

# AWICS Wales News

## July 2017



**Denbighshire Council offices in Denbigh.  
The Council has just completed a consultation on its Homelessness policies.**

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### Welsh First Minister sets out Legislative Priorities

The First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, set out his government's legislative priorities for the year ahead on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017. This includes legislation to tackle harmful alcohol consumption, provide free childcare for working parents, protect tenants from unfair fees and reform local government.

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In the first of its five bills, the Welsh Government will introduce legislation that will make it illegal for alcohol to be sold below a set price. According to the Welsh Government, evidence shows a direct link between drinking harmful levels and the availability of cheap alcohol. The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) Bill will therefore propose a formula for calculating the minimum price for alcohol, based on its strength and volume, and will enable local authorities to enforce the powers and bring prosecutions.

The government is introducing a bill to stop landlords and estate agents from charging unfair, up-front fees to tenants and prospective tenants in the private rented sector. Increasing evidence shows that the current fees – that can be as high as £700 - are a barrier to people looking to rent their own place and discourage people from moving home. The bill will provide private renters with clarity about the costs involved and ensure the system is fair and sustainable.

Over the next twelve months, the government will introduce a bill that will pave the way for one of its key pledges - thirty hours of free childcare a week for working parents of three and four-year olds. Good progress is being made on the childcare offer, with the first pilot set to begin in September. The bill will support this and enable the childcare offer to be rolled out in full by 2020 by creating a national system for applications and eligibility checks.

The Welsh Government will bring forward legislation to reform local government in Wales. The Welsh Government states that the bill will establish a new relationship between the Welsh Government and local government, creating greater transparency in decision making and ensuring greater collaboration through mandatory regional working arrangements.

The government will bring forward legislation in the next twelve months to reform the regulatory controls for registered social landlords in Wales. In September 2016, the Office for National Statistics reclassified social landlords into the public sector. Therefore, any private sector borrowing by social landlords will become a charge against the Welsh Government's capital budget. If not addressed, the changed classification could restrict the development of new affordable social housing and restrict the Welsh Government's ability to fund other capital infrastructure projects. The Welsh Government's bill proposes to reform central and local government controls over social landlords, enabling the Office for National Statistics to reconsider the reclassification and return them to the private sector.

The government is seeking cross-party support for legislation to remove the defence of reasonable punishment, and will consult on proposals with the intention of introducing a bill in the third year of this Assembly term.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said that:

*"The bills we intend to introduce during the 2nd year of this Assembly will support our efforts to build a Wales that is healthy and active, prosperous and secure, ambitious and learning and united and connected."*

*"The 5 bills will tackle harmful alcohol consumption, help support working parents, protect tenants from unfair fees and reform and improve local government."*

*"Last week the UK government set out its legislative intentions in the Queen's Speech. While wholly unambitious, the statement included the Repeal Bill and other Brexit-related bills."*

*“As I have repeatedly made clear, the UK government must respect the devolution settlement. If this does not happen, we will consider other options, such as a Continuity bill, to protect Wales’ interests.*”

*“Leaving the European Union will have a significant impact on the business of this Welsh Government and National Assembly. It would be naive to assume that it will not also have an impact on our own legislative programme – but, we will do all we can to keep driving forward progress and delivering for the people of Wales.”*

Following the Welsh Local Government Association’s Annual General Meeting in Cardiff earlier in the week, Mark Drakeford, the Welsh Secretary for Local Government, congratulated Councillor Debbie Wilcox on her appointment as Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association and then went on to comment on the position of local government, saying that:

*“I’d like to send my warmest congratulations to Cllr Wilcox. I am sure she will lead the Welsh Local Government Association with the utmost professionalism and expertise in the years ahead. This is a very significant moment for the Welsh Local Government Association which today sees the election of its first female leader since the body was created in 1996.*”

*“While it is clear we still have some way to go before our councils are fully reflective of the people they serve, it is encouraging to see women leading Anglesey, Ceredigion and Powys councils as well as Newport. We also now have a new generation of councillors in Wales – all of whom will bring new ideas, different ways of doing things and a fresh perspective.*”

*“I hope to continue the constructive working relationship I’ve had with the Welsh Local Government Association since I took up this post last year. I have been encouraged by a willingness to engage on areas such as local government reform and have been pleased with the positive progress we’ve made.*”

*“It is vital that we continue to make progress on reforming local government and I look forward to working with Cllr Wilcox and the leadership of the Welsh Local Government Association on the serious and credible set of proposals that the Welsh Government has put forwards.”*

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## **Concordat puts People at Heart of Social Care Commissioning**

A new commitment from key partners to put people needing support at the heart of the social care commissioning process was been announced in May 2017 and has been welcomed by Minister Rebecca Evans.

The Concordat between the National Commissioning Board, National Provider Forum (Wales) and the WCVA-hosted Alliance of Alliances was launched by the Minister at the United Kingdom Homecare Association’s (UKHCA) Annual Domiciliary Care Provider Forum in Cardiff. UKHCA is the professional association of home care providers and represents over two-thousand members across the United Kingdom.

The Concordat sees those who commission and provide social care in local authorities, health boards as well as the third and independent sectors, pledge to focus on delivering quality services based on the needs of individuals as well as delivering value for money.

The Welsh Government is committed to supporting social care, including domiciliary care, investing an additional £55million in total in the sector in 2017/18. This includes an extra £25million to help local government respond to the pressures, and an extra £19million to help manage workforce costs.

The Concordat forms part of the work the National Commissioning Board is carrying out to support regional partnership boards that were provided for by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. These bring together health, social services and the third sector to plan and deliver integrated care and support services. From April 2018, all of the partners within Boards will be required to pool their money and jointly commission care home placements for adults, rather than doing so separately as is currently the case.

Minister for Social Services and Public Health, Rebecca Evans said that:

*“Commissioning can sometimes be seen as a ‘backroom’ function, rather than a core component of delivering quality care. That is simply not the case.*

*“That is why I am delighted that commissioners and providers of social care, as well as advocates for citizens and communities, have come together to develop this Concordat. It commits to an integrated approach to commissioning which both provides value for money and improves people’s wellbeing.*

*“This is in keeping with the vision of our revolutionary Social Services and Well-being Act, which focuses on delivering sustainable care services which put the needs of individuals at their heart.*

Dave Street, Chair of the National Commissioning Board, said that:

*“We are all well aware of the serious challenges confronting health and social care in terms of rising demand, workforce and financial pressures. Commissioners, providers and the advocates of citizens and communities need to work together to find effective solutions to these challenges.*

*“The Concordat is designed to help the National Commissioning Board, Provider Forum and advocates for citizens and communities nominated through the WCVA-hosted Alliance of Alliances, to work collaboratively on the shared objective of developing effective commissioning practice across Wales to improve outcomes for people in need of care and support.”*

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## **New Regulatory Framework for Housing Associations in Wales**

In June 2017, the Welsh Government issued a revised Regulatory Framework that seeks to improve and strengthen their approach to regulation. The new framework has been developed in partnership with key stakeholders, including the Registered Social Landlord sector, its tenants and funders. It is an evolution of the risk based approach to regulation set out in the 2011 Regulatory Framework. In response to a changing and more challenging environment, it aims to ensure that Wales continues to have well governed, financially robust registered social landlords providing high quality and improving landlord services to tenants and service users.

Key elements of the risk based approach of the 2011 Framework remain unchanged including:

- Tenants remain at the heart of regulation with improved accountability and transparency to tenants and other stakeholders

- The underpinning principles of proportionality, transparency and openness, consistency and promotion of learning and development, are unchanged
- The approach to regulation continues to be founded on co-regulation

The revised approach provides a focus on continuous improvement and a clear regulatory judgement. New performance standards place a stronger focus on decision making, leadership and financial viability aligned with the way effective organisations actually run their businesses. There is a new requirement for Associations to provide an annual statement of compliance with the performance standards.

The new Framework recognises the autonomy and independence of Housing Association Boards with an increased focus on good governance, specifically on how the Board is assured that its primary responsibility of ensuring the effective running of the RSL is fully and properly discharged.

The key features of the framework are:

- Performance Standards
- Self Assessment
- Annual Statement of Compliance
- Meeting Performance Standards and Capacity to Improve
- Regulatory Judgements
- On going Regulatory Assurance and Oversight – Continuous Assessment
- Regulatory Powers

There are ten Performance Standards as follows:

- Effective Board and executive management with a clear and ambitious vision for the Registered Social Landlord.
- Effective and appropriate tenant involvement and high quality and improving services.
- Comprehensive assessment of the business impacts of current and emerging risks, including new business and development opportunities, with robust risk management arrangements.
- Clearly evidenced self-evaluation and statement of compliance.
- A track record of achieving positive outcomes, responding appropriately to new challenges and performance issues.
- Delivering value for money in all areas of the business.
- Compliance with regulatory and statutory requirements and guidance.
- A financial plan which delivers and supports the business plan and effective monitoring of financial performance.
- Effective management of treasury operations ensuring sufficient liquidity at all times.
- A clear understanding of liabilities and asset performance.

The Regulatory Framework (2017) withdraws and replaces the Regulatory Framework for Housing Associations Registered in Wales (December 2011) with effect from 1st June 2017. A copy of the new regulatory framework can be downloaded from: <http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/170612-housingregframework-en.pdf>

## Service Charges in Wales

In local authorities in Wales, prior to 2015, and in many stock transfer housing associations, there was pooling of service charges. This meant that some tenants were paying for services they did not receive because the costs were spread between all of the landlord's tenants.

The Housing (Wales) Act ended this practice with service charges being disaggregated and clearly identified. The changes usually result in increased service charges for tenants who do receive eligible services.

The new policy, including the requirement to fully de-pool service charges is a good opportunity to ensure that costs are fully and correctly identified and consider any changes that may be needed in view of welfare reform so that the Council or housing association can be certain of securing the maximum revenue possible. This is very important given the current financial climate and a good opportunity to engage with residents as this is an important part of implementing the new rent policy.

The Welsh Government has introduced a new policy for social housing rents. The new rent policy applies to stock holding local authorities from April 2015, linked to exit from the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy system. The policy requires local authorities and housing associations that used to pool rent and service charges to disaggregate service charges from rent; and to consider the impact on their Business Plan, the achievement of the Welsh Housing Quality standard and other government priorities. It requires that the de-pooling exercise be undertaken in full, to ensure only tenants that receive, or are entitled to receive, services pay the service charges. The Welsh Government regards de-pooling service charges as best practice.

The de-pooling of service charges is also required in the light of the introduction of Universal Credit. Under Universal Credit, tenants are required to provide information on the breakdown of their rents and service charges as part of their on-line Universal Credit applications. In addition, Under Housing Benefit rules most services are eligible for Housing Benefit. Universal Credit regulations set out which services charges will be deemed eligible for benefit and those which are not.

Local authorities have traditionally included the cost of providing additional service to shared or communal areas in the rent that all tenants pay, regardless of whether all tenants benefit from the services being provided. While a pooled approach to service charges is administratively simpler for the landlord, it also had a number of disadvantages:

- Tenants may be paying for services they don't receive.
- Tenants are unaware that they are, in fact, paying for services.
- Services provided, and quality of service, do not reflect the needs and aspirations of tenants.
- Financial arrangements can mean that the housing revenue account contribution to some services is not related to the cost of providing that service.
- The cost to the landlord of service provision can be unclear.
- It is difficult to demonstrate value for money.

Even before the introduction of the new policy for social housing rents in Wales and Universal Credit, there were reasons for de-pooling service charges:

- Introducing service charges can generate additional income from properties that receive the service.

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- It is often considered to be unfair to ask tenants who are not receiving services to pay for them, whereas service charging those who receive the service is often considered to be fair and equitable.
- Charging tenants for services can improve the quality of the services being provided, as tenants are more likely to complain about poor service when they know they are paying for it.
- De-pooling service charges provides an opportunity to localise services to reflect tenants' needs and aspirations.

The new rent policy contains a set of key principles for landlords to follow:

- Social landlords should ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are put in place to ensure that service charges are based on full cost recovery, non-profit making and an open and transparent basis.
- Social landlords will need to consult with the affected tenants on, for example, the range, quality, frequency and cost of services provided and how costs will be apportioned between tenants.
- The rent increase notices provided to tenants each year must show separate charges for rents and service charges. Tenants should be provided with information in a clear and consistent format that sets out which service charges are deemed eligible for claiming Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.
- Social landlords to provide advice, as appropriate, to those tenants that would have to fund part, or all, of their service charges from their own resources.
- Service charges will be based on the estimated cost of the services to be provided in the forthcoming year.
- At the end of each year, service charges must be reconciled prior to, and as part of, the setting of estimated service charge costs for the following year.
- Each year, service charges will consider any underpayment, or overpayment, for the previous year.
- Tenants should be provided with an annual statement and breakdown which ensures that they fully understand how the service charge is calculated.
- Tenants should also be provided with information on how they are able to challenge or raise concerns about the reasonableness of service charges.
- Where rent pooling currently applies and tenants do not receive, or are not eligible to receive, services, it will be for each social landlord to determine whether the weekly rent for those tenants should be reduced or held on a marked time basis.
- The de-pooling exercise may impact on tenants receiving support from a warden or support worker who is part funded through the Supporting People Programme Grant. In such cases social landlords are required to discuss the implications of this exercise with their Supporting People Regional Collaborative Committee and local authority Supporting People Team.

The Welsh Government's approach is characterised by:

- Not providing detailed guidance on de-pooling
- High-level guidance setting out the principles that need to be followed with fixed or variable service charges
- Landlords are asked to liaise with other landlords who have completed the exercise or made significant progress

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We are holding a seminar: 'All You Want to Know about Service Charges in Social Housing in Wales' in Cardiff on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2017. For further information or to make a booking, please click here: <http://awics.co.uk/all-you-want-to-know-about-service-charges-in-social-housing-in-wales-2017>

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### **Landfill Disposals Tax Bill passed**

A Bill introducing a second devolved tax in Wales – landfill disposals tax – has been passed by the National Assembly for Wales and is expected to receive royal assent during the summer.

The Landfill Disposals Tax (Wales) Bill is the third of three bills to establish tax arrangements in Wales.

Landfill Disposals Tax that will replace landfill tax in Wales, will come into effect in April 2018. The revenue raised will help to fund public services in Wales. Landfill Disposals Tax will be similar to the current landfill tax that is collected throughout Wales and England in that it will be a tax on the disposal of waste to landfill. It will be paid by landfill site operators who will pass these costs onto waste operators.

The Bill extends the application of landfill disposals tax to unauthorised disposals of waste. This will introduce a financial deterrent to discourage people from disposing of waste unlawfully, encouraging them to pay their fair share of tax by disposing of waste at a registered landfill site.

There are currently 25 landfill sites in Wales, operated by twenty landfill site operators. In Wales, the Office for Budgetary Responsibility forecasts that landfill tax will generate £25million in 2018/19.

The Finance Secretary will announce the rates for landfill disposals tax by October 2017 and the regulations will be laid after the United Kingdom Autumn Budget.

Local communities affected by the disposal of waste to landfill will benefit from the Landfill Disposals Tax Communities Scheme that will also be introduced in April 2018.

Welcoming the passing of the Bill by the National Assembly, Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said that:

*“This Bill is the third piece of legislation to establish tax arrangements in Wales and another important step in our devolution journey. In less than a year’s time, we will be introducing the first Welsh taxes in almost 800 years and Wales will become responsible for raising our own money to spend on public services. Once law, this bill will enable us to introduce a tax on landfill disposals in Wales from April 2018. The bill ensures public services in Wales will continue to benefit from the revenues raised by this tax.*

*“Wales is at the forefront of waste policy and landfill disposals tax is an important element of achieving our goal of a zero waste Wales. We have worked closely with stakeholders in developing this bill. While it is broadly consistent with the existing landfill tax, therefore providing stability to businesses and minimising the risk of waste tourism, we have made a number of improvements to the tax. It is simple and clear to apply; addresses areas of confusion and uncertainty; is up to date and relevant to Wales. Together with the other tax legislation we have introduced it will pave the way to a smooth transition to tax powers.”*

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## **Denbighshire Council reviews Homelessness Services**

Denbighshire County Council is currently reviewing homelessness in the county – and has sought the views of residents and other interested parties in a public consultation.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 expects all councils to carry out a homelessness review and to draft a strategy by 2018 on how the issues raised will be addressed. The Act stipulates that every Local Housing Authority must adopt their first Homelessness Strategy by 2018, and develop a new Strategy every four years thereafter.

Tackling homelessness was already a key priority for Denbighshire Council and its partner organisations. Therefore, the Council aims to adopt its first Homelessness Strategy in early 2017 that will be based upon the findings of this Review.

In 2016/17 the Council's Housing Solutions team saw over 1,200 households who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

- The service recorded 538 outcomes for clients, of which 59% were single people.
- Most of cases (69%) that were assessed for assistance were aged over 25 years, and 30% were aged between 18-24 years.
- A total of 147 households were owed a duty to prevent them from becoming homeless, 81 of these households (55%) were successfully prevented from becoming homeless.
- The Council owed a further to duty to help secure accommodation to a total of 272 clients, of which a further 79 households had their homelessness relieved after they had become homeless. The most successful prevention tool used is assisting people to access private rented accommodation.

Now a review document looks at the homeless levels across Denbighshire, services available, the differing kinds of accommodation on offer, the needs of identified groups and future trends. The Homelessness Review considers the following:

- Current and likely future levels of homelessness in the Local Housing Authority's area
- The activities which are carried out for the achievement of the following objectives (or which contribute to their achievement)
  - The prevention of homelessness
  - Securing that suitable accommodation is or will be available for people who are or may become homeless
  - Providing that satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless
- The resources available to the Authority, other public authorities, voluntary organisations, and other persons for the activities outlined in (b) above

Overall, the Council considers that the Review provides a basis for a strategic approach to preventing homelessness, and meeting housing/housing related support needs in Denbighshire.

The executive summary can be downloaded from here: <https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/your-council/consultations/homelessness-review-executive-summary.pdf>

Findings of on-going consultations with staff and partner agencies, as well as feedback from the public will be considered and will help inform the homelessness strategy when it is produced later in 2017.

Meanwhile, Carl Sergeant, Secretary for Communities and Children with the Welsh Government has said that ending rough sleeping is a priority for him. Speaking at a Crisis conference in Cardiff in May 2017, he said that ‘significant strides’ had been made through the Welsh Government’s homelessness prevention programme. He also said that legislation introduced in Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 that requires councils to help those at risk of homelessness in a 56-day timeframe has helped 8,800 households keep rooves over their heads.

However, he warned that Wales faces ‘a sharp rise in rough sleeping’ as young people find it increasingly harder to secure affordable accommodation, and called for innovative solutions from the housing sector to get people off the streets. He said that:

*“It is simply unacceptable that some of our fellow citizens continue to sleep on our streets with no decent alternative and I am determined to reduce incidents of rough sleeping... We need to rethink our strategy to help single vulnerable people avoid or escape homelessness. Our aim must be to secure long term solutions as quickly as possible and focus our resources on supporting people to rebuild their lives in their own homes.”*

AWICS has assisted Denbighshire Council with matters including housing revenue account business planning, a housing revenue account ‘health check’, the introduction of self-financing and the introduction of service charges.

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### **Wrexham Council implements Welsh Housing Quality Standard**

Wrexham Council is on course to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard according to the latest figures released. A report was presented to the Council’s Homes & Environment Scrutiny Committee in June 2017 to update Members on the progress of the housing modernisation work currently being carried out across the County Borough. The work is being carried out to ensure that Wrexham Council’s 11,200 housing stock achieves the Welsh Government’s Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2020.

Council tenants are receiving new kitchens and bathrooms, if required to meet the standard. Other internal and external improvements such as new central heating systems, reroofing, garden paths, fences and external wall insulation are also being carried out where required.

The report says that:

*“Progress throughout the last twelve months was and remains positive.”*

The Welsh Housing Quality Standard funding programme of £163million (to be invested up until 2020) was approved by the Council’s Executive Board in February, 2016. Just under £52million was invested between April 2016 and April 2017. This included a £7.5million Major Repairs Allowance grant, awarded by the Welsh Government to support the achievement of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.

The report says that, over the last twelve months, completed work included 2,022 kitchens, 2,039 bathrooms, 563 central heating systems, 981 electrical rewires, and 868 properties re-roofed. 79 properties received external wall insulation and 540 properties received other external improvements such as garden paths and fencing.

Progress is ‘extremely positive for tenants and everyone concerned’, according to the report, with five out of seven targets for 2016/17 being achieved. Tenant satisfaction also remains high with the average score being 8.6 for completed works.

The report says that the local economy has also benefitted from the investment in housing improvement work, with over 60 apprentices, including a number who study at Coleg Cambria, being taken on by council contractors.

AWICS has assisted Wrexham Borough Council with matters including staff and member training and the introduction of service charges.

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## Development of New Homes

Welsh housing associations maintained a strong development programme during 2016/17. During the year, 1,243 homes were completed. This is only eleven fewer than were completed during 2015/16 and the second highest figure ever. These housebuilding statistics for 2016/17 released by the Welsh Government show a 2% rise in the number of dwellings started. 1,243 new social sector dwellings were completed, with housing associations responsible for 98%, and local authorities 2%. The nineteen local authority dwellings completed were the first recorded since 2013/14.

Stuart Ropke, Chief Executive of Community Housing Cymru, told 'Inside Housing' that:

*"We welcome the housebuilding figures released by Welsh Government today. We signed a housing supply pact with Welsh Government in December 2016, committing Welsh housing associations to build 12,500 new homes of the 20,000 target agreed in the pact.*

*"We will continue to work with Welsh Government to achieve these goals and, as part of the Homes for Wales coalition which has been re-launched for this month's general election, we are also calling on the new UK government to support a welfare system that ensures everyone can access an affordable home, and to support the construction industry in light of Brexit negotiations so it can access the materials and labour it needs to build new homes."*

Overall figures for Welsh housebuilding showed a similar trend, falling to 6,833 in the past year from 6,900 in the one before. Again, the past two years represent a significant increase from previous years – 6,170 homes were completed in 2014/15.

The two-year rise in housebuilding has been driven in part by an increase in completions in South West Wales. Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire have seen 355 social homes built in the past two years between them, in comparison to 90 over the two years before that. In Swansea, meanwhile, 256 social homes have been built in the past two years, in comparison to 105 in the two years previous.

Matt Dicks, Director at the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru said that:

*"The most recent house building figures in Wales are encouraging. The report demonstrates that housebuilding rates are holding firm in Wales and CIH Cymru welcomes that. Whilst we recognise the commitment made to building more affordable homes by the Welsh Government, and the number of new homes that went beyond the affordable homes target set during the previous Assembly term, it's important that we get further clarity about what these latest figures reveal about the direction of travel towards meeting the 20k target set for this Assembly term. Particularly in the context of challenges that continue to exercise housing professionals in Wales which include mitigating the impact of welfare reform, addressing homelessness and regenerating communities.*

*"Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru will, on behalf of its members, continue to work with the Welsh Government, and other stakeholders, to ensure that any barriers to building new homes are removed or mitigated in order to reach the affordable homes target."*

The Homes for Wales coalition launched its campaign to raise awareness of the housing crisis in Wales ahead of the United Kingdom General Election of June 2017. The Homes for Wales coalition partners include: Residential Landlords' Association, Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, Royal Town Planning Institute, Federation of Master Builders, and the Home Builders Federation.

The Homes for Wales General Election 2017 campaign focused on two issues central to Welsh tenants and landlords that are controlled from Westminster. The coalition called on the next United Kingdom Government to support:

- A welfare system that ensures everyone can access an affordable home
- The construction industry so it can access the materials and labour it needs to build affordable homes.

These issues are a priority for the coalition because of the ongoing transition to Universal Credit from six other benefits, including Housing Benefit, and the upcoming Local Housing Allowance cap on Housing Benefit. The Local Housing Allowance cap is predicted to cause many social housing tenants severe financial problems, as, once introduced, the amount of benefit that some tenants receive will not be enough to cover their rent.

Stuart Ropke, Chief Executive of Community Housing Cymru, said that:

*"Welfare reform is already having a disproportionate effect on Welsh tenants, and we must ensure that our new MPs are fully aware of the impact that these changes are having across Welsh communities. There are more tenants in rent arrears than ever before with the introduction of Universal Credit, and delays in payments are leading to an increase in hardship. In addition, when the Local Housing Allowance cap on Housing Benefit comes into effect in April 2019, we foresee many people being unable to pay their rent if changes are not made to reflect the reality of Welsh rent levels."*

Alongside the impact of welfare reform, Brexit negotiations will also have a significant impact on the construction sector in Wales. The coalition is also keen to ensure that the impact of Brexit on the construction sector in Wales is highlighted and potential solutions identified at an early stage. Stuart Ropke said:

*"We rely on trading with the EU for building materials, and also on the European people within the construction industry who work in Wales. EU nationals make up 7% of the construction workforce in Wales and, with work due to begin on a number of large infrastructure projects in the coming years, there will be 20,000 new jobs created in the industry. Uncertainty over the free movement of people in any Brexit deal and the potential of tariffs on imports – coupled with rising inflation and a falling pound – represent a real concern. We cannot afford for the Welsh Government's commitment to build 20,000 affordable homes in Wales to be adversely affected by decisions made in Westminster."*

In 2016, the Homes for Wales campaign was successful in achieving cross-party support from all parties elected to the Assembly. As a result, a Housing Supply Pact was signed between Community Housing Cymru, Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association which included a target of 20,000 affordable homes to be built by 2021 (including 13,500 by housing associations), the creation of up to 12,500 training and employment opportunities and skills development for 25,000 tenants. Whether a similar success will now be enjoyed at Westminster remains to be seen.

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### **Editorial Note**

The AWICS Wales News is published by AWICS Limited. This edition was edited by Adrian Waite. Articles are written by Adrian Waite unless otherwise stated. However, the views expressed are not necessarily those of Adrian Waite or AWICS unless expressly stated.

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### **AWICS Survey**

We would be grateful if you could take part in our survey of our clients, website users, newsletter readers or others with an interest in local government or housing. If you would like to please visit <http://form.jotform.me/form/50612526489459>

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## **AWICS Seminars:**

### **All You Want to Know about Service Charges in Social Housing in Wales**

'All You Want to know about Service Charges in Social Housing in Wales' will be held in Cardiff on 12th September 2017.

Service charges are an integral part of landlords' work in financing value for money services and sustaining customer satisfaction. They have always been relatively complex but with increased financial challenges and legal and financial complexity there is an increased need to understand how service charging works. This seminar gives an introduction and overview to this important subject and is fully up to date with all developments.

The price of this seminar is £195 plus £39 Value Added Tax, a total of £234.

For further information or to make a booking please click here: <http://awics.co.uk/all-you-want-to-know-about-service-charges-in-social-housing-in-wales-2017>

### **Other AWICS Seminars**

Our next seminars are as follows:

- All You Want to Know about Service Charges in Social Housing.
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance.
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance.
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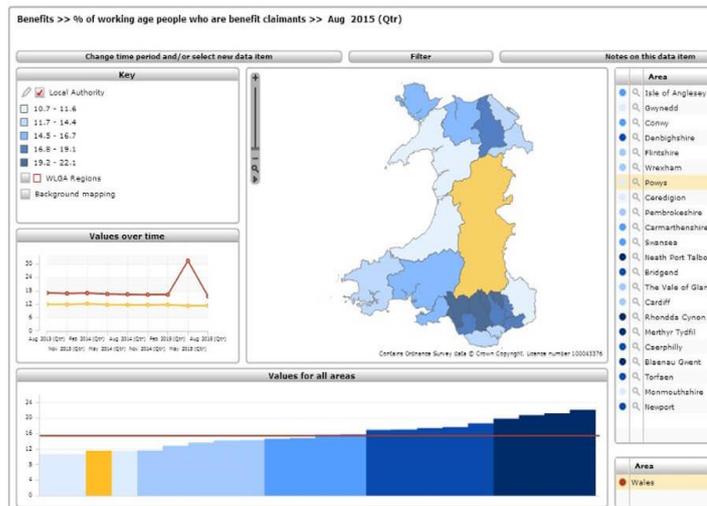
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'AWICS' is a management consultancy and training company. We specialise in providing support in finance and management to clients in local government and housing in England, Scotland and Wales. We are well known for our ability to analyse and explain complex financial and management issues clearly.

Our mission statement is 'Independence, Integrity, Value'. We therefore provide support to clients from an independent standpoint that is designed to help the client to achieve their objectives. We are passionate about working with the utmost integrity. We believe that we offer the best value for money that is available today!

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