

## **Welsh Parliament Elections 2021: More help for housing**

- **Impact assessment on COVID and housing need** - the national lock down measures have shone a light on space, local amenities and connectivity. Housing can play a key part in the economic and social recovery after the pandemic and the next government should embark on an impact assessment to improve housing need based on costs, quality, design and the role of housing in community life.
- **Introduce a Welsh Housing Survey** - accurate data, statistics, and evidence are vital for good policymaking. Therefore, we call on the next government to introduce a Welsh Housing Survey and incorporate data from sources such as Rent Smart Wales. Housing plays a vital role in people's lives and property standards, the role of agents and the actions of landlords and tenants, as well as home buyers and sellers, needs to be better captured in order to ensure policymakers have an accurate view of the industry and ultimately make the right decisions.
- **Regulation of sales agents** - the next government must support the regulation of estate agents and ensure that the profession understands the recommendations of the Regulation of Property Agents (RoPA) Working Group chaired by Lord Best.<sup>1</sup> It is vital that all sales agents are licensed, they adhere to a strict code of practice and hold at least a Level 3 qualification (the level equivalent to an A-level). Regulation offers huge potential to professionalise the sector to eradicate bad practices and provide a smoother consumer experience.
- **Reduce higher rates of Land Transaction Tax (LTT) on residential property** - to boost the supply of rented housing and reduce rent rises the next government should reduce the 1% increase across all bands on additional homes to encourage further investment in the private rented sector.
- **Action on cladding and fire safety** - the next government should be utilising funding to support people living in multi-storey residential buildings. It is important that dangerous cladding on existing buildings is replaced and communal fire alarm and sprinkler systems are introduced. Without action, many properties will be unsaleable and not adequate to be rented out.
- **Take a holistic approach to improving the energy efficiency of housing** - only 28% of property in Wales had an EPC rating of band C or above.<sup>2</sup> The next government must work closely with the UK Government to look beyond a one-size fits all approach for energy efficiency and develop proposals that work with the different age, condition, and size of properties across all tenures.
- **Introduce dedicated grants to support landlords and homeowners with energy efficiency** - the UK Government has recently extended the Green Homes Grant scheme, which provides up to £5,000 in vouchers for energy efficient improvements to homes in England. The next government in Wales should implement similar measures in order to enhance the housing stock, support Welsh jobs and help improve the environment.
- **Introduce leasehold reform** – the next government should implement the primary recommendations of the Residential Leasehold Reform Task and Finish Group on how to improve and make changes to leasehold property.<sup>3</sup> These include legislating to introduce a ban on the unjustified use of leasehold in new build houses, ban onerous ground rents and implement the reduction of future ground rents to a nominal financial value.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulation-of-property-agents-working-group-report>

<sup>2</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-10/welsh-housing-conditions-survey-energy-efficiency-dwellings-april-2017-march-2018-795.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://gov.wales/independent-review-residential-leasehold-report>

- **Housing Tribunal for Wales** - to rectify timing and consistency issues currently faced in the court system, we believe that a specialist Housing Tribunal needs to be introduced. A wide range of stakeholders including sector organisations and bodies should be involved in its development. The current court processes are slow and inconsistent. Without effective court processes, the changes to the eviction process in Wales will not be workable.
- **No rent control measures** - the policy could lead to a reduction in supply and it will have a negative impact on housing quality.
- **Build more social housing** - currently, demand far outstrips supply when it comes to social housing in Wales and the long-term solution to address the lack of affordability in the private rented sector is to ensure that more social housing is built to reduce housing need. To improve the situation, the next government must commit to a significant programme of building social housing to ensure that renting is more affordable and secure for renters in all tenures.
- **Review Local Housing Allowance and Universal Credit** - this is urgently required to bring it in line with average local rents and ensure landlords and letting agents have more confidence to let to renters claiming Universal Credit. Furthermore, tenants should have choice over whether the housing element of their Universal Credit is paid direct to their landlord. All claimants should be able to choose whether to have Universal Credit paid monthly or twice monthly to assist with budgeting. To tackle rent arrears the Universal Credit advance should be turned into a non-repayable grant from the first day of the claim.
- **Build housing for older people and provide incentives to downsize** - the number of people living in Wales aged 65 and over will increase by 232,000 by 2041.<sup>4</sup> In order to cater for this demographic, the next government must:
  - ✓ Require local authorities to have a plan for retirement housing, including identifying appropriate sites and design specifications across a mix of housing tenures for older people to rent and buy.
  - ✓ Promote the benefits of downsizing and incentivise people to do so by offering an LTT exemption for 'last-time' buyers looking to downsize.
- **More action on empty homes** - empty homes can lower land values and make it harder to sell other properties nearby. Bringing empty homes back into use can ease the pressure on housing stock and help improve local communities. The next government should review and extend the Empty Homes Grant scheme to support people to bring empty properties back into use as well as provide more assistance to all local authorities to help them provide dedicated resources to tackle the issue.
- **Expand Help to Buy to the second-hand homes market** - the next government should extend the Help to Buy scheme to the second-hand homes market, including older property and new build property which have been lived in and put up for resale, to boost house sales and allow more first-time buyers to get onto the property ladder in Wales.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ageukmobility.co.uk/mobility-news/article/how-old-is-the-uk>