



Dear John,

13th of January 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to feed into the Local Government and Housing Committee's inquiry into second homes.

The housing crisis is an issue that has been raised with my office through multiple sources in recent months and I have written to Welsh Government (letter attached) to express my concerns on the impact that the current situation of housing in Wales will have on all seven well-being goals as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The situation is indeed dire and urgent action is necessary to address it before it further impacts the well-being of our current and future generations.

While the Act does not prescribe a specific solution, it does require Welsh Government and public bodies to carry out sustainable development and thinking holistically about the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It also requires them to act in a manner that does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs and that takes account of the long-term, prevention, involvement, collaboration and integration.

The people who have contacted my office have been in this case particularly concerned with the involvement way of working and have been calling for a democratisation of the approach to housing in Wales. They are asking Welsh Government for an 'emergency housing conference' as a first step in the process that could then lead to a citizen's assembly to enable communities across Wales to directly participate in the solutions and ensure everyone's voice is heard on this issue.

Following the attached letter, which I sent to the First Minister, I have recently met the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James, to discuss this issue. The Minister has agreed, through my office, to meet with campaigners to hear their concerns and potential solutions, including exploring a Citizens Assembly on housing.

Thank you again for looking into this important issue and I look forward to reading your conclusions and recommendations.

Yours Sincerely
Sophie

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sophie Howe', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Sophie Howe

Comisiynydd Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol Cymru / Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

By email

7th October 2021

Dear First Minister,

I am writing in relation to the housing crisis that Wales is currently experiencing and its impact on the well-being of Future Generations.

I have been contacted by individuals and community organisations who have expressed grave concerns about the detrimental impact of second homes and widespread commercial holiday letting of previously residential properties.

While this has so far been framed mostly as a Welsh language and rural matter, it also is a systemic issue that has ramifications on much more than language and rurality, especially as it interacts, impacts and is impacted by other systemic issues such as the climate and nature emergencies, health and equality. That is why I decided to write to you to highlight the many ways, in which the housing crisis is affecting the well-being of current and future generations, and its negative impact on all seven well-being goals.

The [Brooks report](#) on second homes tells us that the rising figures for second homes are already as high as 46% in some of our communities, while members of these same communities are put on waiting lists for social housing that, with current timescales, might mean they will wait years and would mean that Welsh Government would have to build more and more housing to meet this demand, thus increasing the carbon footprint of the residential sector and making it more difficult to reach Wales' target of net zero by 2050. The fact that a large number of properties remain empty for a big proportion of the year also means that local businesses cannot survive, and local economies are destroyed, thus impacting the goal of *A Prosperous Wales*.

Recent events in Afghanistan mean that soon Wales is likely to expect hundreds of refugees, who will also need housing. The current housing provision is clearly not sufficient for people in Wales, which would mean these refugees having to compete with local people of lower socio-economic background for the available social housing. To be a truly *Globally Responsible Wales*, we need to prevent such an outcome and ensure that housing is available to both local people and those fleeing from war now and in the future.

The increasing demand on land for housing would also mean less land for reforestation and green initiatives, thus limiting Wales' ability to respond to the nature crisis and be a *Resilient* nation. If communities are being priced out of rural areas and into locations 'less desirable' for holiday homes, this is also likely to decrease their access to nature and their ability to grow and access local food, overall diminishing their well-being.

Housing has long been recognised as a wider determinant of *health* - we know that our houses massively impact our physical and mental health, quality and even length of life. We need to ensure that all people in Wales have access to quality housing in order to address many underlying health issues that we are facing today.

The housing crisis has huge implications for *equality*. It is mainly impacting people from lower socio-economic backgrounds - people who cannot afford to buy their home, relying on landlords who wish to turn their properties into Airbnb's, young people who cannot afford to purchase their first home in the community they grew up in, and people who are being priced out because they cannot match the offers of those who can afford multiple properties. We have heard stories of mothers who await eviction, uncertain where their children will grow up and go to school.

Communities are being torn with local people moving away and losing connection to their roots, heritage and language. The housing crisis so far has mainly spread to the heartlands of the *Welsh language*, meaning that not only is the language not being promoted - it is actually being lost as people have to leave their communities. Many areas are also losing key local amenities like shops, banks and fire services. We were told the tragic story of the last fireman in a village in Wales, who is effectively homeless and sleeps on a sofa but is unable to move away because the community would then lose its fire service as there are no available volunteers around due to most properties being second homes and empty for most of the year.

As evident, this is a cross-cutting issue, which impacts many Ministerial portfolios and has a considerable negative impact on people's well-being today, which is likely to increase and span generations, impacting our children and grandchildren as well.

Welsh Government has a number of duties that need to be considered in relation to the housing crisis in Wales, including its duties under the *Well-being of Future Generations Act*, the *Welsh Language Measure* and the *Socio-economic Duty*.

I welcome the Government's announcement of a three-pronged approach to address the impact of second home ownership in Wales. I welcome the intention to trial this new approach in a pilot area. However, I am keen to have more details about the Government's plans, including how they will ensure consideration of the duties above. I would be grateful if you would provide more information about the likely timetables, the location of the proposed trial and the criteria for assessing the outcomes of these new measures. I would also like to learn more about the proposed Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan. The Welsh Language Commissioner has written to Julie James MS requesting a meeting to discuss these matters and is looking forward to doing so soon.

One of the recommendations in the [section on Housing](#) in the [Future Generations Report 2020](#) is that Welsh Government '*Work with organisations and communities to set a vision and long-term strategy for the future of housing in Wales.*'

The communities and groups that have contacted me have highlighted the need to take urgent action to tackle the housing crisis in time to prevent further irreparable damage. They have proposed multiple solutions, including the **urgent declaration of a housing emergency**, and a **citizens' assembly on housing**. They are keen to work constructively with Welsh Government to co-produce solutions. I encourage you to take an approach of true involvement and collaboration with communities in this matter as they are the ones most affected by this and can

speak with experience and awareness of which solutions will work. We enclose a letter on behalf of Siarter Cartrefi and other stakeholders who are anxious to arrange a meeting to discuss their concerns.

As this is a cross-cutting issue, I am copying in Julie James MS Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS Deputy Minister for Climate Change and Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and the Welsh Language and I would ask that this is treated with urgency.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,
Sophie



Sophie Howe
Future Generations Commissioner for Wales