



23 January 2022

R.E. Draft Welsh Government Budget – Housing Support Grant

Dear Members of the Senedd Finance Committee,

We are writing to you regarding the need for additional investment in homelessness and housing support services in Wales in the upcoming budget. We strongly believe that the Housing Support Grant (HSG) should be one of the Welsh Government's priorities and given an inflationary increase.

We are The Wallich. We believe that everyone deserves the right to a home, but more than that, that everyone deserves the right to feel safe, to feel valued and to feel positive about their future.

We operate 112 services across 18 Welsh local authorities. The vast majority of these services are commissioned by the local authorities, with funds from the Housing Support Grant (HSG), in order to meet statutory duties to prevent or alleviate homelessness.

The context

In the Welsh Government's draft budget for 2023/24, the total HSG budget for all Welsh authorities is £166m, which due to inflation represents a real-terms cut on the current level of funding.

What this means in practice is that all housing support workers in HSG-funded projects are likely to see a pay-freeze – and a real-terms pay cut – for the next year, despite the spiralling costs of living. Staff working in these projects have not had a meaningful pay rise in the last decade.

Like many other frontline health and care workers, housing support staff worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to keep people safe, undoubtedly saving many lives. However, after nearly three years of ever-increasing pressures on services, many are exhausted and demoralised, and are considering leaving the sector. This is causing a recruitment and retention crisis, something which has already been identified as a priority by the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board.

The evidence

Recent research from Cymorth Cymru, referenced in the [draft budget narrative](#), found that 79% of frontline housing support workers were cutting back on heating to save money, and 44% were struggling to pay rent and bills. 7% reported using food banks, and many more are skipping meals or taking on additional jobs to make ends meet.

In our own organisation, we have heard anecdotal evidence that suggests staff are using annual leave to take on second jobs.

There are currently record numbers presenting to local authorities in need of housing support – at the end of September there were 8,652 individuals in temporary accommodation and 160 people sleeping rough – and there is a real risk that services will be unable to recruit and retain enough staff to maintain service delivery.

The consequences

We have previously expressed concern in our evidence to the Local Government and Housing Committee, about the race-to-the-bottom on price caused by competitive commissioning of HSG services. If local authorities are not able to provide sufficient funding to meet the actual cost of delivering services, providers will face the choice between delivering understaffed (and potentially unsafe) services, or choosing not to bid for contracts.

Finally, research from Cardiff Metropolitan University demonstrated the significant value for money of investments into the HSG. Services such as those run by The Wallich typically support people who have experienced significant trauma or adverse life experiences, and without appropriate support are likely to have more chaotic lives with regular contact with health, criminal justice and other public services. Conversely, the university research found a net-saving of £1.40 across all public services for every £1 invested in the HSG.

We understand that the Welsh Government face extremely difficult decisions in setting the budget for the coming year, but we believe that the risks posed by failing to increase HSG funding in line with inflation must not be discounted.

We hope the issues raised in this letter will prompt a consideration of the vital nature of the work that we do, and the need to reward support staff fairly for our contributions to communities across Wales.

Signed:

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Alan Charlton	Support Worker	Bridgend
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Alexander Oyego	Night Support Worker	Swansea
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Ceri Duffy	Assistant Service Manager	Bridgend
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Christopher John	Senior Support Worker	Swansea
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Jan Jordan	Trust, Foundation and Statutory Manager	Cardiff
Jane Newman	Health & Safety Manager	Cardiff
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