

HB 68

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Housing (Wales) Bill: Stage 1

Response from: City and County of Swansea

Response of the City and County of Swansea to the Housing Bill

1. Compulsory registration and licensing scheme to be introduced for all private rented sector landlords and lettings and management agents

Council Response – The Authority will implement a register of landlords in collaboration with other Authorities via the existing Landlord Accreditation Wales scheme. Authorities will be required to take enforcement action against landlords who do not register and this will be an additional burden on Authorities, as it will not replace any existing enforcement actions Authorities are expected to undertake.

2. Reform of homelessness law, including placing stronger duty on Local Authorities to prevent homelessness and allowing them to use suitable accommodation in the private sector

Council Response - We welcome the extension of the time scales associated with the legal definition of homelessness. Over recent years we have sought to work with households at the earliest opportunity and this proposal is consistent with our methods of working.

Discharging housing duties into the private sector will help to reduce the burden on Social Housing and will help Local Authorities deal with the increased demand on services as a result of welfare reform. We have been working for a number of years to develop capacity within social lettings agencies and are currently exploring a new delivery model to provide more good quality, well managed, affordable housing in the private sector.

We would however welcome the availability of additional resources to encourage private landlords to work with social lettings agencies and house tenants on welfare benefits. This would increase the ability of Local Authorities to incentivise private landlords with such things as bonds, rent guarantees etc. This would encourage more private landlords to work in this area of the market and help reduce the likelihood of tenants on benefits being excluded from the private rented sector.

We support the proposed amendments to priority need groups for verified rough sleepers becoming a vulnerable group. We also support former prisoners losing the automatic priority to reflect that not all prisoners are vulnerable. However any guidance provided in relation to the assessment of vulnerability, whilst giving appropriate examples, should not restrain the LA's ability to make decisions based on particular circumstances. LA's should be permitted to consider such factors as where the former prisoner is housed now, their ability to return home, their financial means and likelihood of reoffending for example as part of the vulnerability assessment.

3. A duty on Local Authorities to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers where a need has been identified

Council's Response – The Council Supports this proposal

4. Standards for Local Authorities on rents, service charges and quality of accommodation

Council's Response - The Council supports the introduction of the standards as it will make the calculation of rents and service charges more transparent for tenants. However the 'depooling' of service charges will be a very complex and time consuming exercise for Authorities.

5. Reform of the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy System

Council's Response - 'The Council endorses any reforms which ensures that the full value of the rental income is retained locally to support investment in the local stock, rather than it being returned to the Treasury'

6. The Power for Local Authorities to charge more than the standard rate of Council Tax on homes empty for over a year

Council's Response - There are several potential problems with this proposal. For many long term empty properties, the Council does not have the owner details or cannot trace owners. Therefore increasing charges will increase bad debts and reduce our collection performance. This has already been experienced by the Authority when business rates increased on empty properties.

7. The provision of housing by Co operative Housing Associations

Council's Response – This is a rapidly developing agenda and we await further detailed information from the Welsh Government regarding how they intend to increase the number of coops and mutuals.

8. Amendments to the Mobile Homes (Wales) Act 2013

Council's Response – The Council supports the amendments.