

Our response is informed by feedback from our members, our knowledge of the housing industry and expertise from our policy and practice teams.

CIH Cymru supports the development of Welsh policies, practices and legislation that aim to address the key housing challenges we face, to improve standards and supply, promote community cohesion, tackle poverty and promote equality. We promote a one housing system approach that:

- places the delivery of additional affordable housing at the top of national, regional and local strategies as a primary method of tackling the housing crisis;
- secures investment to ensure the high and sustainable quality of all homes in sustainable framework;
- improves standards and develops the consumer voice within the private rented sector
- promotes the concept of housing led regeneration to capture the added value that housing brings in terms of economic, social and environmental outcomes;
- recognises that meeting the housing needs of our communities is a key aspect of tackling inequality and poverty;
- ensures that that there are properly resourced support services in place to prevent homelessness and protect the most vulnerable;
- uses current and potential legislative and financial powers to intervene in housing markets and benefit schemes;
- promotes consumer rights & tenant involvement;
- and supports the continued professional development of housing practitioners.

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Supporting People Programme Grant (SPPG) has been a pivotal keystone in ensuring some of society's most potentially vulnerable groups in Wales can gain access to support services which sustain tenancies, develop skills and maintain independence. The following responses provide an overview on aspects of the programme's delivery and challenges to its longer-term prospects.

## **2. The impact of wider policy developments on the programme**

2.1 Whilst we believe the impact SPPG is well-understood within the housing sector, by partners involved in its delivery and those in receipt of services, it is clear that there is further work required to increase understanding in other sectors and the broader public on what the programme tangibly achieves. We would welcome further efforts by the Welsh Government to communicate the achievement of SPPG services to date, the value of its workforce and clarity on the longer-term supported we would hope to see it receive.

2.2 The broader picture impacting the implementation of SPPG services relates directly to the UK Government's supported accommodation review. Although many considerations in the review do not apply directly to Wales, the exploration of a devolved pot of funding for short-term accommodation is clearly central to the SPPG programme. We would want to see a clear mechanism to ensure suitable space for the funding to grow in-line with demand. A limited or capped pot will only dwindle in effectiveness as services increasingly come under pressure.

2.3 From a governance perspective the delivery structure for SPPG in Wales has been developing well through Regional Collaborative Committees (RCCs). The RCCs are underpinned by strong partnership work encompassing representatives from a number of sectors, including housing, health, public protection and local councillors.

2.4 Whilst it is clear that some areas are able to work together more effectively than others the RCCs should continue to be developed and highlighted as positive steps forward in regional working. We would want to see clear links with the work of Public Service Boards as well a strengthened links with Health Board in Wales, recognising the merits of its prevention work to the health sector.

### **3. Monitoring and evaluation**

3.1 We believe that further work is required to ensure the lived-experience of those accessing services is captured effectively by the outcomes framework. This should include developing consistent mechanisms for involving people using SPPG services following their time involved with the service.

3.2 In addition there needs to be a clear understanding of the diversity profile of those receiving services and a clear method of utilising diversity data to identify any gaps in service provision which could cause inequalities to arise in accessing services.

### **4. The distribution of Programme funding and financial planning**

4.1 As one of the Welsh Government's largest revenue budgets, it is understandable that the SPPG receives a considerable level of scrutiny around how funding is allocated and spent. Whilst budgetary pressures have meant that the level of funding has reduced overall, in recent years however there has been protection for the budget recognising the vital work provided through services funded by the grant. We strongly welcome the Welsh Government's support for this area and believe a continued focus and protection for this budget is vital if we are to sustain services that reduce homelessness, tackle poverty and increase employment opportunities.

4.2 We are concerned however that whilst protection has brought with it an annual renewal of confidence in the sector, this cycle does not lend itself well to the long-term planning of services. Year on year the housing sector continues to campaign for the protection of the SPPG as the Welsh Government undertakes the drafting and confirmation of its budgetary commitments. Whilst it is clear that the voice of the sector has been well recognised in both this, and previous years, greater certainty is required to ensure the SPPG is able to be as effective as possible in meeting both long and immediate short-term demand.

4.3 The most recent Welsh Government budget has reflected that SPPG is sustained at current levels but in 2019/20 the ring-fence, as it appears, will be removed and the budget combined with a number of other prevention-type budgets.

4.4 We have real concerns that this move will create greater uncertainty and create similar consequences to developments in England following the removal of the ring-fence from the equivalent budget. In England the ring-fence was removed in 2009 and following a Freedom of Information request by Inside Housing, substantial cuts we're highlighted following this with some local authorities cutting the budget line for Supporting People by up to 60% (<https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/scale-of-supporting-people-cuts-uncovered-25403> (Accessed 13/12/2017)).

4.5 Whilst we understand the Welsh Government's rationale in seeking sensible approaches to ensuring funding is as effective as possible we urge caution in pursuing these options. Service providers will be understandably anxious considering the situation that developed in England where Supporting People funding has disappeared in the aftermath.

4.6 We strongly urge the Welsh Government to maintain the ring-fence for the SPPG programme and provide certainty for service providers at an early stage as to not