

Social Justice and Regeneration Research Summary



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



An evaluation of the effectiveness of Community Housing Agreements

Introduction

Community Housing Agreements (CHAs) are voluntary agreements established between local authorities and registered social landlords. CHAs sought to provide a vehicle for more effective partnership working between local authorities and housing associations on shared priorities and objectives. The model for CHAs was developed by the Welsh National Social Landlords' Forum in October 1998. The Forum recommended that Welsh local authorities and housing associations adopt the agreements.

Since the development of the model CHA in 1998, the policy environment within which both local authorities and housing associations operate has changed considerably.

The research project sought to evaluate the effectiveness of CHAs and was undertaken between June 2005 and March 2006. The key stages of the research were:

- i. policy/literature review;
- ii. telephone interviews with local authorities, housing associations and key stakeholders;
- iii. interviews with key stakeholders in local authorities and housing associations in six case study areas; and
- iv. consultation with key stakeholders in local authorities and housing associations on proposals for the way forward.

This executive summary provides an overview of the findings and policy suggestions contained in the main report.

Summary of Findings

CHAs are not widely used - just eight (36%) Welsh local authorities have one in place.

One of the main reasons cited for CHAs not being introduced was the level of resources required to develop and implement an agreement.

In those areas where a CHA was in place:

- there was variation in the parties to the agreements, the approaches adopted to develop the agreements and their content; and
- the majority of CHAs were regarded as effective catalysts for improving partnership working when initially developed. One local authority stated that the process of developing the CHA was all about driving change and developing a culture of collaborative working.

The long term usefulness of CHAs:

- was determined by the process of developing the agreement;
- tended to depend on the quality of the schedule, which in most cases was weak, with tasks, responsibilities and timescales not specified in any detail; and
- tended to depend on the arrangements for monitoring the schedule which, in most cases, was poor.

Three of the eight local authorities appear to view the CHA as a framework for drawing together and formalising existing agreements and partnership arrangements.

A common weakness of CHAs was their tendency to be viewed corporately as “housing agreements”. In practice, they were not “owned” by the authority corporately or tied in with other local authority departments/directorates.

CHAs did not appear to have a significant impact on partnership working around homelessness. However, in one local authority where the performance of

housing associations was monitored and used to determine the allocation of social housing grant, it was reported that the agreement has had a big impact on homelessness and lettings.

The effectiveness of partnership working does not seem to be dependent on whether or not there is a CHA in place. However, local authorities with CHAs in place are more likely to have other forms of operational agreements in place than those without CHAs in place.

Effective partnership working appears mainly to be due to the culture of the organisations involved, especially the culture of the local authority. It appears to hinge on a series of relational issues such as:

- trust;
- openness;
- willingness to share information and experiences;
- recognition of the skills and aptitudes of partner agencies and the contribution that all parties can potentially make; and
- willingness to engage partners, not just in agreeing documents, but in identifying issues that need tackling and in developing solutions.

The research found many examples of creative partnership working initiatives which had been developed in the absence of a CHA, or outside of CHA arrangements.

The quality of guidance on CHAs and the absence of guidance by the Welsh Assembly Government on the development and implementation of CHAs has meant that:

- the use of CHAs has been limited;
- CHAs have not achieved corporate ownership;
- there has been a lack of consistency in the approaches to their development; and

- there is considerable variation in their quality and content.

The lack of capacity to perform the strategic housing function in Welsh local authorities has meant that:

- the use of CHAs has been limited;
- CHAs have not achieved wider corporate ownership; and
- there has been a lack of consistency in the approach to the development of CHAs and their implementation.

Policy Suggestions

The report authors consider a revised form of community housing agreement could play a key role both in strengthening the strategic housing function and moving forward the partnership and collaborative working agenda in housing.

The main report contains a proposal that sets out a series of policy suggestions in relation to the role of the Welsh Assembly Government. They focus on strengthening the local authority strategic housing function and ensuring housing associations contribute to the high-level policy objectives of all Welsh local authorities.

The proposal suggests the Welsh Assembly Government:

- provide training for local authority members and senior officers on the strategic housing function, in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association;
- make the development of a revised form of CHA a requirement for Welsh local authorities, by making its development one element of the Policy Agreement negotiated between the Welsh Assembly Government and all Welsh local authorities;
- encourage local authorities and housing associations to develop the revised form of agreement by introducing a range of measures such as establishing a distinct fund (similar to the Social Housing Management Grant fund), making

additional Social Housing Grant (SHG) available to areas where an agreement is in place and operating effectively, and showcasing positive practice;

- amend guidance for local authorities on the preparation of the Community Strategy and the three high level plans to reinforce the involvement of housing associations in the development of each;
- develop guidance for local authorities on the effective performance of the strategic housing function, which incorporates guidance on the development and implementation of a revised form of CHA, which should be renamed the “community partnership agreement”;
- produce guidance on the development and implementation of community partnership agreements, which:
 - recommends the agreement is a common agreement between each local authority and all the associations operating in that area;
 - recommends careful attention should be paid to the process by which agreements are developed;
 - sets out principles to be followed in the development of the agreement and the form of the agreement, but does not prescribe a model form of agreement or a process to be followed in its development; and
 - recommends the agreement contains both strategic and operational elements and sets out the respective responsibilities of local authorities and housing associations in relation to each of these elements.



The report **An evaluation of the effectiveness of Community Housing Agreements** and further copies of this summary can be obtained from:

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