

EP 18

Ymchwiliad i eiddo gwag

Inquiry into empty properties

Ymateb gan: Tai Pawb

Response from: Tai Pawb



promoting equality in housing
hybu cydraddoldeb ym maes tai

Tai Pawb

Response to:

Inquiry into Empty Properties

**Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee,
National Assembly for Wales**

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For further information about this paper please contact:

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Who we are

Tai Pawb (housing for all) is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The organisation's mission is, "To promote equality and social justice in housing in Wales". It operates a membership system which is open to local authorities, registered social landlords, third (voluntary) sector organisations, other housing interests and individuals.

What we do

Tai Pawb works closely with the Welsh Assembly Government and other key partners on national housing strategies and key working groups, to ensure that equality is an inherent consideration in national strategic development and implementation. The organisation also provides practical advice and assistance to its members on a range of equality and diversity issues in housing and related services.

Tai Pawb's vision is to be:

The primary driver in the promotion of equality and diversity in housing, leading to the reduction of prejudice and disadvantage, as well as changing lives for the better.

A valued partner who supports housing providers and services to recognise, respect and respond appropriately to the diversity of housing needs and characteristics of people living in Wales, including those who are vulnerable and marginalised.

For further information visit: www.taipawb.org

Charity registration no. 1110078

Company No. 5282554

Our comments

Empty properties are known to have various negative impacts - and on a wide-ranging scale - at both a community level as well as on a personal level if living in close proximity. This includes, but is not limited to:

- antisocial behaviour – empty properties often act as a magnet for low level crime
- environmental issues – attracting vermin or the fly-tipping of waste
- property values – in cases of noticeable neglect, properties in the immediate vicinity which are on the market have had their sale prices affected
- physical impact on neighbouring properties – for example with overgrown greenery, damp problems, access issues
- aesthetics – empty properties that have deteriorated give a poor impression of an area which can lead to a collective and wider sense of neglect in the community

In relation to the **awareness of the practical assistance that local authorities can offer to owners of empty properties**, we believe the level of awareness is relatively low. While local authorities are under increasing budget pressures, we believe it would be worthwhile there being a campaign – run regionally or perhaps nationally with the support of Welsh Government – to draw attention to the support.

The benefits of a relatively low cost of a national and time-limited campaign should outweigh the cost and level of resources that local authorities are having to bear in dealing with the consequences of troublesome empty properties and associated difficulties in housing people in need.

We believe that there is potential to do more to ensure that **empty properties are brought back into use**.

We commissioned a feasibility study earlier this year, written by Joy Kent, on ***‘Refugee Housing and Support’*** which looked into establishing temporary

accommodation and support specifically for refugees in Wales, based on models already at work by specialist providers in England. One of the key recommendations from the report focuses on the potential offered by an increased focus on empty properties, and suggests a consideration ‘...empty properties could be identified that could be brought back in to use by refugee-led organisations working in partnership with local authorities and RSLs and used on a long-term lease to provide supported accommodation for refugees’. Reflecting on projects which have been taken forward in England, those that were particularly successful provided properties either rent free, or charged a ‘peppercorn’ rent, and were, in the main, properties from local authorities, church groups, RSLs or private owners that wanted to donate. Government statistics for December 2018 (Parliament UK asylum statistics) show the number of supported asylum seekers living in dispersed accommodation in Wales at that point as Cardiff – 1293; Swansea – 843; Newport – 504; and Wrexham – 140. These figures compare unfavourably with similar-sized locations in England, demonstrating a clear need in Wales that is, as yet, unmet.

Tai Pawb has responded to previous consultations on **council tax** and empty properties. Notwithstanding prior comments, we believe that there is scope for the use of council tax premiums on long term empty homes. However, there may be a danger that, since local authorities are able to retain the revenue generated by additional council tax, any council tax strategy will be primarily driven by budgetary considerations and not housing need. This might be addressed by making sure that revenue generated in this way is ring fenced to address local housing needs.

Moreover, there remains a question as to whether using council tax as a tool will significantly alter the availability of affordable and good quality housing – this needs careful consideration. Not all empty properties will offer affordable housing, whether that’s based on the type of property, the state of the property (i.e. the need for modernisation or specific adaptations) or its location. In some rural areas for example, there may be remote properties which even if brought back into use could be unsuitable for certain population groups such

as older, retired people, working households, young families, vulnerable adults and the reasons may be poor transport links, distance from shops, facilities and schools, difficulties in maintaining and heating the property. Therefore although housing need may have been identified, it is important to consider to what extent the stock of long term empty properties, if brought back into use, will satisfy that housing need. To that end, and considering that there is, in general, very poor access for disabled people to the private rented sector, we believe there are opportunities by owners of empty properties are provided with incentives through the use loans and grants for adaptations.

Similarly, opportunities exist for special incentives, should empty properties be used through the Housing First programme, in order to quickly regenerate a property – tackling many of the issues referred to in the earlier phase of this response – while also ensuring that the needs of those faced with homelessness are met more quickly through having access to a property.

In focusing on the private rented sector specifically, Tai Pawb, in conjunction with the Residential Landlords Association (RLA), has hosted [‘Open Doors’](#) for the past two years, a Big Lottery-funded project that has sought to break down barriers between landlords and tenants and promote equality and diversity in the PRS. This is an area of work in which we would warmly welcome further involvement, using the Open Doors project as a vehicle to further ensure that tenants have access to good quality homes and security of tenure, and landlords have support to develop their skills and understanding of unmet housing need, including bring empty properties back to use.