

Cross-Party Housing Group Meeting
12.00-1.15pm on 25th November 2015
Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay
Minutes

AMs in attendance: Sandy Mewies, Jocelyn Davies, Mark Isherwood, Mike Hedges

Also Present:

Elle McNeil, CAB

Julie Nicholas, CIH Cymru (minutes)

John Puzey, Shelter Cymru

Jocelle Lovell, Wales Cooperative Centre

Dave Palmer, Wales Cooperative Centre

David Wilton, TPAS Cymru

Ceri Cryer, Age Cymru

Mark Harris, Home Builders Federation

Steve Clarke, Welsh Tenants

Sioned Hughes, Community Housing Cymru

David Morgan, RICS

Douglas Haig, RLA

Apologies: Auriol Miller, Cymorth Cymru, Jim Bird- Waddington, Caer Las, Neil Howell, Housing Leadership Cymru, Martin Asquith, HouseMark Cymru, Stuart Ropke, CHC

1. **Welcome to joint meeting** - Sandy Mewies AM welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Item** - Leaseholder papers, presented by DP
Three papers were circulated, authored by CHC, RLA and Wales co-operative centre, with a recommendation to consolidate the papers into one, post-discussion at the group, and present to the Minister for consideration. There was general agreement that there was no need for additional legislation, but that guidance, support and practice could be strengthened.
Recommendations:
Leaseholder accreditation linked to Rent Smart Wales
Explore RSL sink-funding options for existing leaseholders
Ensure links to Competition and markets research report published recently
Develop approach to leaseholders being empowered and involved

Questions & Comments

MHe: Co-operative options for leaseholders should be better explored, as this is more common in other parts of the world

DP: It is about presenting a balanced picture, strengthening protection for leaseholders and all options are available.

JN: Updated on background to papers, following request at last cross-party housing group for members to present a report exploring emerging issues for social housing and private rented leaseholders.

DW: Is there evidence that leaseholders want sink-funds (rather than landlords view only)

SH: Social landlords [RSLs] view is that better planning is required and that the focus should be on developing the relationship between leaseholders and landlords. An accredited scheme might support this, which would require further funding to develop further, though in the past Welsh Gov. has not supported this request for funding, though some work is going on.

SC: Section 19-21 of the paper refers to previous consultation. Welsh Tenants would also like to see additional recommendations regarding a national representative body, as currently there is limited access to information and advice. WT would like to feed into the next report to go to the Minister.

DH: Sink funds for 125 year leases are an issue, we need to mitigate against short-term approach, particular issues for buy-to-let landlords who may be avoiding long-term infrastructure costs. Some education needs to be met to ensure understanding of need, infrastructure should be included alongside maintenance surveys and reactive maintenance needs. Artificially low charges are unhelpful for long-term viability of buildings.

DW: Are we confident of how sinking funds are managed?

DH: No, there is work to be undertaken on good practice.

JD: Fair and equitable arrangements are required for current and future leaseholders.

SM: I am declaring an interest as a leaseholder. I am much more confident with property that does have sinking fund in operation than one that does not.

JD: Is the value of the property affected by this?

DH: Yes, but people do not necessarily understand this.

SM: Education seems key to taking this forward, frontloading is important. I am therefore requesting a consolidation of the papers for the meeting in January; recommendations can be agreed between the organisations participating ahead of the meeting.

Actions:

- JN to coordinate a meeting to draft the joint report for the next XPHG.
- A consolidated report with recommendations to come back to the XPHG next meeting before going to the minister on behalf of the group.

3. Item 2: Homes for Wales campaign

SH introduced the campaign, a joint collaboration between 7 housing-related organisations ahead of the NAW elections 2016. Using the tagline End the housing crisis and build a stronger Wales the campaign focusses on the important role of housing in the economy, wellbeing and tackling poverty agendas. The aim is to raise the profile of housing with the electorate and politicians as critical to Wales. SH explained that there would be a Christmas card campaign, a housing story focus and a rally on the 4th March 2016 from the Senedd to the Hayes in Cardiff.

Information can be found on the website: <http://chcymru.org.uk/comms/homes-for-wales/>

Questions & Comments

SM: The current AMs to get in touch with regarding party manifestos for the campaign are Ken Skates for Labour, Suzie Davies for Conservatives, Elin Jones for Plaid Cymru and Peter Black for the Lib Dems.

MHe: It is interesting to consider what will happen if interest rates rise, and also we need greater awareness of housing and health which was not mentioned earlier.

SH: Health is a big part of the housing agenda and vice versa. CHC has a joint post currently to support this.

SM: Important that this group works with whoever is in power to make housing in Wales work for the people.

Actions: None

4. Item 3: Shelter Cymru Make Renting Right campaign

JP gave an update on the new Shelter Cymru campaign which focusses on the private rented sector, understanding of rights, responsibilities and duties for tenants and landlords.

JP: The campaign aims to help meet the needs of those who want greater tenure security and those who do not, as it has been established by Shelter Cymru that 40% of tenants in the PRS in Wales are on monthly periodic tenancies. Shelter's long-term aim is to get rid of the no-fault evictions, but we recognise that this can not be done overnight and there is a need to give landlords more comfort regarding fair resolution. Setting up a housing tribunal may be helpful. Quality issues continue in the PRS and we need to explore how to increase investment. Affordability issues continue.

Questions & Comments

JD: It is difficult to disagree with the principles of the campaign.

DH: RLA are working hard to find themes to agree on and take forward.

SM: This paper has been noted and there is general consensus in the group to support the campaign.

SC: Tenant representation is important in the history of PRS development and improvement. but resourcing is difficult. There are concerns with throwing the baby out with the bathwater, important to build on what we have.

JN: Shelter Cymru are also part of the Homes for Wales campaign and this is a good example of how the H4W campaign is the overarching ambition for Welsh housing with individual member campaigns sitting underneath it focussing on different areas.

JD: Good legislation is better than lots of legislation- this approach is helpful.

SC: This also applies to leaseholders; we suggested to Welsh Government that a code of practice separate for landlords and leaseholders would be beneficial but this has not been taken up.

MHa: This work began with JD as Deputy Minister for Housing and the work on enabling homeless discharge of duty into the private sector. It also links to enabling longer tenancies, improving standards, but there is a definite sense of unfinished business.

Actions: None

5. Item 4: Your Money Your Home project update

JL gave an update on the private rented sector project at the Wales cooperative centre.

Focussing on supporting tenants with financial management and preparedness needs, currently working across a number of local authority areas. Targeting vulnerable tenants the project has a 38% engagement rate.

JD: Do you ask people if they understand borrowing risks and options?

JL: Yes

SM: Updated on a constituent issue regarding high cost rental of electrical goods – is there any investigation on this type of borrowing?

SC: Consumer groups have raised concerns about this previously; there is a need to support people to understand time costs and HP/rental charges.

JD: If you have money then you can borrow cheaply, for people with mortgages there may be limited understanding of their arrangements too. Many people focus on the monthly payments

rather than the APR. But important to recognise that people have limited options, they are not stupid!

JL: Yes, focus is on increasing options for people such as credit unions.

SM: There is something going wrong with promotion of services if people do not know about credit unions.

JL: Please contact me for more information

DH: Many landlords help tenants with their budgeting and LHA. Data sharing is an issue going forward under Universal Credit. We would like to see parity with social landlord's data sharing.

JL: Trusted landlord status pilot is currently in place in Wales. Rent Smart Wales could link to a trusted landlord status perhaps.

SC: Significant caveats would be required.

Questions & Comments

Actions: None

6. Date of 2016 AGM

JN will contact current party members of the group and Mike Hedges, AM to agree a date for late Jan/February to include a new secretary at CIH Cymru and a new Chair, as SM is stepping down after the election.

JN will inform other members of date once confirmed and room booked.

7. Meeting closed