

Housing Information Group (HIG) Meeting 19 January 2022

Attendees		
Katy	Addison	Welsh Government
Mark	Alexander	Welsh Government
Judith	Alfrey	Welsh Government
Dyfed	Alsop	Welsh Revenue Authority
Richard	Baker	Welsh Government
Rachel	Bowen	Welsh Government
Sian	Bradley	Housing Justice
Hannah	Browne Gott	Welsh Government
Hywel	Butts	Welsh Government
Emily	Church	CLA Cymru
Scott	Clifford	Welsh Government
Lin	Cousins	Three Dragons Consultants
Rhian	Davies	Welsh Government
Janine	Edwards	Conwy County Borough Council
Alun	Evans	Citizens Advice
Jill	Fairweather	Welsh Government
Stephanie	Freeth	Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
Richard	Fry	Swansea University
Charlotte	Gibson	Welsh Government
Alysha	Gill	Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
Lucy	Griffiths	Swansea University
Darren	Hatton	Welsh Government
Robert	Hay	Welsh Government
Carolyn	Hayles	Cardiff Metropolitan University
Aled Owen	Humphreys	Gwynedd Council
Kristian	James	Public Health Wales
Paul	James	Welsh Government
Judith	Jenkins	Conwy County Borough Council
Amelia	John	Welsh Government
Dewi	John	Shelter Cymru
Leanne	John	City and County of Swansea
Cathy	Johnson	Welsh Government
Simon	Lannon	Cardiff University
Sue	Leake	Welsh Government

Nina	Ley	Welsh Government
Alexandra	Long	Welsh Government
Ron	Loveland	Welsh Government
Fran	MacDonald	Welsh Government
Jim	McKirdle	Welsh Local Government Association
Matt	Miller	Carmarthenshire County Council
Rob	Milligan	Tai Pawb
Jenny	Murphy	Newport City Homes
Jonathan	Oates	Welsh Government
Sean	O'Donnell	Flintshire County Council
Michelle	Playle	Welsh Government
Jack	Price	Wales Centre for Public Policy
Bethan	Proctor	Community Housing Cymru
Simon	Prothero	Welsh Government
Madeleine	Rees	Speakeasy Law Centre
Sam	Rees	Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
Nia	Roblin	United Welsh Housing Association
David	Rowlands	Tai Pawb
Francois	Samuel	Welsh Government
Claire	Smith	Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
Robert	Smith	Cardiff University
Catrin	Sneade	Powys County Council
Karl	Thomas	Welsh Government
Lee	Thomas	Welsh Government
Neil	Waghorn	Welsh Government
Michelle	Waters	ONS
Gowan	Watkins	Welsh Government
Adam	West	Coastal Housing Group
John	Wickenden	Housemark
Tony	Wilkins	ONS
Nia	Wyn Vaughan	Gwynedd Council
Xinshuang	Zhang	Cardiff Metropolitan University

1. Welcome and Introduction

Amelia John (AJ), Welsh Government (WG), welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the theme - Climate Change and Housing. Climate change is clearly an enormous priority, reflected in both Ministerial portfolio for Climate Change, and the Programme for Government. There are numerous commitments in the Programme for Government on Housing and Regeneration, reflecting its importance.

2. Climate Change Adaptations

AJ introduced Professor Carolyn Hayles (CH), Cardiff Metropolitan University. CH joined the Cardiff School of Art and Design in January 2019 and is Professor of Sustainable and Environmental Design for the Built Environment. She has a

particular research interest in the development and delivery of sustainable decision making processes and frameworks, including approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation; and design for health and wellbeing. CH presented slides on [Climate Vulnerability Modelling](#). The research is as a result of a year-long embedded fellowship in WG. The presentation focussed on the impact of climate change on the indoor environmental quality (thermal comfort and moisture) and building fabric of different building types (age, building materials, etc.) and what adaptations can be put in place to mitigate against these scenarios. Future work on this could be to produce mapping and information sheets to inform householders and professional advisors. CH noted in her presentation that the RCP8.5 emissions scenario may seem like an extreme view but was within current projection scenariosⁱ.

Discussion:

A discussion was had on whether RCP8.5 is appropriate for the modelling. It was felt that RCP8.5 is potentially an extreme case and that a maximum of RCP4.5 could be considered.

Dampness, condensation and penetrating damp have always been some of the top problems in the housing sector. The model suggests with global warming these problems will get worse, not better. A discussion was had around the affordability of mitigating measures. The crisis of sharply rising fuel prices was noted and it was felt that the mitigating measures would have a huge impact on the social housing sector, owner occupiers and private landlords. It was noted that this would need to be incorporated into funding models.

3. Energy efficiency measures for traditional and historic buildings & Introduction to the Heritage Impact Assessment process

AJ introduced Jill Fairweather (JF) & Judith Alfrey (JA) from Cadw. They both work for the Regeneration and Conservation team in WG giving advice on listing and historic buildings, historic landscape and urban characterisation work, as well as giving planning advice for Historic Landscapes throughout Wales.

JF presented slides on '[How to improve energy efficiency on historic buildings in Wales](#)'. New guidance will be launched in the next few weeks. A link to this will be shared on the [Housing Information Group webpage](#) once available.

JA spoke about heritage impact assessment, which is a structured process intended to make sure that the significance of a building is taken into account in the development and design of proposals for change. It was developed for use with listed buildings, but is relevant for other traditional and historic buildings. Many unlisted buildings define the character of an area and that those traditional buildings are important for heritage and future generations. JA explained said that the necessity to make changes - including energy efficiency measures – can be reconciled with the desire to keep what is special by working with the special qualities of the building when devising proposals for change. Heritage impact assessment is intended to help find a way of making changes that sustains and perhaps even enhances the special qualities of buildings. It's a design tool which

begins by identifying clear objectives (for example improving energy efficiency), and finds the best way to achieve the objective by testing alternatives against the impact they would have on the significance of building. JA concluded by saying that the principles of heritage impact assessment would support the whole building approach; that approach is also a structured process that depends on establishing clear objectives, having a thorough understanding of the building, and designing interventions that grow out of that understanding.

Discussion:

A discussion was held on whether we have the right skills base for maintaining and adapting these traditional buildings in Wales. It was stated that the ECO (Energy Company Obligation) programme doesn't financially support maintenance of properties but this can be a large issue with older properties. It was discussed that newer isn't always better and there was a reason properties were built a certain way with certain materials. It was recognised that it is important not just to build in changes without thinking about how it fits with the rest of the building.

JF stated that the new guidance will be on the Cadw website in the coming weeks and a link will be circulated as soon as it is available.

4. Development of Dashboard on Fuel Poverty related data

Rachel Bowen (RB), a senior statistical officer working with the Housing Conditions Evidence Programme Team in WG, where she leads on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency statistics.

RB said that she is currently developing a fuel poverty dashboard in Microsoft PowerBI to meet an action in the fuel poverty plan '[Tackling fuel poverty 2021 to 2035](#)' create a compendium of data on fuel poverty. Additionally the dashboard will benefit the Welsh public sector and Third Sector stakeholders in giving them easy access to Welsh fuel poverty related data and will help to inform decision making.

The plan is to collect, prepare, publish and maintain a public facing dataset, which brings together sources of data that relate to fuel poverty including official statistics and admin data using automated methods where possible to ensure timely updates.

The data that RB is intending to include are:

- Estimated levels of Fuel Poverty from the Welsh Housing Conditions Survey 2017-18
- Projected levels of Fuel Poverty currently being modelled to take account of COVID and changes that have taken place since the last estimates.
- Beneficiary levels for UK Government funded programmes including:
 - Warm Homes Discount
 - Cold Weather
 - Winter Fuel Payments
- Energy Company Obligation activities – estimated bill and carbon savings

- Warm Homes Activity Data estimated bill and carbon savings (Nest and Arbed (ended) and the new warm homes programme data)
- Average annual domestic Energy Bills for gas and electricity from BEIS
- Tariff and Energy Company switching rates
- Average household income data (UK and Wales) from ONS and Family resource survey.
- Domestic metering – including Smart meter installations
- Domestic Energy Efficiency ratings in Wales
- Off gas grid households and alternative fuel types

RB asked attendees to let the team know if there is anything else they would like included or if they have/know of data that could be of use to the dashboard.

The plan is to go live with a first version of the dashboard in April. A link will be placed on the Housing Information Group Web pages and emailed out.

RB gave a quick run through of the [COVID dashboard](#) to give an idea of what a dashboard can do. RB noted that dashboards are designed to be interactive and easy for the user but the development of a dashboard takes a lot of effort behind the scenes in development. The development is time intensive but afterwards updates to existing pages do not take as long.

Discussion:

GW stated that the FP dashboard won't be a fixed product; as more data becomes available and as ideas come up they can be added. She encouraged members to have a look once it is published and give feedback and suggestions.

Suggested item to include: data on pre-payment meters. When asked about geographic level, RB and GW indicated that the aim would be to present data down to LA level and, if possible, for smaller geographic area. However that depended on data availability and the need to avoid the data being disclosive. Members were encouraged to point WG to suitable data sources.

Claire Smith (DHLUC) agreed with RB that dashboards take a lot of work especially when including a lot of different datasets. DLUHC have recently put together a Housing dashboard and offered support, they also have a [dashboard on EPCs](#).

Simon Lannon stated that they are working on a [project to analyse smart meter data in Wales](#), which may be useful to consider

Tony Wilkins added that ONS have also recently produced a [Climate Change statistics portal \(dashboard\)](#).

5. Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS): progress to date, the new standard, timelines and data collection

Cathy Johnson (CJ) gave a policy introduction into WHQS which has set the standard for social homes in Wales since 2002 and aims to ensure that tenants live in homes which are good quality, safe, secure and suitable for their needs – this is a

long-standing programme with £1.9billion WG investment being provided since from 2004. CJ stated that a lot more is known on the impact of housing on health than 20 years ago.

The [latest data](#) shows that 99% of social homes met the WHQS at 31st December 2020 (including compliance subject to acceptable fails).

A new and updated version of WHQS is being developed. It will retain many of the core elements which have driven the high standard achieved to date but the new standard will also drive us forward in tackling affordable warmth and decarbonisation.

WG recognise the need for a planning period especially around the decarbonisation elements so the change will take time. There will be learning and development over time and it's important to get it right due to potential costs and disruption.

WG has worked with the sector to get to this stage – recognising that they need engagement: WG don't deal directly with tenants, undertake the work or have the practical experience of implementing the standard.

Briefly the process has been:

- At the start of the pandemic, online sessions were held with all social landlords to ask what they thought of WHQS and how we could change and update it
- Feedback session with all social landlords to summarise what WG heard and sense-check it
- WG has a group to engage with on this (i.e. learn from their practical experience)
- WG commissioned an independent evaluation to give an unbiased assessment of WHQS so far. Really important step and many lessons learned about the long history of WHQS but also much is positive about what has been achieved and what remains valuable in the WHQS. This also included workshops with the sector.

Current stage:

- Commissioned external consultants to support the technical aspects of writing the new standard – they have also engaged with the sector.

Next stage:

- present a draft of the proposed new standard to the WHQS Task & Finish group which has members from representative bodies across the sector (CHC, WLGA, Tai Pawb, TPAS Cymru, PHW, Future Generations Commissioner, CIH), also presenting to other stakeholder groups
- A full public consultation on the new standard, expected to launch in spring **2022** with the standard being implemented **from 2023**. Engagement at consultation stage to take the form of workshops.

Gowan Watkins (GW) stated that there would need to be changes to the statistical reporting. WG are aiming to measure WHQS better and as such will establish

improved data collection. There will be a period of adjustment and settling in as some organisations don't currently have the data structures in place to facilitate the type of data collection envisaged, which involves individual property level submissions. GW is talking to various data experts in the groups and working with the WG data collection team to see if WG can reduce the burden of housing returns in general along these lines. GW stated that input is actively being sought on whether the proposed data collection method is realistic. If people would like to feed in, they are encouraged to engage in the consultation or email: HousingQualityStandards@gov.wales

Discussion:

Stephanie Freeth stated that DLUHC is doing something along the same lines as WG in regards to the [review of the Decent Homes Standard](#). The email address of the review team is DecentHomesReview@communities.gov.uk.

AJ indicated that the intention is that evaluation of WHQS2 will be built in from the start.

6. Update on analysis relevant to energy efficiency of homes, Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Tony Wilkins (TW), ONS presented [slides](#) introducing his team, the publications to date, current work and future plans. He stated that there were plans to expand the [Integrated Data Service](#) further to bring in analysts from WG.

Discussion:

A question was asked about how the combined EPC/VOA data reported by ONS differs to the WG WHCS reporting and analysis around EPCs. TW answered that the representativeness of the data and comparability with other data sources is something that ONS are looking into. For the current ONS analysis – it's only the latest EPC on a property that is used. They are also looking at change over time for properties with multiple EPC records. GW added that for now WG are not able to access the VOA data so whilst ONS look at that they are focusing on other sources, but that WG and DHLUC are involved in the work ONS are doing.

GW stated that WG are linked up and actively involved with the work being done in other government departments on housing/EPCs etc. (ONS, DLUHC, Scottish Government, Northern Ireland etc.). She stated that there is wider work ongoing in BEIS on a new SAP would take into account any wider energy usage in homes and hopefully provide a better EPC in future.

CS stated that there is a lot going on with the [EPC action plan](#) to make EPC data more accessible to people.

7. AOB / Close

AJ warmly thanked the presenters and stated the next meeting will take place on Wednesday, 18 May 2022.

Sue Leake directed attendees to the housing statistics update and other publications that may be of interest:

[Statistics Wales quarterly update: December 2021 | GOV.WALES](#)

[New house building: April 2019 to March 2021](#)

[Homelessness: April 2020 to March 2021](#)

[Affordable housing provision: April 2020 to March 2021](#)

SL informed the group that the Welsh Government will be carrying out user research on the open data platform [StatsWales](#). WG are keen to gather views from a wide range of users, including from people working for public bodies, the third sector and beyond. The user research will shape the future direction of the StatsWales site. If participants use StatsWales and would like to take part in this research, they were asked to get in touch by 31 January 2022 to confirm that they are happy for details to be passed to those undertaking the research: KASAdmin@gov.wales

ⁱ RCP8.5 is a high-emissions scenario and is frequently referred to as “business as usual”, suggesting a likely outcome if society does not make concerted efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions.