



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK
Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee
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(By Email)

Please ask for: Councillor Andrea Lewis
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Our Ref: AL/JG
Your Ref:
Date:

20 February 2023

Dear Councillor Black,

Re: - Scrutiny Letter to Cabinet Member for Service Transformation dated 30 Jan (SPC 13 Dec - Homelessness)

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the Scrutiny Programme Committee that was received on 30 January 2023.

In your letter you have asked for further information on three areas:

a) Information on comparative figures across Local Authorities regarding the numbers of rough sleepers.

As stated in the report, as of December 2022, Swansea was averaging 9 people sleeping rough per night.

Since the pandemic the collation of rough sleeping figures has changed across Wales as there is no longer a requirement for LA's to carry out an annual rough sleeping count. In addition, it is always difficult to compare LA's across Wales with regard to levels of rough sleeping as there will always be variations depending on a number of factors, such as size of Authority, density of population, services available etc.

In October 2022, it was reported that 5 LA's had over 10 rough sleepers in their area, these were Newport, Cardiff, Gwynedd, Pembrokeshire and Caerphilly. Newport reported the highest figure with 33 rough sleepers.

b) Ensuring that help available such as Mortgage Rescue Schemes (or similar in operation) and access to Social Housing Grant, is made more visible to the public as part of proactive efforts to prevent homelessness, particularly as the cost-of-living crisis bites further.

The Mortgage Rescue Scheme funded by the Welsh Government was stopped in about 2010/2011. Since then, there hasn't been a formal scheme running but the RSL's can access grants on a case-by-case basis to purchase properties in order to keep people in their homes and thereby prevent homelessness. This has been done in exceptional cases and we have worked with one RSL this year whereby the needs of the family were such that keeping the family in their home was the best option.

There are other ways of course to assist people who are having difficulties with their mortgage. Housing Options operate a dedicated money advice service, which provides



budgeting advice and negotiates with Lenders to prevent mortgage repossessions wherever possible. On occasions, we have been able to access prevention funds to assist with mortgage payments. However, with the cost of living and a rise in interest rates and repossessions, there is growing concern in this area. Currently, organisations such as Shelter Cymru are lobbying the Welsh Government to re-introduce the Mortgage Rescue Scheme. Whilst the landscape has changed since 2011, particularly around house prices, as a Local Authority we would be supportive of the development of a new Mortgage Rescue Scheme provided it was appropriately funded. I will ensure that the views of the Committee are shared with the Welsh Government as this is something that they are having early discussions on.

c) Comment on reasons for the reduction in the supply of affordable housing within the private rented sector.

There are a number of factors which have contributed to the reduction of supply of affordable housing in the private rented sector in Wales. In recent surveys carried out with Landlords they have cited a number of reasons for leaving the market. These have included:

- The ability to sell their property at a relatively high price
- The pandemic and the difficulties they had with being able to evict tenants who were in arrears
- Implications of the Renting Home Act
- Moving from long-term renting into Air B&B market

Consequently, with less properties available, demand is outstripping supply leading to an increase in rent being charged, often not in line with Local Housing Allowance rates. As stated in the Scrutiny report, we are mitigating against this by increasing the number of Social housing properties and working with landlords in the private rented sector to develop innovative solutions. We will continue to consider ways to increase the supply of affordable housing, particularly one bed properties.

The meeting on 13 December 2022 with the Scrutiny Policy Committee allowed us to reflect on what has been achieved in Swansea since the pandemic in 2020. It also gave us the opportunity to look at the challenges that lie ahead, both for the Local Authority and Wales as a whole, with regards to the ongoing housing crisis.

If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Y Cynghorydd Andrea Lewis / Councillor Andrea Lewis
Dirprwy Arweinydd / Aelod y Cabinet dros Drawsnewid Gwasanaethau
Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member for Service Transformation