

Local Government and Housing Committee inquiry response: Housing for Vulnerable People

February 2025

About us

Community Housing Cymru is the voice of housing associations (HAs) in Wales. We represent 33 not-for-profit housing associations that provide almost 165,000 homes to 10% of the Welsh population.

Our collective vision is to make Wales a country where good housing is a basic right for all.

Summary

We welcome the Committee's call for written evidence on housing for vulnerable people, with an initial focus on housing-related support services. During this Senedd term, the Committee has undertaken important and valuable work on various aspects of the housing crisis, and we welcome this particular focus on the support services that we know are so important for ensuring people can avoid homelessness, escape abuse, live in their own homes and thrive in their communities.

The right support, for as long as it is needed, alongside an affordable, high quality home, is essential for meeting our shared ambition of making sure homelessness is rare, brief, and unrepeatable, and the system-wide transition to rapid rehousing.

Alongside evidence from our Housing Matters campaign, delivered in partnership with Cymorth Cymru, we conducted individual deep dive sessions with several of our members to produce a representative sector response. Key messages from housing associations are:

Challenges

- Despite increased Housing Support Grant (HSG) funding for the last 2 years, these services have been historically undervalued and underfunded. The recent increases in funding have offered some protection from the increased cost of delivering services, but not all current providers have felt this uniformly. Nor has increased funding addressed the fundamental challenge of ensuring that funding is proportionate to need and that the sector can recruit, retain, and reward its skilled workforce. This is hindering effective service delivery, particularly for people with complex needs.
- Recent increases to HSG funding have been upon a historic baseline. In the past 10 years, we have seen multiple crises - Covid, cost-of-living, the war in Ukraine, and a wider housing crisis - that combined have fundamentally altered the scale and nature of housing and support needs across Wales.

Solutions

- Local authorities' (LAs) Rapid Rehousing transition plans seek to assess levels of support needs in their communities. This is an important step forward in building a shared assessment of housing support needs. An important next step will be to continue to build upon local assessment of need and translate this to adequate funding for housing support services.
- The forthcoming Homelessness legislation presents an opportunity to enhance collaboration and address systemic issues in funding and service delivery. The [Expert Review Panel on ending homelessness in Wales](#) was clear that investment in the workforce, housing support services, and more suitable temporary accommodation, as well as an increased supply of settled housing, will be needed to deliver this ambition

We propose a three-step approach for ensuring sustainable and effective housing support services in Wales:

- 1) Stabilise the housing support sector by protecting existing commissioned services through sufficient and ring-fenced multi-year funding that fully meets the cost of delivering services and investing in the skilled workforce.
- 2) Investment in granular data on housing need to better understand the demand for, and progress made, on meeting housing support needs.

- 3) A long-term funding commitment for HSG, based on a robust understanding of need, that allows the sector to invest in the skilled workforce and services needed to prevent homelessness and support people to live well in their homes. There also needs to be recognition and investment in the wider public services that also provide support, for example mental health services.

How effectively the Welsh Government is planning for the future of HSG in light of the rapid rehousing transition and the forthcoming Homelessness Bill

Strategic and collaborative disconnects

Housing Associations across Wales report that they are supporting more people with increasingly complex support needs, and that alongside housing-related support increasing numbers of individuals also require support from wider public services. This includes but is not limited to the police, social services, mental health experts, and third sector tenancy sustainment support.

Wider pressures on public services, a fragmented service landscape, and a lack of effective partnerships in some areas can make it challenging for housing support staff to navigate and access the support people need. Housing associations report they frequently have to try and fill in the gaps when there is a lack of available support from wider public services. This is even more challenging when a person requires support across multiple disciplines. The Welsh Government's recent white paper on Ending Homelessness proposed a duty to identify, refer, and cooperate on a set of relevant bodies to prevent homelessness. We welcome this specific proposal as an opportunity to enhance collaboration and partnership working.

Our members find that it is currently very difficult for HAs to refer to health or other services. The white paper considered the potential of multidisciplinary teams, which would hopefully allow for a clearer pathway that ensures people receive the support they require to live well in their homes and sustain their tenancy promptly.

Due to a lack of internal resources, increasing levels of homelessness, and pressures to meet demand, local authorities have had varying ability to implement rapid rehousing action plans. Local authorities' Rapid Rehousing transition plans seek to assess levels of support needs in their communities. This is an important step in building a shared

assessment of housing support needs. An important next step will be to continue to build upon local assessment of need and translate this to adequate funding for housing support services.

The increase in the need for housing related support in recent years over the past couple of years means that housing support services are already stretched to their limit. An increased focus on preventative policy ambitions as part of the forthcoming Homelessness Bill must be supported by sufficient investment in the HSG for it to be deliverable and a success. We believe there is an opportunity with the forthcoming Homelessness Bill to articulate a vision for a future system that unlocks untapped potential for the HSG and rapid rehousing by building long-term funding certainty so that providers can effectively plan and deliver better outcomes.

Funding

The sector has welcomed the Welsh Government's support for the sector and increase in HSG funding over the past two years. This investment has offered temporary relief to services, and begun the journey towards appropriately funded services to ensure staff are paid their Real Living Wage. However, there is much further to go until services can pay their staff appropriately for the life-changing work they do.

The reality is, that we do not currently have an accurate understanding of what constitutes an appropriate HSG budget. Recent increases to HSG funding have been upon a historic baseline. In the past 10 years, we have seen multiple crises - Covid, cost-of-living, the war in Ukraine, and a wider housing crisis - that combined have fundamentally altered the scale and nature of housing needs across Wales.

Whilst there are some indicative data from local authority RRH plans, work needs to be done to better understand the level of need to accurately establish a new base level of funding that effectively reflects the services required. This work needs to be undertaken with urgency and aligned with the introduction of new duties and expectations as part of the forthcoming Homelessness Bill. The [Expert Review Panel](#) was also unequivocal in its final report that the success of legislative reform relies on a properly funded HSG.

Once the HSG has been rebased to account for current and future needs, we believe that a multi-year, ring-fenced commitment is required to give services the stability and confidence they require to evolve to meet needs. The multi-year commitment to the Social Housing Grant in recent budgets has made a positive difference in enabling housing associations to plan for the future and invest in more affordable housing, and we believe the same certainty is required for housing support services.

In addition to preventing homelessness, the Housing Support Grant also reduces pressure on a myriad of public services, from health and social services to criminal justice. [Research](#) conducted by Cardiff Metropolitan University found that every £1 invested in HSG services delivers £1.40 net savings to public services in Wales. The consequences of disproportionate funding will equate to even more pressure on public services as well as poorer outcomes for people. It is therefore vital that preventative funding is allocated with long-term certainty and is specifically ring-fenced to only deliver housing support services.

Vulnerable groups and wrap-around support

As part of planning for the future, specific consideration needs to be given to the increasing number of people with complex needs who require specialist housing-related support and face difficulties in navigating and accessing services in a timely way.

HA staff are concerned they do not have the expertise needed, but in many cases are providing the only source of support as the threshold of access to wider public services is high, particularly for mental health. There are particular concerns about services for people with complex needs, as well as the cohort of prison leavers that need specific wrap-around support, and suitable accommodation in a suitable location to manage safeguarding risks.

Housing Association [data](#) shows that 73% of households received some form of housing support from their HA between October 2023 and October 2024, with 20% of households receiving multiple types of support. The following case study illustrates how HSG-funded services provide impactful specific wrap-around support to maintain a home and support people's ability to live independently.

Case study: Foyer Complex - supporting young people with multiple needs

Emily*, a 16-year-old girl, was referred to the service in early 2023 due to a breakdown in her relationship with her father. Emily has a physical disability and experienced a range of mental health issues. Emily's initial engagement with staff at the service was limited; she rarely came out of her room or spoke with anyone within the project and was quite isolated. After a few weeks, the staff were able to forge a trusting professional relationship with her, and she started opening up more during her support sessions and appeared more settled.

When she moved in, Emily was already enrolled in college studying A-levels although she was struggling to engage with this due to her turbulent living conditions at the time. Staff supported Emily by attending meetings with her tutors at college to

communicate Emily's situation and ensure wrap-around support, which enabled her to remain on her college course.

Throughout her time at the service, Emily's mental health was very up and down. However, the staff was able to recognise patterns of behavior such as withdrawing from support, missing college, and appearing quiet which allowed them to intervene before her mental health deteriorated significantly. At these times, Emily was supported to speak with her GP and was also referred to outside agencies to complete talking therapy and CBT. Staff accompanied her to many of these appointments due to her feeling quite anxious.

By August 2023, Emily's confidence had grown tremendously. She was attending concerts independently and went on her first solo trip abroad. By April 2024, she began applying to universities to study social psychology. Staff assisted Emily with applying for her accommodation, and student financing and also put in an application for DSA. However, in May 2024, around the time of her final exams in college, her mental health began declining. Staff spent significant time with Emily to try and build up her confidence and remained in close contact with the support staff from the college to ensure that she could remain on the course and complete her exams, with a sufficient plan of support in place. Despite less engagement with staff during this time, they continued to try to support Emily during this time. Emily sat her exams and achieved the results she needed to secure her place at university and moved out of the project in September 2024.

Before leaving, staff supported Emily with her transition to new accommodation and ensured she had access to support from the university wellbeing team before she left to fill the gaps in support. Emily stated before leaving the project that she had never moved on from somewhere for a positive reason and has since been in contact with staff and has settled in well to her new accommodation.

Current and anticipated pressures in the delivery of HSG-funded support services, including pressures on the workforce

Funding and fair pay

Every year for the past ten years, alongside Cymorth Cymru we have campaigned for sufficient funding for the Housing Support Grant (HSG), to prevent more people from becoming homeless, to support people well whilst they live in temporary accommodation and to ensure those who move on from homelessness have the support they need to rebuild their lives and live well in their new home. The campaign is

a direct consequence of housing support being historically underfunded and undervalued.

Housing support providers should not have to continuously fight for fair funding, reward and recognition for their workers. Ultimately, we need to secure a long-term, sustainable multi-year funding settlement that ensures these vital services continue for as long as they are needed in Wales.

Whilst we've seen increases to the Housing Support Grant for the last 2 years, in real terms, the budget has been reduced by £13 million since 2012. The lack of certainty each year due to current funding arrangements places constraints on how effectively providers can plan for maintaining current services, as well as improvements for the future. Annual threats to services' ability to continue have meant the focus has been on services maintaining provision rather than growing their offer.

Funding constraints mean this skilled and dedicated workforce does not receive the rate of pay and recognition they deserve. In our [most recent survey](#) of providers (October 2024) 79% said that they do not receive enough HSG to cover the full Real Living Wage costs and had to subsidise using their reserves, fundraising, or other income. Whilst 91% of organisations say they are paying frontline staff the Real Living Wage, it does little to account for unsociable hours, the lack of job security, and the lack of career development.

The £13m uplift for 2024/25's final budget came too late for some providers. 17% of respondents to our survey said it was announced too late to avoid some service reductions and/or staff redundancies.

We urgently need to stabilise the housing support sector by protecting existing commissioned services through sufficient and ring-fenced multi-year funding that fully meets the cost of delivering services and investing in the skilled workforce.

Impact on staff

Our research shows that 50% of respondents to our survey said there has been an increase in staff turnover over the last year. Pay is one of the biggest causes of high staff turnover in this sector. This coupled with the impact of increased caseload demand and complexity has affected staff health and wellbeing. 91% of providers who responded to our survey said there had been a negative impact on staff wellbeing, sickness, and burnout, with 41% saying this had been extremely negative. Many provided further detail about how this was affecting staff, with some hugely concerning comments about staff mental health, with one citing "It shouldn't be this hard to help people".

The Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board's Workforce sub-group has done valuable work to map actions to support and grow the housing support workforce, with a focus on:

- Mental health and wellbeing support for frontline staff, particularly concerning traumatic scenarios.
- Recruitment guidance
- Research on Pay
- Staff qualifications
- Commissioning guidance

How effective is joint working between housing support services and public services such as health and social care

Some members provided positive examples of joint working, such as:

- Collaboration between [Adra, North Wales Housing Association, and Gwynedd Council](#) to develop a building into 12 flats to provide new accommodation with bespoke support on the same site.
- Having a safeguarding officer in place has helped to improve partnership working with wider services to understand each other's remits, limits, and where others need to step in.
- Cwm Taf health board's multi-disciplinary team regularly attends housing support services and works alongside staff.
- [Boost project](#): The project works in partnership with service providers throughout Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, and Torfaen. and delivers new initiatives to people at risk of homelessness, currently experiencing homelessness, or people with lived experience of homelessness ensuring that people are enabled with the tools and skills they need to move on with their lives, leaving homelessness behind for good.

However, effective multi-agency work is not yet embedded across Wales. For example, one housing association described the case of a tenant with a hoarding disorder who was physically unable to manage their home. Staff struggled with access to wider services to help the tenant, and were advised by social services to take the tenant to court. Whilst a stark example, this illustrates the tension between a wider public service

system under intense pressure and the person-centred and trauma-informed response housing support services seek to offer.

Where difficulties have been identified, members have caveated with the hope that duties imposed on other agencies as part of the forthcoming Homelessness Bill will provide the legislative framework that supports effective partnership working housing support and public services to work better together.

How much is known about service performance, including data on outcomes

The Welsh Government's Housing Support Grant Outcomes Framework has gone some way to developing a shared understanding of outcomes achieved between providers of services and local authorities. The outcomes framework was developed collaboratively with providers, frontline workers, and local authorities and is a positive step forward in helping to build shared understanding of the outcomes delivered by services.

However, to date, no national synthesis of this information that would allow us to understand progress has been published. Coupled with efforts to better understand housing needs, data on outcomes will help us assess the progress we are making.

As evidenced elsewhere in our response, services are already under intense pressure, and it is important to strike a balance between reporting on meaningful outcomes that drive service improvement and protecting front-line workers' time to provide much needed support.

What services should be commissioned in the future to effectively support people with complex needs to find and keep a home?

As a starting point, we need an improved national understanding of housing need to ensure that commissioned services can respond effectively.

Our most recent Housing Matters report with Cymorth Cymru gathered perspectives from services about the changing nature of housing support needs. The evidence we have collected from support providers demonstrates that demand for homelessness

and housing support services has increased over the last year, as well as the complexity of people's support needs:

- 91% said demand for their services had increased since last year
- 94% said the complexity of support needs had increased since last year

We believe a focused discussion is needed on how services need to adapt - and be supported to do so - to meet the ambitions set out in the Expert Review Panel's report and effectively respond to the increase in complex needs.

As a guiding principle, our members believe it needs to be as easy as possible for people to get the support they need to sustain a tenancy, with more floating support services, flexible thresholds, and support provided for as long as needed. Ingredients for these services include:

- Increased staff capacity that allows front-line staff to work flexibly with people as their needs change
- Strengthened partnerships with wider public services, as recommended by the Expert Review Panel, to respond effectively to complex needs, in particular mental health needs
- Investment in front-line workers' ongoing training and support, to ensure they are supported to develop the skills required to meet complex needs
- Continued investment in fair pay for front-line workers.
- Bespoke specialist accommodation for vulnerable people to live independently.
- Supported accommodation with ongoing support.

In particular, our members called for more flexible and adaptable services, brought directly to a person's home. It is thought this is where the biggest strides could be made to support the transition to rapid rehousing and ensure people are supported to live well in their new homes. In addition to this, specialist services for specific groups of people should be considered, including families, 16 & 17-year-olds, and care leavers.