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Group

## Political Party Manifestos for 2015 UK General Election

This week saw the major parties release their manifestos for the upcoming General Election in May. Polls suggest that there will be no overall winner so the competition is tougher than ever for the parties to get their messages across. The following is a summary of the parties' pledges that will affect the sector and how they relate to [Community Housing Cymru's manifesto asks](#).

### Fair Funding for Wales

**Community Housing Cymru has asked that Wales receives a fair funding deal from Westminster.**

All parties agree that Wales is underfunded and all have included funding reform in their party manifestos.

The **Conservatives**, the **Labour Party** and the **Liberal Democrats** have all promised to deliver a funding floor – this will ensure that Wales cannot fall below a certain level of funding. None of the parties have outlined what the value of their floors will be.

**Plaid Cymru** has called for parity with Scotland which they claim would see an additional £1.2bn for the annual Welsh budget.

### Welfare Powers

**Community Housing Cymru asks that Welsh tenants are given the same choice as those in Scotland and Northern Ireland under Universal Credit.**

Wales currently has no powers over welfare unlike Northern Ireland and Scotland. Universal Credit and the element of housing benefit is of particular interest. Tenants in Scotland and Northern Ireland may choose to have their Housing Benefit paid directly to their landlord whereas Welsh tenants will not have a right to choose.

The **Conservatives**, the **Labour Party** and the **Liberal Democrats** all oppose any devolution of welfare. This would prevent the National Assembly for Wales from being able to give Welsh tenants the choice which is currently offered to tenants in the other devolved nations.

**Plaid Cymru** has asked for parity with Scotland and Northern Ireland which would see the devolution of some welfare powers to Wales, including the power to give tenants the choice to pay their landlord directly under Universal Credit.

## The 'bedroom tax' or Spare Room Subsidy

**Community Housing Cymru has called for the repeal of the 'bedroom tax' or spare room subsidy.**

The removal of the 'Bedroom Tax' or spare room subsidy is a reduction in the housing benefits of tenants who are deemed to have one or more 'spare' room/s. We have seen a rise in rent arrears and tenants' personal debts since its introduction in Wales which puts tenants at risk and undermines housing associations' business plans.

The **Conservatives** are committed to maintaining the 'Bedroom Tax' and deem the removal of the subsidy as 'fair'.

The **Liberal Democrats** would reform the tax; only tenants who refuse a smaller property would see a decrease in their housing benefit.

The **Labour Party** and **Plaid Cymru** are both committed to scrapping the 'Bedroom Tax'.

## Energy

The cost of energy and the rise in fuel poverty has been widely discussed in the run up to the general election. **Community Housing Cymru would like to see greater improvements in tackling fuel poverty and in improving energy efficiency in homes across Wales.**

The **Conservatives** have pledged to ensure that every home has a smart meter by 2020 and will set a goal to insulate a million homes over 5 years.

The **Labour Party** has pledged to freeze fuel bills until 2017, allowing bills to fall but not rise. Welsh Labour has also said that they would help some 13,000 households make improvements to their homes' energy efficiency by 2016.

The **Liberal Democrats** would increase spending to achieve greater energy efficiency, including a national roll out of smart meters. They have also pledged that those who make 'big improvements' in their home's energy efficiency will be entitled to £100 off their council tax for a decade.

**Plaid Cymru** would support energy efficiency improvements through reducing VAT on the renovation of certified homes to 5%. They would also establish a 'Fuel Duty regulator' to prevent sudden spikes in fuel prices.

## Lobbying

The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act (also known as the Lobbying Bill) which has been in place since 2014 has placed tough restrictions on non-party campaigning, making it difficult for third-sector groups to campaign and lobby around elections.

**Community Housing Cymru has called for the repeal of the non-party campaigning element ("Part 2") of the Lobbying Bill.**

The **Conservatives** would retain the bill, only introducing changes to the trade union aspect of the Act.

The **Labour Party** has pledged to repeal the Lobbying Bill and replace it altogether.

The **Liberal Democrats** will wait for the publication of the independent review into the effects of the Bill before making any significant changes. The party would require political parties to include the cost of staffing in their national expenses in the same way that third parties now do to make it fairer.

**Plaid Cymru** would repeal the controversial "Part 2" of the Bill which relates to the restrictions on the activities of the third sector.

## Local Government

Policies regarding local government are devolved and will play a big part in the 2016 National Assembly for Wales elections but, following the publication of the Williams Commission report in 2014, the Welsh parties have now outlined their stance on the recommendations, particularly where council mergers are concerned. **Community Housing Cymru welcomes the incentivisation of the voluntary mergers of Local Authorities as opposed to forcing mergers.**

The **Welsh Labour Party** supports the recommendations and will draw up a new map of councils for Wales before the 2015 Assembly recess. Welsh Labour will bring about mergers, voluntary or otherwise.

The **Welsh Conservatives** do not support compulsory mergers but would support voluntary mergers where there is local consensus.

**Plaid Cymru** opposes the merging of councils and has rejected the recommendations of the Williams Commission.

The **Welsh Liberal Democrats** support the principle of having fewer councils in Wales and argue that any approach to merge must be done carefully and must be long-lasting.

## Right to Buy

Right to Buy is the responsibility of the Welsh Government and will therefore play a big part in the 2016 Welsh Assembly elections. Right to Buy has also been a headline issue for the 2015 general elections and the Welsh parties have made their priorities clear. **Community Housing Cymru supports home ownership but not at the cost of desperately needed social housing.**

**Welsh Labour** plans to reduce the discounts available under Right to Buy before ending the policy in the next Assembly if re-elected.

The **Welsh Conservatives** would retain the Right to Buy and have pledged to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants.

**Plaid Cymru** and the **Welsh Liberal Democrats** support home ownership and would provide local authorities with the power to suspend the policy if and when necessary to stem the loss of available social housing.

## Policies at a Glance

Policy	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats	Plaid Cymru
<b>Fair Funding</b>	Funding floor (undetermined)	Funding floor (undetermined)	Funding floor (undetermined)	Parity with Scotland: additional £1.2bn per annum
<b>Choice under Universal Credit</b>	No welfare devolution	No welfare devolution	No welfare devolution	Parity with Scotland and Northern Ireland: limited welfare powers
<b>Repeal the Spare Room Subsidy</b>	Retain	Repeal	Retain only for tenants who refuse smaller properties	Repeal
<b>Energy</b>	Ensure every home has a smart meter by 2020  Insulate 1 million homes	Freeze bills until 2017  Help 13,000 homes in Wales to improve energy efficiency	National roll out of smart meters  £100 off council tax for a decade for improving energy efficiency	Reduce VAT on home renovations to 5%  Establish a 'Fuel Duty regulator' to prevent price hikes
<b>Lobbying</b>	Retain the	Scrap the Lobbying	Retain and review	Scrap "Part 2" of

	Lobbying Bill	Bill	the Lobbying Bill	the Lobbying Bill
<b>Local Government</b>	Support voluntary mergers where there is support	Reduce the number of councils in Wales in line with Williams' recommendations	Supports fewer councils	Rejects Williams' recommendations  Opposes mergers
<b>Right to buy</b>	Retain Right to Buy and extend to HAs	Reduce discounts  End Right to Buy after 2016	Greater powers for LAs to suspend Right to Buy when necessary	Greater powers for LAs to suspend Right to Buy when necessary

Community Housing Cymru will continue to work with all parties to highlight and evidence our asks and are following up with conversations we had with MPs at our Welsh reception on 17<sup>th</sup> March in the House of Commons.