



CHC's Response

About Us

Community Housing Cymru (CHC) is the representative body for housing associations and community mutuals in Wales, which are all not-for profit organisations. Our members provide over 158,000 homes and related housing services across Wales. In 2015/16, our members directly employed 9,109 people and spent nearly £2bn (directly and indirectly) in the economy, with 89% of this spend retained in Wales. Our members work closely with local government, third sector organisations and the Welsh Government to provide a range of services in communities across Wales.

Our objectives are to:

- Be the leading voice of the social housing sector.
- Promote the social housing sector in Wales.
- Promote the relief of financial hardship through the sector's provision of low cost social housing.
- Provide services, education, training, information, advice and support to members.
- Encourage and facilitate the provision, construction, improvement and management of low cost social housing by housing associations in Wales.

UK Government Improving Lives Green Paper

Work, health and disability: consultation



Below are the questions answered by CHC, through the UK Government consultation online portal.

1.1 What innovative and evidence-based support are you already delivering to improve health and employment outcomes for people in your community which you think could be replicated at scale? What evidence sources did you draw on when making your investment decision?

Housing associations in Wales recognise that, for those who can work, tenants being in good quality employment is good for both tenants and the housing association itself. Tenants in employment are far less likely to be affected by welfare reform, particularly those aged between 18-21 or under 35. For this reason, housing associations in Wales offer a range of initiatives to improve employment outcomes for their tenants and the wider community. These projects are funded through a mix of external and core funding streams, including the DWP Flexible Support Fund (FSF).

Projects run by housing associations tend to be small in scale, perhaps run in partner with one other organisation to bring in external skills. An example of this would be the Pathways Project, run by Charter Housing and Gofal, the mental health charity. This project offers participants with mental health problems one-to-one support to access employment, education, training or volunteering opportunities. This project is funded through the Flexible Support Fund.¹

The Flexible Support Fund tends to offer short term contracts, around 12 months. This results in projects being unable to guarantee continuation of service and damages momentum being built in areas, particularly those with high levels of inter-generational unemployment. We believe that there should be an emphasis on longer term funding for employability projects.

In terms of evidence sources, housing associations will regularly pilot a project on a small scale to assess efficacy before committing core funded investment. An example of this is the LaunchPad project, run by Newport City Homes. LaunchPad, a four week course, was piloted with a cohort of 8 participants, four of which had never worked before and a further two who were unemployed. The pilot succeeded in six participants finding full time employment and a further participant securing a long term voluntary placement²

¹ <http://www.charterhousing.co.uk/charter-teams-up-with-mental-health-charity-gofal/>

² [http://www.newportcityhomes.com/about-us/NCH-News/Pages/2016/05\)%20May/Launching-you-into-your-new-career.aspx](http://www.newportcityhomes.com/about-us/NCH-News/Pages/2016/05)%20May/Launching-you-into-your-new-career.aspx)



Scaling up projects may be difficult as the majority of projects are funded in whole or part by the individual housing associations and are therefore primarily for the tenants of those housing associations. Consideration should also be given to the differing challenges in rural and urban areas. Scaling up of projects would incur far larger costs in terms of supporting participants to attend in rural areas with poor transport infrastructure than in well-connected urban areas.

An example of a successful partnership programme between a housing association and DWP is the Partnership Working with Tai Calon Community Housing.

Tai Calon participated in a Work Placement programme for unemployed tenants and members of the community through a commercial contract with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on behalf of Working Links and A19 Skills. Tai Calon work with the long term unemployed who face multiple barriers to finding a job and may have been unemployed for a number of years, have little work experience, lack confidence and self-esteem. The project provides 1-2-1 support tackling multiple and complex barriers to seeking employment which include, debt problems, fuel poverty, domestic abuse and issues around addiction and also gives guidance on budgeting and digital inclusion. 6 month placements are identified through contacts with contractors and the community and some clients are placed within Tai Calon.

Cartrefi Conwy has brought a range of work streams in house through Creating Enterprise. Creating Enterprise is a wholly owned subsidiary of Cartrefi Conwy Limited and was incorporated as a Community Interest Company (C.I.C.) and became fully operational as a Social Enterprise organisation in April 2015. The initiative came from the organisation's drive to maintaining their properties to a good standard while recognising the need to provide skills, training and employment to unemployed tenants and the wider community.

Creating Enterprise now provides the organisation with a range of services that include gas servicing, fencing, property clearance and cleaning, property maintenance, painting and decorating and grounds and garden maintenance. Cartrefi Conwy has created an employment academy which works alongside Creating Enterprise to supply ring fenced jobs for unemployed tenants for up to 12 months paid contract. While on the paid placement each tenant receives training, support and mentoring. They are then assisted to secure local employment at the end of the 12 months which 'frees up' their job for another tenant to benefit from.

So far Creating Enterprise has created 27 new job opportunities, including six 12 month traineeships for Cartrefi Conway tenants, 155 hours of volunteering, bringing vital employability skills to tenants struggling to get into work and in the process created a



more productive team among the skilled labourers who can focus on other work while the apprentices focus on ad-hoc repair services.

In England and Wales, 92% of owner-occupiers with mortgages are in employment. In contrast, only 41% of social renters are employed. This makes housing association tenants a core group to be targeted for employment support. Housing associations have a proven track record at delivering employment related support to their communities. We believe that increased funding for these projects, in partnership with the third sector where appropriate, would be more effective than the creation of new pathways.

1.2 What evidence gaps have you identified in your local area in relation to supporting disabled people or those with long term health conditions? Are there particular gaps that a Challenge Fund approach could most successfully respond to?

Housing association employability projects rely mostly on self-referrals. There is a significant gap in terms of the general literacy and computer literacy skills of housing association tenants. Only around two thirds of housing association tenants have access to the internet.³ This requires a two pronged approach to engage these most hard to reach tenants. Traditional methods of communication should not be discontinued and an emphasis should be placed on teaching computer literacy skills. This is particularly important with the imminent closure of seven Job Centres Plus in Wales and the roll out of the Universal Credit Full (Digital) Service in Wales between 2017 and 2019. These changes disproportionately affect claimants in rural areas where broadband may not be available and the nearest JCP may be many miles away with infrequent public transport in between.

Housing Associations experience challenges in that there is short term funding for projects (i.e. Lift & Communities First) and also short term funding from training organisations making it difficult to continue with provision.

- Difficulty in meeting strict criteria of funding streams such as European funded projects. Some barriers have included the eligibility of participants depending on where they live and the length of time they have been unemployed which may result in a restricted catchment area. The lack of wrap around services such as child care to assist tenants in participating.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2014/jul/24/print-media-social-housing>



- Multiple deprivation barriers. In some areas the infrastructure makes it difficult for participants as there is poor transport, lack of jobs or sustainable employment which makes it difficult for participants to move on.

2.1 How do we ensure that Jobcentres can support the provision of the right personal support at the right time for individuals?

We have concerns over the planned closure of seven JCPs in Wales and the effect this could have on the ability for individuals to access support. Even in rural areas not affected by closures, there are significant barriers between individuals and physically accessing support. Similarly, those who require support through the medium of Welsh should have the option of that support. We are concerned that the Universal Credit Full (Digital) Service will not be available in Welsh before the end of 2017.

Support to attend appointments regularly falls to housing associations or third sector organisations, generally funded through the Welsh Government Supporting People Programme. The work undertaken to support individuals to attend appointments should not be underestimated, particularly for the most vulnerable.

Once the individual has physically accessed the JCP, it is essential that staff are appropriately trained and resourced to support individuals. Individuals will rarely be simply long term unemployed or sick. They will regularly present with multiple needs and require staff to be able to empathise and understand how to support them. Staff should be supported to provide long enough appointments, particularly for those individuals with mental health problems or learning difficulties. Training should also be provided to enable staff to understand when an individual is distressed and be able to deal with this sensitively.

Develop practice guidance/ toolkits that can help with referrals to appropriate services such as mental health services. This guidance could be developed in partnership with local partners.

2.2 What specialist tools or support should we provide to work coaches to help them work with disabled people and people with health conditions?

Work coaches should be trained to develop a speciality or multiple specialities such as supporting individuals with autism or those with very low literacy levels. However, simply addressing the disability is not sufficient. The individual should be dealt with holistically, connected issues need to be dealt with before an individual will be in a position to enter work. Stable, secure housing is paramount to creating the right atmosphere for an individual to successfully gain and sustain employment. Issues such



as rent arrears and insecure housing need to be dealt with alongside employability support.

3.1 What support should we offer to help those 'in work' stay in work and progress? Sanctions are not an effective tool to encourage work. Emphasis should be placed on providing aspiration to work and supporting individuals into the kind of work they want to do.

Particular support should be provided to those in temporary employment or on zero hours contracts and therefore experience regular fluctuations in income. This is very important with those who are in work and living in supported or adapted properties where housing costs are higher. It is not the case that DLA will cover these costs as DLA is regularly used to cover the costs of carers and support staff.

4.1 Should we offer targeted health and employment support to individuals in the Employment Support Allowance Support Group, and Universal Credit equivalent, where appropriate?

Yes, but not as a requirement of being in the support group. Similarly, the difference between the work related activity group and support group should be made very clear to individuals moving from one to the other changes the responsibilities on the individual considerably.

4.2 What type of support might be most effective and who should provide this? Support should be tailored to the individual as far as possible and delivered holistically. It is very important to deal with connected issues such as housing prior to, or alongside, the delivery of employment related support.

Housing associations are expert at providing employability related support and have an excellent track record of doing so. Support should be delivered at a local level by a trusted provider with a strong understanding of their client group.

4.3 How might the voluntary sector and local partners be able to help this group?

The voluntary sector can provide housing associations with specific skillsets to enhance the employability support offered by housing associations. For example, the mental health charity Gofal has worked in partnership with Charter Housing to deliver one-to-one support to unemployed individuals with mental health problems. Neither



organisation possess the total required skillset to deliver the training but together the two can deliver holistic employment related support.⁴

4.4 How can we best maintain contact with people in the Support Group to ensure no-one is written off?

In order to better maintain contact with individuals in the support group, healthcare, housing and job centres require better linkages in terms of data sharing. However, this must be undertaken with the privacy of the individual as paramount.

6.1 Should the assessment for the financial support an individual receives from the system be separate from the discussion a claimant has about employment or health support?

Yes. It is important that individuals perceive a separation of financial support, and employment and health support. Discussions around employment and/or health support could be delivered outside the system, perhaps by work coaches based within housing associations.

6.3 What other alternatives could we explore to improve the system for assessing financial support?

Better data sharing between housing and JCPs could provide information required for assessing financial support. Housing costs and arrears would contribute significantly to the overall picture of an individual's financial support needs.

7.1 How might we share evidence between assessments, including between Employment Support Allowance/Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments to help DWP benefit decision makers and reduce burdens on claimants? What benefits and challenges would this bring?

We believe that the assessment for ESA is about an individual's ability to work and PIP is about an individual's disability support needs. These should remain separate.

⁴ <http://www.charterhousing.co.uk/charter-teams-up-with-mental-health-charity-gofal/>



7.3 Is there scope to improve the way DWP uses the evidence from Service Medical Boards and other institutions, who may have assessed service personnel, which would enable awards of benefit to be made without the need for the claimant to send in the same information or attend a face-to-face assessment?

We agree with this proposal. However, conditions can change over time and information provided should be timely.

10.1 What good practice is already in place to support inclusive recruitment, promote health and wellbeing, prevent ill health and support people to return to work after periods of sickness absence?

An example of this would be the Pathways Project, run by Charter Housing and Gofal, the mental health charity. This project offers participants with mental health problems one-to-one support to access employment, education, training or volunteering opportunities. This project is funded through the Flexible Support Fund⁵

11.1 How can we bring about better work-focussed conversations between an individual, healthcare professional, employer and Jobcentre Plus work coach, which focus on what work an individual can do, particularly during the early stages of an illness/developing condition?

We believe that housing professionals should be included in these conversations. Housing officers and other professionals have significant contact with and understanding of their tenants' needs and abilities.

11.3 Are doctors best placed to provide work and health information, make a judgement on fitness for work and provide sickness certification?

Yes. However, they will require additional resources and funding to deliver this service.

14.4 How can government and local partners best encourage improved sharing of health and employment data?

Professional portals should be developed to allow partners to interface with the benefits system. A similar portal is under development to allow social landlords to input housing related data into the Universal Credit system.

⁵ <http://www.charterhousing.co.uk/charter-teams-up-with-mental-health-charity-gofal/>