



Chartered  
Institute of  
Housing  
Cymru



# Public attitudes to social housing in Wales: Report for the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru

## Introduction

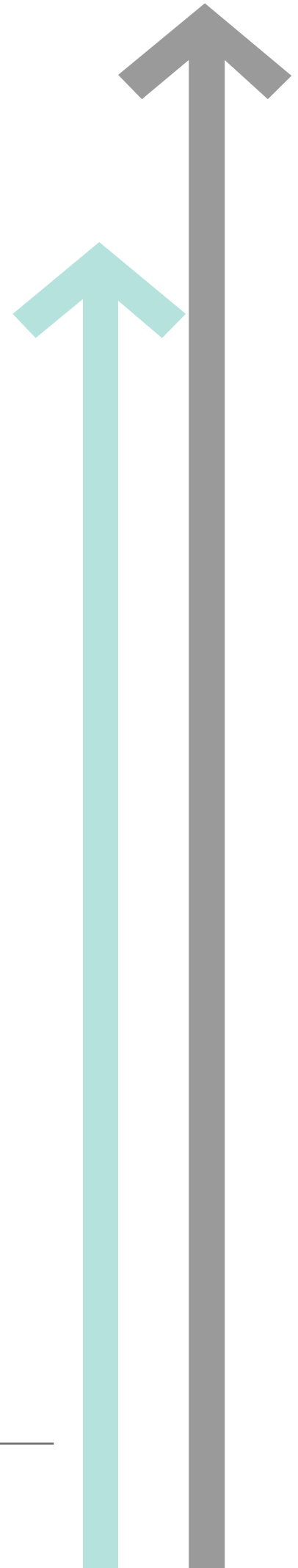
This work has been commissioned by the Tyfu Tai Cymru project which is a 5-year policy project seeking to provide insightful analysis and address gaps in evidence to inform current and future housing policy. The project is managed and delivered by CIH Cymru and is possible thanks to the support of Oak Foundation.

A series of questions on attitudes to, and perceptions of, social housing were added to the March Welsh Political Barometer poll. This poll was one of a regular series, conducted by ITV Cymru-Wales in collaboration with Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre and YouGov (who carry out the fieldwork). The poll was carried out via the internet, with a sample of over 1000 adults; the sample was weighted to be representative of the population across Wales.

In addition to getting full responses on all the questions asked, the results provided by YouGov include detailed breakdowns by various social and political categories. Thus, we can analyse results according to a number of factors, including:

- How respondents voted in the 2017 general election
- How respondents voted in the 2016 Brexit referendum
- Gender
- Age
- Social Class
- Region within Wales
- Housing status

As will be discussed below, the last of these categories produces some particularly interesting differences on many questions.



## The importance of housing

The first question relevant to housing in the poll was, in fact, a standard question on major issues that has been asked in several previous Welsh Political Barometer polls. This asks respondents:

*“Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time?”*

Respondents are then given a lengthy list of options, and invited to select up to three issues. They can also select ‘None of these’ and ‘Don’t know’. (Because respondents can choose up to three issues, the percentages reported below add up to well over 100). Two of the possible options listed were ‘Homelessness’ and ‘Housing’.

The following were the most commonly chosen responses:

**Britain leaving the EU: 56%**

**Health: 45%**

**Immigration and Asylum: 30%**

**The economy: 29%**

*After this, Homelessness and Housing combined were chosen by 25% of the poll’s respondents. This makes housing overall one of the top five issues – chosen by far more people than were, for instance, Defence, Education, the Environment or Crime. Housing and Homeless were also selected notably more often by respondents themselves living in social housing than they were by people who were home owners, or even those renting privately. Interestingly, there were not such major differences by age-group or social class.*

Previous barometer polls that included this question did not generally list both Homelessness and Housing as responses. For instance, the final last pre-election poll in 2017 that carried this question (fielded in late May 2017) only included ‘Housing’ as a response. This option was chosen by 14 percent of respondents. We cannot therefore be sure of whether the 25 percent choosing one of the two housing responses in our new poll represent a genuine post-Grenfell rise in the perceived importance of housing issues, or simply reflect the impact of including an additional housing option in the list. In reality it is probably some combination of the two.

## Government responsibility for housing

A second question that was asked in the poll enquired about the responsibilities of government:

*“Which of the following, if any, do you think the government is responsible for ensuring are provided to a decent standard for every citizen, no matter what their income? Please tick all that apply.”*

Headline responses were as follows:

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| A health service, including hospital and local GPs | <b>85%</b> |
| Schools  | <b>77%</b> |
| Defence  | <b>65%</b> |
| Housing  | <b>60%</b> |
| Public transport                                   | <b>56%</b> |
| Other [see Tab 1]                                  | <b>4%</b>  |
| None of the above                                  | <b>2%</b>  |
| Don’t know   | <b>7%</b>  |

*In short, a majority of respondents did view it as a government responsibility to provide housing to a decent standard. This indeed was the majority view across all age groups and social grades, as well as all main categories of housing tenure: even home owners in general believed that government had responsibilities in this area. However, housing was identified as a core government responsibility by a somewhat smaller majority than did so for health, schools and defence.*

## Housing and health

One of the key arguments often made by advocates of increased spending on social housing is that, by providing people with decent housing, we can avoid or minimise other social problems later on; that spending on social housing should be seen as an investment that can reap numerous rewards – including avoiding having to spend more later on dealing with the problems that lack of, or poor, housing can generate.

With this in mind, the poll framed one question around the relative priority of spending on social housing versus another key priority, the NHS:

*“Please imagine that the Welsh Government was deciding where to allocate more funding, and was choosing between spending more money on the NHS and spending more money on social housing. On the below scale, where 0 means spending all the additional funding on the NHS and 10 means spending all the additional money on social housing, where do you think the Welsh Government should allocate the funding?”*

Respondents were also able to select a Don’t Know option for this question, although only eight percent of them did so.

Opinion on this question clearly leaned towards the NHS. This is hardly surprising: it is perhaps the most iconic public service in the UK, while the poll was fielded just towards the end of the 2017-18 NHS winter crisis period. Fully half of the sample selected between 0 and 3 on the scale, indicating that they thought resources should be pushed primarily towards the health service. **However, more than a third of the sample chose 5 or above on the scale, showing that there was also considerable public sentiment behind at least some balance between competing priorities in public spending. Those living in social housing were particularly likely to take a more balanced view on this question, and not wish all or nearly all resources to be pushed to the NHS: some 38 percent of them chose the mid-point 5 on the 0-10 scale.**

## Who should be helped with housing?

A further question in the poll asked people about the sorts of people who respondents believed “should be eligible for help from the state to meet their housing needs?” A list of different types of people was provided to respondents, and they were asked to tick all those groups whom they believed should receive help. Four percent of respondents suggested that no categories of people should receive help, while another ten percent chose a Don’t Know option. The following table shows the percentage who indicated that each respective category should be eligible to receive some state support:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| People sleeping rough on the streets  | 72% |
| People being housed in temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation, paid for by their local authority         | 63% |
| People sleeping in shelters provided by charities   | 63% |
| People sleeping on a friend’s couch one night and then moving onto another friend’s couch the next night    | 45% |
| People who have to live with their parents because they cannot afford to buy or rent somewhere on their own | 21% |

This shows clear majority support for several categories of people who would be classified as ‘homeless’ to be eligible for support. Such support is particularly high among those currently renting privately or living in social housing, but rather lower among home-owners.

## Responses to statements on social housing

The poll also fielded a set of statements about social housing. As is common practice in social surveys, respondents were given a series of (often quite pointed) statements, and asked to indicate their extent of agreement or disagreement with each, on a scale running from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'.

The series of statements were as follows:

I would never want to live in social housing

All young people should aspire to become home owners

I would be happy to see more social housing built near my own home

We need more social housing in my local community

Social housing estates suffer from high levels of anti-social behaviour and crime

Social housing is of a low quality

People who grew up in social housing are less likely to attain educational success

Social housing is where we hide people with problems

As can be seen, and in line with standard practice in social surveys, the statements included ones that were both positive and negative with regard to social housing. There was not thus a set of questions all pushing people to respond in a particular direction.

The following table summarises the overall pattern of results for these statements:

| Statement  | % Agree | % Disagree | % Neither / Don't Know |
|--|---------|------------|------------------------|
| I would never want to live in social housing                                       | 41      | 29         | 30                     |
| All young people should aspire to become home owners                               | 45      | 18         | 37                     |
| I would be happy to see more social housing built near my own home                 | 33      | 33         | 34                     |
| We need more social housing in my local community                                  | 38      | 23         | 39                     |
| Social housing estates suffer from high levels of anti-social behaviour and crime  | 52      | 12         | 37                     |
| Social housing is of a low quality   | 25      | 36         | 39                     |
| People who grew up in social housing are less likely to attain educational success | 27      | 38         | 35                     |
| Social housing is where we hide people with problems                               | 28      | 38         | 34                     |

Overall, this pattern of responses reveals a mixed set of attitudes towards social housing. *There is significant public recognition of the need for social housing. However, there are also some negative public perceptions of social housing. It is not generally seen as desirable - home ownership still remains widely valued - and social housing estates are seen as problematic by many. There is also evidence of some NIMBY-ism in attitudes, with at least some respondents recognising the need for social housing yet not wishing for it to be built near to them.*

These overall patterns, however, in some respects conceal as much as they reveal. For there are substantial differences in responses on many of these items within the sample. These differences are not primarily by party preference, age group or gender, but by social class and - most obviously of all - by housing tenure. *In particular, people who actually have some experience of living in social housing have much more positive perceptions of it than home owners or private renters.* This is illustrated in the table below: some 75 percent of those currently in social housing disagree with the statement that "I would never want to live in social housing", compared to only twenty percent of home owners. Similarly, far more of those in social housing say that they "would be happy to see more social housing built near my own home" and agree that "we need more social housing in my local community", and far fewer of those currently in social housing agreed that "People who grew up in social housing are less likely to attain educational success".

| Statement  | Home-Owners | Private Renters | Social Housing Occupants |
|--|-------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| I would never want to live in social housing                                       | 47%         | 42%             | 9%                       |
| All young people should aspire to become home owners                               | 49%         | 37%             | 22%                      |
| I would be happy to see more social housing built near my own home                 | 26%         | 38%             | 69%                      |
| We need more social housing in my local community                                  | 35%         | 38%             | 63%                      |
| Social housing estates suffer from high levels of anti-social behaviour and crime  | 56%         | 58%             | 25%                      |
| Social housing is of a low quality   | 23%         | 37%             | 18%                      |
| People who grew up in social housing are less likely to attain educational success | 31%         | 36%             | 8%                       |
| Social housing is where we hide people with problems                               | 30%         | 31%             | 16%                      |

*The overall message, then seems to be that negative perceptions of social housing, where they exist, are strongly concentrated among those people who do not actually live in such housing. Those who do live there have much more positive attitudes.* Who does live in social housing?

One of the final questions in the poll asked respondents about the sort of people who occupy social housing:

*“What sort of people do you believe typically occupy the social housing that is provided in your area and other local authorities? Please tick all that apply.”*

Respondents were then once more provided with a list of options: the table below shows the percentage of the poll’s sample who chose each option. (Twelve percent of the sample selected the Don’t Know option).

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| People on low incomes  | 75% |
| Single mothers   | 67% |
| Immigrants and Asylum Seekers                                    | 49% |
| Working families   | 44% |
| Drug addicts   | 38% |
| Retired people   | 28% |
| People working in professions like teaching, the law or medicine | 7%  |

*The general perception, therefore, is that social housing occupancy is concentrated to some extent among the poor and single mothers, with many also believing that drug addicts and those coming into the UK are frequent users of it. However, nearly half the sample also suggest that working families typically occupy social housing - so the overall perception is certainly not that social housing is dominated exclusively by people linked to major social problems. And, once more, there are distinct differences in perception by housing tenure. Those who actually live in social housing are much more likely than others to believe that it is commonly occupied by working families, and much less likely to think that the typical tenant in such housing is an immigrant or asylum seeker.*

## Working in social housing

The final question in the poll enquired about perception of the social housing sector as a place to work. Respondents were asked:

*“Which of the following would you consider to be a desirable area to work in for yourself or a family member? Please tick all that apply.”*

Respondents were once more given a list of pre-defined response options, and could choose as many as they wished, or a ‘None of the above’ option (chosen by seven percent), or Don’t Know (chosen by twelve percent). The table below summarises responses:

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Medicine (as a doctor or nurse)         | <b>63%</b> |
| Law                                     | <b>57%</b> |
| Teaching                                | <b>57%</b> |
| Designing apps for computers and phones | <b>48%</b> |
| Banking                                 | <b>47%</b> |
| Retail                                  | <b>37%</b> |
| Social housing provision                | <b>32%</b> |

*As can be seen, social housing was the least commonly selected of the various options placed before respondents. However, most of the other options were clearly desirable careers, so this was quite a tough ‘test’ for social housing. Nonetheless, one-third of our sample selected it. Within the overall sample, there were interesting differences: not this time by housing status but by gender, with women more likely than men (by 36% to 27%) to have chosen social housing as a desirable career. There were also some differences by age group: younger respondents were least likely to choose working in social housing as desirable, those in the 5-64 age bracket the most likely.*

## Conclusion

This poll has provided valuable and detailed evidence on attitudes towards social housing in Wales today. That evidence comes from a source with established credibility and a track record of accurately gauging public attitudes in Wales.

The evidence from this poll shows considerable recognition of the importance of social housing among many people in Wales. It has also some significant variation in attitudes towards social housing, and those who occupy it. There is some evidence of negative attitudes in some places. But among those with direct experience of social housing, attitudes are substantially more positive.



## Tyfu Tai Cymru - Because Housing Matters

Tyfu Tai Cymru (TTC) is a 5-year policy project seeking to provide insightful analysis and evidence to help shape housing policy in Wales both now and in the future. Engaging with housing professionals and local communities TTC will bring housing to life working along three strands:

- Building the right homes to meet demand
- Making sure housing is always a priority for Local Government
- Showing housing's role in keep people well and healthy

If you would like more information on the TTC project or would like to get involved in the work using your expertise and insight contact [Catherine.may@cih.org](mailto:Catherine.may@cih.org) (Tyfu Tai Cymru Manager).

