



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

www.cymru.gov.uk

Housing Association in Wales – Improving the lives of tenants and communities: A descriptive study

Research Summary

Social research

Number: 20/2012

This report presents the findings of a research study commissioned in January 2012 to gather and summarise information about housing associations' community development and support activities, for their tenants and their families and for the wider communities in which they operate. The study focused on activity in 2010-11 and 2011-12.

The study assessed the nature, range and volume of activities, and the contribution that they make to the Welsh Government's objectives. The report presents the number of individuals and households benefiting from these activities, the financial and staff resource invested in them, and the contributions that partners made to their delivery.

Introduction

Registered Social Landlords, or as they are more commonly known, housing associations, own and manage approximately 150,000 homes across Wales. The primary roles of associations as landlords, are the development of new homes for rent (and in some instances for shared ownership) the repair and improvement of existing homes, and the provision of housing management services. Some associations have extended their core role to provide:

- Care & Repair services providing information, advice and repair, improvement and adaptation of the homes of older people, to assist them in maintaining independence in the community;
- housing related support services to people with a variety of support needs;
- care services such as residential and domiciliary care.

Many associations have also developed a variety of **additional** services and support, for tenants and their families and, in some cases, for the wider community, which can be described broadly as community development activities.

Whilst some information was available about community development activities being undertaken by housing associations in Wales, a comprehensive picture was missing. The Welsh Government therefore commissioned this descriptive study, which was undertaken between January and March 2012 by consultants Housing + Cymru.

Dadansodi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy

Methodology

39 housing associations were asked to complete a questionnaire about community development activities they had developed, led or managed, either alone or in partnership with others, which aim to benefit tenants, the families of tenants and the communities in which they live and which are **additional** to associations’:

- statutory housing management and maintenance duties as a landlord;
- contractual obligations as a support or care provider;
- obligations as a Care and Repair agency;
- ARBED funded energy efficiency activities.

The survey achieved a 100% response rate.

For each of the activities listed, associations were asked to indicate, which of the following Welsh Government’s main policy objectives they contributed to:

- improving people's health and well being and reducing inequalities in health
- improving people's well being and reducing social isolation
- creating jobs and training opportunities
- promoting equality of opportunity and access
- digital inclusion
- improving education, skills and learning more generally
- tackling poverty
- reducing carbon emissions.

Some activities listed, although contributing directly to one or more policy objective, played a more

important role in helping to develop, the **capacity** of organisations and communities in their area to contribute to those objectives. An additional category entitled 'developing local capacity' was therefore created.

Telephone interviews were held with key officers in 15 housing associations, to develop a series of case studies throughout the report, and to establish an understanding, of the reasons why some associations had a more limited involvement, in community development activity than others.

The timescales for this project were very short. The information requested from associations was broad in range and complex. Some of the responses received were comprehensive, while others were less so, and associations took different approaches to providing information on some aspects of the questionnaire. The findings below, provide a reasonably robust indication, of the range and scope of community development activity, undertaken by housing associations across Wales, but cannot be said to constitute a completely comprehensive picture. The researchers took a conservative approach to the interpretation of data, and consider that the figures provided in the report, represent an under-estimate of associations’ involvement in community development activity.

Summary of Findings

This project has clearly demonstrated that most housing associations in Wales, are involved in an impressive amount of community development activity,

and that this activity contributes substantially and directly, to a wide range of Welsh Government objectives that go far beyond housing.

Extent of activities

Of the 39 associations approached, 36 (92.4%) were involved in the delivery of community development activities and 3 (7.6%) were not.

Housing associations were involved in the delivery of a total of 269 community development activities in 2010/11, of which at least 195 have continued beyond April 2011. 224 new community development activities have commenced since April 2011.

In 2010/11 and since April 2011, the greatest number of activities have been addressed primarily to:

- improving well being and reducing social isolation;
- improving education, skills and learning;
- creating jobs and training opportunities; and
- tackling poverty.

Types of activities

There was tremendous variety in the range, type and scale of activities in which associations were involved. Activities ranged from the large scale (e.g. developing and sustaining Moneyline Cymru) to the smaller scale (e.g. armchair aerobics for older tenants). More detailed information about activities under each Welsh Government objective is included in the main report.

Outcomes and outputs from activities

At least 48,690 individuals plus 8,485 households benefitted from these activities during the financial year 2010/11. The greatest numbers benefited from activities that sought to:

- develop local capacity;
- improve well being and reduce social isolation;
- tackle poverty; and
- create safer communities.

Outputs of activities varied widely between the different policy objectives, and included, for example:

- visits to 101 schools to raise awareness of domestic abuse
- at least 650 people offered employment advice and support
- 500 free PCs distributed to tenants.

Outcomes also varied widely, and included, for example:

- at least 580 older people facilitated a speedy but safe discharge from hospital.
- savings in excess of £300,000 for agencies involved in one family intervention project
- £455,244 of income generated and £123,191 reduction to Job Seekers Allowance payments, as a result of the increased employment rates of trainees in one project
- £800k secured for Gypsy Traveller site improvements
- personal debt reduction of £42,927.82, and increased income of £10,476.93, for

tenants in one financial inclusion project.

Groundwork Trust, National Energy Action).

Many associations were unable able to provide substantive information about the outcomes of activities. Work remains to be done, to help associations define and capture the outcomes and impacts, of the community development work they are involved in.

The amount of association funding for individual activities varied enormously. Associations contributed very large amounts to some activities (e.g. £2,000,000 for the development of a creative hub, in a key town centre location). To others, they contributed little or no funding, but many relatively low cost activities have benefitted very large numbers of individuals.

Expenditure on activities and sources of funding

The delivery of activities

The expenditure on associations' community development activities is substantial. In 2010/11, total expenditure from all sources on community development activities, in which housing associations were involved was at least £10,045,996. Of this expenditure, funding on activities from associations themselves (including staff costs) amounted to at least £6,188,416. Funding from associations for new activities commenced since April 2011 has increased to at least £6,918,205.

Increasing numbers of Welsh housing associations regard community development as part of their core business. In 2010/11, 65% of community development activities had been 'mainstreamed' within individual associations (i.e. they had become part of the core work of the association).

The main sources of non-association funding for community development activities in 2010/11 came from:

In the same year, only 6% of all activities were delivered by groups of associations working in partnership. Despite the fact that many of the activities that associations are involved in are often similar, the extent of collaboration between associations was limited.

- the statutory sector (e.g. local authority departments, Welsh Government, Communities 2.0, Community Safety Partnerships, Future Jobs Fund, Heads of the Valleys Programme)
- the private sector (e.g. associations' contractors, private donations/ sponsorship, banks)
- the voluntary and charitable sectors (e.g. National Lottery,

Associations carried out community development activities with a wide range of partners. In 2010/11:

- the % of voluntary sector partnerships was 49%
- the % of private sector partnerships was 9%
- the % of public sector partnerships was 42%

Many associations found it difficult to estimate the total amount of staff time involved in delivering community development activities,

but from returns, we can say that association staff time involved, has amounted to the equivalent of at least 70 FTE posts during the financial year 2010/11, and 54 FTE posts since April 2011.

Volunteers provided time to the delivery of 134 activities in 2010/11. The number of hours provided to each activity ranged from less than 100 hours (in the majority of cases) to 2,571 hours (given to a Time Exchange project).

Reasons for and barriers to involvement in activities

Housing associations said they were involved in the delivery of community development activities, mainly because they considered such work integral to the strategic priorities, or the mission of the organisation (63%), and because of their commitment to improving the quality of life for their tenants (17%) and improving the communities in which they operate (17%).

The main barriers to association involvement in community development activities were:

- the small size of some associations and consequent lack of human resources;
- the geographically dispersed nature of some associations' stock;
- the role and priorities of key partners, in particular local authorities;

At the time of the research, not all housing associations were involved in community development activities, and the extent of associations' involvement varies significantly. This creates a

patchwork of services across Wales, with the range of services available to tenants and communities varying widely, from landlord to landlord and from local authority to local authority. Some level of variation between areas and landlords is entirely logical given the different local contexts and the variations in approach taken by associations. However, greater collaboration and sharing of practice and learning between associations may help to reduce what could currently be considered as 'a landlord and postcode lottery', and it is to be hoped that this report will aid that collaboration and sharing.

Author: Housing + Cymru

ISBN: 978 0 7504 7506 8