

# Housing for Older People in Wales

## A response to the National Assembly for Wales Social Justice and Regeneration Committee Policy Review:

### The Federation

The Welsh Federation of Housing Associations is a membership body serving independent not-for-profit housing providers in Wales. We work to a core vision of a Wales in which everyone can:

- enjoy decent housing, with homes that meet developing quality standards on health, warmth, space, mobility, quality of life and access to services and community facilities.
- be secure in our homes and free from the damaging fear of homelessness.
- afford to pay for the housing we need, supported by a system of tax and benefits which enables us to take up jobs and enjoy the rewards of our labours.
- have access to the support services we need to help us live independently in our own homes.
- lead our lives in communities that are free from crime, harassment and nuisance. expect high standards, accountability, respect, value for money and quality services from the organisations that help meet our housing needs, and:
- exercise choices over where we live, what services we use, and the type and tenure of our homes.

These objectives inform our response to this consultation, which focuses on four key aspects of future housing need in an ageing population, and especially factors affecting the capacity of people to stay in their own homes or to have access to accommodation of their choice:

- **Socio-economic trends and the development of shared equity schemes**
- **The availability of suitable housing and adaptations**
- **Domiciliary and accommodation-based support services**
- **The community regeneration agenda**

### **1 Demographic factors and the changing financial circumstances of older people in Wales**

Demographic trends show that Wales has an ageing population with the number of people over retirement age projected to rise from 588,000, as counted in 2000, to 869,000 in 2040. It is estimated that the highest proportion of these individuals will live in the rural areas of north, mid and west Wales compared to the more urban areas in the south - reflecting the current geographical spread.

While there is a wealth of statistical data on population trends to help institutions and organisations plan how to tackle the needs of an ageing population there is little coherent public sector research available on their future financial circumstances (it is assumed that actuarial forecasts have been developed for commercial use but this research is not readily available in the public domain). However, it is possible to

speculate on a number of financial factors affecting personal housing-related finance that may find solutions in shared equity schemes.

## ● Sustainable mortgages

Council of Mortgage Lender studies suggest that Wales has a significantly higher incidence of **late mortgages**, where people take long-term mortgages late in life on the assumption of adequate future pensions and other income. At the same time, **pension funds** are consistently revising income forecasts downward. The net effect is likely to be that an increasing number of people facing mortgage payment crises. CML members have responded by developing more flexible packages, often involving extended mortgage periods to limit monthly payments and apparently relying on charges against the estate if mortgagees die before final payments are made.

Housing Associations have an increasing body of experience in the development of **shared equity schemes** designed to facilitate affordable home ownership, including Homebuy and Mortgage Rescue schemes. The Federation suggests that similar shared equity models should be explored to enable older people to sustain existing mortgage commitments.

## ● Equity release

Several situations may benefit from the realisation of assets, including:

- Residential and other means-tested care costs
- Home improvements to increase energy efficiency, improve access to facilities, maintain the fabric of the house etc.
- Buying in non-care services (gardening, decoration etc)
- Improving quality of life through purchase of labour-saving equipment, personal transport, travel etc.

To date, the take-up of equity release schemes has been limited by Housing Associations applying eligibility criteria based on essential need. In light of current socio-economic trends it is suggested that a fundamental debate needs to be had on the definition of "essential".

The credibility of equity release schemes has also suffered from well-publicised fictional and actual fraud. Therefore even if the definition of "essential" is redefined to extend eligibility to a wider range of individuals it is unlikely that there will be any increase in take-up without a significant investment in information, marketing and promotional activities.

Whatever flexibility is developed in shared equity options, it is likely that an increasing number of people will still find either that mortgage payments remain unsustainable or that insufficient assets can be released to fund essential facilities. **Affordable rented accommodation** will therefore be in increasing demand on financial grounds. However, as documented in the recent CML report on future housing needs, there has been considerable under-investment in so-called "social" housing in Wales, with concomitant over-investment in private sector homes.

The capacity of Housing Associations to develop properties has been limited by decreases in the relative value of the Social Housing Grant budget and unrealistic ACG levels. However, despite these constraints Housing Associations have developed a total of 23,935 units for older people and are often referenced as providers of good practice in delivering homes and services to meet older people's needs.

Living in a Housing Association property presents several advantages to older people

including knowledge that; they live in a safe and secure environment, they have the ability to delegate responsibility for repairs and maintenance to the Housing Association, there is ease of access to public services and opportunities to be part of social networks.

**Housing Associations offer a wide range of housing options and it is recommended that the Assembly reviews its housing development priorities to ensure mixed developments with significantly increased investment in affordable housing.**

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## **2. Availability of suitable housing and adaptations**

One of the consequences of an older housing stock is that Wales has a **low proportion of houses built to modern access standards**, although those standards have not significantly improved in private sector developments even now. It is a fundamental truism that mobility and sensory impairments increase with age (70% of disabled people in Wales are over 60) and much of our existing housing stock effectively increases dependence on informal and formal care services because of designs that preclude independent action.

New design specifications imposed by the Assembly on Housing Association developments include compliance with **lifetime home standards** developed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and others. All new Housing Association developments in Wales therefore offer more accessible homes that can more easily be adapted to meet changing mobility requirements. It should be recognised, though, that the lifetime home standard is a minimum specification that does not meet full access standards developed by bodies such as the Centre for Accessible Environments. As the recent RNIB standards endorsed by the Minister illustrate, best practice guidelines are evolving apace. **The Assembly should continue to work with disability and housing groups to ensure that design standards evolve and improve, increasing choice for older people.**

Where adaptations provide an effective solution, the value of **Care & Repair services** has been of proven value and the Assembly has made significant funding commitments to developing the rapid response services provided by Care & Repair agencies in Wales, all of which receive considerable support from Housing Associations. The Assembly might usefully review the eligibility criteria for Care & Repair services to ensure that people can access services irrespective of tenure.

As recognised in the consultation letter, **technological solutions** are increasingly available to resolve independent living issues, including alarm systems, intelligent home systems, reminder messaging, e-communication systems and self-regulating energy systems. Housing Associations, and especially those specialising in housing for older people in England, have been at the forefront of technological development, including new housing options for people with dementia and other dysfunctional problems.

A key issue for any strategic approach is that of **retention of accessible housing**. The dearth of truly accessible housing, whether new-build or adapted, suggests that restrictions should be placed on their disposal under the Right-to-Buy/Acquire or any other arrangements. However, we recognise that, provided there is a clear programme to increase funding commitments to new affordable housing built to lifetime homes standards or better, the arguments for accessible stock retention should reduce. The **Disabled Persons Housing Project** currently funded by the Assembly under s16 (SHMG) arrangements should be extended throughout

Wales as soon as possible to enable more older and disabled people to identify available accessible homes and to facilitate transfers or access to those homes where appropriate.

### **3 Development of effective domiciliary and other accommodation-based support services**

It is important to recognise and reinforce the Assembly's early commitment to the concept of **independent living**. This concept is based on the principles of informed choice and control of personal activities and lifestyle, not necessarily being able to do everything for oneself. To this extent it is merely an extension of non-disabled lifestyle principles, adding a range of personal support services to the portfolio of domestic services we all use (such as plumbers, electricians etc).

Housing Associations have developed a range of support options as alternatives to residential care. These vary from **Extra-Care schemes** such as Wellwood House to **floating support services** provided on an occasional basis as needed.

Extra-care schemes work at one end of a spectrum of independent living options that fall just short of full-blown institutional care. By retaining individual tenancies and minimising contractual links between care services and accommodation, such schemes are properly defined as homes where care is available, not homes for the provision of care, thus retaining a significant degree of financial and lifestyle independence for residents. At the other end of this spectrum of care services are group or individual homes for disabled people who require some degree of support to live independently. These are intended to be as different from the institutional care from which many residents have moved as possible, locating and involving disabled people in mixed-tenure communities and building on the pioneering work done in Wales under the aegis of the All-Wales Strategies of the 1980's.

However, while Extra-Care schemes received widespread acclaim (and welcome funding) from the Assembly, many **independent living homes** are under threat because of inconsistent approaches by Care Standards Inspectors on whether such homes should be registered as residential care homes. Recent examples in Cardiff have jeopardised the independence of people with learning difficulties living in Opportunities Housing Trust accommodation by requiring registration as residential care accommodation with consequent loss of benefit rights and imposition of commercial health & safety regulations on a domestic situation. The Assembly has a clear duty to ensure that independent living policies and commitments are understood and embedded in all its work and that of its agencies.

While we do not intend to rehearse the ongoing debates on the efficacy of the Supporting People programme here, it is important to recognise the need for coherent funding regimes that minimise bureaucracy and introduce the certainty that **specialist support services** require to generate confidence among customers. Devolution of duties and powers to local authorities without clear guidelines on service provision can result in "postcode" service delivery that discriminates between people living in different areas – people who are less likely to move to areas with better provision but without the established infrastructure of informal support that many older people develop.

We would encourage the Assembly to build on the innovative housing and independent living solutions developed by Housing Associations (often using Assembly funding) to develop a

menu of independent living options for older people in Wales. This approach would avoid the single-solution approach that has resulted in over-provision of hard-to-let sheltered accommodation.

We remain unconvinced by the arguments for segregated "retirement villages" as sustainable solutions, preferring the concept of mixed, balanced communities that embrace people of all ages.

#### **4 The community regeneration agenda**

As the Community Housing Mutual agenda acknowledges, housing is inextricably linked with a range of community regeneration agendas, including development of **economic activity** opportunities and an **entrepreneurial culture** with **sustainable communities**.

This meshes with current Government thinking on economic activity by older people. Development of an older persons' housing strategy should include provision for people who may experience increasing mobility constraints and seek local work or community business opportunities. Older people have a wealth of work and life experience to bring to a community and local and national housing strategies should encourage active participation. The Assembly has a clear duty to ensure that ELWa, WDA and other agencies responsible for developing Lifelong Learning and economic development initiatives actively engage with the housing agenda for older people.

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#### **Conclusions**

**Housing Associations in Wales are responsible for the development of innovative housing solutions for a wide range of people in very different circumstances. We all work to improve choice for current and potential tenants. Shared equity schemes and our support for Care & Repair schemes actively encourages and enables people to stay in their own homes if they prefer and development of the spectrum of independent living schemes offers new opportunities to live in homes that provide appropriate support while retaining the independence and personal dignity for residents that we all expect.**

**We urge the National Assembly for Wales to recognise the need for a range of appropriate models of housing which can reflect the needs and choices of older people. This means mixed and flexible tenure (so people can move into and out of ownership, rent, shared ownership etc), affordable choices (anticipating higher mortgage costs and declining value of pensions) and different accommodation requirements.**

**We would be pleased to arrange visits to and/or presentations from Housing Associations in Wales to demonstrate and discuss current options.**

WFHA contacts: Howard John; Director

David Hedges: Assistant Director

**Current housing provision for older people in Wales.**

Wales has the highest proportion of pre-1919 housing stock in the UK (35%), many of which are in poor condition, have poor insulation, no central heating and lack modern features which improve accessibility. These homes are disproportionately occupied by older people.

Table 1 below shows the variations in house condition by the age of the household head.

	<b>Under 60</b>	<b>60-74</b>	<b>75-84</b>	<b>85 plus</b>	<b>Total</b>
Unfit	57,300	23,500	13,600	3,900	98,200
Fit	674,600	257,700	101,300	25,400	1,059,100
% unfit	7.8	8.3	11.8	13.3	8.5
Lacking amenities	23,528	9,232	6,485	1,916	41,161
%lacking amenities	3.2	3.3	5.6	6.5	3.6

*Source: Welsh House Condition Survey 1998*

It is clear from the table that the percentage of properties unfit for habitation and lacking basic amenities increases with the age of the individual. The reason for this is that despite being home owners, many older people have low incomes and limited savings, and therefore face major difficulties in coping with repair and adaptation costs. Even where older people own their homes outright and can draw on the equity in their property to cover repair costs many are reluctant to do so as they either regard schemes for helping them access this money poor value or wish to preserve it as a legacy to their relatives.

These problems were avoided in the past by many older people being tenants with responsibility for repairs and maintenance falling to the Housing Association or Local Authority. However, over the past three decades, the prevailing culture has shifted to one where the preferred tenure is homeownership and 70% of older people are now owner -occupiers. It is predicted that this will rise to 77% by 2021.

Concerns about the state of older peoples housing are elevated when trends show that the number of people over retirement age is increasing and predictions are that the increase will continue well into the future – a rise of 48% in the number of people over retirement age is forecast from 2000 to 2040.

Table 2 shows increases in the percentage of the population aged 65 and over from 1998 - 2001

	1998	1999	2000	2001
Population (thousands):	2,892.9	2,893.6	2,900.1	2,903.2
Males	1,402.3	1,402.6	1,403.5	1,404.1
Females	1,490.6	1,491.0	1,496.6	1,499.1
Percentage of population:				
Aged 65 and over	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4
Aged 75 and over	8.0	8.1	8.2	8.3
	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>

Source: Welsh Assembly Government, Statistics Directorate

### **Housing Association accommodation for older people**

Housing Associations have developed a total of 23,935 units specifically for older people. Homes are designed to cater for individuals with a wide range of needs including those in need of 24 hour care. For those individuals wishing to remain in their own homes shared ownership is also available through several Housing Associations.

Table 3 below shows accommodation developed by Housing Associations for older people by local authority area.

**Registered social landlord stock for the elderly and disabled, by unitary authority, 2002 (a)**

<i>Number</i>				
	Elderly	Warden	Wheel-	Mobility
		access	chair	
		(b)		
Isle of Anglesey	108	74	1	35
Gwynedd	299	324	4	66
Conwy	725	776	14	146
Denbighshire	187	105	26	136
Flintshire	263	268	54	190
Wrexham	1,308	1,013	100	501
Powys	420	343	56	247
Ceredigion	199	191	18	90
Pembrokeshire	47	291	49	199
Carmarthenshire	311	421	56	499
Swansea	804	678	151	849
Neath Port Talbot	400	246	35	302
Bridgend	552	401	29	116
The Vale of Glamorgan	443	395	8	251
Cardiff	1,057	778	121	158
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	989	711	56	455
Merthyr Tydfil	335	258	18	17
Caerphilly	346	309	33	122
Blaenau Gwent	388	485	10	203
Torfaen	122	111	14	4

Monmouthshire	115	280	16	56
Newport	226	295	19	8
Wales	9,644	8,753	888	4,650

a) At 31 March. Refers only to registered social landlords registered with the National Assembly for Wales. Excludes Abbeyfield Societies, Almshouse Charities and Co-ownership Societies.

b) For the majority of authorities, dwellings with warden access are also included in those for the elderly.

Source: Welsh Housing Statistics 2002

### **Very Sheltered Housing**

Housing Associations are also actively involved in the development of very sheltered housing.

Table 4 Very Sheltered Housing by Registered Social Landlords in Wales at October 2002

Status	Units
Completed	40
Under construction	38
At design stage	50

Source: *The Age related housing domiciliary care and support requirements of older people in*

*Wales National Assembly for Wales, Housing Research Report, May 2003*

Of course, older people in Housing Association properties are in general needs housing for which there is little comparable disaggregated data on age, gender and other demographic factors. It would be useful to revive discussions on a Wales-wide data collection system such as the CORE reports in England (SCORE in Scotland), which was developed under the aegis of Tai Cymru but which is no longer funded in Wales.