

CHC Group Manifesto – European Parliamentary Elections 2014

Together for a better Europe

In these elections, CHC is supporting key priorities identified by our colleagues in CECODHAS Housing Europe, the European network promoting the right to decent housing for all. CHC believes that the European Parliament and Welsh MEPs should:

1. Support national strategies against energy poverty, and improve the business case for refurbishing affordable housing

Using EU Structural Funds for refurbishing existing homes with energy efficiency measures, and developing renewable energy, can help deliver co-benefits including job creation, improved health and lower levels of fuel poverty.

386,000 homes were estimated to be in fuel poverty in Wales in 2012, an increase of more than 30,000 on 2008 estimates, with many facing arrears on their utility bills as figures illustrate rising energy costs and a growing inability for low income households to cope with them. Furthermore, it is estimated that over a quarter of the CO₂ produced in the UK comes from domestic properties.

CHC believes that a number of steps can be taken to tackle these problems, including:

- Finance for low cost low carbon refurbishment, including more available up-front investment.
- Training for both affordable housing staff and residents to change behaviours in relation to energy consumption.
- Promoting decentralised, community based energy production, including the promotion of new technologies, reducing harmful waste, and encouraging the research community to work more closely with affordable housing providers to further develop ways to achieve the reduction of energy.

CHC members are investing heavily in the physical regeneration of communities, community assets, employment and training and environmental works - all areas where our activity can help match fund the EU structural fund programmes in Wales and make investment in economic and social cohesion go further and be more effective in tackling poverty.

2. Utilise EU funding to increase the support for the supply of affordable homes

For a stable housing market, stable and reasonably cheap finance is needed for a number of different objectives. Having finance mechanisms and European instruments specifically dedicated to housing issues would give greater leverage to capital supplied by the European Investment Bank, by raising funds from other financial institutions and from the capital markets. Initiatives could include:

- Creating an entity dedicated to investment in sustainable and affordable housing, reflecting on the flagship Welsh Social Housing Revenue Grant scheme as good practice.
- Supporting affordable housing supply and fair energy transition in housing stock by clearly allowing reduced VAT rates for the sector, along with public procurement rules which make it easier for key partners to cooperate, pool their services and become more efficient
- Supporting zero-carbon and positive-energy new build housing, unlocking the access to affordable market finance for social infrastructures and stimulating the decrease of construction costs.
- Working with the construction sector to develop a European exchange programme on procurement practices and the use of construction techniques and materials, with a view to decreasing the cost of new construction

3. Make affordable housing a key lever for employment

The European Union is beleaguered by high unemployment rates, particularly youth unemployment, and both of these issues have taken on huge policy and political importance in Wales due to the tough economic circumstance of recent years. Despite those tough times, providers of social housing are not only managing housing stocks but supporting and creating jobs and training opportunities.

During this difficult economic period, investment in housing has the dual impact of **improving people's lives** and **stimulating economic recovery**. EU investment and initiatives focusing on the housing sector can be an integral factor in helping economic growth, and CHC wants all MEPs to recognise this as a method of supporting the people they represent.

In Wales, an independent report on the impact of housing associations has found that of the £1bn spent by the sector in 2012/13, £840m was retained in the Welsh economy. The sector in Wales directly employs 8,000 people, and 2.5 jobs are supported elsewhere in the economy for every full time housing association job.



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Meanwhile the development of new homes plays a huge role in supporting the construction industry – the seventh largest industry in Wales – contributing close to 10% of Wales' GDP and directly employing over 100,000 people. Working together with housing associations and local authorities, construction has the potential to stimulate long term growth in the Welsh economy through:

- Strong community benefit clauses that build commitments to employment, apprenticeships, and training for local people into procurement.
- Rolling out Shared Apprenticeship Schemes across Wales.
- Diverse careers advice in schools helping to unlock future construction talent.

These facts highlight the potential value of housing investment, for people in need and the economy as a whole.

We believe that all successful candidates should support initiatives around energy efficiency, maximising investment opportunities and tackling fuel poverty, and we will be supporting our partners in Europe to achieve these initiatives. Now is the time for action.

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