

Housing Information Group (HIG) Meeting 9 May 2019

Cydweli 1 and 2, Welsh Government Offices, Cathays Park, Cardiff

Attendees

Nia Roblin (NR)	United Welsh Housing Association
Tamara Hooper (TH)	Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)
Ross Thomas (RT)	Tai Pawb
Liam Richards	Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
Matt Miller (MM)	Carmarthenshire County Council
Stephanie Irvine (SI)	Lichfields
Gary Seaman (GS)	Housemark
Luned Jones (LJ)	Welsh Government (KAS)
Sue Leake (SL)	Welsh Government (KAS)
Katherine Green (KG)	Welsh Government (KAS)
Judy David (JD)	Welsh Government (KAS)
Mel Brown (MB)	Welsh Government (KAS)
Jamie Cleves	Welsh Government (KAS)
Rhian Davies (RD)	Welsh Government (KAS)
James Burgess (JB)	Welsh Government (Housing Policy)
Helga Warren (HW)	Welsh Government (Housing Policy)
Paul Davies (PD)	Welsh Government (Housing Policy)
Fran MacDonald (FM)	Welsh Government (Housing Policy)

Apologies

Mark Harris	House Builders Federation
Bob Smith	CaCHE
Lisa Dobbins	Welsh Government (Housing Policy)
Cathy Johnson	Welsh Government (Housing Policy)
Louise Woodfine	NHS Wales
Leanne Roberts	Welsh Government

1. Welcome and introduction

SL welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

SL ran through the actions from the last meeting:

- Action: JD to send out link to Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) consultation to HIG members – completed
- Action: JD to send all relevant links to cross government working group action plan and blogs to HIG members – completed (and included in Housing Update papers)

3. Affordable housing supply review

JB gave a presentation covering the recommendations from the Affordable Housing Supply Review report which was published on the 1 May 2019. Its initial purpose had been to look at ways of increasing the supply/delivery of Affordable Housing using available resources. It was a long process and became broad ranging with 10 work streams and a hundred or so individuals and organisations involved.

The key recommendations were broken down into various categories:

Housing need

The Panel concluded that the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) system was important but was not working as well as it should. There were issues around inconsistency in coverage, timing and approach. The report suggested that the Welsh Government was not making use of the LHMA's and there was a need for some joint commissioning of LHMA's and Local Development Plans (LDPs) using agreed data sets. The report recommended that copies of LHMA's should be deposited with Welsh Government and used in assessment of housing need.

- HW advised that demonstrating the level of housing need at a local authority level would mean policy would be better equipped to ask for funding.
- SI questioned what was meant by depositing data into Welsh Government, to which JB responded stating that once deposited further analyses could potentially be undertaken and shared; either internally or published. SL advised this has been tried before but proved to be a difficult task.
- HW also informed the group that funding to Local Authorities (LAs) from WG was based on allocation mechanisms decided many years ago; with more recent Housing Need figures funding could therefore be better allocated.

Housing quality standard

The review concluded that Development Quality Requirements (DQR) standards were important and needed to be retained with space a key element. DQR should be simplified and should cover S106 properties.

- NR questioned if any distinction was made between S106 rental and s106 home ownership properties when the review was carried out. JB advised that he doesn't think so though the review mainly focused on rental properties. MM emphasised it should cover both.

- The target set in the Review of near zero carbon by 2021 for new affordable housing and 2025 for all tenures was felt to be challenging.

Modern methods of construction

Welsh government should continue to support the trialling of Modern Methods of Construction and link to zero carbon agenda.

Rent policy

Welsh government should implement 5 year rent policy from 2020-21, take separate account of bungalows and have landlords focus on Value for Money.

LAs as enablers and builders

Local Authorities should be encourage to use lifting of borrowing cap to deliver new affordable housing accessing grant from Welsh Government. Welsh Government to encourage partnership working and sharing of resources between LAs and Registered Social landlord (RSLs).

Public sector land

Welsh Government establish Arms Length Body to bring forward and manage public sector land.

Financing affordable housing

Welsh Government to reform grant system and introduce flexible long term five year Affordable Housing Supply Partnerships model. This would end the current fixed grant rate of 58 percent for allocation of Social Housing Grant (SHG), maximise output and demonstrate grant value for money.

- HW advised this would be unique to Wales. The partnerships with RSLs need to be discussed further to ensure they capture the correct model and that LAs are not excluded.
- NR asked whether these partnerships would be like consortiums which hadn't worked successfully in the past. HW stated that the approach was different now with much more general agreement. Consideration would also be given to the need for a housing infrastructure and regeneration fund alongside the main grant programme for larger more complex sites.

Dowry and Major Repairs Allowance (MRA)

Welsh Government should commission an independent financial review of LSVTs receipt of Dowry and LA s in receipt of MRA. Business plans post achievement of Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) in 2020 should be scrutinised and accelerated programme of decarbonisation needs to be demonstrated.

The Minister plans to respond to the recommendations before summer recess (Mid July).

The group discussed the recommendations.

- Space standards - SL asked the group what is known about housing space standards. PD - in social rented housing there are mandated space standards. MM pointed out that for Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) it's not straight forward and the bedroom number does not always equate to space required. NR informed the group that the 'bedroom tax' makes more space difficult to allow. TH questioned if space is being considered for ageing populations; group advised it is, and informed that this is very important as over 30 percent of social housing occupants have a disability.

- Dowry and MRA – FM emphasised that LAs are nervous about review of the Major Repairs Allowance, but 2020 would be a good time to review and refresh it as the current system is restrictive as covers only properties in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) prior to exit in 2015 so lack of incentive for new building.
- SL stressed need to continue monitoring Supply, Quality and Rent, the importance of getting a five year rent agreement, and the issues in measuring affordability. NR stressed importance of clear definitions. House Mark have produced a 'rent affordability' tool based on Joseph Rowntree formula and GS is prepared to demonstrate to group as potential for it to be used in Wales. RT emphasised work by Tai Pawb on accessible housing registers and need for a standard across Wales.

JB informed that if anyone wants to make any further comments they should seek meetings with the Minister or more likely officials. Welsh Government is currently looking for opportunities to talk to stakeholders about review.

4. Housing need

MB provided an overview of the current Housing Need work and what's planned next. The first article was published in January and presented estimates of housing need at a national and regional level. The second article will present the estimates split by tenure (market and affordable) and is due for publication on the 5 June 2019.

- SI questioned how we can prevent figures being used as targets. Group responded it's a difficult thing to do, but it has been stressed that users should look at the range of figures rather than the central estimate. The statistical article is very clear in this respect.
- SI also stated it would be helpful to have timetable of publications going forward.
- MB also discussed plans for releasing an Excel based tool to illustrate Housing Need estimates. These will be at a national and regional level and will be an overall figure not split by size or type. The tool could however be used by local authorities to produce their own local estimates.
- MB advised that this is the first step in a long process.

5. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence

SL discussed paper relating to the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence which is being carried out by Bob Smith and Peter Mackie. She advised there is now a knowledge exchange hub available.

Action: JD to send round link of published reports to HIG Group.

6. Housing update

JD gave overview of Housing Update Paper discussing what's been published and what's upcoming. SL also advised about Welsh House Conditions Survey (WHCS) releases and that Fuel Poverty estimates are being published on the 21 May 2019.

7. Housing research

RD gave an update on Housing Research (included within Welsh Government update paper). She advised that current work is ongoing with a few projects coming up soon and that a review of priority need for homelessness has also been started.

AOB

Next meeting on the 26/9/2019

- Group welcomes ideas; current plan is to focus on decarbonisation.
- SL noted that this would be JD's last HIG meeting. She thanked her for her considerable work over a long period of time and the group wished her well for the future.