



Housing in later life in Wales: Building the climate for change

Written by Jeremy Porteus, director and founder of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network

With spring – and St David’s Day – only a fortnight away, it would be nice to think that a key report published yesterday could kick-start a cultural transformation in housing for older people in Wales.

As a west country resident, I enthusiastically crossed the River Severn regularly during 2016 in my role as a member of the Welsh Government’s expert group on housing an ageing population in Wales.

You would be wrong to think the group’s report, [‘Our Housing AGEnda: meeting the aspirations of older people in Wales’](#), is just about bricks and mortar. Its recommendations extend well beyond simply building more specialist housing, important though that is. Instead, we call for a more ambitious approach.

The Welsh Government and local authorities should galvanise their people – not just those who design, plan, commission and build housing and communities. Some of the most creative and effective responses to the ageing population challenge across the western world have come from smaller countries such as Holland and Denmark. With its similar sized population and distinct culture, Wales should seek to emulate those nations. That means:

- encouraging and inspiring people to think about their future housing needs
- raising older people’s expectations about the range and quality of housing options open to them as their needs and lifestyle change, and
- establishing a national climate in which the public, private and third sectors work well together to invest, innovate and co-create homes that older people want to live in and that are part of a thriving, inclusive community.

While Wales will develop Welsh solutions to Welsh challenges, policymakers, planners, lenders and designers should not be afraid to look to work done by its larger neighbour in this sector. The [HAPPI reports](#) by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Housing for Older People inquiries, for example, are a good starting point. They have done much to improve the design and inclusiveness of housing for older people in England. Importantly, taken together they address the bigger picture – looking also, for example, at flexible and innovative approaches to financing, town planning and tenure.

This new report seeks to do likewise and that’s why it’s appropriate to talk about a cultural transformation as much as the bricks and mortar. At one end of the chain that means encouraging innovation by designers and construction firms. The report suggests an annual national competition that recognises the best in design of purpose-built or age-sustainable housing in Wales.

At the other end of that chain are the consumers – older people with a range of needs, resources and aspirations. They are often ignored and Welsh Government and its partners should embark on raising awareness of the housing options available to them. As the report says, this could include public exhibitions to showcase the range of different housing models for people in or approaching retirement, or highlighting the wider benefits of each in addressing their specific lifestyle choices in later life.

There are already pockets of excellent housing for older people in Wales and putting the spotlight in these could inspire the nation. Not just its designers and those charged with meeting the housing needs of older people – but its people. This report shows how we can create spring – even summer – for those said to be in the autumn of their lives.

Following the launch of the expert's group report, the Housing LIN has invited other members of the Expert Group to contribute in writing a blog on their particular area of expertise. We hope to bring these to you over the coming weeks and months.

And if you have been inspired to write a case study for the Housing LIN on one of your innovative specialist housing developments or housing related care and support service, please email us at: cymru@housinglin.org.uk.

Lastly, to find out more about latest policy, funding and practice developments on housing for older people in Wales, visit our dedicated Housing LIN Cymru webpages [here](#).

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