



Chartered
Institute of
Housing
Cymru

Housing Voices 2

Summary of TTC forums in 2019



Tyfu Tai Cymru (TTC) held five forums in 2019, starting in Rhyl, then Newport, Swansea, Llandrindod Wells and finishing in Merthyr Tydfil. At each forum we held lively and informative discussions about the topics people felt were priorities in their work. The TTC team work hard to create a space that is supportive of people reflecting on their own experiences and this is demonstrated in the quality of conversations that happen during our events.

Houses for now and the future

Delegates considered if the vision for housing in Wales is right, and the perception of staying in one home for life. Some delegates felt that we need to challenge the current obsession with home ownership that means young people are reluctant to move into shared houses and older people do not want to move into smaller houses. Housing associations have successfully let two-bedroom properties through joint tenancies to friends and at our forums we discussed the need to know more about alternative living arrangements.

We held conversations about concerns in relation to the quality of housing across Wales in all properties that are 75 years and older and those that may need replacing rather than refurbishing. They also wanted clarity on how to address housing need when the regeneration case for refurbishment doesn't stack up.

Some delegates highlighted that people struggle to get on with choice-based lettings systems, and lack of understanding about limited supply. Further problems occur when people are homeless and are in more urgent housing need.

The changing make-up of local housing markets was also highlighted as an issue with the push for tourism in some areas seeing greater rise of Airbnb-type properties, diminishing the availability of housing options to meet local and urgent housing need.

For some areas with a reliance on tourism, delegates told us of the need to discuss the options for seasonal workers and houses of multiple occupants (HMOs), a discussion some felt local authorities were not keen to engage with due to the negative press around HMOs.

Health, housing and partnership working

Delegates told us they think "We invest too much in crisis, not enough in prevention", and that for their tenants they felt the biggest issue is access to health services. People told us experiences of health staff only involving housing at crisis point or when something is seen as a "housing" issue. Delegates agreed that the health and housing prevention agenda is in its infancy and the need for more collaborative working to be recognised.



More detailed conversations on the role of partnership led to the below observations:

- Partnership working stems from jointly funding projects - this provides the buy-in and commitment from all partners.
- The legislation we have (Future Generations Act, Wellbeing and Social Services Act) and the Welsh Government commitment in Prosperity for All are encouraging people to work together, but there is impatience this is not happening more systematically.
- More specifically within housing it was felt that we need to think about how pre-tenancy work engages health to make sure people have services in place at the earliest opportunity.
- Discussions led to some people highlighting the below ideas
 - field trips for health and social care to see what housing does and can do
 - Pooled budgets and resources in care home placements and how this could build new housing, health and social care relationships
 - Opportunity for regional partnership boards to promote role of housing
 - Accessible and specialist homes - need to recognise cost implications - long-term services and maintenance can equal high-rent properties

Private Rented Sector (PRS)

The issue of standards in the PRS were highlighted, delegates were worried that landlords are struggling to upkeep properties. They felt there needs to be a balance between getting the standards right and the role of the PRS in tackling homelessness. People told us they had heard stories of landlords accessing grants through tenants to do up homes and then evicting the tenants to be replaced with higher paying tenants. Conversely, other delegates highlighted the lack of resources to support the PRS to thrive.

There was agreement there is a problem with the conditions attached to mortgage insurance on renting homes that preclude landlords taking tenants in receipt of housing benefit as highlighted in the "No DSS" campaign (https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/dss)

Some delegates raised the consultation on ending Section 21 "No Fault" evictions, highlighting that the Resident Landlords Association have quoted 75,000 houses could be sold as a result.

In addition, delegates highlighted the issues Universal Credit (UC) is causing in ensuring people can access the PRS and that landlords are not receptive to recipients of UC - particularly given the challenges around delays to payments.



Local Authorities (LAs)

Delegates highlighted two main issues. Firstly, that LAs are understaffed – and therefore asking if we need a different approach to support planning department capacity.

Secondly the selling of land – some sites aren't worth building on and problems such as gaining access to the land has abnormal costs that even when land is allocated it is not possible to build homes that are affordable.

Local Authorities offer a wide range of services, including their role in building communities but are also experiencing unprecedented financial restraints.

The push to build new homes from Welsh Government is not always matched by supply and skills available locally.

Stigma and perception

Delegates told us about negative attitudes towards residents of social housing reflected amongst some staff of local authorities and housing associations.

In the wider population it was felt that, there seems to be a sense of “you're lucky to have a property”. Some attendees felt that private developers do not promote the building of social housing and the social good it is creating – at times deliberately giving the social housing element of mixed-tenure developments less prominence.

The need to re-consider priority need was highlighted, a sense that the method used to means test priority needs has led to increasing stigmatisation. Delegates told us that they were uncomfortable with the perception of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ Priority Need created.

One Housing System

Bringing together the above issues leads to a reflection on the need for a much deeper recognition of the central role of housing and homes in building an equal and fair society. While many initiatives do work towards this target, until we have a system that has housing at the centre of it people will continue to highlight the difficulties rooted within housing inequality facing communities.

Conclusion

This report shows the importance of amplifying the voice of housing professionals to enrich discussions around housing for now and the future.

Tyfu Tai Cymru will be holding follow up events in 2020 and will develop research based on the topics discussed in the forums and in this report.

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Because Housing Matters