



Wales Safer Communities Network response to: Renting homes: bed and breakfast accommodation used for homelessness purposes consultation response.

Closed 15 September 2023

Response submitted via email.

Introduction

The Wales Safer Communities Network was established in January 2021 following the recommendations of the Welsh Government's Working Together for Safer Communities Review. The Network aims to become the strategic voice for community safety in Wales, working collaboratively to champion and support community safety partnership working, and influence the shaping and development of national policy and local practice.

Community Safety partners include Fire and Rescue Services, Public Health, Councils, Police, Probation and the third sector.

A separate response maybe submitted by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

Consultation Responses:

Question 1: Do you agree with the policy of excluding B&B accommodation provided to meet homelessness housing duties from being an occupation contract?

Yes

In order to support the 'no one left out' approach we agree in principle to the proposed amendments. We do however wish to highlight that these changes must come with appropriate safeguards both to the Business and to the tenants. B&B are not designed to be long term solutions and our concern is that by introducing this proposal it does provide greater opportunity for extended use. We are also aware that the insecurity caused by the short-term nature of B&B can leave children and adults worried about where they will sleep which can prevent them from having the ability to engage in services and support, such as those which enable community cohesion and reduce anti-social behaviour, criminal exploitation and manage substance misuse.

As a Network we are aware that there is a housing crisis and to ensure people are offered safe accommodation this would go some way to offer protection for tenants. However, we do feel that further investment in more social housing provision in Wales is required to provide an appropriate long term solution.

Question 2: Do you think that B&B accommodation providers are likely to stop providing temporary accommodation to those who are homeless, if the accommodation is subject to an occupation contract?

Don't know

We suspect that if B&B accommodation providers are subject to occupation contracts they will be less inclined to offer short term provision, due to the possible longer term duties this contract would have. They may see it as having restrictive implications that this would have on their business which may impact their income, or freedoms to amend the direction of their business if they were subject to additional duties. An alternative opinion is that it could provide them with a more constant income which may alleviate any negative impact caused by the cost of living or the seasonal nature of B&B activity, though this may have a longer term impact and an overall detrimental impact on tourism with reduced accommodation options.

Question 3: Does the proposal mitigate the risk of a reduction in the availability of B&B provision as temporary accommodation, due to it otherwise becoming subject to an occupation contract?

Don't know

The Network agrees that this proposal appears to potentially mitigate the risk of a reduction in the availability of B&B provision for temporary housing. It should remain one of the last resorts rather than a first choice option as it provides limited assurance for those accessing the provision but may be more suitable than some hostel accommodation when children or adults at risk are concerned. It is important to note that B&Bs are independent businesses who have the option to refuse the use of their premises to house the homeless. We would like to reiterate (as recognised within the consultation) the use of B&B accommodation is not a fix to the housing crisis and more suitable and accessible, long and short term, social housing is required across Wales.

The Network are cognoscente that by making B&Bs subject to occupational contracts then there would be additional risk that those B&Bs that are currently bridging the gap may rescind their services and Local Housing Services may be left with even more limited options available to protect vulnerable citizens.

Question 4: Do you consider there to be any additional risks to homeless households directly, or on the wider approach to homelessness prevention as a result of these proposals?

Yes

Question 5: If yes, please identify these risks and possible mitigations.

There is always a risk that by enabling landlords to not be subject to occupational contracts, individuals and/or families placed in B&B's who are subject to staying their longer than anticipated fail to get the appropriate safeguards designed to protect them (i.e. short notice eviction). We are also aware there may need to be additional

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safeguarding checks for those running B&Bs when there are children and vulnerable adults housed.

If a family or individual has been placed in a B&B and have settled due to the extended period of time they have been there then there are welfare concerns in respect moving them away from established support links i.e. school/ community.

We are also aware that the insecurity caused by the short term nature of B&B can leave children and adults worried about where they will sleep which can prevent them from having the ability to engage in services and support, such as those which enable community cohesion and reduce anti-social behaviour, criminal exploitation and manage substance misuse

As a Network we do understand that this may be a situation that can not be avoided, however where possible the periods of stay in B&Bs should be as short as possible and by exception.

Question 6: Do you consider there to be any wider potential risks or adverse effects of the proposal?

Don't know

We have already voiced our concern that this mitigation may actually place individuals at risk of staying in B&Bs for longer than desired. However, the use of B&Bs is not new and we recognise that housing and homelessness teams use this provision to offset other options not available to them and as such there should already be established local procedures in place.

There may be negative impacts on community cohesion and community safety with those housed in temporary accommodation such as B&Bs may not develop community links and have learnt not to be attached to an area or people. This lack of cohesion could result in non-engagement from services, support and education or in increased littering, anti-social behaviour, criminal behaviour or risk of exploitation.

Question 7: We would like to know your views on the effects that the proposal would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

We do not think the proposal will have a positive or negative impact on the use of Welsh and treating Welsh no less favourable than English. Information needs to be available for all those involved in the process in either Welsh or English including and guidance or procedure.

Question 8: Please also explain how you believe the proposal could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

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We have no comment on how the proposal could be changed to have a positive impact on the use of the Welsh language providing detail included in question 7 applies.

Question 9: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

Whilst the use of B&Bs is not new practice the Network would suggest formal guidance on their use with suggested contracts with approved B&B owners to ensure the safety of the individuals using them. Safeguards such as DBS checks for owners if children or vulnerable adults are to be staying at the residence is one such example.

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