal grant funding only covered move-on costs for 62% of councils to “a small extent”.

A longer move-on period would also help tackle another problem.

Many refugees face a destitution gap between leaving asylum support and getting their first pay from a job or receiving their first Universal Credit payment. During that period, people can be left with no income at all.

When that happens, the cost doesn't disappear. It is picked up by councils, health services, charities and local communities instead. In other words, shortening the move-on period does not remove pressure from the system; it simply shifts that pressure onto services that are already dealing with high demand and limited resources.

THE WELSH CONTEXT

When it comes to policy direction, Wales is moving one way, and the Home Office is moving another.

In Wales, with the passing of the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Act, housing policy is increasingly focused on prevention, rapid rehousing and long-term stability.

The Nation of Sanctuary approach also recognises that people are more likely to thrive when they have a secure home.

A shorter move-on period undermines that ambition. It pulls newly granted refugees away from that integration and towards insecurity and crisis.

At the Welsh Refugee Council, we see housing as the foundation for integration.

People cannot focus on finding work, learning English or becoming part of their community if they don't know where they will sleep next week. Stability is not a side issue in integration policy; it is the condition that makes every other outcome more achievable.

A secure home should be the beginning of someone's journey.

Not the reward at the end of it.

WHAT CAN WALES DO?

The move-on period itself is controlled by the UK Government. But many of its consequences are felt here in Wales. That means there are still practical steps that Welsh Government and local authorities can take. These include:

- Expanding rent deposit schemes.
- Increasing access to guarantor schemes.
- Improving support into the private rented sector.
- Recognising time spent in Home Office accommodation when assessing local connections.

Expanding access to rent deposit and guarantor schemes could represent one of the most practical interventions available to the Welsh Government and

local authorities. These schemes are already used as homelessness prevention tools in other contexts and could be systematically adapted to support refugee move-on.

With Welsh local authorities already spending record amounts on temporary accommodation, without truly knowing whether it represents value for money, the expansion of rent deposits and guarantor schemes could represent both a real-terms cost saving and improved move-on outcomes for sanctuary seekers.

With Welsh local authorities already spending record amounts on temporary accommodation, without truly knowing whether it represents value for money, the expansion of rent deposits and guarantor schemes could represent both a real-terms cost saving and improved move-on outcomes for sanctuary seekers.

With guidance and the implementation of Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Act still to be published, the Welsh Government should also be considering allowing time spent in Home Office accommodation to count towards local connection tests. This would expand newly granted refugees' housing options and support more effective move-on outcomes.

These changes would not replace the need for a 56-day move-on period.

But they could help prevent people from falling into homelessness when they receive refugee status.

If Wales is serious about its ambition to be a Nation of Sanctuary, then move-on cannot simply be treated as an issue for the Home Office alone. The housing system that refugees move into matters just as much as the asylum system they leave behind.

THE REAL TEST

The debate about move-on is often treated as an administrative issue.

It isn't. It's a test of whether refugee integration is a genuine policy goal or simply something we say we support. If people are given too little time to secure housing, income and support, homelessness becomes predictable.

And when something is predictable, it stops being an unintended consequence.

It becomes a policy choice.



Stan Senior is Housing Policy and Research Lead at the Welsh Refugee Council

Embedding experts by experience



Cymorth Cymru reveals how the voices of people with lived experience impacted Wales new Homelessness Bill and explains how to get people involved



From left: Scotty, Eluned Morgan MS, Jayne Bryant MS, Phil and Julie James MS at the Welsh Government sealing ceremony for the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Act 2026 on 1 April

At the sealing ceremony for the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Act, there were two VIP guests who were mentioned in every ministerial speech. Their names are Phil and Scotty, and they, along with more than 300 people with experience of homelessness, made invaluable contributions to the development of this ground-breaking piece of legislation. Collectively, their views and experiences have shaped meaningful changes that will affect countless lives. Let's hope this approach becomes the norm for policy development in Wales.

When Julie James MS established the Expert Review Panel (ERP) in summer 2022, we were asked to make recommendations for legislative reform to improve how we prevent and respond to homelessness in Wales. We met the chair, Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, and offered to facilitate engagement with people who had experience of

homelessness. We had recently been awarded funding by the Oak Foundation that enabled us to run an Experts by Experience project, and the opportunity to direct this towards legislative change was too good to miss.

One of our first considerations was that people's experiences of homelessness were hugely varied, and it would be important to capture a diversity of perspectives. We also knew that people's journeys through homelessness can include many ups and downs, and there would be times when people want to engage, and times when they need to focus on their own lives. Rather than establishing a small panel of people to engage with consistently throughout the ERP, we decided to engage with as many people as possible. This approach

would avoid the need for a long-term commitment from people, and let them dip in and dip out, depending on what was of interest to them.

THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

We aligned this engagement with each ERP meeting, which were focused on a specific issue, such as the prevention and relief duties, the role of other public services, temporary accommodation, or access to social housing. We went into a monthly cycle of undertaking engagement activity on the specified topic, writing up a report, and then presenting it to the meeting (and repeating). It was a very intense period, with tight deadlines, as we travelled the country, worked with numerous



partners, and analysed thousands of survey responses and post-it notes from our engagement events.

Suzanne, as ERP chair, placed huge value on the views of people with lived experience. Before we embarked on each discussion about potential legislative changes, she would ask me to present the latest Experts by Experience paper. It was top of the agenda, and valued not only by the chair, but also by every member of the panel. During the discussions, panel members would frequently refer to themes or individual comments in the Experts by Experience paper. It genuinely influenced our thinking and decisions.

A NATIONAL EFFORT

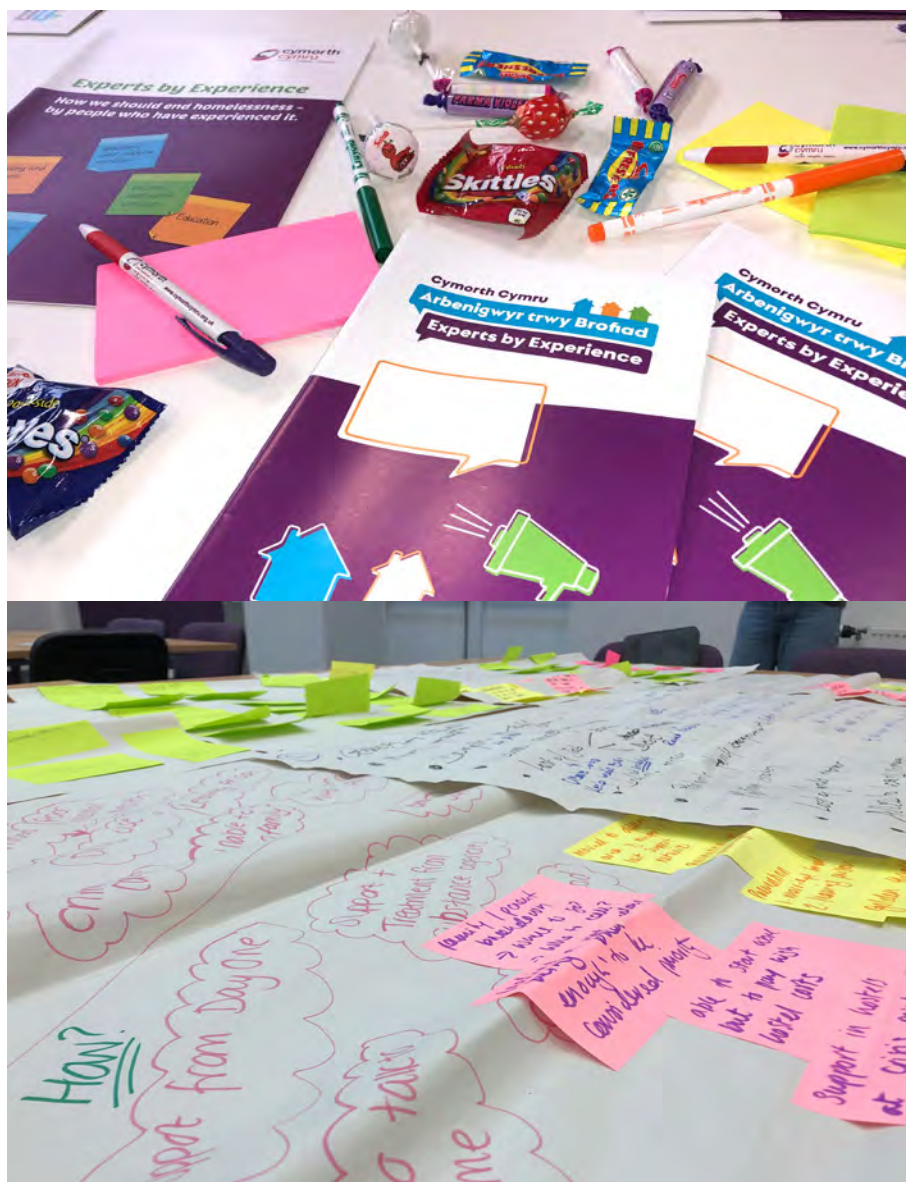
In total, we engaged with more than 300 people, through online surveys, in-person engagement events, one-on-one online interviews, conversations on the streets and visits to temporary accommodation, prison and probation services. We are so proud that the ERP's report and recommendations to the Cabinet Secretary were heavily influenced by lived experience and delighted that the Government's White Paper, and subsequent Bill, had the fingerprints of experts by experience all over it.

We were also very happy with the inclusion of Section 28, which hardwires this approach into the development of local authority homelessness strategies and the provision of information, advice and assistance. It also requires Welsh ministers to consult with people who have experienced or been threatened with homelessness, when developing guidance in relation to homelessness.

DRIVING LEGISLATIVE CHANGE

Honouring the contributions of experts by experience was a major focus of our campaigning efforts and evidence to Senedd committees throughout the legislative journey. So many people trusted us with their stories, in the hope of achieving change for future generations. We remain resolute in our commitment to this.

At the sealing ceremony for the Act, I told the First Minister that this should be the blueprint for how Government involves people in the development of policy and legislation. I hope this becomes the established way of working during the seventh Senedd.



Our learning:

We don't claim to have got everything right, but here are some of the things we learned along the way:

- Provide a variety of ways for people to get involved, including online and in-person.
- If possible, go to where people are, rather than expecting everyone to come to you.
- Create an informal environment, where people can be themselves and take time out if needed.
- Ensure people feel safe to share their views, and provide assurances that contributions will remain anonymous.
- Enable people to communicate in a variety of ways – some people want to talk, others prefer to write down their thoughts.
- Make the discussions as accessible as possible – it's our job to translate people's views into policy or legislation.
- Work with support agencies to ensure people have access to support if they need it.
- Consider how you can reward people's time and expertise.
- Be honest about the likely pace and scale of change.
- Honour people's contributions by advocating strongly for change.



Turning empty promises into action

A new handbook aims to help everyone involved in bringing empty properties back into use. Helen Taylor explains the thinking

The Welsh Government has published a new Empty Property Handbook, a guide for local authorities, empty property owners, community groups, and anyone involved in bring empty commercial and residential properties back into use.

The handbook was written by researchers from Cardiff Metropolitan University and was informed by a broad range of experts from the housing sector. It shares best practice, case studies and financial tools to help turn vacant spaces into thriving areas.

The issue of empty properties is multi-dimensional and complex. Empty properties can be described as a housing issue or an environmental health issue, an issue with regeneration and planning or an economic issue. The negative impact of empty properties can cause anti-social behaviour, undermining community cohesion. Due to the complex nature of the issue, the range of stakeholders needed to tackle it is also broad. Partnership working is therefore a key element in addressing this issue, and there needs to be joined-up working between different professionals within and outside of the local authorities.

The handbook can be used in different ways depending on the stakeholder: as an informative broad overview to the processes, tools, context, and ways of working around tackling empty properties, or as a practical resource to support those involved in bringing properties back into beneficial use. It outlines important considerations and the broad steps necessary for addressing empty properties.

It is structured in two parts: the guide and resources. The guide provides a broad overview of the key themes and issues of tackling empty properties. It is split into four sections:

1. Issues with empty properties
2. Who is involved in empty properties?
3. How are empty properties addressed?
4. What skills are needed to tackle empty properties?

Information presented in these sections includes an overview of who is involved in empty property work inside and outside of local authorities, the process of bringing empty properties back into use, and an overview of financial viability considerations for all stakeholders, including property owners.

The second part of the handbook is the resources document. This provides template and exemplar documents to support the processes outlined in the guide, as well as a legislative handbook which condenses all the pertinent legislative tools around empty properties into one place. The documents presented here are intended to be practical and accessible for stakeholders to use. Best practice case studies from different local authorities in Wales are also included, to showcase work that has been successful in bringing empty properties back into beneficial use.

INTERVIEWS AND WORKSHOPS

The handbook was developed through interviews and workshops with the housing sector, reflecting the broad set of professionals with an interest in this work. This included those working in the local authority, and individuals from housing associations, the third

sector, and those working as private landlords. Housing professionals also contributed exemplar documents, case studies, and acted as critical friends on drafts of the handbook.

Throughout the design of the document there has been a focus on functionality so it can act as a practical resource. The exemplar and template documents within the resources document can be either filled in digitally or downloaded and printed off. This is so that these documents don't just describe what professionals can do but provide them with the exact document that they can use immediately. Links are also provided between the guide and the resources documents so that the relevant template document can be easily opened alongside the section discussing it in the guide. An example of this can be found below.

FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

The handbook has been informed by, and is for, all stakeholders involved in empty properties. It can be used as an introduction to training for those new to empty property work within the local authority, outlining the process and complexities of how properties can be brought back into beneficial use. It can be used as a guide for landlords who own empty properties and want to know how to bring these back into use, who to speak to about this, and what funding is available. It can also be used to support community groups in following this process.

We hope that this will be a useful document for those working in housing and that it provides a set of practical and informative resources to support bringing empty properties back into beneficial use.

Dr Helen Taylor is senior lecturer in housing at Cardiff Metropolitan University. The handbook is available [HERE](#)

Resource 4: Tracing Owner Checklist

Overview

This resource is a template document to support the process of tracing the owner of an empty property.

Not all of the actions will be relevant to each empty property. Different actions or combinations of actions can be used for different scenarios.

Action	Completed?	Notes
Not all of the actions will be relevant to each empty property.	• Yes/no • If no, why not? • Include date of action	• What happened following the action? • What needs to happen next? • Is there another action that needs to be added to the list?
Undertake a land registry search		
Request current and previous council tax/business rates records and uploaded documents (if		

Building better



From protecting bats to dealing with surface water, WHQ explores how Wales' housing sector is balancing environmental ambition, legal frameworks and the need for more homes.

Tenby's marine environment is protected as part of the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries Special Area of Conservation



HOMES ON HOLD

One year into the marine nitrates crisis, Hayley Eastment explores how we can balance the vital protection of our natural environment with the equally urgent need to provide safe, affordable homes

It has been a year since Natural Resources Wales (NRW) published its updated conditions assessments and planning advice relating to marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) across west Wales. What followed was one of the most significant planning shocks to hit housing delivery in Wales in recent years.

NRW's advice effectively halted the development of thousands of urgently needed social homes across large parts of west Wales, impacting housing associations, local authorities, developers, supply chains and communities already experiencing acute housing pressures.

A year later, despite considerable work by Welsh Government, local authorities and wider stakeholders, thousands of homes remain stalled, including affordable homes. Against the backdrop of a housing emergency, the question facing Wales is increasingly stark: how do we balance the vital

protection of our natural environment with the equally urgent need to provide safe, affordable homes?

WHAT HAPPENED?

The issue emerged following updated evidence and conservation advice published by NRW for several marine SACs, including Pembrokeshire, Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries, and Cardigan Bay. NRW concluded that elevated levels of Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (DIN) were contributing to unfavourable environmental conditions in these protected sites. Under the Habitats Regulations, local planning authorities are required to ensure that development does not adversely affect the integrity of these protected areas.

In practical terms, the result was immediate uncertainty across affected local authority areas. New housing developments, and in some cases schemes already progressing through planning or construction, were suddenly

required to demonstrate nutrient neutrality or provide mitigation to offset their impact before planning permission could be granted or lawfully implemented.

The impact has been profound. As many as 11,000 homes across west Wales have been reported as affected by the advice. For housing associations alone, more than 2,000 affordable homes are currently impacted, and 70 ready-to-go affordable homes risk standing empty this summer if the situation remains unchanged.

This is happening against the backdrop of record pressure on housing need. More than 10,500 people in Wales are currently living in temporary accommodation, including more than 2,000 children, with local authorities facing rising costs and increasing difficulty securing suitable placements. At a time when tens of thousands of people across Wales remain on waiting lists for social housing, it is deeply

concerning that affordable homes which could help relieve this pressure are unable to progress. Wales has declared a housing emergency, yet in parts of west Wales the delivery of affordable homes has effectively stopped.

PROTECTING NATURE AND DELIVERING HOMES

Housing associations across Wales are deeply committed to protecting and restoring the natural environment. The sector recognises the importance of safeguarding protected habitats and improving biodiversity outcomes for future generations, and many organisations are already going beyond minimum requirements in areas such as energy efficiency, placemaking, biodiversity enhancement and sustainable drainage. The sector fully accepts the need for robust environmental protections.

But there is a growing tension between environmental ambitions and housing delivery. NRW's own reports indicate that nutrient pollution is driven predominantly by agriculture, alongside contributions from private sewage systems and pressures within the water industry, with agriculture responsible for around 95% of nutrient loads in many catchments. Yet housing development has become one of the most immediate and visible sectors impacted by the planning response. There remains frustration that while housing delivery has slowed dramatically, equivalent visible progress in addressing the largest contributor to nutrient pollution has not followed. This imbalance risks creating a perception that housing delivery is carrying a disproportionate burden for a much broader environmental challenge.

THE IMPACT ON THE WIDER ECONOMY

The impact is now extending far beyond delayed housing schemes alone. Across west Wales, prolonged restrictions are beginning to affect the wider development and construction ecosystem that affordable housing delivery depends upon. Local consultants and contractors are already reporting significant reductions in workload linked directly to the continued planning moratorium in affected areas.

One west Wales architectural practice

reported that revenues in the first half of the financial year were down by almost a third compared with pre-restriction levels, following an earlier 20% annual reduction in turnover linked to the slowdown in planning activity. The practice had already been forced to make redundancies as a direct result of halted development activity. Nick Cox, commercial director at RLH Architectural Ltd, said this was "a desperate situation we are all in", warning that without urgent intervention "jobs will be lost, businesses will close and the building of these much-needed homes will cease".

Many businesses are now actively seeking work outside affected counties in order to remain viable, while competing against a growing number of firms doing the same. This risks creating a longer-term weakening of local development capacity and supply chains within rural west Wales, precisely at the point when significant housing delivery is needed. Rebuilding lost confidence, expertise and supply chain capacity in

failing tighter phosphorus targets. This led to nutrient neutrality requirements being applied across several river catchments, with major impacts on housing delivery in areas including the Wye, Usk, Teifi and Cleddau catchments. Housing developments stalled, LDPs were delayed, planning applications paused, and affordable housing schemes placed at risk. Welsh Government established working groups, river summits and support programmes aimed at unblocking development and identifying mitigation approaches. Significant effort was invested across the sector to understand wastewater treatment capacity, nutrient pathways and potential offsetting mechanisms.

And yet, here we are again, only a few years later, this time with marine nitrates. The recent crisis has left the sector questioning whether it learned enough from the phosphates experience. It raises questions whether early warning systems, clearer

This is not simply a housing issue. It is an economic issue, a community issue and a workforce issue

rural areas would take significant time, even once solutions are implemented.

The sector is already facing rising construction costs, economic uncertainty and pressure on capacity; the sudden removal of a substantial pipeline of development has created major instability. There are also growing concerns that prolonged disruption to development pipelines could begin to place additional pressure on contractors operating in Wales more broadly. Recent experiences across the construction industry have demonstrated how quickly financial pressures can escalate once workloads reduce and confidence weakens. This is not simply a housing issue. It is an economic issue, a community issue and a workforce issue.

WE HAVE SEEN THIS BEFORE

In January 2021, NRW published evidence showing that a significant proportion of SAC rivers in Wales were

regulatory coordination, and faster strategic solutions can be delivered before the current crisis deepens.

There is also frustration that Wales continues to respond reactively to environmental compliance issues after planning systems and housing pipelines have already been severely disrupted, rather than taking a more proactive national approach to environmental capacity, infrastructure investment and catchment management. Without learning from previous experience, there is a real risk that nutrient neutrality becomes an ongoing cycle of uncertainty, delay and stalled housing delivery across different parts of Wales.

THE RURAL CHALLENGE

The impact is particularly acute in rural communities, where bringing forward affordable housing is already difficult due to land availability, viability pressures, infrastructure constraints



and complex planning requirements. Many communities across west Wales are already facing affordability pressures, ageing populations and the loss of younger people unable to remain in the areas where they grew up. Housing associations play a vital role in sustaining these communities by delivering homes for local people, families and key workers.

The marine nitrates issue compounds these existing challenges and risks making affected areas less attractive for future development investment altogether. There is also growing concern that, with further environmental assessments taking place elsewhere in Wales, similar restrictions could emerge in additional parts of the country. Without a clear long-term national strategy, there is a real risk that these challenges become more widespread and the supply chains who have sustained investment in rural Wales begin to look elsewhere.

THE IMPACT ON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The implications extend beyond individual planning applications and

stalled housing sites. Marine nitrates are beginning to have significant consequences for LDPs, which are intended to provide certainty about where homes, jobs and infrastructure should be delivered over the coming years. Planning authorities are increasingly having to revisit evidence bases, Habitats Regulations Assessments and site allocations, placing further pressure on already under-resourced planning teams.

treatment capacity, mitigation measures or environmental impacts, authorities may struggle to confidently allocate sites for future housing growth. The result risks delaying plan-making, weakening housing land supply and reducing confidence for future investment, particularly in rural areas where viable development opportunities are already limited.

At a time when Wales has declared a housing emergency and is seeking

Physically completed homes may stand empty in the middle of a declared housing emergency

This creates major challenges for housing associations attempting to plan long-term development pipelines and investment programmes. The experience mirrors the phosphate crisis, which disrupted LDP progression across multiple parts of Wales. Where uncertainty remains around wastewater

to accelerate social housing delivery, prolonged uncertainty within the planning system risks achieving the opposite.

WELSH GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

The last Welsh Government moved quickly to establish the Marine Nitrates

Cardigan Bay



Development Taskforce, bringing together officials, NRW, local planning authorities and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water to develop practical solutions to unblock development while remaining compliant with environmental legislation. Progress over the past year includes the development of a Nutrient Calculator and the establishment of a Nutrient Credit Trading Group, which in time will allow developers to offset nutrient impacts through investment in wetland creation, woodland planting and wider environmental improvements. However, many of these solutions are heavily dependent on the availability of suitable land for mitigation, which is itself a finite and increasingly constrained resource, particularly in rural areas where development opportunities are already limited.

Welsh Government also commissioned guidance and case studies to support planning authorities in progressing LDPs and determining planning applications in affected areas. Alongside this, Carmarthenshire County Council led the development of a mitigation handbook for developers. This is a welcome initiative demonstrating strong commitment from local authorities to support delivery wherever possible. However, for many housing associations and developers, the handbook has raised further questions and does not yet provide a clear route map for schemes already on site or nearing completion.

Some authorities are exploring whether affordable housing occupied by existing catchment residents generates any genuinely additional environmental impact – a potentially important route for certain schemes, given that these households already contribute to local nutrient loads. But considerable uncertainty remains around ongoing wastewater treatment capacity assessments by NRW and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, and how these will affect development going forward.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

A year on, the sector is still searching for practical pathways to unlock delivery. Many pipeline schemes remain on hold pending a clear solution, and the longer that situation persists, the harder it becomes to support local supply chains, investor confidence and development



momentum. The Marine Nitrates Development Taskforce dissolved at the end of the last Senedd term, yet many of the issues it was established to address remain unresolved. There is understandable concern across the housing sector about how this work will continue under the new Welsh Government, and whether the pace and urgency required will be maintained.

The reality is stark. Large projects remain stalled. Affordable homes that communities urgently need are delayed. Physically completed homes may stand empty in the middle of a declared housing emergency. The challenge facing Wales is not a choice between protecting nature and delivering homes, we must

do both. Environmental restoration is essential. So too is providing secure, affordable housing for the thousands of people currently waiting for a home.

The solutions will require long-term collaboration across government, regulators, the water industry, agriculture, planning authorities and the housing sector. They also require urgency, because while systems, guidance and governance structures continue to evolve, families across Wales remain without the homes they desperately need.

Hayley Eastment is Policy and External Affairs Manager at Community Housing Cymru



Hedyn has been collecting data on how many bats and bird boxes are present on its properties



BOXING CLEVER

Rob Picton on why and how the presence of the bats and birds that also call housing stock their home should be monitored

When you are relatively new to the world of housing and a senior colleague at Hedyn asks you how many bird and bat boxes we have, you have to say, 'I don't personally know, but I will do my best to find out for you.'

With a desire to find a definitive number, finding out what data we might hold and who might have the information I needed became my first port of call. However, while we held lots of ecology reports and asset data about our properties, it was the specific question of how many bird and bat boxes which elicited the response from others of, 'Sorry I don't know, let me know what you find and we can add it to our records.'

It dawned on me that this was no simple project, so to help build the foundations of what would follow, I created a list of scenarios that I could

use to steer conversations with potential data owners. My first question was 'What might have instigated the bird or bat box being installed in the first place?' Was it because a new development was planned and ecology reports stipulated that bat and bird species were in the area and needed nesting sites, or did we add boxes retrospectively to our existing portfolio of properties as bat and bird species had been spotted in the area?

With new builds and existing assets being considered under the category 'the ones we probably know about', my mind started to turn to 'the ones we probably don't know about' and these included third parties who might have put up bird and bat boxes through community projects aimed at supporting local ecology, or where the well-meaning residents might have bought or even

made bird and bat boxes and installed them themselves.

THE BIG UNKNOWN

There is, of course, one very big unknown in the 'ones we probably don't know about' category and that is the natural ones – the nooks, crevices, gaps and the void spaces that have become home to these creatures.

Now that I roughly knew the scenarios that we are working with, my attention turned to the more technical side of the data and whether the boxes and roosts were part of the structure and fabric of the building, i.e. some sort of specialist brick or access to a void granted via a grille or hole that was built into the property. Or whether the bat boxes/roosts had been added on to the external structure. This, I later discovered, would be invaluable, as it

provided a vital part of the puzzle in where to look during visual inspections.

Even though finding the definitive number was not as simple as a click of a button, I am pleased to say that lots of progress has been made in how we now record data and pull key ecology information together. From a colleague perspective, a number of us have undertaken in-depth bat surveying and recording training. This has helped us to understand the legislation, how to spot bats and how to ensure they are protected within our properties and across our estates.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The course and the subsequent knowledge gained has also allowed us to create our own internal eLearning packages, which will help colleagues to understand their roles and responsibilities when it comes to protected species.

We have also supported data owners across the association to understand the importance of our ecology information so that all new developments have key



Housemartins, which construct distinct mud nests on exterior walls, are protected under legislation

data reporting as standard. With the templates for collation set up and a clear understanding of what needs to be recorded, we are retrospectively looking at properties built in the last five years to ensure this information is present. Following this, we will be undertaking an assessment of the rest of our housing stock via bat surveying, stock condition

checks and routine maintenance. The picture regarding ecology is much clearer and will help support our role in ensuring protected species get the due care and attention they deserve.

Rob Picton is Environmental Sustainability Business Partner at Hedyn

What you need to know about bats, birds and housing

It is worth pointing out that there are specialists who will need to be called upon to help as all bat species and their roosts are fully protected in the UK under domestic and European legislation.

Because they are classified as European Protected Species (EPS), it is a criminal offence to harm, disturb or alter their habitats. Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is an offence to:

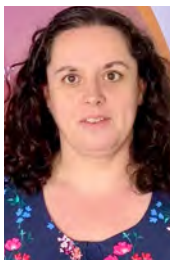
- **Harm:** Deliberately capture, injure, or kill a bat.
- **Disturb:** Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a shelter or place of protection.
- **Damage roosts:** Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place (roost). This applies whether the bats are actively occupying the roost at the time or not.
- **Obstruct:** Obstruct access to a bat roost.
- **Sell or Transport:** Possess, control, transport or sell any live or dead bat or any part of a bat.



The rules also apply to protected birds that commonly nest in roof spaces and under the eaves of residential homes and include protected species such as:

- **House sparrows and starlings:** Both are on the UK's red list of conservation concern. They readily slip under roof tiles and into soffits to raise their young.
- **Swifts and swallows:** Highly protected migratory birds that return to the exact same nest sites (often in roof voids, gables, or under eaves) every summer.
- **Housemartins:** These birds construct distinct mud nests on the exterior walls, directly underneath eaves.
- **Barn owls:** Though less common, they sometimes roost or nest in larger outbuildings, old traditional barns and chimneys.





A BALANCING ACT

Wendy Dearden discusses the tension between environmental aspirations for social homes and the need to boost supply

In the lead up to the Senedd elections, our calls for a review of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) were quickly echoed by others in the sector. It is a difficult conversation to start, as no-one wants to be seen to be talking down action to reduce the environmental impact of our homes.

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS

WHQS, which sets the requirement for existing social homes, was updated in 2023 to include the first EPC rating requirements. These were that:

- Heating systems must be economical to run and capable of heating the whole of the home to a comfortable level to a rating of EPC A (the highest EPC rating).
- A minimum rating of EPC A must be achieved across homes through the installation of measures or planned for as part of a future programme of works.
- In the interim, all homes must meet a minimum standard of EPC C by 2030.

The standards for new homes are set by the Welsh Development Quality Requirements (WDQR) and must be at EPC A. Where existing homes are being acquired and refurbished, social landlords should take all opportunities to meet the standard.

To provide context:

- In England, the new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) requires existing homes to achieve EPC C by 2030 in one area – fabric, heating or smart technology – and in a second area by 2039. Exemptions and extensions can apply if the works are over £10,000 per property.
- In Scotland, the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH) had been set as EPC B by December 2032 with no existing social housing below EPC D being allowed to be re-let from December 2025. These milestones are temporarily on hold pending a new Social Housing Net Zero Standard.

In both nations, new social homes have higher EPC rating requirements than existing ones.

IMPACT ON BOOSTING SUPPLY: COST

Audit Wales has previously reported that the cost of new development has had a clear impact on the delivery of new social homes. As the former Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Local Government and Planning Julie James said in 2023: “We could get somewhere between five and seven houses for £1 million; now we get four if we’re lucky.”

One factor is the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine pushing up construction costs. Another is the additional costs associated with the aspiration for net zero homes.

One housing association shared that the average cost of achieving an energy performance rating (EPC) of A on a new build home is on average

vary across different types of landlords. Local authorities and large-scale voluntary transfer associations will have significantly older housing stock in need of greater investment. Social landlords have reported to us that they face a difficult financial balancing act. Do they improve their existing stock or add to their stock through new development? Do they have the financial capacity to do both?

IMPACT ON BOOSTING SUPPLY: BUY-BACKS

Our recent report *Tenure Change: Turning Existing Dwellings and Buildings into Social Homes* evidenced that current standards are also making many existing dwellings unviable for acquisition.

The Local Government and Housing Committee's Social Housing Supply inquiry reported that acquisitions could be a bigger part of the supply solution if

‘Every social housing organisation has limited borrowing powers; and to meet current housing standards; the cost of building each unit is higher, and this limits the number of homes the sector is able to deliver.’

Housing association director in conversation with the Bevan Foundation

£15,000 more than an EPC B-rated home, depending on the scale of the development and construction method. They had estimated that if the EPC target was lowered to a B rating for the 20,000 homes target, an additional 1,000 homes could have been supported with the same funding.

The financial challenge of bringing existing social homes up to WHQS will

there was further flexibility on standards. It recommended that a separate standard should be developed for acquisitions which would never achieve full WDQR and WHQS but ‘can still deliver quality.

The government's response was that it did not want to create two tiers of accommodation standards. We would make the case that temporary accommodation could itself be regarded

as a second tier of accommodation. Here, thousands of households may experience accommodation that does not even meet the lowest standards as they wait in hope for a gold standard social home.

UNFAIR FOCUS ON SOCIAL HOMES

The Government has used social housing to support a testing and learning approach to decarbonising homes, with the intention of that learning being passed to other tenures.

However, the Chartered Institute of Building has called for a retrofit plan for the private housing market as lessons from initiatives focused on social homes have 'yet to be fully applied to the private sector'. It is important to remember that more than 80% of existing homes are in private ownership.

Our analysis of EPC data from 2024 reveals clear variations between different tenures and particularly between social homes and privately owned dwellings:

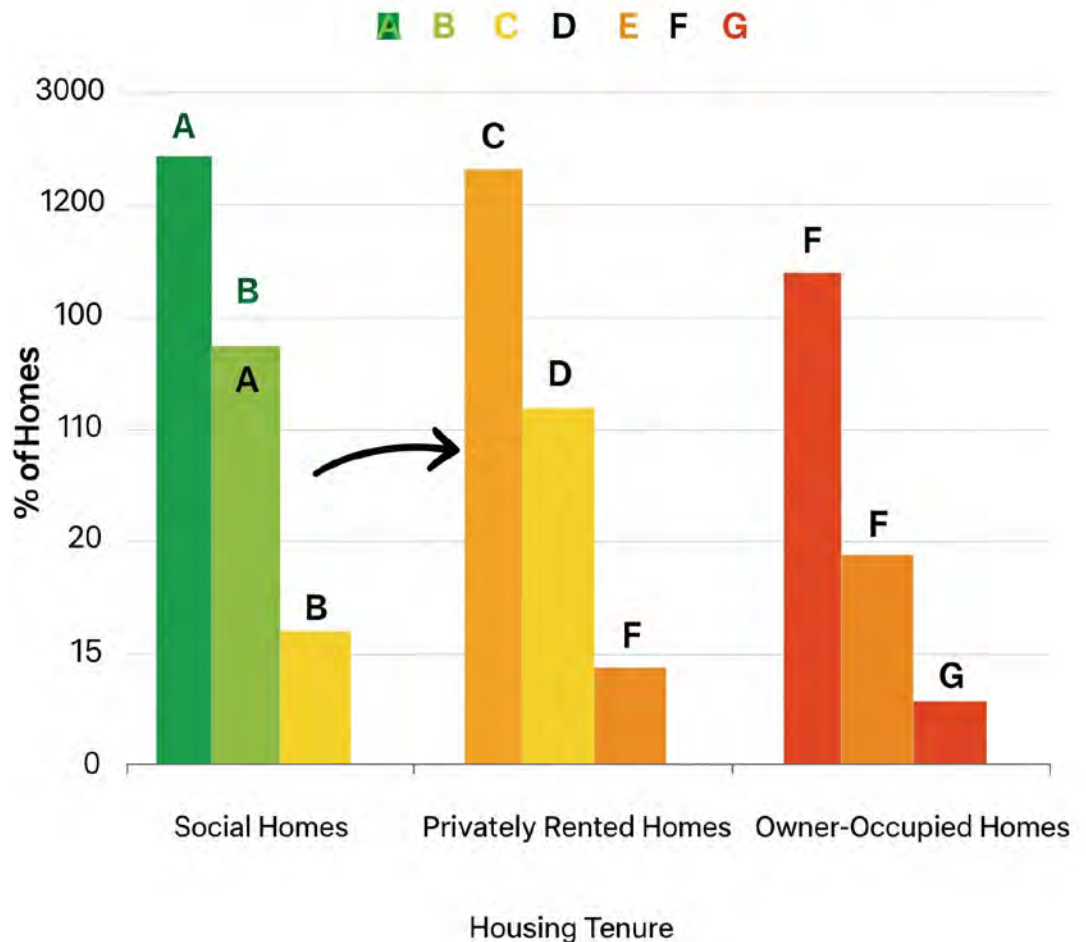
- Social homes were clearly the most energy efficient, with 71% of those with EPC certificates having a rating of C or above. Social homes also had the highest number of EPC A rated homes at 0.6%.
- Owner-occupied dwellings however had the highest proportion of the lowest value ratings, with 8% with an F or G rating, compared with 3% of private rents and 0.5% of social homes.

These results lead us to question why the focus is on making the best homes better, rather than targeting action at the worst?

MOVING FORWARD

It is right to ensure that tenants have the guarantee of a good-quality social

Energy Efficiency Rating (EPC Bands) Comparison by Housing Tenure



Individual Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Bands, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics NB This data only covers properties with an EPC – all new dwellings, and those sold or rented.

home, but we must be pragmatic and led by what tenants need and want. We must also find the right balance between improving existing homes and providing for those who have no home at all.

One local government development officer described this conflict to us very succinctly: 'Is the priority more houses? To combat homelessness? Or is it reaching net zero and saving the planet? Obviously, you want to do everything...'

In their manifesto, Plaid Cymru committed to reducing regulatory barriers to building and buying-in more social homes, including through more balanced energy efficiency requirements.

The Bevan Foundation is pleased to

see this indication of pragmatism and would also like to see:

- A critical review to assess the merits of requiring all new and existing social homes to meet an EPC of A.
- The suitability of acquisitions being assessed on a property-by-property basis, balancing physical properties factor with wider considerations on demand and suitability.
- Greater flexibility in the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) funding requirement that a dwelling must be sold after 10 years if it does not meet WHQS.

Wendy Dearden is Senior Policy and Research Officer at the Bevan Foundation



BACKING WELSH WOOD

An eight-year project explored how the timber supply chain can deliver genuinely low-carbon social housing. David Hedges explains

The Welsh Government-funded Home-Grown Homes Project (2018-26) and the EU Rural Development Programme, led by Woodknowledge Wales, has been a catalyst for change across forestry, timber manufacturing and construction, directly supporting Welsh priorities in decarbonisation, the circular economy and sustainable land use.

The project had a strong emphasis on reducing both embodied and whole-life carbon emissions. Two influential reports on wood in construction (WIC) as a scalable greenhouse gas removal (GGR) solution positioned timber as one of the most cost-effective methods for carbon capture and storage, highlighting its potential to help the UK meet its annual requirement to remove approximately 75 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (the standard unit of measurement for greenhouse gas emissions).

The report's recommendations include policy incentives, carbon credits, mandates for timber use in public buildings and the creation of a national taskforce to govern how we measure and value the carbon absorbed by trees and stored in wood products such as timber-frame homes.

DEVELOPING TOOLS

Tools to embed carbon reduction into decision making were developed. The ESECT (early stage embodied carbon tool), launched in 2025, helps social housing developers consider embodied carbon from the earliest design stages and clearly demonstrates the carbon benefits of timber over higher-embodied alternatives. Complementary work on sustainable placemaking showed that early masterplanning decisions (e.g. density, orientation and landscaping) have a greater influence on overall carbon performance than individual building specifications.

Building performance evaluation (BPE) activities addressed the well-documented

"performance gap" between designed and actual energy use. A proposed six-stage quality assurance pathway aims to ensure homes deliver genuine operational carbon savings and occupant comfort, reducing long-term emissions and fuel poverty risks.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES

The project also looked at how to strengthen domestic timber supply while advancing circular principles. Case studies, a Sawmill Survey and new tools (including a timber framers' embodied carbon tool and supply chain mapping tool) have been developed to support greater use of home-grown and reclaimed timber. The project built evidence for domestic manufacturing of glulam (an engineered timber), high-performance timber windows and wood-fibre insulation – all of which offer lower transport emissions and enhanced carbon storage compared with imported materials. Circular economy principles were promoted through events, exploring barriers to reclaimed timber use and cascading systems (reusing wood at its highest value before eventual recycling). This approach maximises long-term carbon storage while minimising waste.

Wales' future timber resource needs in the context of economy-wide decarbonisation were also considered. Key reports stressed that planting trees alone is insufficient. Instead, hierarchical and circular use models – directing timber to long-life construction products – can deliver multiple benefits: increased carbon capture and storage, enhanced biodiversity, better soil and water regulation, and improved ecosystem services.

BETTER INTEGRATION

Work on farm forestry and the National Forest for Wales explored how new private woodlands can

produce high-value construction timber alongside recreation, health and ecological outcomes. Studies highlighted opportunities for more accurate woodland valuation and better integration of productive forestry with environmental goals. The project emphasised the need to align commercial timber production with the National Forest to avoid missed opportunities for carbon storage and rural resilience.

Prioritising home-grown timber shows key environmental benefits in reduced reliance on high-carbon imports, shorter supply chains and the locking up of carbon in buildings for decades. It also supports responsible woodland expansion that balances climate mitigation with biodiversity and landscape values.

The project has laid robust foundations for Wales to become a leader in sustainable, timber-based construction. While full transformation is ongoing, its tools, evidence and recommendations provide a credible pathway to significant environmental gains. Continued implementation of the Welsh Government's Timber Industrial Strategy, combined with courageous policy support and demonstrator projects, can deliver lasting benefits for carbon reduction, biodiversity and climate resilience across Wales.

David Hedges is Head of Housing at Woodknowledge Wales

The project developed a series of reports, tools and guidance, all free to download on Woodknowledge Wales' website: [woodknowledge.wales/home-grown-homes](https://www.woodknowledge.wales/home-grown-homes)

The Welsh Government timber strategy can be found at: www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2025-07/timber-industrial-strategy.pdf



BENEATH THE SURFACE?

Justin Griffiths explains how sustainable drainage systems, SABs and the SAB Society Wales are impacting modern housing development

The delivery of housing across Wales is increasingly shaped by the need to balance growth with environmental resilience. Central to this transition is the implementation of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), enforced through the statutory framework of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. Since its commencement in January 2019, this legislation has fundamentally redefined how surface water is managed within new developments, placing Wales at the forefront of sustainable water management policy in the UK.

Within this evolving landscape, local authorities exercise their duties as SuDS Approving Bodies (SABs), while the recent establishment of SAB Society Wales reflects a growing recognition that collaboration and consistency are essential to delivering the full benefits of the regime.

From my perspective as chair of SAB Society Wales, the past few years

have marked a significant period of transition – one that has brought both clear successes and important learning opportunities for the sector.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are designed to manage rainfall in a way that mimics the natural environment, slowing, storing and treating surface water close to where it falls. In contrast to traditional piped drainage systems, SuDS seek to reduce flood risk, improve water quality and contribute to wider environmental and community benefits, including biodiversity and amenity value.

Under Welsh legislation, all developments comprising more than one dwelling or exceeding 100sq metres of construction area must incorporate SuDS that comply with national standards. These systems must be approved by the SAB prior to construction commencing, separate from the planning process.

The SAB performs a statutory role to:

- Evaluate and approve drainage proposals for new developments.

- Ensure compliance with national SuDS standards.
- Adopt and maintain approved systems (subject to conditions).
- Undertake inspection and enforcement duties.

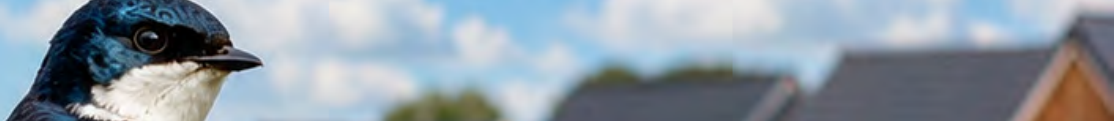
This dual-consent approach – requiring planning permission and SAB approval – ensures surface water drainage is embedded as fundamental infrastructure within the development process.

THE ROLE OF SAB SOCIETY WALES

SAB Society Wales was created on 7 January 2026 marking seven years of the implementation of Schedule 3 (Flood & Water Management Act 2010). It marks an important step in the maturity of the SuDS regime in Wales, providing a unified national platform representing the 22 SAB authorities.

The society has been established to:

- Promote consistency in technical assessment and decision-making.



- Share knowledge, guidance and best practice.
- Support training and capacity building within SAB teams.
- Engage constructively with developers, Welsh Government and stakeholders
- Influence policy and drive continuous improvement.

As chair, I consider one of the most important aspects of the society's work to be fostering a shared understanding across all authorities and stakeholders. As I have previously stated: 'SAB Society Wales stands as the unified national voice for Sustainable Drainage Approving Bodies – driving consistency, collaboration, and professional excellence across Wales. By bridging policy and practice, the society brings clarity and confidence to the development process, translating national ambition into practical delivery on the ground. Through one coordinated approach, it ensures that Sustainable Drainage Systems not only meet standards, but deliver lasting benefits for communities, the environment, and the Welsh economy.'

This ethos underpins the society's approach – ensuring that, while respecting local context, a more consistent, transparent and collaborative system is delivered across Wales.

CHALLENGES AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS

While the benefits are clear, the implementation of the SAB regime has presented challenges that continue to affect housing delivery.

The dual-consent requirement introduces an additional regulatory step, and where planning and SAB processes are not aligned, this can lead to delays, redesign and programme uncertainty.

VIABILITY PRESSURES

The delivery of SuDS can introduce additional costs, including land requirements and alternative construction methods. Commuted sums for maintenance remain a particular concern due to variations in approach across authorities, creating financial uncertainty for developers.

CONSISTENCY AND CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS

Variations in interpretation of standards, combined with ongoing resource

pressures within local authorities, can affect the consistency and timeliness of decision-making.

IMPLICATIONS

There is increasing acknowledgment within the sector that delays associated with infrastructure approvals, including the SAB process, can impact housing supply.

Recommendations consistently highlight the need for improved resourcing, standardisation and process alignment.

POSITIVE IMPACTS

One of the most significant achievements of the SAB regime has been its contribution to reducing flood risk. By slowing runoff and promoting infiltration, SuDS can reduce the burden on existing drainage networks and mitigate downstream flooding.

Evidence from Wales demonstrates that SuDS are successfully diverting flows away from combined sewer systems, helping to reduce both flooding incidents and pollution events.

In a changing climate, this resilience is essential in protecting both new and existing communities.

SuDS have redefined drainage from a purely functional requirement into an integral component of placemaking.

The benefits include:

- Creation of habitats supporting biodiversity.
- Improved water quality through natural filtration.
- Delivery of green and blue infrastructure.
- Enhanced amenity and well-being for communities.

These outcomes align with wider Welsh Government priorities, reinforcing the role of SuDS in delivering sustainable, high-quality residential environments.

The duty placed upon SABs to adopt compliant systems ensures that drainage infrastructure is maintained in perpetuity, providing certainty for residents and local authorities alike.

The SAB process has driven a cultural shift within the development sector. Drainage is now a primary design consideration, requiring integration at the earliest stages of masterplanning. This has led to more innovative, sustainable and resilient site design.

Wales has implemented a progressive

and ambitious sustainable drainage framework. However, continued success will depend upon achieving an appropriate balance between environmental outcomes and development viability.

Through collaborative working across all 22 SAB authorities, developers, consultants and Welsh Government, there remains a clear opportunity to refine the system, addressing challenges whilst maintaining the integrity of the standards.

From my experience working closely with colleagues across all authorities, there is a strong collective commitment to this objective.

Sustainable Drainage Systems and the SAB framework represent a positive and necessary step forward in how development is delivered across Wales. By placing resilience, environmental protection and community wellbeing at the forefront, SuDS are helping to ensure that new homes are not only built to meet demand, but designed to stand the test of time.

As the system continues to mature, there is growing recognition that sustainable drainage and efficient housing delivery can go hand in hand. With clearer guidance, improved consistency and a shared commitment to getting schemes right first time, SABs are increasingly supporting a more streamlined and predictable development process.

SAB Society Wales has a key role to play in this journey. By working collaboratively with Welsh Government, local authorities, developers and other stakeholders, the society is helping to build a better understanding of the challenges facing the housing sector, while promoting practical, proportionate solutions. This partnership approach is strengthening confidence in the process and supporting continuous improvement across Wales.

With this collective effort, Wales is well placed to lead the way – demonstrating how sustainable drainage can successfully underpin the delivery of high-quality, resilient and attractive communities for the future.

Justin Griffiths is SAB and Highway Development Control Manager at Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council



CLIMATE CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS

Dr Alan Netherwood completed a climate change risk assessment for Gwent. His insights give housing professionals much to think about

Between October 2025 and March 2026 Gwent's Public Services Board commissioned Netherwood Sustainable Futures to undertake a climate change risk assessment (CCRA) to examine the likely risks resulting from a changing climate for the communities, townscapes, landscape and infrastructure of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen. This work was funded by Natural Resources Wales.

The CCRA involved input from local authority leaders, public sector managers and other local experts who help to manage Gwent's roads, housing, schools, countryside, towns, emergency planning, landscapes and utilities. Forty-six organisations and more than 300 people were consulted to explore which impacts were likely and where.

The Met Office and *UK Climate Change Committee* provide a clear idea about what changes in climate are likely in coming decades in Gwent. Broad changes will occur, including warmer and wetter winters; hotter and drier summers; and high variability of extreme weather. Critically, this will mean increased exposure to repeated weather-related hazards: such as flooding, the effect of heatwaves, storm damage and wildfire. The severe weather impacts that we are currently experiencing will gradually intensify.

Assessing climate risk is not just about the effects of single weather events or responses to emergency incidents or single issues such as flooding. Its focus is on the risks from repeated impacts as they build over time; how combinations of risks will play out in unique ways in different locations; understanding how different parts of Gwent will be resilient to change, others less so; and the short-medium-long term consequences of this to well-being.

It is clear from the CCRA that the housing sector in Wales should be

Newport's Transporter Bridge. Gwent's post-industrial landscapes are likely to become more dynamic as a result of climate change



viewing climate change as a risk multiplier – with projected impacts challenging thermal comfort, drainage capability, building fabric, road access, utilities disruption and increased threat of wildfire to housing stock. This work is a vital step to begin to identify the local housing characteristics and potential risks in “place”, for example; risks to Torfaen's flat roofs from increased winter rainfall; indoor air quality and heat stress in Caerphilly's housing estates; impacts on Gwent's listed buildings; or potential impacts of subsidence and slope stability on residential areas. Further work has been recommended in a number of Gwent's towns across the five local authorities.

The risk assessment has helped to identify climate adaptation priorities which organisations from all sectors, including the housing sector, should be factoring in to shape their response to climate impacts in coming decades.

POST-INDUSTRIAL GWENT

Gwent's post-industrial landscapes are likely to become more dynamic as a result of climate change. There is increased potential for repeated intense rainfall combined with extended periods of extreme heat and wildfire, destabilising coal and spoil tips, “activating” contaminated land; impacting old mine workings, impacting subterranean features and historical landfill, with increased likelihood of subsidence; changing groundwater levels and dispersed pollution. These changes are likely to cause increasing disruption.

HIGHWAYS, BRIDGES AND PATHS

It is highly likely that Gwent's highway, bridge and public rights of way network will come under strain from more frequent combinations of heavy rainfall, flooding, extreme heat, wildfire and ground movement. This is likely to increase the speed of deterioration



of already vulnerable road and path networks, affecting surfaces and foundations, embankments and with regular impacts of windfall from trees. Increased bridge scour and debris damage is also likely from river flooding. Disruption is likely to increase from road and bridge closures.

CO-LOCATED INFRASTRUCTURE

Public sector partners and communities will need to plan for increased frequency, scale and costs of disruption to key infrastructure, especially at infrastructural “pinch points”, where water, sewerage, transport, utilities and drainage infrastructure are co-located. Vulnerability of utilities infrastructure to flooding, landslips, bank erosion, severe weather damage, ground movement and wildfire is likely. Current vulnerabilities need to be better understood. Maintaining the integrity of historical infrastructure such as Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and reservoirs will become increasingly important going forward.

PUBLIC SECTOR ASSETS

Gwent’s diverse public sector assets, including buildings, leisure centres, schools, parks, care homes, hospitals, cemeteries, country parks and county farms, as well as other buildings and land, will be subject to different combinations of risk resulting from heavy rainfall, extreme heat, ground movement, increased flooding and erosion and, for some, wildfire. Asset deterioration will speed up through combinations of increased heavy rainfall and extended hot dry periods.

VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Gwent’s diverse settlements are highly likely to experience combined and cumulative effects from repeated severe weather events on thermal comfort, accommodation, livelihoods, access to services, access to food and fuel, financial hardship and mental health. Each community will experience this differently depending on local circumstances, landscape features and existing pressures. Those less resilient will need support and services in the short, medium and long term to cope.

GWENT’S BUSINESSES

Small and medium sized businesses in Gwent’s towns, on its business parks, industrial estates, tourist sites and farms will all need to operate in a “new normal” caused by climate change. These businesses are likely to be increasingly impacted by transport disruptions, utilities disruption, property damage, staff and customer and supplier access issues, as well as higher insurance cost. This will mean that their business continuity planning, choice of location and supply chains need to factor in repeated climate risk.

WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT

Combinations of warmer conditions, more frequent prolonged periods of heat and seasonal change are likely to mean larger areas of drier “fuel” being “available” for wildfires in Gwent’s grassland, woodland and upland peatland areas, on and adjacent to coal deposits and coal spoil heaps. Increased numbers, severity and length of wildfires will have

implications for Gwent’s soils, water and air quality as well as having a direct threat to life.

ALTERED LANDSCAPES

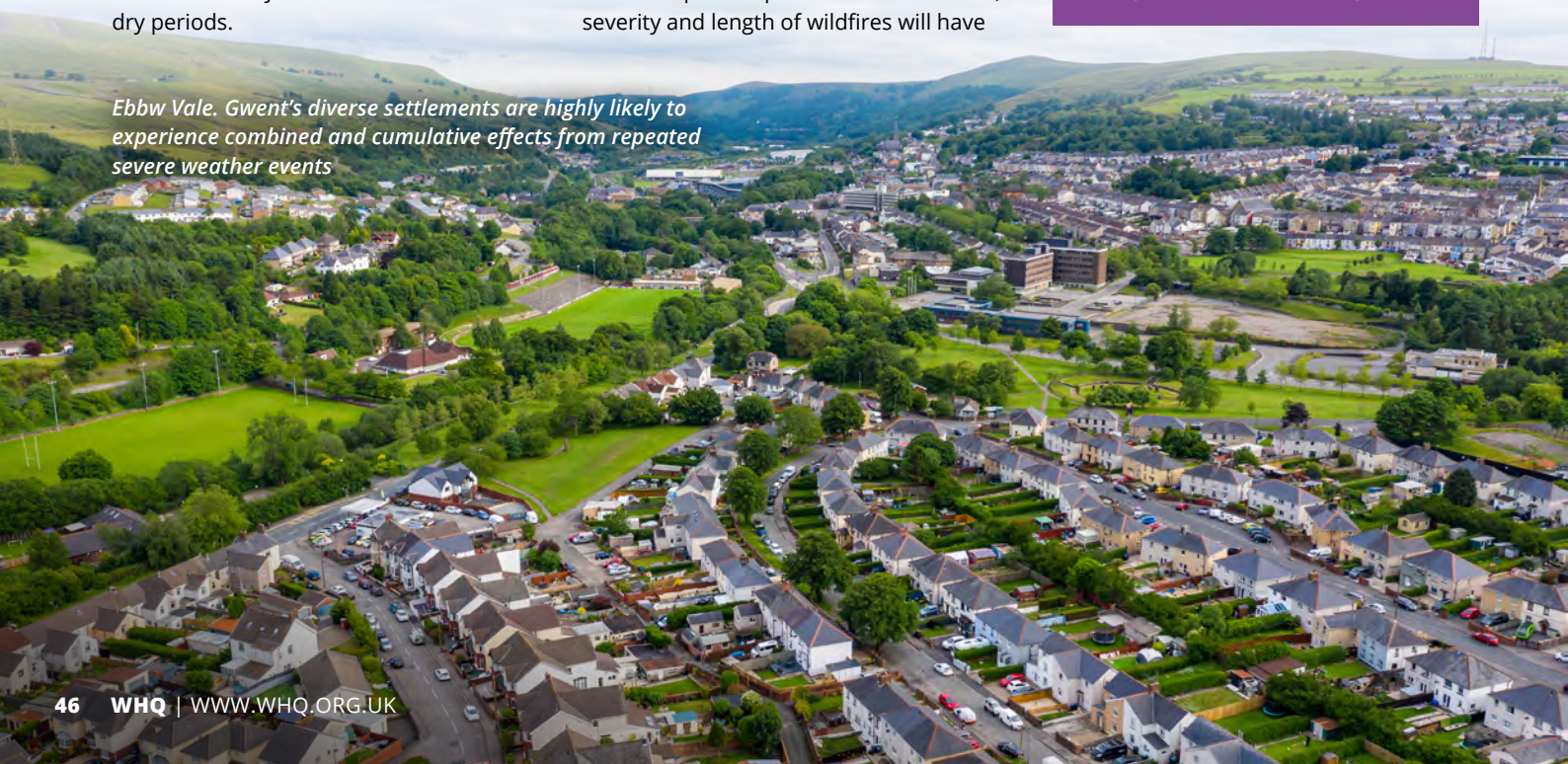
Gwent’s natural environment, landscapes and ecosystem services (clean water, air, functioning soil and food production) are highly likely to be impacted by frequent combinations of heavy rainfall, flooding and extreme heat, drought and wildfire. Woodland, wetland features, saltmarsh and Gwent’s farmland will all be affected. Effective vegetation, soil and water management will be needed to address these risks in a more “dynamic” landscape to “stabilise” landscape features such as slopes, spoil tips and slow down flood waters; as well as ensuring farmland remains productive as the climate changes.

Dr Alan Netherwood runs the Netherwood Sustainable Futures consultancy. Find out more at uk.linkedin.com/in/dr-alan-netherwood-074184a

Find out more

The CCRA also makes a number of recommendations to the PSB on initial areas of focus for climate adaptation including leadership and governance. Technical and summary reports are available at www.gwentpsb.org/en/areas-of-focus/climate-nature/climate-ready-gwent/gwent-climate-change-risk-assessment-report

Ebbw Vale. Gwent’s diverse settlements are highly likely to experience combined and cumulative effects from repeated severe weather events





MAKING IT WORK

Debbie Thomas explores the challenges for putting the new Homelessness and Social Housing Allocations (Wales) Act into practice

The Homelessness and Social Housing Allocations (Wales) Act received Royal Assent just weeks before the Senedd election. Designed to strengthen homelessness prevention and support, it marked a significant milestone in Wales' efforts to end homelessness.

Since then, a new Welsh Government has been elected, raising an important question: what happens next?

During the election campaign, Plaid Cymru pledged to “effectively implement and monitor the new law”. While securing the legislation was a major landmark, implementation is where the next challenge begins. Turning the Act's ambitions into meaningful change will require careful planning, collaboration and investment.

The Welsh Government now faces the task of developing an implementation timetable that balances preparation with urgency. Local authorities and partner organisations need time to prepare, train staff and develop new systems.

Meanwhile, the need for swift action is clear. More than 10,000 people are currently living in temporary accommodation each month across Wales. Behind these figures are individuals and families facing

Local authorities and partner organisations need time to prepare, train staff and develop new systems

uncertainty and instability, while councils foot significant bills for temporary accommodation.

The new legislation offers an opportunity to address these challenges through stronger prevention measures, earlier intervention and improved support. The sooner these reforms are implemented effectively, the sooner we can see the benefits.

At the time of writing, the Welsh Government is developing the all-important implementation roadmap. Broadly, what can we expect?

PREVENTION FIRST

It's anticipated that implementation will begin with the prevention-focused elements of the Act.

This includes the extended prevention duty, allowing people to seek support when they are at risk of homelessness within six months, rather than the current 56-day period.

Other early reforms are expected to include the duty for people with complex needs who have experienced homelessness to be offered support to retain their new home; strengthened rights of review for people applying for homelessness assistance; and access to a new Prevention, Support and Accommodation Plan (PSAP). These plans aim to provide a more tailored, person-centered approach that reflects individual circumstances and needs.

Getting these changes right will require clear guidance and preparation. For example, there will need to be clarity about what support plans should contain and how they can be developed

collaboratively in a trauma-informed way. As such, the first phase of implementation may not take effect until autumn 2027.

WIDENING THE APPROACH

In the medium term, the Welsh Government is expected to introduce the new “ask and act and co-operate” duties across selected public sector bodies.

These duties recognise that preventing homelessness is not solely the responsibility of housing services. Health, social care and other public services

all have a role in identifying risks and ensuring people can access support at the earliest opportunity.

Their success will depend on close preparatory work with partners to develop clear referral pathways and a shared understanding of responsibilities among frontline staff.

REMOVING BARRIERS

Measures to remove existing and restrictive eligibility tests such as Priority Need are likely to be introduced in the later stages. However, Crisis and other homelessness charities will be keen to ensure these reforms are not delayed unnecessarily.

These tests can prevent people from accessing vital support and leave them trapped in prolonged homelessness. Removing such barriers is central to the Act's ambition of creating a more equitable, trauma-informed and person-centred system.

The act includes numerous changes and new measures, and the above is only a snapshot of what may lie ahead.

As the Welsh Government develops the pathway to implementation and the detail behind it, the coming months and years will be pivotal. Delivering on the Act's promise will require much commitment from the government, in partnership with local authorities, housing providers, the third sector and wider public services. It will require investment, guidance and training, as well as new data captures so that the implementation of the Bill can be appropriately monitored.

The hard work of turning the Act into reality is just beginning. But if implemented successfully, the rewards could be significant – Wales could become a world-leader on homelessness prevention and support.

Debbie Thomas is Head of Policy and Communications for Wales at Crisis Cymru



FINDING THEIR VOICE

After a decade, the independent voice of tenants is again being heard at the highest level, say **Emma Nicholas** and **Keith Edwards**

Since devolution, the Welsh Government has encouraged partners – housing associations, councils, and national organisations like Shelter Cymru, TPAS, and Tai Pawb – to help shape policies for better homes. However, for a decade, the chair reserved for a national independent tenant organisation remained vacant.

That changed 12 months ago. When tenants met in Pontypridd in January 2025 to form National Independent Tenant Voice Cymru (NITVC), we didn't imagine such rapid progress. Supported by the Foundational Economy Alliance, the group now represents tenants from 13 landlords and continues to grow.

RELATIONSHIPS AND REACH

NITVC has built strong links with the Welsh Government on tenant engagement and rent policy. We have also established relationships with Shelter Cymru and Tai Pawb, while the “no strings” support from landlords like Trivallis, Merthyr Valleys Homes, and Taff has been invaluable.

Communication has been vital. NITVC members have spoken at over 25 events organised by CIH, Tai Pawb, Shelter Cymru, HQN, and the Northern Ireland

Federation of Housing Associations.

We engage with landlords individually and via the Landlord Engagement Network (LENS). We also played a leading role in tenant engagement for the net-zero initiative, Tai Ar Y Cyd.

Interest from England is growing, and we are supporting groups there looking to build similar independent organisations.

CONSULTATION AND PRIORITIES

A priority is reaching tenants through regular consultation. During summer 2025, focus shifted to the Welsh Government's new Rent Standard. Tenants expressed deep concern over the gap between set rents and what they can afford, especially with energy prices projected to rise 13% annually.

In March, NITVC held “What Tenants Want” sessions to gather unfiltered views. As one tenant noted, landlords often provide what they think tenants need, rather than what is actually requested.

Rents and affordability remain the top concerns. Tenants want action on the gap caused by rent and service charge increases. Plaid Cymru's commitment to making renting fairer is encouraging, and

NITVC looks forward to working with the new Welsh Government on this.

NITVC is also collaborating with housing association executives and the Foundational Economy Alliance to address the affordability gap for tenants and the viability gap for landlords.

Tenants also want action on housing association mergers. They urge the Welsh Government and regulator to require landlords to consult tenants before proceeding and want “promises” made during mergers to be legally binding.

TACKLING DAMP AND MOULD

In January, NITVC gave evidence to the Senedd inquiry into damp and mould. Feedback was positive, and our influence is reflected in the committee's report.

Progress in just over a year is impressive. NITVC is increasingly securing a place for tenants at the “top table.” We are confident that listening to the authentic voice of tenants is crucial to delivering Wales' housing ambitions.

Emma Nicholas is the Coordinator of National Independent Tenant Voice. Keith Edwards is Housing Lead for the Foundational Economy Alliance



Valuing our people

Katie Dalton and Clare Budden outline the pathway towards a resilient and valued homelessness and housing support workforce in Wales

The homelessness and housing support workforce is remarkable. Every day, these people deliver life-changing and sometimes life-saving support to thousands across Wales. Yet, they often go unseen and underappreciated.

A day in the life of a support worker is varied and unpredictable, requiring expert knowledge to respond to acute crises. They are compassionate listeners who enable people to process traumatic experiences. They build trust where system failures have left none. They navigate housing law and welfare entitlements, advocating for people within complex systems. They intervene in overdoses and suicide attempts, support people to escape from abuse and help them embark on new chapters of their lives.

THE WORKFORCE REALITY

Despite this, they do not receive the recognition, reward or support they deserve. Workers love their jobs, but low wages and the cost of living crisis mean some struggle to pay rent and put food on the table. The complexity of their roles puts them at high risk of burnout without proper support. Providers want to pay more, but services must operate within limited funding. This affects recruitment and retention, which has a real impact on people using services. When a trusting relationship is lost, it can be devastating for the person supported.

DEVELOPING THE WORKFORCE PLAN

During the development of the previous Welsh Government's Ending Homelessness Action Plan, it was clear that this workforce would be critical to achieving the goal of ending homelessness. The plan committed to developing a resilient and valued workforce, recognised for their expertise. The Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board oversaw this, establishing Task and Finish Groups to take forward key priorities.

A Workforce Task and Finish Group was established, chaired by Clare Budden, Chief Executive of ClwydAlyn, with representatives from Cymorth Cymru, support providers, local authorities and frontline workers. Our first actions included considering the views of frontline workers via the Frontline Network Wales. This shaped our workplan and led to subgroups on pay, staff support, training and qualifications and commissioning. Over three years, these subgroups engaged with the sector, conducted research and developed recommendations. These were scrutinised by the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board and compiled into a *final report* sent to the Cabinet Secretary for Housing.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The report recommended a pay increase reflecting the skill and complexity of the job. Research found comparable jobs in other sectors paid significantly more, so

the report recommended pay parity with these roles. While the Welsh Government provided additional funding in recent budgets, more is needed. Last year, 58% of providers said they do not receive enough funding to cover the full cost of the Real Living Wage.

The report also recognised the trauma staff face daily and the importance of supporting them. It recommended that all services should provide reflective practice and psychological support for staff.

On training and qualifications, the report recommended a skills framework for homelessness and housing support workers to set consistent standards and highlight existing skills. We also recommended developing a specific qualification for workers in the sector.

This is only possible with right commissioning arrangements. This includes increased funding for better pay, support and training, as well as guidance and grant conditions to ensure these are built into service expectations.

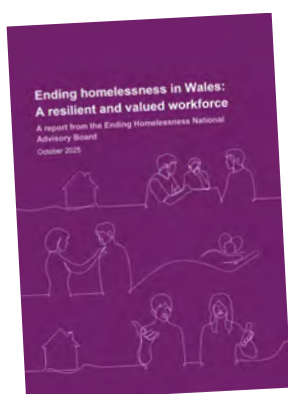
A CALL TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT

We believe this report sets out a pathway towards a resilient and valued workforce. With the Senedd election delivering a new Welsh Government, the baton passes to Plaid Cymru to take the next steps.

In their manifesto, Plaid committed to a Fair Work First approach to public sector grants and contracts. They also committed to tackling homelessness by taking a Housing First, trauma-informed and person-centred approach. As outlined, this can only be achieved by ensuring the workforce is recognised, rewarded and supported for their life-changing work.

We are ready to work with the new government to deliver the next steps towards this ambition.

Katie Dalton is the Director of Cymorth Cymru. Clare Budden is Chair of the Workforce Task and Finish Group





Community-led housing at a turning point

A new Welsh Government offers a historic opportunity to reshape housing through community-led delivery models, says Casey Edwards

The emergence of a Plaid Cymru-led minority government in Wales marks a historic shift in political direction, with potentially profound implications for housing policy, and particularly for community-led housing (CLH). This moment could represent not only a change in leadership but a potential realignment of how housing is conceived: from market-led provision to a more community-centred model.

At the heart of Plaid Cymru's approach is a clear and explicit recognition of community-led housing as a legitimate and necessary delivery mechanism for affordable homes. The party has committed to supporting CLH "as a way to deliver affordable homes that meet local needs, particularly where the market and speculative development fail communities".

This framing positions CLH not as a niche alternative, but as a strategic response to the housing emergency.

However, the Plaid Cymru administration will rely on cross-party support to pass legislation, meaning that policy ambition must be combined with political pragmatism.

Unsurprisingly, housing has been elevated as a central political priority. We are pleased to see that the new gGovernment has committed to increasing social housebuilding, reforming planning and legislating for a right to adequate housing. These structural changes create a fertile policy environment for CLH and could enable major upscaling.

Crucially, support for community-led housing does not sit within a single party agenda but reflects a wider cross-party consensus within the Senedd.

The Wales Green Party manifesto

explicitly recognises community-led housing, including cooperatives and community land trusts, as a key delivery mechanism for affordable homes, committing to improve access to grants and finance, raise awareness among local authorities and investors, and remove planning barriers to enable community-led schemes to come forward.

Similarly, Welsh Labour's manifesto reinforces this direction of travel through its commitment to expand support for co-operative and community-led housing, alongside measures to increase community ownership such as a proposed Community Right to Buy and the scaling up of social and affordable housebuilding. Together, these positions demonstrate a shared political recognition that housing solutions rooted in community ownership, long-term affordability and local control have a vital role to play in addressing the housing crisis in Wales.

This level of policy alignment is significant in a minority government context. Compared with more contested areas of housing or land reform, community-led housing represents a pragmatic and politically deliverable opportunity, one where legislation, funding interventions and enabling policy changes could command relatively broad Senedd support.

As such, CLH offers a realistic route for early legislative progress in this Senedd term, providing a tangible way to translate cross-party consensus into action while laying the foundations for longer-term structural change in how housing is delivered and owned in Wales.

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS AND THEIR CLH IMPLICATIONS

The Plaid Cymru manifesto's direct endorsement of CLH is accompanied by a broader commitment to community ownership of land and assets. This includes proposals for a "community right to buy" extended to land, not just buildings. Policy is key here and given that this is something the last labour government didn't quite manage to get over the line, it is something that we would hope to see happen within this Senedd term. Certainly, this is something which should have wide cross-party consensus.

This is transformative. For CLH groups, access to land at affordable prices remains one of the primary barriers to delivery.

By intervening in land markets, this policy has the potential to fundamentally rebalance power towards communities.

PLANNING REFORM IN FAVOUR OF COMMUNITIES

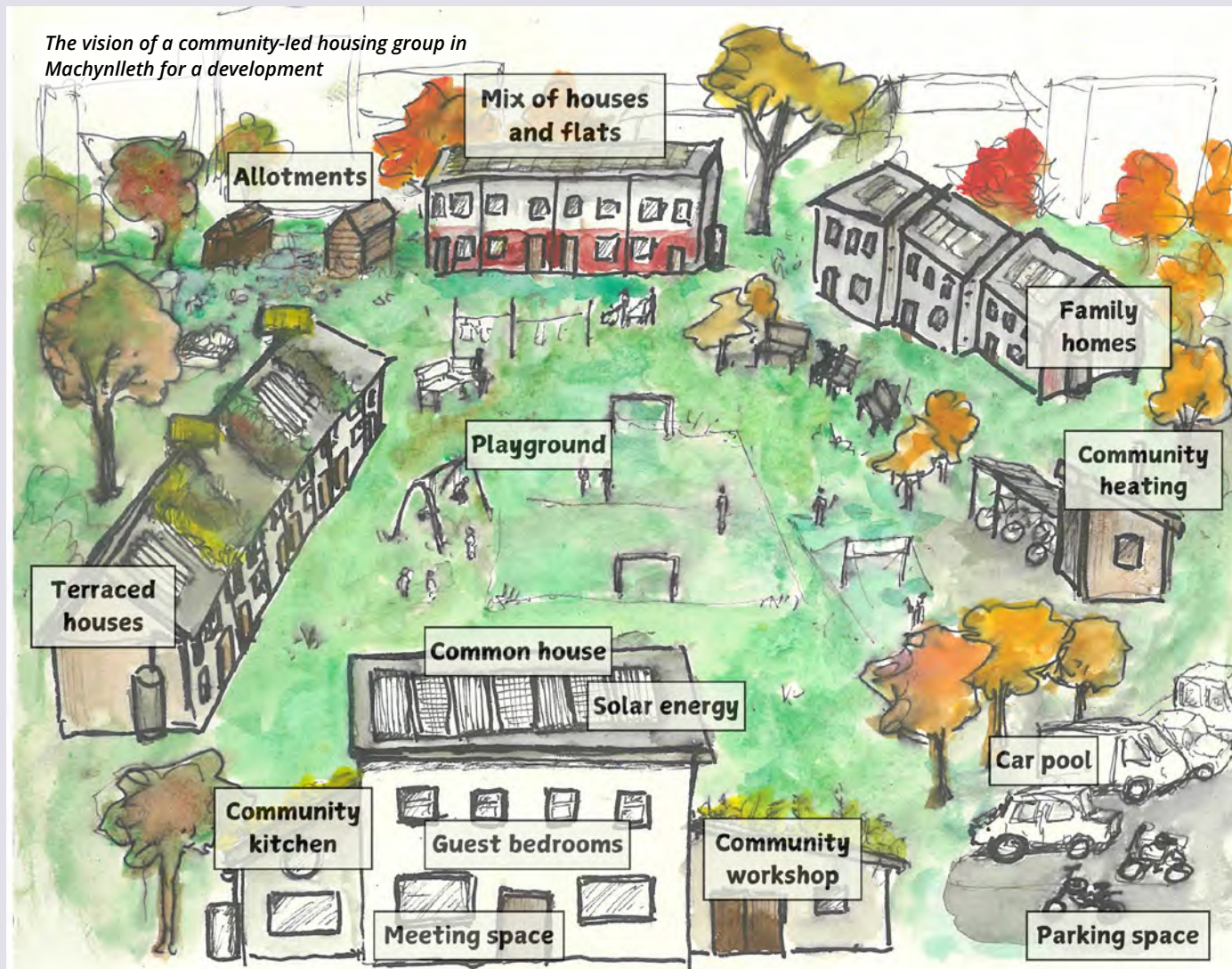
Plaid Cymru's manifesto signals an intention to reshape planning systems to better reflect local priorities and enable community-led initiatives. This could include streamlining planning processes and giving communities more control over development decisions.

For CLH, this could reduce barriers and uncertainty, particularly for smaller, community-based schemes that often struggle within complex planning frameworks.

ALIGNMENT WITH WIDER POLICY GOALS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCALING CLH

Perhaps most importantly, the manifesto situates housing within a wider framework of rural resilience,

The vision of a community-led housing group in Machynlleth for a development



Welsh language sustainability, climate action and community wealth-building.

This integrated approach aligns closely with CLH's core ethos.

Community-led housing is not simply about homes, it is about place, identity and long-term social value.

Taken together, these commitments suggest a potential "step change" in the role of CLH in Wales.

Explicit policy support and new law implementation like a "community right to buy" could move CLH beyond demonstration projects into a recognised delivery pathway, and could unlock sites previously inaccessible to community groups. Increased public investment in housing and grant regimes may make CLH schemes more financially viable, and CLH's contribution to climate, language and rural policy may strengthen its case across Senedd departments.

RISKS AND CONSTRAINTS

However, these opportunities are not guaranteed.

The minority government context

means that delivery will depend on building consensus across the Senedd. Some elements of the manifesto, particularly those involving intervention in land markets, may face political resistance.

There is also the ongoing challenge of implementation. Ambitious policy must translate into:

- Clear funding mechanisms.
- Accessible delivery frameworks.
- Capacity within local authorities and communities.
- Coordinated support infrastructure.

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

For the first time, community-led housing is not only recognised but embedded within a broader vision of economic, social and cultural renewal in Wales. The challenge now is to translate this recognition into reality.

For us at Cwmpas' Communities Creating Homes programme, Wales' only CLH hub providing support, advice and guidance to the growing CLH movement, the task ahead is clear: to engage proactively with the Senedd, shape implementation and

demonstrate the tangible impact of community-led approaches.

However, realising this opportunity will depend on collective action. We encourage partners across the housing sector to step forward – to champion community-led approaches, open up access to land and finance, and work in genuine partnership with communities.

Together, we can move beyond small-scale projects and build a housing system that is rooted in local need, long-term stewardship, and shared ownership. With some hard work and perseverance, this Senedd term could mark a decisive shift, where communities are not just consulted on housing policy but empowered to lead it.

Casey Edwards is Communities Creating Homes Programme Manager at Cwmpas. To find out more about Community Led Housing and Cwmpas's work, visit www.cwmpas.coop or get in touch with the team co-op.housing@cwmpas.coop



Conduct and competency framework: what's right for Wales?

CIH Cymru has issued a survey asking this question of the sector in Wales. **Jonathan Morris** explains why this is an important moment in our collective professional development

The new competence and conduct requirements in England means thousands of housing professionals working for regulated social landlords will need to hold – or work towards – mandated qualifications. Providers themselves will also be required to ensure the right systems, policies and procedures are in place to support that framework.

For a long time in Wales, we have often congratulated ourselves on being ahead of the curve on housing policy. But on this issue, we now risk falling behind.

And I must ask – why?

THE MERITS OF PROFESSIONALISM

I'm genuinely puzzled as to why there appears to be a shuffling of the feet and a downward gaze when we broach the topic of some sort of mandated professional standard in Wales.

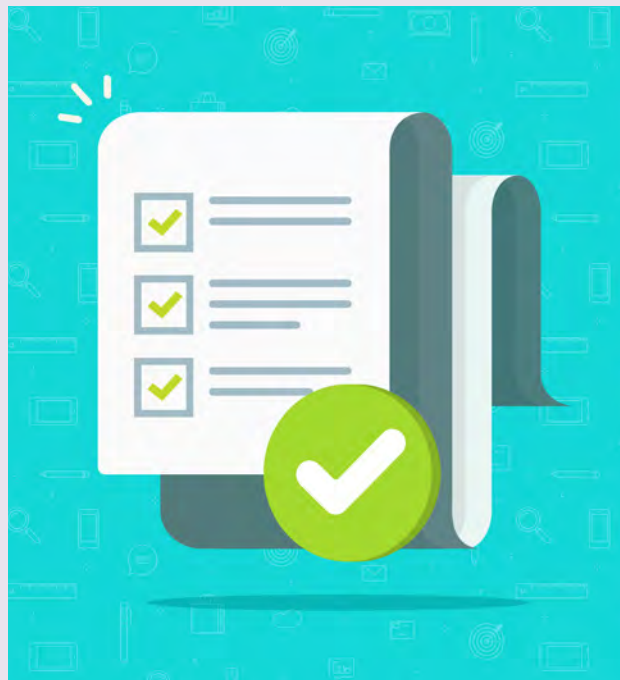
After all, professionalisation gives the sector something valuable: a shared understanding of what professionalism means. It creates standards to aspire to and standards to uphold. Most importantly, it builds confidence – among colleagues, organisations and tenants alike.

That confidence matters because housing professionals make decisions that profoundly affect people's lives. Just as someone sitting opposite a lawyer or a doctor expects that individual to be qualified, competent and acting in their best interests, tenants deserve the same reassurance from the housing professionals supporting them through moments of crisis, vulnerability and uncertainty.

We also have a clear appetite among housing professionals, particularly younger professionals – the future of

our sector – for learning, development and recognition. And we shouldn't ignore that.

We also cannot ignore the impact of Grenfell, and the solemn reality that England's reforms were born out of tragedy. It raises an uncomfortable but necessary question for the Welsh Government: if a tragedy on that scale



were to happen here, what would our answer be?

This debate has barely begun here, and we are still some distance from a meaningful examination of what professional regulation could – or should – look like. That conversation needs to start now, not years down the line after events force our hand.

THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

I am a product of Welsh housing education in the 1990s. My alma mater is Cardiff University, which had an incredibly strong housing department both in teaching and research. Over time, much of that academic infrastructure has been systematically

dismantled, and the impact has been felt across the sector – from frontline practice to policy development and academic research.

Yet, a strong housing sector requires more than operational competence alone. It needs rigorous analysis, critical thinking and a deep understanding of an increasingly challenging housing landscape. From front-facing staff to boardrooms, we would all benefit from a renewed investment in Welsh housing education.

I would go as far as to argue that a move towards a regulated competence and conduct framework could strengthen housing education in Wales immensely. There are already green shoots through the work of the CIH Academy, Cardiff Met and Gower College. With the right ambition, Wales could build an education system that supports professionals at every stage of their career and promotes both technical knowledge and cultural intelligence.

WHAT'S RIGHT FOR WALES

All this is to say: we need to look seriously at what is happening across the border and ask what is right for Wales.

That means developing – or at least exploring the possibility of developing – a distinctly Welsh solution, one that reflects our own housing landscape, values and priorities while still recognising the importance of competence, conduct and professional standards.

The foundations already exist. Now we need to decide whether we are willing to build on them.

But it is important that as many of you as possible have your say, so please fill in the survey at www.cih.org/news/does-wales-need-its-own-competence-and-conduct-framework.

Jonathan Morris is CIH Cymru's board chair



Ending social stigma



Cerys Clarke calls for the new Welsh Government to tackle negative attitudes about people living in social housing

When I moved into my first home in the early 2000s I was the fourth generation of my family to move into a social home. I was proud of my little one-bed cottage in the south Wales valleys, echoing the pride my maternal great-grandparents felt moving into their social home in the mid-1930s.

A home that, though now owned, is still in the family after 10 decades. So much is the community spirit among the longest residing residents they still ask after my elderly grandmother. This is my experience of social housing: a secure home for generations and a strong sense of community. It is also the experience of so many other families.

Yet this is often not the narrative we hear in the media or in communities. Research by [*Tyfu Tai Cymru into public attitudes to social housing in Wales*](#) found that 52% of respondents stated social housing estates suffer from high levels of anti-social behaviour, 41% never wanted to live in social housing and 45% stated young people should aspire to become homeowners. The one stat that really irks me is that 27% of respondents stated people who grow up in social housing are less likely to attain educational success. I obtained my degree while living in social housing and my mother was the first in our family to earn a degree.

But where do these views come from? If we think back to the inter-war and post-war periods with the high levels of council house building, households were proud to be moving into a social home. Certain sections of the UK media have culpability in driving stigma, with articles describing social housing estates as drug-infested zones of criminality, and the families who live on them as workshy, uneducated or benefit scroungers.

The residualisation of social housing also has a part to play. The original

aim of social housing was to provide decent and affordable housing for the masses. Often households living in slum clearance areas in the 1940s and 1950s would be moved into a council home that was significantly better quality than where they had been living.

INCENTIVISING HOME OWNERSHIP

Many of these families would have been working in their local towns or, as in the case of my grandmother's family, owned their own businesses. Yet from the 1970s onward, the UK shifted



towards a residual model of welfare provision with the state only providing support to those unable to access it from the market. Home ownership was incentivised with the right to buy reducing social housing stock as tenants sought to buy their home, with those sold not being replaced. Allocation policies compounded the issue through their prioritisation of the poorest and most vulnerable applicants for tenancies.

It is right social housing provides a safety net for those unable to secure a home on the open market, something that is becoming more and more difficult in the UK. Yet it is not right that the individuals living in social

housing are subject to stigma and that it bleeds through into planning processes, impacting the pace and scale of development.

Our members are seeing this impact first hand with opposition to new social housing in established communities. There have also been examples of a scheme of one-bed properties in a town centre for all ages being amended at the planning consent stage to age 50-plus, following community pressure. This comes at a time where there is an acute shortage of one-bed properties at social rent, effectively denying young people – a demographic disproportionately affected by the housing crisis – access to much-needed affordable homes.

END THE STIGMA

This is why our proposed [*programme of government*](#) outlines a key piece of work that Welsh Government needs to undertake, in collaboration with our members and the wider sector, over this Senedd term to develop a national campaign to end the stigma surrounding social housing and improve understanding of what social housing is and the positive impact it has on households and communities.

A key part of this will be increasing the supply of social homes in Wales so social housing is once more seen as providing decent and affordable housing for the masses. Everybody in Wales should have the right to a safe, suitable and affordable home. Legislating for this right has already been committed to by the current Welsh Government. It is this right that is the key mechanism to increasing the supply of our homes, addressing housing stigma and delivering an equitable Wales for this and future generations.

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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Research update

The latest news from the Welsh Government Knowledge and Analytical Services team

WELSH GOVERNMENT HOUSING RESEARCH

The following research projects are underway:

- **Second Homes and Affordability Pilot evaluation** – the process evaluation report was published before Christmas. The impact evaluation is currently underway and will be published in January 2027.
- **Evaluation of the Transforming Towns Programme** – Both the process evaluation and impact evaluation have now been completed. These reports are being finalised for publication.
- **Leasing Scheme Wales evaluation** – This project is now complete, and reports will be published over the summer.
- **Help to Buy research** – data collection was completed before Christmas, and this is currently being analysed and written up for publication. The research aims to understand the existing landscape of financial assistance schemes in place to help people into homeownership in the UK.
- **Welsh Housing Survey** – The survey is still in the early stages, and we are working on deciding which topics should be prioritised for inclusion in the survey.
- **Warm Homes evaluation** – An evaluation of the warm homes nest scheme. The contract was awarded to IFF Research in January, and the initial stages of the project are underway. Initial scoping research with key stakeholders in the scheme is currently being carried out.
- **Ending Homelessness Outcomes framework** – This research aims to identify and collate existing research on best practice in engaging people with lived experience in the development of policies and practices in homelessness and housing support services. The project was awarded to Imogen Blood Associates (IBA) in November 2025 and IBA have recruited a Lived Experience Working Group of people who have experienced homelessness to co-produce their research. IBA are undertaking a scoping review of key literature and are approaching key stakeholders ahead of the fieldwork phase.
- **WHQS2023/ORP evaluation** – The dual Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023 and Optimised Retrofit Programme 3 Evaluation was published in late March.
- **Renting Homes Act evaluation** – The second draft of the Phase 3 evaluation (the final phase) has been received and publication is planned for the Summer. This phase focuses more heavily on triangulating the demonstrable impact of the Act than previous phases.
- **The Housing with Care Fund** – the evaluation contract has recently been awarded and the initial work is commencing.
- **Joint Inspection Team evaluation** – The evaluation is now in its second and final phase. Fieldwork is ongoing and publication is planned for autumn 2026.
- **Ending Homelessness Outcomes framework** – Dignity and Respect Research – This research will develop lived experience-grounded definitions of dignity and respect in the context of engaging with homelessness services in Wales, and will capture examples of good/best practice, and insights into what treating people with dignity and respect might look like in homelessness services. World Café workshops with individuals with lived experience of homelessness or experience being at risk of homelessness are due to commence in late June. These will be followed by an accessible survey, distributed more widely.
- **Housing with Care Fund evaluation** – This research aims to understand the progress made by funded HCF projects to increase the stock of housing to

meet the needs of people with care and support needs. A desk review and initial interviews with key stakeholders have been completed, and an initial Theory of Change has been developed. Further interviews with Regional Partnership Boards representatives and case studies with fund beneficiaries are to be conducted over the Summer.

HOUSING STATISTICS

This quarterly meeting brought together the Housing Information Group to review current evidence needs across the housing sector, share updates on major research projects, and discuss upcoming survey work in Wales.

The session included updates from academic partners, government analysts and sector bodies, covering work from the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, plans for the Welsh Housing Survey 2027-28, and comparative insights from the English Housing Survey and Scottish Household Survey. It also featured findings from recent research into social housing allocations in Wales.

It provided a space for attendees to explore new analytical work, compare approaches across the UK, and identify shared priorities for improving housing data and evidence.

The agenda, minutes and supporting papers are available online. Please get in touch with KASevents@gov.wales if you have any questions.

Since the last update the following statistical outputs have been published:

- **Help to Buy – Wales (Shared Equity Loan Scheme): October to December 2025** – 5 March 2026.
- **Homelessness: April to September 2025** – 2 April 2026.
- **Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping: March 2026** – 28 May 2026.
- **Dwelling stock estimates: as at 31 March 2025** – 4 June 2026.