



Housing support for vulnerable people

Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee Inquiry

A response from **Housing Justice Cymru**

11 February 2025

About Housing Justice Cymru:

Everyone has the right to a home that meets their needs. The lack of a safe and stable home significantly impacts people's lives. Solutions led by local communities, in strong partnership with the voluntary, community, and public sectors, along with individuals who have lived experience, must be central to changing the housing system.

Our vision is of a community where everyone has a safe and stable home, and feeling they belong.

Our purpose is to unite diverse communities to build personal connections, help people out of homelessness, and create justice in the housing system.

Our values are inspired by the Christian principles of **love**, **nurture**, and **partnerships**.

Website: www.housingjustice.org.uk

Contact: N.Evans@housingjustice.org.uk

1. Overview

1.1 Housing Justice Cymru (HJC) currently provides Housing Support Grant (HSG) commissioned homelessness prevention services in Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and Wrexham. HJC also provides non-commissioned support to people seeking sanctuary in Wales, including Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Key points:

- Models that deliver a community response to homelessness should be rolled out across Wales to capitalise on the added value that harnessing the strengths of the community can bring – both in terms of creating an increased sense of community belonging and the added value delivered to the well-being of volunteers.
- Specialist housing and support for sanctuary seekers is needed, including newly granted Refugees, to address homelessness and to support Wales's vision of becoming a Nation of Sanctuary.
- Greater transparency is needed on the impact achieved by services to allow for better comparison of what actually works, with this forming the basis of commissioning.
- Services for individuals with low to medium level support needs should be prioritised to ensure that individuals do not fall through the gaps, preventing homelessness and stopping the cycle of homelessness.

2. Citadel model

2.1 Citadel was established in Wales under Housing Justice Cymru in 2020. Our work in Wales spans across Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Wrexham, where, on average, 96% people remain engaged in the project, and 98% sustain their tenancies for at least 12 months after seeking support.

2.2 Citadel is a volunteer-led homelessness prevention project which supports people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, to find and/or sustain their tenancies and establish a home. Once volunteers are recruited, trained and DBS checked, Citadel Co-ordinators match them with a person referred to Citadel for support. Co-ordinators and volunteers work closely with people who have been referred, identifying their needs and providing personalised support.

- 2.3 Citadel was initially set up to support guests following their move on from Night Shelters. The need for further support, during the initial months of obtaining a tenancy was highlighted by those we support with lived experience of homelessness. Further feedback from people experiencing homelessness showed that more tailored support was needed, which focuses on the person and ‘what matters’ to each individual. As such, Citadel volunteers provide support to individuals in a flexible way that responds to their specific needs. Volunteers are rooted within their community and help the person to build a sense of belonging.
- 2.4 Citadel is sometimes described as ‘people helping people’ due to the human response provided by our volunteers, in contrast to support that feels like a service. Our volunteers are matched with individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and through this process a relationship is established which is different from that of a relationship between a traditional support worker and their client. This is underpinned by the mutually beneficial nature of the relationship, as our volunteers themselves report an increased sense of community belonging and a sense of purpose from the support they provide to the person in need of support.
- 2.5 Following the impact made in Wales, Housing Justice as received UK Government funding to expand Citadel to 5 areas in England: Southeast London, Bristol, Cornwall, Sheffield and Hastings.

3. Support for sanctuary seekers

- 3.1 Housing Justice has provided over 75,000 safe nights across Wales and London for people seeking sanctuary. Over the past 3 years, HJC has developed Hosting provision as an accommodation solution, facilitating over 60 placements for people to access safe, short-term homes in Wales. Our Sanctuary Support Officers provide ongoing face-to-face support for the sanctuary seekers hosted through our network. Additionally, we have supported over 160 Ukrainian Refugees since 2023, helping them to secure permanent accommodation, and assisting the transition from hosting placements to social or private homes. We provide culturally appropriate support to enable people to rebuild their lives in the UK, through creating a sense of connection with their new community, fostering a sense of belonging.
- 3.2 The support that we provide to Refugees and Asylum Seekers is mainly non-commissioned and funded through Grants and other charitable means. Some of the people supported by HJC will have the No Recourse to Public Funds

(NRPF) condition attached to their immigration status and are destitute. Despite a person's immigration status, it must be recognised that we cannot end homelessness in Wales if we do not end homelessness for sanctuary seekers.

- 3.3 In 2019, Wales set out its vision to become a Nation of Sanctuary. This commitment was restated in 2024 through the refreshed Anti Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP)¹ which now incorporates the Nation of Sanctuary plan. The Nation of Sanctuary chapter as part of ARWAP commits to providing housing support to Refugees, acknowledging the transition from Asylum Seekers to gaining Refugee status and, as a result, a person loses their Home Office accommodation, as a point at which homelessness is greatly increased. Whilst a person with Refugee status can access public services, including housing, there is often very little support available to assist newly granted Refugees to secure and maintain accommodation.
- 3.4 Newly granted Refugees often face additional barriers to securing housing, including a lack of guarantor, increased costs such as 12-months' rent in advance, language barriers, and lack of community connections, contributing to the trauma that people have faced in their home country. These situations exacerbate the risk of homelessness, exploitation, harm, and modern slavery. As such, more support is needed to address the housing and support needs of sanctuary seekers in Wales.

4. Housing Support Grant

- 4.1 Increasing demand for housing and housing-support means that people's complex needs are being increasingly unmet. As capacity is stretched, people with low to medium support needs are falling through the gaps. As a result, more and more people are reaching crisis point. A recent report from the Bevan Foundation highlighted that around 20% of people in Temporary Accommodation have been through statutory homelessness services within the last 12 months², indicating that people were unable to maintain a tenancy following Temporary Accommodation, possibly due to a lack of support. There is a missed opportunity if adequate resources are not directed towards ensuring that homelessness is not repeated to help ensure that people

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/anti-racist-wales-action-plan-2024-update.html>

² <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Nowhere-to-call-home-living-in-temporary-accommodation-2.pdf>

leaving Temporary Accommodation, especially those with low to medium needs, are supported to rebuild their lives within their new community. The additional benefit of a model like Citadel which uses volunteers to support those with low to medium support needs is through the way in which it harnesses the strengths of a community-led response, providing an increased sense of belonging for both the individuals in need of support and the volunteer. Citadel not only prevents homelessness for the people being supported but it also serves as a preventative mechanism for the wider population in terms of promoting well-being and reducing loneliness and isolation.

- 4.2 Despite the impact demonstrated by Citadel, expanding the model to other local authorities across Wales has been a challenge. Local authorities appear to re-commission the same services year on year rather than undertaking an evaluation into what is needed and what is working. There is a lack of transparency on how services perform, making it difficult to compare the effectiveness of provision. Whilst Citadel achieves a 98% tenancy sustainment rate for 6 months and has a 96% engagement rate, without comparative data for other HSG-funded services available, making a case for why our Citadel model is more effective (both financially and operationally) is a challenge.
- 4.3 Finally, HJC's HSG-commissioned services in Wales are currently underfunded. Whilst the increase to HSG has been helpful in maintaining the workforce, it has not improved the pressures on other project costs. As a result, our Citadel services continue to run at a deficit and the pressures on the wider organisation remain. HJC has had to draw on its financial reserves in order to provide our HSG-commissioned services which is not sustainable. We are hopeful that discussions with commissioners will result in an increase in funded to cover our full project costs going forward.