

AWICS Wales News

January 2016



The Council Offices at Denbigh

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Welcome

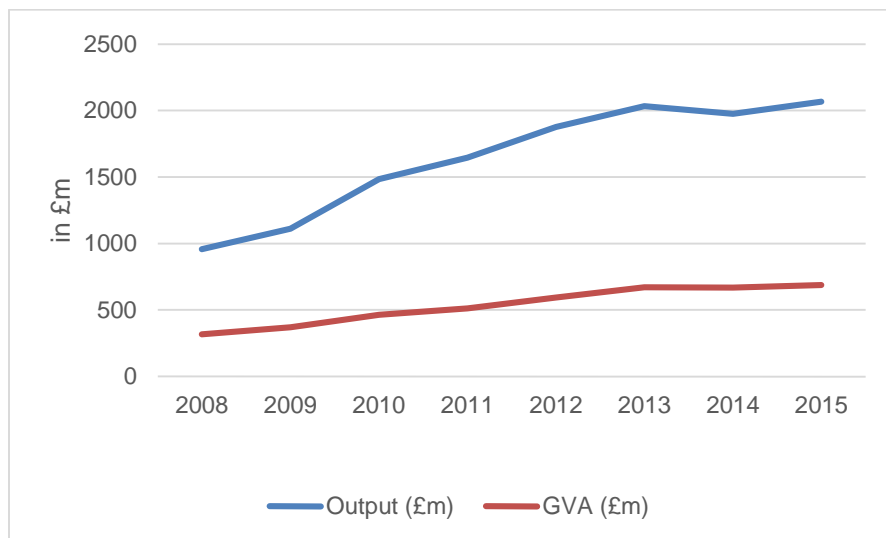
Welcome to the January 2016 edition of the AWICS Welsh News'.

This month's edition reports on the impressive statistics describing the beneficial role of the housing sector to the Welsh economy. Over the past five years, the sector's direct and indirect employment has increased by 30% and now provides jobs for 22,000 individuals. Also in this issue, we report on plans for local government reform in Wales, the future of housing associations, and the implications of devolution. We also have a number of articles on the debate surrounding the Comprehensive Spending Review, the recently released Wales Bill, and the possible implications for Wales of the English rent policies and the reclassification of English housing associations as 'public' organisations.

I hope that you will find this newsletter to be informative. If you have any feedback, please contact Adrian Waite at Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk, or participate in our customer survey that can be found at

Latest statistics show the value of housing associations to the Welsh economy

According to the latest economics research report by the Welsh Economy Research Staff (WERS) at Cardiff University, the Welsh economy gained £2billion from the effects of investments made by housing associations in the past financial year. According to the figures, the social housing sector's Gross Value Added was estimated at £278million. The report disclosed that of the £1.1billion direct capital expenditure made by housing associations, the Welsh economy absorbed £872million, a figure of almost 80%, showing the value of the sector to the Welsh economy. The report was commissioned by Community Housing Cymru that represents seventy housing associations in Wales.



The latest figures disclosed in the report mark the steady increase in both housing availability and the robustness of the Welsh affordable housing sector. This matches the ambitious target set by the Welsh Government for the building of 10,000 new homes by the end of their current term. During 2014/15 alone, 1,923 affordable homes were completed, an increase of 4% over the 1,850 completions in 2013/14. Additionally, 517 homes completed during 2014/15 did not include the social housing grant. Over the past eight years, housing associations alone have completed 11,100 new homes and renovated or acquired a further 4,500.

The continued growth in the affordable housing sector has also provided a significant boost to employment. During 2014/15, the sector employed 8,800 full-time workers directly and supported an additional 13,495 full-time jobs in other adjacent sectors that supply the housing sector, thus employing a total of 22,000 individuals. Every full time role in the housing sector supported one full time and one-part time role in adjacent sectors. Overall, employment depending on the affordable housing sector has grown by 30% over the past five years. This comes alongside the Welsh Government investment of an additional £7million into training to link with recent changes that require certification of housing providers. A further £2.1million was allocated to fund apprenticeships and employment support.

Stuart Ropke, Chief Executive Officer of Community Housing Cymru, spoke of his commitment towards investing 'heavily in the services for tenants and communities (despite) a backdrop of austerity'. Further he commented on the report that:

"This year's report further demonstrates the impact of housing associations on the Welsh economy and the communities we serve. Housing associations are independent organisations. Our independence allows us to draw in billions of pounds of private finance to provide affordable homes, create jobs and stimulate the economy. As a sector we continue to show resilience through innovative working, and the latest WERU figures prove that the Welsh economy is reaping the benefits."

Review into finance of local government in Wales launched

During the past few years, following the financial crises and subsequent austerity measures introduced by the United Kingdom government, there has been considerable debate about devolution of more financial control to local government in England. The English Local Government Association has championed increased devolution of control over council tax, business rates and other income. It is suggested that this provides a level of flexibility needed to respond to the substantial cuts by the national government to English local authorities.

Similarly, Welsh local authorities have requested increased devolution of financial responsibilities from the Welsh Government. Now, an independent commission, the Independent Commission on Local Government Finance Wales, has been set up to research potential revisions to the financing of Welsh Local Authorities. The commission is sponsored by the Welsh Local Government Association and Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy. According to its website, the commission will 'examine how local government funding in Wales can be made more sustainable' and it seeks to provide 'a series of recommendations designed to reform and improve how local public services are financed in Wales'. The commission is chaired by Professor Tony Travers who is visiting professor at the London School of Economics' Local Government Department. He is joined by six other experts from academia and the public finance sector. Its final recommendations will be published in early 2016. Commenting on the commissions' objectives, Tony Travers said:

'We will be considering a range of possible changes, including possibly radical ones. People in Wales deserve local government which is accountable and where people have more influence over how the Welsh government and councils use the taxes they pay.'

On the back of calls for radical devolution of powers, the Welsh Local Government Association published a forty-point manifesto on Welsh local government devolution in November 2015. For a while the Welsh Local Government Association has expressed concerns over the lack of authority and responsibility held by local government in Wales. Amidst fears of a projected £941million council budget shortfall by 2020, the Welsh Local Government Association is determined to secure more freedom in spending for local government.

The Welsh Local Government Association proposes ending the weekly £60 cap on council charges for non-residential care and cutting protected school budgets. The association calculates that channelling the income from the 5p plastic bag charge could raise nearly £22million for frontline services. It also raises an ambition for Welsh local authorities to retain 100% of business rates as is already the case in England. The Welsh Local Government Association desires parity with English councils and a similar responsibility over municipal public health services.

The Welsh Local Government Association have requested a 'preventative care fund' to raise health standards & alleviate stress on the Welsh National Health Service. The Welsh Local Government Association argue that the United Kingdom government should finance the care fund in light of increased spending on the English National Health Service. Other health-based proposals include a ban on all fast-food outlets within 400metres of a school zone, as well as increasing dietary awareness in education.

Councillor Bob Wellington (Labour), the Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association, claimed that 'the current approach for funding and running public services is clearly not working', and that the next Welsh government, to be elected in May 2016, 'must free up and trust local government to work with its communities'. He said:

"The Welsh Local Government Association has launched a manifesto for the future of local government that has the potential to strengthen local democracy and revitalise community life in Wales. As local government leaders we make it clear that the current approach for funding and running public services in Wales is clearly not working, and that the next Welsh Government must free-up and trust local government to work with its communities to deliver a better solution.

"The finances available to run our public services have been decimated over recent years, and local councils are being forced to close or shrink back many of the services and facilities that our communities feel most strongly about. This is a manifesto designed to halt this decline.

"Our manifesto makes it clear that if we work in partnership and completely revamp central-local government relations, if we develop a funding system that allows councils to respond to community needs and if we give more powers to a local level, then we will be in a much stronger position to deliver for our communities.

"Today we are offering a new way of doing business. One based on a shared appreciation of the impacts of ongoing austerity, and more importantly, one based on the joint ownership of solutions designed to protect vital and highly valued public services in Wales."

Councillor Peter Fox of Monmouthshire, the Conservative Group Leader at the Welsh Local Government Association added:

"It is high time for a move away from an expensive, centralised and often ineffective approach where central governments try to second guess what is best for our local communities. The next Welsh Government needs to be ambitious in how it frees up councils to work with their communities to shape their local areas and manage their local services – an approach that is already happening in other regions of the United Kingdom.

"To succeed, local councils need autonomy, financial security and control of their own localities. This is the essence of localism and the essence of the manifesto that has been published by local government today. "

Recently, the Welsh Minister for Public Services Leighton Andrews suggested that local government in Wales could be consolidated from 22 to just eight local authorities. The reorganisation, it is hoped, could save public money by merging administrative functions and spreading them over a larger area. Interestingly enough, before 1996, Wales had a two-tier system of local government with eight county councils whose boundaries were very similar to the boundaries that the Welsh government is suggesting for the new local authorities.

However, the Welsh Local Government Association has dismissed the feasibility of these plans on the grounds of the costly reorganisation that such mergers would require. To some extent, the position of the Welsh government and the recent proposals by the Welsh Local Government Association regarding devolution might thus be conflicting.

The full report is accessible here: [link](#)

The WLGA's manifesto for local government reform is found here: [link](#)

Release of Draft Wales Bill

The Draft Wales Bill was introduced to the United Kingdom Parliament in October 2015. The bill amends the Government of Wales Act 2006 and provides a number of changes that will strengthen the self-administration and authority of the Welsh assembly in a range of policy areas, such as energy and transport.

In the foreword to the Draft Wales Bill, Stephen Crabb MP (Conservative), the Secretary of State for Wales, states that:

"This draft Bill sets out in detail how the Government plans to deliver the St David's Day commitments to create a stronger, clearer and fairer devolution settlement for Wales that will stand the test of time.

"The proposals in the draft Bill create a new Welsh devolution system, moving to a reserved powers model similar to the one which currently operates in Scotland. This will deliver a devolution settlement which provides greater accountability to the Welsh people.

"The draft Bill also devolves important new powers over energy, transport and local government and Assembly elections. These are powers that can make a real difference to the lives of people in Wales. As set out in the St David's Day agreement they are also proposals which attracted cross-party political consensus.

"The Wales Bill is part of a wider ambitious devolution package for Wales. Alongside the forthcoming Spending Review, the Government will introduce a floor in the level of relative funding it provides to the Welsh Government. This will ensure that Wales' funding, relative to England, will not drop below a specified level. I also want to see the Assembly and the Welsh Government become more accountable for the money they spend, and to see income tax powers devolved to the Assembly to help make this happen."

However, several high profile representatives in Wales have voiced concerns over the content of the draft bill. Carwyn Jones, First Minister of Wales (Labour) stated that the draft bill would 'fan the flames of nationalism', and believes it is merely an 'English veto on Welsh laws' requiring approval for regulatory changes in Wales before they become law. Supporting his position, he suggested that under the new law fourteen of the nineteen bills passed since 2011 would have required the United Kingdom parliament's approval. For example, the recent Housing Act would not have been possible within the framework suggested by the Wales Bill.

Presiding officer for the Welsh Assembly, Dame Rosemary Butler (Labour) said that the Bill:

"Would amount to a backwards step for the national assembly and would not deliver the lasting constitutional settlement for Wales, and the United Kingdom as a whole. If the United Kingdom government proceed as presently proposed, I would anticipate almost immediate calls for yet another Wales Bill, something that none of us wishes to see."

On the other hand, a representative of the Welsh Office dismissed these claims and said that national contention need not arise as the Welsh government would still be able to 'legislate in all the (currently) devolved areas' in addition to those newly devolved in the Bill.

Housing policy is one of the areas in which decisions in Wales and England have differed most. While English rents have increased significantly before the mandatory cuts in social housing rents of 1% were announced in July 2015, rents in Wales have historically remained much lower than those in England. Additionally, the social rented housing market in Wales has been stronger and received considerable investment over the years. Wales has also differed to England in its plans for abolishing the Right to Buy for council homes. This policy is already in place in certain high pressure areas such as Swansea. Furthermore, the Welsh Assembly decided not to follow England in its extension of Right to Buy to housing associations. Should the new Wales Bill hinder policy decisions taken by the Welsh Assembly, the criticism that the new devolution settlement faces may be justified.

The draft bill can be accessed here: [link](#)

Responses to the Spending Review

The United Kingdom government released their Spending Review in November 2015.

Following their defeat in the House of Lords the United Kingdom government have decided to abandon their proposed reductions in tax credits. The four-year spending plans will reduce government expenditure by an average of 19%, less than had been anticipated but still a significant amount.

One reason why the reductions in budgets were not as large as had been expected is that the Office for Budgetary Responsibility has identified a £27billion improvement in the public finances compared to the summer Budget, due to higher tax receipts and lower rates of interest.

£4trillion of spending has been allocated by the government over the next five years. The Spending Review sets out how this will be allocated. On average, departmental spending will fall at less than half the rate of the previous five years.

The government is expected to borrow £8billion less than forecast as it aims to secure a £10.1billion budget surplus by 2020. Total spending is to rise from £756billion in 2015/16 to £821billion by 2019/20. State spending - as a share of total output is to fall to 36.5% in 2020 compared with 45% in 2010. Overall day-to-day departmental spending is to be cut by £20billion, equivalent to 0.8% of total expenditure each year by 2020 in real terms, meaning a cumulative reduction of 19% to 2019/20.

The government states that in 2014/15 the deficit was halved compared to its 2009/10 level, in 2016/17 it will be down by three quarters and that by 2019/20 there will be a £10billion surplus.

The Chancellor said:

"With housing associations included, the Office for Budgetary Responsibility predicted at the time of the Budget that Britain would borrow £74.1billion this year. Instead, they now forecast we will borrow less than that at £73.5billion. Borrowing then falls to £49.9 billion next year."

The Spending Review mentions further commitments to an agenda of devolution of powers to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with the 'appropriate levers to take decisions to address their specific challenges'. Promising news for Wales is the allocation of more public expenditure for national infrastructure projects. The allocation and spending of the budget will be within the remit of the Welsh Assembly. The spending review indicates funding increases of around 14% for Scotland, 16% for Wales and 12% for Northern Ireland. Overall the Welsh budget will be £12.9billion in 2015/16, £13billion in 2016/17, £13.1billion in 2017/18, £13.2billion in 2018/19, and £13.3billion in 2019/20. Furthermore, George Osborne announced a comprehensive City Deal with Cardiff City Council.

The Welsh Government is to be given a 115% funding guarantee. This means that the Welsh Government will receive 115% of comparable spending per head in England. The Welsh block grant will now reach almost £15billion by 2019/20, while capital spending in Wales is set to be £900million over five years. The Welsh Government has long complained about the deal it receives through the Barnett Formula that distributes block grant between the devolved administrations. Finance minister Jane Hutt has for years been lobbying the Treasury for greater funding certainty.

Income tax powers are also to be devolved to the Welsh Government without first being passed by a referendum.

George Osborne said:

"For years Wales has asked for a funding floor to protect public spending there. Now, within months of coming to office, this Conservative government is answering that call and providing that historic funding guarantee for Wales."

Welfare has been a serious concern during recent years, with 238,000 Welsh households affected by the reductions in entitlements announced in the 2015 budget and with child poverty continuing to increase in Wales.

Councillor Aaron Shotton of Flintshire Council (Labour), Deputy Leader and Spokesperson for Finance and Resources at the Welsh Local Government Association said:

"There are political choices that the Chancellor could have made to limit the impact on local services, unfortunately he has not done that and continues to hit the poorest in society with draconian reductions to basic services and benefits. The full scale of the impact on local government in Wales will not be clear until the Welsh Government sets its draft budget in the coming weeks, however it is clear that valued local services are now at a tipping point. Our focus as family of local government in Wales must now turn to working with the Welsh Government and how together we can attempt to shield our residents from the worst excesses of these brutal and prolonged cuts."

Councillor Anthony Hunt of Torfaen Council (Labour), Deputy Spokesperson for Finance and Resources at the Welsh Local Government Association said:

"Maintained austerity from the UK Government is not good news for public services in Wales, but we will not know the full impact on local government until announcements by the Welsh Government in two weeks' time. While the future looks tough, the CSR figures show that there is potential for the Welsh Government and Welsh Councils to work together to maintain levels of investment in preventative local services, to avoid many of the problems being faced in England, particularly in the area of social care."

The 2015 Spending Review document can be accessed here: [link](#)

AWICS has published a briefing paper on the implications of the Spending Review for Housing. Your copy can be freely downloaded from here: [link](#)

A Picture of Public Services

The Auditor General published a report entitled 'A Picture of Public Services' in December 2015 that highlighted how many of Wales' cash strapped public services are continuing to perform well.

In the foreword, Huw Vaughan Thomas, the Auditor General for Wales says:

"With a £1.2billion cut to the spending allocated to devolved public services, all parts of Wales' public services have faced financial pressures since 2010-11. This report paints a balanced and mixed picture in terms of public services' response. It is positive to see that despite the financial pressures, some measures of population well-being and service performance have got better. But some public services are clearly struggling to sustain service levels and performance in key areas. The report shows that despite some progress, public services are yet to develop the long-term and radical change that is needed to respond effectively to the pressures they have and will continue to face.

"Looking forwards, Welsh public services face the prospect of further spending cuts and continued demand pressures. In this report, I have chosen not to make specific recommendations. Instead, I want to set out my key messages for public services. These are the kinds of things I will be looking out for in my work in future to test whether public services are indeed rising to the growing challenges they face."

The report, while calling on all public services in Wales to innovate and increase the pace of reform, acknowledges how many service areas continue to offer a positive level of performance despite facing significant cuts to their budgets over recent years.

Despite these improvements the report also voices concern and calls for a 'wholesale transformation' of how public services are delivered in Wales. This is a call that supports many of the key messages of the Welsh Local Government Association's recent manifesto that offers a forty-point plan for the future of public services in Wales based on increased partnership and a greater commitment to the principle of localism.

The key messages of the report for public services are:

- Expand the horizons

The report finds that despite some progress, Wales' public services are still too focused on short-term organisational pressures. Many still follow a cycle of managing annual budgets and performance targets. Public services need to expand their horizons in many different directions. They need to better understand and plan for the huge future opportunities and challenges from things like demographic change and technological innovation. They need to go further in adopting preventative approaches that will reduce future pressures on, and demand for, services. They need to do more to get beyond organisational boundaries to find new ways to join up services at the frontline. And there are lessons to be learnt from looking outside organisational and geographical silos to see what is being done well elsewhere. The Auditor General fully understands that pressures on immediate capacity mean it is difficult. But we need our public services to be changing now to meet the long-term challenges.

- Take well-managed risks to innovate

The Auditor General considers that radical service reform is the sustainable solution to financial and demand pressures on public services. Doing things differently means taking risks. Indeed, the pressures are such that not doing things differently might be a bigger risk. But that does not mean public services should throw caution to the wind. Risks need to be properly identified, mitigated and managed. And where things do not turn out as planned, public services need to be prepared to recognise, share and learn from failure.

- Be realistic

The report argues that public services need to be ambitious but also realistic about the scale of the pressures they face and what that means. Some of the key areas where the Auditor General thinks public services need to be more realistic are the

- Level of savings that can be achieved by individual schemes and the time it takes to achieve them
- Need for some cuts to service levels and the impacts on the public
- Financial and capacity consequences of creating new duties and responsibilities
- Barriers to radically reshaping services, including political and cultural barriers, and the hard work that will be needed to overcome them.

- Measure the things that matter

‘What gets measured gets managed’ – so goes the saying. The report finds that while Welsh public services are increasingly adopting ‘outcome’ measures, there remains a tendency to measure and manage how much activity is going on and how long it takes. Given the growing emphasis on personal and population outcomes, a greater focus is needed on making sure that (a) individuals and communities are better off as a result of what public services do and (b) the efforts add up to an overall improvement in collective well-being.

- Work together to manage the impacts of reductions in the level of services

The Auditor General’s survey shows that most parts of the public services are expecting cuts to service levels. So far, the approach to managing the impact of reductions in service levels has not been sufficiently robust. It is in the interests of all public services to work together through the difficult choices, to have clear and consistent priorities, to understand the short- and long-term impacts for the public and other public services, and to mitigate those impacts where possible.

Councillor Bob Wellington of Torfaen Council (Labour), Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association said:

“We welcome today’s report from the Auditor General which echoes many of the key messages of the Welsh Local Government Association’s own ‘Localism 2016-21’ manifesto for public services in Wales, within which we fully acknowledge the need for significant reform – not of local councils in isolation, but of public services as a whole in Wales.

“Local government has been at the forefront of United Kingdom austerity, and while councils have been offered a level of relative protection in Wales they have shouldered more than their fair share of the financial burden and they have responded positively in seeking to adapt how they deliver their local services. We have seen an increasing variety of new service delivery models emerging such as community trusts, local authority trading companies and mutuals. Our councils have made significant financial savings, merged a number of vital local services and have developed new and innovative ways of delivering public services at both a local and regional level.

“Today’s report reinforces local government’s message that if public services are to radically change to meet the challenges they face now and in the future, then the Welsh public sector as a whole will require a new way of doing business. In particular, we need to be clear if we are to reform our public services, then we need to develop responses which are sensitive to the complexities of ‘place’. This is the essence of localism – local services shaped in consultation with local communities and delivered in ways that directly meet the needs of local communities. It is encouraging to receive such support for the vitally important principle of localism within the report published by the Auditor General today.”

A copy of the report can be downloaded from the Auditor General’s website at: https://gallery.mailchimp.com/99566004543c1bbaf2572c5fa/files/POPS_2015_ENG_embargo.pdf

Reclassification of English Housing Associations might affect Wales

In late November 2015, Community Housing Cymru held its annual conference. At the conference, there was debate about the effects of housing policies in England, including the reclassification of English Housing Associations as public organisations and the mandatory annual rent reductions of 1% by social housing providers. There is a potential for this to have effects on the Welsh housing sector.

This debate was held at the same time as the recent release of the Wales Bill that sets out arrangements of for how the Welsh Assembly will produce legislation affecting Wales in the future.

Much of the debate concerned the classification of English Housing Associations. For the national accounts, the Office for National Statistics has reclassified the associations as public as opposed to private. Whilst some argue that these labels are merely technical, Stuart Ropke, Chief Executive of Community Housing Cymru argues that the implications are more sinister. Instead of an arbitrary semantic change, Ropke argues that the reclassification is a ‘battle... within the United Kingdom Government’, and that Westminster is attempting to redefine where power truly resides. The Office for National Statistics apparently based its decision regarding English Housing Associations on the provisions of the 2008 Housing & Regeneration Act rather than on the current government’s policies on ‘right to buy’ and rents. However, the argument that English Housing Associations must be classed as public sector organisations because they are regulated by the state could also be applied to Welsh Housing Associations.

Pertaining to the effects of the Wales Bill on Welsh housing, Stuart Ropke described the situation as ‘perverse’ saying:

“We might have to move policy because of changes over the border.”

Welsh Government takes action to increase affordable housing

In December 2015, the Welsh Government set out its commitment to supporting social landlords and increasing the supply of affordable homes in Wales.

In the draft Budget for 2016/17, the Welsh Government pledged an additional £21.7million to increase the number of social houses in Wales. This significant investment in housing associations is expected to support the construction of over 250 new affordable homes, providing a safe and secure place to live for hundreds of Wales' most vulnerable people.

Lesley Griffiths, Welsh Minister for Communities & Tackling Poverty said:

"Providing people with a safe, warm and secure home is one of the key priorities for this government. This is why we have pledged an additional £21.7million to help housing associations increase the availability of affordable housing in Wales. I am proud of our positive and constructive relationship with our invaluable social landlords and our commitment to work together for the benefit of tenants."

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

"We are pleased that Welsh Government has made the decision to confirm the rent settlement which was previously agreed between Community Housing Cymru and the Welsh Government for 2016/17. A secure rental income stream alongside continued financial support from Welsh Government is vital for the future viability of Welsh housing associations, and this security means that the sector can continue to build more homes and deliver services in communities across Wales."

"Investment in housing helps to stimulate the economy as well as providing funding for new affordable homes, and it is heartening to see Welsh Government's confidence in Welsh housing associations' ability to deliver. We will continue to work on behalf of our members to evidence their impact."

Welsh Government decides against rent cut

Following the decision of the United Kingdom government to require annual rent reductions of 1% in English social housing, the Welsh government consulted with local authorities and housing associations in Wales about the potential to introduce a similar policy in Wales and required social landlords to carry out modelling to demonstrate the impact of a similar cut in Wales, or other options including no rise in rents. It is understood that the financial modelling showed that most Welsh housing associations would cease to be viable after about two years.

In the event it was decided to make no changes to the existing Welsh policies on social rents that have been introduced only recently and provide for modest increases and local discretion.

In December 2015, Lesley Griffiths, Welsh Minister for Communities & Tackling Poverty, provided assurance to social landlords in Wales that the current rent policy will continue to apply next year. She said:

"Maintaining our social rent policy provides stability for social landlords and enables them to continue to provide the good quality, affordable housing Welsh families need – as well as a whole host of invaluable tenants' services."

This decision means social landlords can continue to invest in their properties and ensure the supply of affordable housing in Wales is maintained. It also allows social landlords to continue to provide key services to tenants, such as job and training opportunities, and ensure they can meet the Welsh Government's quality standards for social housing.

Social landlords have therefore been notified that for the next five years Welsh social rents will still increase each year by the Consumer Price Index of inflation plus 1.5% plus £2 per week. This means that social landlords will be allowed to increase weekly rents by 1.4% plus £2 in 2016/17 – September's level of the consumer prices index of -0.1%, plus 1.5%.

Julie Nicholas, policy and public affairs manager at the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru said:

"This announcement is great news for housing and communities in Wales. It reinforces the Welsh Government's commitment to support social landlords to continue to deliver on their business plans, to increase the supply of new homes, to improve the quality of existing homes and to provide important community benefits."

In September 2015 the Conservative Group in the Welsh Assembly decided that they would not press for a reduction in social rents in Wales.

Stuart Ropke of Community Housing Cymru commented that it had been 'cheeky' of the United Kingdom government to ask Wales to re-evaluate their rent policy, as Wales' rent policy was decided 'consciously' with lowering the welfare bill in mind.

Seminar: All You Want to Know about Service Charges in Social Housing

We are holding our seminars on 'All You Want to Know about Service Charges in Social Housing' in February 2016. These seminars are designed to give an introduction and overview to this important subject and are fully up to date with all developments.

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.

Housing Associations have traditionally levied service charges with most local authorities in England introducing them in the 'noughties'. In Wales, local authorities have introduced service charges as part of the Welsh government's new rent policy. The rolling out of Universal Credit is having an impact on benefit entitlement for service charges.

These seminars are suitable for people who are not experts in service charges, but who need to understand the basics and achieve an overview of what is going on. It is suitable for councillors, board members, housing managers, legal staff, finance staff, tenant representatives, members of the service charges team with limited experience and others who realise that an understanding of service charges can place them at an advantage!

The seminars will cover:

- How do Service Charges work in Housing Associations and Local Authorities and for Leaseholders and Tenants?
- How are service charges calculated?
- How to de-pool service charges?
- Legal obligations, accounting guidance and good practice
- When are service charges eligible for housing benefit / universal credit?

- How to ensure excellent customer service?

The seminars are accompanied by a very useful 100-page book that is designed for reference after the session entitled: **“All You Want to Know about Service Charges in Social Housing 2016”**

The venues and dates are:

London: Novotel Hotel, Waterloo – 16th February 2016.

North: Novotel Hotel, Leeds – 24th February 2016.

The presenter is Adrian Waite who has experience of service charges in local authorities and housing associations in all parts of Britain including Wales.

For more information or to make a booking please click here:
<http://www.awics.co.uk/schs2016.asp>

This seminar is also available in-house. For further information about in-house sessions, please contact Adrian Waite on 017683-52165 or adrian.waite@awics.co.uk

Webinar: Welsh Social Housing Finance

29th January 2016 - starting at 2.00pm

This webinar gives an introduction and overview of social housing finance in Wales and is fully up to date with all developments.

The webinar will answer the following questions:

- What financial environment are Welsh local authorities and housing associations working in?
- How do the finances of Welsh social Housing work? (including income & expenditure accounts, self-financing in local authorities, rents & service charges and the financing of capital programmes)
- How is the development of new social housing funded?
- What are the financial opportunities and threats facing Welsh local authorities and housing associations?

This webinar is suitable for people who are not experts in housing finance, but who need to understand the basics and achieve an overview of what is going on. It is suitable for councillors, board members, housing managers, finance staff, tenant representatives, members of the finance team with limited experience and others who realise that an understanding of housing finance can place them at an advantage!

The presenter will be Adrian Waite who has experience in the finance of local authorities and housing associations in Wales.

The webinar will start at 2.00pm and last for between 1½ and 2 hours.

Price: £50 plus VAT, total £60.

After the webinar attendees will be provided with a copy of the presentation used and a briefing paper.

For more information or to make a booking please click here:
<http://www.awics.co.uk/webwalesfin.asp>

Client and reader survey (please give us feedback)

Please consider to give us feedback on how we are doing through our client survey: [link](#).

Editorial notes



This edition of the AWICS Welsh News was edited by Sebastian Weise. Sebastian is a freelancer and recently completed a PhD at the Centre for Digital Innovation at Lancaster University. He is knowledgeable about participatory urban planning, local government, government reform, and geospatial services.

The AWICS Housing News is published by 'AWICS' Limited. Articles are written by Adrian Waite unless otherwise stated. However, the views expressed in articles are not necessarily those of 'AWICS' or Adrian Waite unless expressly stated.

About 'AWICS'

'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!

For more information about our services and us please visit our website at www.awics.co.uk or contact Adrian Waite at Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk. Services that we offer include:

- Management Consultancy – <http://www.awics.co.uk/ManagementConsultancy.asp>
- Interim Management – <http://www.awics.co.uk/interimmanagement.asp>
- Regional Seminars - <http://www.awics.co.uk/seminars2015.asp>
- In-House Training - <http://www.awics.co.uk/inHouseCourses.asp>
- Independent Residents' Advice – <http://www.awics.co.uk/IndependentTenantAdvice.asp>
- Technical Books - <http://www.awics.co.uk/TechnicalBooks.asp>
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