



Building a Future: Plaid Cymru's Vision for Transforming Social Housing Delivery in Wales

a report commissioned
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Pre-ambble

Wales faces a housing crisis of unprecedented scale, with over 139,000 people on social housing waiting lists and homelessness at record levels. Addressing this crisis requires bold, innovative solutions and a renewed focus on social housing delivery. This paper sets out Plaid Cymru's vision for transforming social housing provision in Wales, emphasising the need for robust policies, strategic planning, and targeted investment. Central to this vision is the principle that everyone in Wales should have the right to a safe, affordable, and adequate home.

The paper explores the key challenges and barriers to delivery, such as funding gaps, planning system inefficiencies, and limited land availability, while highlighting opportunities like community-led housing initiatives, while offering a revitalised vision for Unnos, considering its potential strategic role as an enhanced, arms-length entity with independent finance-raising capacity and strengthened compulsory purchase powers. It concludes with actionable recommendations and next steps for ensuring Wales achieves a sustainable and equitable social housing future.

Introduction: Challenges and Issues in Social Housing Delivery

Wales is in the grip of a housing crisis that has grown over decades, leaving tens of thousands of people without adequate, affordable homes. For too many, the promise of a secure home is out of reach, with the number of households in temporary accommodation and the social housing waiting list figures continuing to climb. This crisis is a human tragedy, but it is also a solvable problem—one that demands urgent action and visionary leadership.

Plaid Cymru believes that social housing is not just a safety net; it is a cornerstone of a fair and just society. A home provides stability, supports physical and mental health, and underpins opportunities for education and employment. Yet, Wales has been held back by systemic barriers that hinder the delivery of social housing at the scale required to meet need. This paper sets out our vision for overcoming these barriers and delivering transformative change.

One of the most significant challenges is understanding and meeting housing need. The Welsh Government's target of delivering 20,000 low-carbon social homes by 2026 is ambitious, yet evidence suggests it will fall short. The ability to accurately measure housing need and translate it into actionable targets is critical. Equally vital is ensuring the funding is in place to deliver these homes—current funding mechanisms are insufficient, and innovative solutions will be required.

Data, too, plays a vital role in addressing the housing crisis. Reliable, transparent data is essential for informed decision-making, yet current deficiencies hinder effective planning and resource allocation. Improvements in data collection and analysis will strengthen accountability and ensure that resources are directed where they are needed most.

Planning remains a persistent obstacle to swift housing delivery. Lengthy processes and inconsistent application of planning policies across local authorities slow the pace of construction. Addressing these inefficiencies is essential to unlocking the potential for social housing development.

Land availability is another critical issue. The high cost of land, compounded by speculative practices and limited public land reserves, restricts opportunities for large-scale social housing projects. Innovative approaches, including reforms to land banking and enhanced use of compulsory purchase powers, must be part of the solution.

While these structural issues dominate the landscape, there are also significant opportunities to be seized. Community-led housing initiatives provide a powerful model for delivering homes that reflect local needs. Similarly, modern methods of construction, such as modular housing, could speed up delivery while reducing costs and environmental impact.

A revitalised vision for Unnos, as an enhanced, arms-length entity with independent finance-raising capacity and strengthened compulsory purchase powers, offers an exciting opportunity to lead Wales's social housing revolution. Such an entity could drive the delivery of large-scale, strategic projects while aligning housing efforts with broader regeneration and economic development goals. This paper explores the potential for Unnos or a new entity to become a cornerstone of Plaid Cymru's vision for housing in Wales.

The following sections delve into these issues in greater detail, outlining the challenges and opportunities ahead and setting out a roadmap for achieving Plaid Cymru's bold ambition: a Wales where everyone has a home they can afford, and where social housing is a driver of equity, opportunity, and sustainability.

Measuring and Meeting Housing Need, and Data Requirements

The delivery of social housing in Wales must begin with a robust understanding of the scale and nature of housing need, both at the national and local levels. Accurate data and targeted action are essential to address the growing crisis of homelessness, temporary accommodation, and inadequate housing. The current methods of assessing need, alongside the Welsh Government's approaches to meeting demand, highlight both progress and significant gaps that require urgent attention.

National Level Demand

The latest statistics paint a stark picture of the housing crisis in Wales. In 2023-24, 13,539 households were assessed as homeless, while an estimated 173 individuals were sleeping rough on a single night in September 2024. Meanwhile, 11,363 people were housed in temporary accommodation, including nearly 3,000 children, as of the same date. Alarmingly, 139,000 individuals were on waiting lists for social housing as of October 2023, according to data obtained through Freedom of Information requests. These figures underscore the critical shortage of suitable, permanent housing options.

The Bevan Foundation's analysis of Shelter Cymru casework revealed that the lack of social homes is the single most significant barrier faced by individuals living in temporary accommodation. Groups particularly affected include single-person households, larger families, and those requiring accessible or adapted housing. This shortage reflects broader systemic issues, such as insufficient supply and a mismatch between the homes available and the needs of those seeking housing.

Welsh Government (WG) central estimates suggest that 7,400 additional homes are needed annually between 2019/20 and 2023/24, with 52% of this demand attributed to market housing and 48% to affordable housing. However, these estimates are based on outdated 2018 household projections and the number of households in temporary accommodation as of 2019, which was 2,229. By March 2023, this figure had more than doubled to 5,481 households. The estimates fail to account for households living in unsuitable accommodation,

and WG's own statistical quality report concedes that the figures likely underestimate the true scale of unmet need.

Experts and organisations have called for improvements in how housing need is assessed. Shelter Cymru advocates for the inclusion of a qualitative dimension in housing assessments to ensure that outcomes reflect the needs of communities. Similarly, Cymorth Cymru and Tai Pawb stress that delivering the right homes in the right places must take precedence over a purely unit-led approach.

The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), CIH Cymru, and Tai Pawb have called for a Welsh Housing Survey, akin to the English Housing Survey, to provide a more detailed and consistent picture of housing needs. However, despite a commitment to exploring the feasibility of a five-year survey, the former Cabinet Secretary confirmed in April 2024 that there are no plans for an annual housing survey, citing resource constraints.

Estimating Local Need

At the local level, housing need is assessed through Local Housing Market Assessments (LHMAs), conducted by Local Authorities (LAs) every five years and refreshed every two years. These assessments inform Local Development Plans (LDPs) and Social Housing Grant (SHG) prospectuses, which specify the types and sizes of housing required in each area.

Following updated LHMA guidance in 2022, assessments now include previously unaccounted-for categories such as overcrowded households, rough sleepers, hidden homelessness, and unsuitably housed individuals on social housing waiting lists. Despite these improvements, there are concerns about the reliability of these assessments. The Bevan Foundation and Crisis have highlighted issues such as underestimation of need, resource constraints faced by LAs, and a lack of consistency in methodology. Crisis has also called for greater consideration of protected characteristics, including age, household size, and disabilities, to ensure that assessments fully reflect the diversity of housing needs.



The Senedd's Local Government and Housing Committee has reported that current social housing provision often fails to align with the needs of those on waiting lists. For instance, there is a pronounced shortage of housing suitable for retirement-age applicants and single individuals. The Planning Officers Society Wales (POSW), CIH Cymru, and Swansea Council have emphasised the "massive demand" for one-bedroom properties, a need that is not adequately addressed by the current planning system. To tackle this, organisations such as Cwmpas have proposed community-led housing solutions, while Conwy Council has pointed to the potential of repurposing empty properties above high streets.

Meeting Demand

The Welsh Government has set a target of delivering 20,000 new low-carbon homes for social rent by 2026. As of March 2023, 5,775 homes had been delivered, of which an estimated 83% (4,793 units) were for social rent, according to the Bevan Foundation. However, the Audit Wales report on affordable housing warns that achieving this target will require significant additional funding and that even meeting the target would likely fall short of addressing the scale of demand.

Since the target was established, the housing landscape has worsened. Homelessness and temporary accommodation usage have surged, and the number of people on social housing waiting lists has reached 139,000. Many experts argue that the 20,000-home target is insufficient. Housing Europe suggests that social housing must comprise at least 20% of a nation's housing stock to provide adequate options and stabilise private market prices. By comparison, social housing constitutes 16% of Wales's housing stock, far below the levels seen in Scotland (23%) and other European nations such as Denmark (20%) and the Netherlands (29%). Achieving a 20% share in Wales would require approximately 60,000 additional homes, while a more ambitious target of 33% would necessitate an increase of 250,000 homes.

To address this, there is a growing consensus that Wales needs a bolder, long-term strategy for social housing delivery, extending beyond the confines of individual Senedd terms. The Local Government and Housing Committee has called for a plan to bring social housing closer to 20% of the housing stock within the next Senedd term, a vision that should form the basis of Plaid Cymru's policy approach.

Data and Delivery Challenges

Current delivery methods include Social Housing Grants, the Unnos national construction company, and the Welsh Government's Land Division, which oversees exemplar sites and supports local authorities in overcoming barriers to development. While these methods have yielded some progress, stakeholders such as CIH Cymru and Shelter Cymru have called for scaled-up approaches, including the establishment of an arms-length development corporation to deliver large-scale strategic sites. This could be a key role for Unnos under a Plaid Cymru government, enabling it to address gaps in local authority capacity and expertise while intervening in the land market and planning system.

Despite these efforts, the target-driven approach risks producing the wrong type of homes in unsuitable locations. The lack of a Welsh Housing Survey exacerbates these challenges, as does the reliance on outdated national estimates. A more comprehensive and strategic framework for assessing housing need—incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data—is essential to ensure that social housing delivery meets the evolving needs of communities across Wales.

Meeting Wales's social housing needs requires a fundamental rethink of how housing demand is assessed and addressed. By aligning housing delivery with the diverse and dynamic needs of its population, adopting a long-term vision for social housing, and committing to robust data collection and analysis, Wales can move towards a more equitable and sustainable housing future. Plaid Cymru must champion these principles, advocating for a strategy that prioritises the right homes in the right places while aiming for at least 20% of Wales' housing stock to be social housing in the long term.

Key Barriers to Delivery

The delivery of social housing in Wales faces numerous challenges, presenting a complex landscape that requires urgent attention. These hurdles span across funding constraints, capacity issues in construction, the rising costs of development, and the tension between meeting ambitious quality standards and delivering a greater number of homes. While efforts to increase social housing stock are critical to addressing the housing crisis and moving people out of temporary accommodation, the sector faces significant barriers that hinder progress.

Economic pressures stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine have dramatically increased construction costs, further complicating the delivery of social homes. As the former Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Local Government and Planning noted, the purchasing power of public funds has diminished considerably; where once a budget of £1 million could deliver five to seven homes, it now achieves as few as four. This economic backdrop underscores the urgency of addressing funding shortfalls and finding innovative ways to maximise the efficiency of investments in social housing.

In 2021, the Welsh Government estimated that £1.6 billion in Social Housing Grant funding would be required over five years to meet its target of delivering 20,000 homes. Of these, 17,500 homes would be directly funded through grants, with the remaining 2,500 reliant on social landlords' resources or section 106 agreements. However, rising costs have put these targets under strain. Audit Wales highlighted that the grant required for each new general needs property increased by 75% between 2020-21 and 2023-24, from £93,000 to £163,000. Consequently, achieving the ambitious 20,000-home target may require an additional £580 million to £740 million in capital funding beyond current budget assumptions.

The escalation in construction costs is compounded by higher expectations for the quality and energy efficiency of new homes. The aspiration to build net-zero homes, while commendable, significantly increases the cost per unit. For example, achieving an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of A can add an average of £15,000 to the cost of a new

home compared to an EPC B-rated property. Housing associations have noted that relaxing this target to EPC B could enable the construction of an additional 1,000 homes within the same funding envelope, illustrating the trade-offs inherent in policy decisions.

Social landlords face a difficult financial balancing act between improving their existing stock and adding new homes. The Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023 (WHQS) imposes rigorous requirements on all social housing, including the need to achieve EPC C ratings and incorporate features such as water collection systems and storage facilities. While these measures aim to enhance the quality of housing, they also impose significant financial burdens. For instance, Adra, a housing association, reported the need to allocate an additional £800,000 annually to meet new flooring standards, diverting resources away from their development programme.

The challenges are further exacerbated by a lack of capacity in the construction sector. Material cost inflation, high interest rates, and delays in planning and approval processes have created a difficult operating environment. CITB Cymru highlighted that the sector, largely comprised of SMEs, is struggling to invest in workforce development amidst these pressures. An ageing workforce and skills shortages compound the problem. According to CITB, an additional 12,000 full-time equivalent workers will be needed in Wales by 2028 to deliver energy efficiency improvements and other essential upgrades. Without targeted strategies to attract new talent and invest in skills, these workforce gaps will continue to impede progress.

The use of social housing as a testbed for innovative construction methods has shown promise, but scalability remains a challenge. The sector requires solutions that can be deployed at scale to achieve economies of scale and meet ambitious housing targets. This issue is particularly pertinent in the context of developing a new housing delivery entity, such as Unnos, which must navigate these challenges to fulfil its role effectively.

The need to improve existing housing stock—already under pressure from events such as the Grenfell

Tower tragedy and the tragic death of a child in Rochdale due to mould exposure—further strains the sector. Social landlords are required to prioritise both tenant safety and compliance with WHQS standards, creating a potential trade-off between investing in current stock and building new homes. Local authorities and large-scale voluntary transfer associations, which often manage older housing stock, face particularly acute financial pressures in meeting these dual objectives.

Infrastructure availability also poses a significant barrier to social housing development. Restrictions in utilities capacity, particularly in the national grid, have been noted as key obstacles. A more strategic approach to planning infrastructure, encompassing energy, water, transport, and digital systems, could alleviate these constraints. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Cymru has emphasized the importance of integrated planning to address objections related to infrastructure capacity and facilitate smoother development processes.

Finally, the need for flexibility in meeting standards has been highlighted by various stakeholders. While the aspiration for high-quality, energy-efficient housing is widely supported, rigid requirements can hinder the reuse of existing properties and limit the sector's ability to address immediate housing needs. For example, Conwy Council noted the difficulty in repurposing homes that could otherwise provide much-needed social housing due to stringent standards. Introducing greater flexibility, particularly in the short term, could enable the sector to make more efficient use of available resources while working toward longer-term goals.

In conclusion, the delivery of social housing in Wales is constrained by a complex interplay of economic pressures, rising construction costs, capacity issues, and the competing demands of improving existing stock versus building new homes. While funding increases are necessary, they must be accompanied by strategic interventions to address workforce shortages, streamline planning processes, and enhance infrastructure capacity. Balancing the quality and quantity of social housing remains a central challenge, but with targeted action and flexibility, the sector can make meaningful progress toward alleviating the housing crisis.

Finance

The financial foundations of social housing delivery in Wales are integral to addressing the acute housing crisis and achieving long-term policy goals. Plaid Cymru should acknowledge that the current funding mechanisms, while significant, are insufficient to meet the ambitious target of increasing social housing stock to 20% of the total housing stock in the medium term and a third in the longer term. This translates into an additional 60,000 homes in the short term and up to 250,000 homes over the longer term. Meeting these targets necessitates a fundamental shift in the scale and nature of funding for social housing in Wales.

The Social Housing Grant (SHG) remains the primary mechanism through which the Welsh Government supports the development of affordable homes. Despite its importance, the SHG budget has stagnated at £370 million for 2024-25, matching the allocation for 2023-24. This is insufficient to close the substantial funding gap identified in recent reviews, including the Audit Wales report on affordable housing. The report concluded that an additional £600 million in capital is necessary to deliver the projects currently in the pipeline, and even then, achieving the Welsh Government's target of 20,000 homes by March 2026 seems increasingly unfeasible. At current funding levels, projections suggest a shortfall, with only 15,860 to 16,670 homes likely to be delivered within the timeframe.

The Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) has emerged as a flexible and pragmatic funding stream that complements the SHG. Introduced in 2022-23, the TACP has successfully supported the rapid delivery of housing solutions, including the acquisition and remodelling of existing homes. Stakeholders such as Shelter Cymru and Community Housing Cymru have lauded the programme, advocating for its continuation. However, like the SHG, the TACP requires a multi-year funding commitment to provide social landlords with the financial certainty needed for long-term planning. Plaid Cymru should support extending the TACP into its third year with a stable, multi-annual settlement akin to that of the SHG.

To maximise the effectiveness of these funding streams, Plaid Cymru should propose the establishment of a "community of practice" for the

SHG. This initiative would foster collaboration between policymakers and professionals, enabling mutual learning and problem-solving to optimise the grant's impact and better align spending with the ambitious targets. This recommendation corresponds with the view of the Senedd's own Local government and Housing Committee.

Beyond grants, the role of borrowing and institutional investment is critical. Housing associations in Wales currently leverage private finance, with access to £3.5 billion in private funding, expected to rise to £4.5 billion by 2027. Innovative models, such as those employed by the not-for-profit developer Tirion, demonstrate how private capital can be effectively utilised. Tirion's projects are predominantly funded through pension funds, showcasing the untapped potential of institutional investment in the housing sector. Plaid Cymru should advocate for Welsh pension funds to play a more prominent role in social housing investment, aligning with broader economic and social goals.

The Development Bank of Wales (DBW) also has a pivotal role to play. While its current focus on supporting SME developers has yielded some affordable housing, the proportion remains low, with only 17% of homes funded by the DBW in 2022-23 classified as affordable. Plaid Cymru should call for a more direct role for the DBW in financing social housing developments, potentially offering terms more favourable than those provided by private investors. By prioritising social housing, the DBW could unlock significant additional capacity within the sector.

The Welsh Government's borrowing powers, while limited under the current fiscal framework, must be strategically utilised. With an annual borrowing limit of £150 million for capital projects, Plaid Cymru should urge the Welsh Government to earmark a portion of this capacity specifically for social housing development. Furthermore, Financial Transactions Capital (FTC), which must be used for loans or equity investments, presents another avenue for leveraging private sector contributions to deliver housing projects.



A critical barrier to social housing delivery lies in the financial pressures faced by social landlords. Many housing associations, especially smaller ones, struggle to raise sufficient capital due to balance sheet restrictions and tightening credit markets. Greater predictability in rent policy and clearer funding streams for decarbonisation are essential to alleviate these pressures. Decarbonising existing housing stock is a significant financial burden that currently competes with development priorities. Plaid Cymru should advocate for providing landlords with certainty over these costs, enabling them to allocate resources more effectively toward new housing.

Plaid Cymru should also recognise the ethical imperative to avoid over-reliance on social rent payments from some of the poorest individuals in society to finance housing development. A sustainable model of housing finance must balance public subsidy with innovative funding mechanisms, ensuring affordability and equity.

Overcoming these financial barriers is crucial to achieving Plaid Cymru's vision for social housing. A significant uplift in the SHG and TACP budgets, strategic utilisation of borrowing powers, expanded institutional investment, and targeted support through the DBW are key components of this vision. By addressing these challenges, Wales can not only meet its social housing targets but also establish a resilient and ethical funding framework that prioritises the needs of communities.

Planning

The planning system in Wales plays a pivotal role in determining the feasibility and pace of social housing delivery. Plaid Cymru should prioritise reforming and resourcing the planning system to address barriers that currently hinder housing supply. The Welsh planning framework is underpinned by Planning Policy Wales, originally published in 2002 and most recently updated in February 2024. This document provides the overarching policy guidance for local planning authorities in developing their Local Development Plans, which are informed by Local Housing Market Assessments to identify housing needs. These Local Development Plans are complemented by Strategic Development Plans, led by the four Corporate Joint Committees in North Wales, Mid Wales, South-West Wales, and South-East Wales. Strategic Development Plans align with the national framework set out in Future Wales, the national development framework, but do not replace Local Development Plans. As of May 2024, Wales has achieved full coverage of Local Development Plans across its local authorities.

Despite the clear framework, the planning system has been widely criticised for creating significant barriers to housing delivery. The Competition and Markets Authority's 2024 report found that the system exerts significant downward pressure on the number of planning consents granted, with developers and housing associations facing an unpredictable, costly, and lengthy process. Developers frequently describe planning as a "guessing game," with numerous costly surveys and reports required before an application can progress. Local authority departments often work in silos, with conflicting objectives that can hinder the granting of planning permissions necessary for social housing. Furthermore, public opposition to new housing developments, particularly social housing, poses challenges. Negative perceptions about prospective neighbours often delay or prevent approvals, despite the significant need for these homes.

Resourcing constraints are another critical issue. Many voices in the housing sector, including the Royal Town Planning Institute, have highlighted the need for additional investment in planning departments. They argue that planning teams are underfunded and undersupported, preventing them

from effectively addressing the housing crisis in Wales. The Bevan Foundation and other stakeholders have noted that the complexity and cost of the planning system are prohibitive, with housing associations sometimes forced to abandon projects due to upfront expenses. The lack of resources has also led to delays in responses from statutory consultees, with organisations such as Community Housing Cymru calling for a review of the statutory consultee regime to streamline the process and reduce bottlenecks.

Plaid Cymru should explore a range of reforms to improve the planning system for social housing delivery. Increasing planning fees and ring-fencing the funds to support local authority planning teams could help address capacity and delivery constraints. There is also scope to explore greater regional working, building on recommendations from Audit Wales for a more strategic approach. Investment in the planning profession, including promoting long-term career opportunities, would help address skills shortages that currently impact social housebuilding.

Rural Exception Sites offer another opportunity to boost the supply of social housing. These sites are currently required to deliver 100% affordable housing, but allowing an element of cross-subsidy could make them more viable. A Plaid Cymru Government could further incentivise the use of Rural Exception Sites by introducing planning passports to expedite the process and reduce barriers.

At its core, the planning system in Wales does not currently give sufficient weight to addressing the housing crisis. Resources for planning and statutory consultees are inadequate, and there is too much silo working across the public sector, with insufficient pooling of resources and expertise. Plaid Cymru should prioritise reforms to streamline and simplify the system, making it more predictable and efficient while ensuring that public sector planners are well-resourced and empowered to deliver the social homes Wales desperately needs.

Land

The availability of the right land, in the right location, at a price that enables social rent levels to be set, is a critical foundation for the delivery of social housing. Plaid Cymru should prioritise addressing the systemic barriers to land acquisition for social housing development. Housing associations and local authorities consistently highlight the importance of ensuring that land is affordable, available, and suitable for development, with some emphasising the benefits of medium-sized sites—large enough for 20 to 30 homes but small enough to maintain viability. Smaller sites may also be suitable for specialist or community-led schemes, but these options often remain underexplored.

Privately owned land presents a unique set of challenges. While there is generally land available for development in most areas, its presence on the market depends on landowners' willingness to sell. As highlighted by the Competition and Markets Authority, this reluctance can delay development, as landowners strategically decide when and if to release land. Audit Wales has also observed that while existing Local Development Plans suggest sufficient land availability, much of it is unsuitable or not located in areas of high housing need. The Home Builders Federation warns that Wales' overly complex, plan-led system exacerbates these issues, with out-of-date plans and an over-reliance on large sites reducing overall housing supply and discouraging smaller developers. Additionally, the practice of land banking, where developers hold onto land rather than building on it, further restricts the flow of available sites, offering no benefits to the housing supply.

Plaid Cymru should address these challenges by making greater use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs). Streamlining CPO processes to accelerate the acquisition of land for social housing, as recommended by the Affordable Housing Supply Review, should be a key policy objective. Plaid Cymru should also consider granting new CPO powers to Unnos or a similar development-focused public body. Legislative changes under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which aim to remove "hope value" from the CPO process, could enable land to be acquired based on its development value, a crucial step in ensuring affordability.

A Plaid Cymru Government should explore the possibility of reinstating a national approach to land assembly. Historically, the Land Authority for Wales played a vital role in preparing land for development before its powers were transferred. A renewed focus on this role, potentially under Unnos, could help secure land for affordable housing and overcome barriers faced by local authorities and housing associations. Plaid Cymru should also promote community ownership of land, drawing on successful models like Scotland's Community Right to Buy and England's Community Right to Bid. Expanding opportunities for Welsh communities to access and own land assets would not only empower local groups but also unlock opportunities to deliver social and community housing.

Public sector land holds immense untapped potential for affordable housing development. Recent data shows that land owned by local authorities, the Welsh Government, and health boards is increasingly contributing to affordable housing delivery, rising from 22% of additional supply in 2021-22 to 40% in 2022-23. However, housing associations report that public sector land infrequently comes to market and that there is no preferential treatment for affordable housing developments. Plaid Cymru should ensure that all public land with development potential is offered at competitive values to help address the housing crisis. Legislative mechanisms like the Local Government Act 1972, which allow local authorities to dispose of assets at less than best value for social, economic, or environmental wellbeing, should be used more effectively to prioritise affordable housing over short-term financial returns.

Local authorities building social homes on their own land often face high development costs due to abnormal site conditions, as seen in Swansea, where regeneration projects focus on unviable sites for private developers. A Plaid Cymru Government should provide additional support to local authorities to cover these costs and prioritise the reuse of public land for social housing. Plaid Cymru should also work to embed social value considerations into land disposal practices, encouraging local authorities to weigh the long-term benefits of affordable housing—such as reduced temporary

accommodation costs-against short-term financial gains.

The Bevan Foundation have cited the potential, community and socially owned assets, including churches, chapels, and other community buildings, present further opportunities for delivering affordable housing. Initiatives like the Faith in Affordable Housing project demonstrate the potential for such sites to contribute to housing supply, particularly in central locations with good access to amenities. Plaid Cymru should promote the redevelopment of these assets, aligning with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by focusing on sustainability, community cohesion, and accessibility.

Strategic land management requires a more active role for the public sector. Witnesses to the Senedd's inquiry into social housing supply have consistently called for a dedicated public body to accelerate the release of public land for affordable housing and to assemble development sites. Unnos could take on this role, but its mission must be sharply focused on land assembly and the delivery of high targets for social and affordable housing. Plaid Cymru should ensure that Unnos or a similar entity has the resources and authority needed to fulfil this purpose.

Smaller sites, including vacant and derelict land, offer significant untapped potential for social housing. Housing Justice Cymru and others have noted the challenges of building on such sites, which are often dismissed as financially unviable. However, successful examples from England, such as the Small Sites Programme adopted by four unitary authorities in the West of England, demonstrate how packaging small sites together can unlock development opportunities. A Plaid Cymru Government should encourage Welsh local authorities to adopt similar approaches and adjust grant funding criteria to support the viability of smaller sites.

Transparency in land ownership is another crucial area for reform. Existing evidence on public land ownership should be made more accessible, and a future Plaid Cymru Government should expand these sources to include all land ownership. This would facilitate better planning and land use, ensuring that land is developed where it is most needed.

Plaid Cymru's housing strategy must also address the integration of transport, infrastructure, and housing development. The current siloed approach between transport, property, and housing departments undermines efforts to create sustainable, well-connected communities. A Plaid Cymru Government could establish mechanisms, potentially through public-private partnerships or a dedicated arms-length entity with significant powers, to ensure that housing development is planned alongside transport and other infrastructure improvements.

Ultimately, Plaid Cymru should lead the way in fostering a holistic, innovative approach to land use and housing development in Wales. By addressing private land barriers, empowering communities, leveraging public land, and integrating strategic planning, a Plaid Cymru Government could unlock the potential for a transformative increase in social housing supply, meeting the urgent needs of communities across Wales.

Opportunities in Community-Led Housing

Community-led housing (CLH) represents a transformative opportunity to increase the supply of affordable homes, particularly in rural areas, while empowering communities to shape their futures. Although there is limited data on the existing stock of community-led housing in Wales, its potential to contribute significantly to the delivery of social housing is evident. Plaid Cymru recognises the critical role that CLH can play in meeting the urgent demand for affordable homes, especially in rural and underserved areas, while fostering a sense of community and building essential skills.

The Welsh Government's 2021 Programme for Government included commitments to support cooperative housing, community-led initiatives, and community land trusts. Initiatives such as the Communities Creating Homes project, co-funded by the Welsh Government and delivered by Cwmpas, already demonstrate the value of CLH in delivering affordable homes. However, despite these efforts, the sector's contribution remains small-scale and has not expanded at the pace required to address the housing crisis.

One of the most significant barriers to the growth of CLH is the difficulty community groups face in accessing funding. Witnesses to the Senedd's Local Government and Housing Committee highlighted the lack of appropriately priced and structured finance, particularly for pre-development activities. Cwmpas has proposed a revolving loan fund for CLH based on £12.6 million of Financial Transactions Capital. Implementing such a fund under a Plaid Cymru Government would provide much-needed financial support, enabling community groups to move projects from conception to completion more efficiently. Additionally, Housing Justice Cymru has underscored the need for legislation to establish a community right to buy, which would empower communities to acquire land and assets. Without this right, the sector remains heavily dependent on philanthropic landowners willing to sell land privately at reduced costs. A Plaid Cymru Government should legislate to address this gap, ensuring that communities have the legal and financial tools they need to acquire land and buildings for affordable housing.

CLH also faces challenges in engaging with the planning system. There is significant inconsistency among local planning authorities in their approach to CLH, with some being supportive and others reluctant to engage despite national policies that encourage CLH organisations to deliver affordable housing. A Plaid Cymru Government would work to ensure a consistent and supportive approach to CLH across all planning authorities, aligning local practices with national objectives. This would involve providing clear guidance to planners and integrating CLH more explicitly into local housing strategies.

Expanding the network of Rural Housing Enablers and introducing Urban Housing Enablers and Community Housing Enablers would further support the development of CLH. These enablers play a vital role in connecting community groups with expertise, resources, and funding opportunities. Corresponding with Plaid Cymru's broader focus on enhancing data quality and meeting local housing needs, a future government would prioritise more granular, community-level work to inform local housing market assessments and tailor solutions to specific areas.

CLH comes in many forms, from small groups of friends sharing a home to community members buying local land to develop housing. These projects bring people together to decide what kind of homes and communities they want to live in, ensuring that developments reflect local priorities and values. They provide an influential voice for residents, complementing the work of councils, developers, and investors in creating affordable housing that meets the unique needs of each community.

The broader benefits of CLH go beyond housing. These projects can foster stronger community bonds, improve local wellbeing, and provide opportunities for skill-building and collaboration. By empowering communities to take ownership of housing development, CLH can also address specific housing needs that traditional models often overlook, such as housing for older people, young families, or workers in key industries.

Under a Plaid Cymru Government, the potential of CLH would be unlocked. Through enhanced financial support, legislative changes, planning system reform, and the expansion of enabling networks, Plaid Cymru would ensure that community-led housing becomes a cornerstone of its housing strategy. By empowering communities to lead on housing development, Wales can not only address the housing crisis but also build resilient, sustainable communities that reflect the values and aspirations of their residents.



Unnos is a key Plaid Cymru policy first introduced as part of the 2021 Senedd Election manifesto. It later became a central feature of the Co-operation Agreement with the Welsh Government, eventually adopted as official policy. However, the Welsh Government's execution of Unnos has significantly diverged from Plaid Cymru's original vision. A Plaid Cymru government after 2026 should reinstate and develop Unnos to reflect its intended purpose as a transformative mechanism for addressing Wales's housing crisis.

Unnos could be established in a variety of forms, as an arms-length entity, or one wholly owned by and answerable to the Welsh Government, while remaining accountable to the Senedd. It could operate as a not-for-dividend company, self-sufficient through the charges it makes for its services and products. Rental streams from new social housing developments could attract long-term investors, such as pension funds, to finance a substantial and sustained increase in social and affordable housing provision. Using the Welsh Government's covenant to reduce interest rate costs where desirable could ensure competitive borrowing rates.

What's clear to us, is that Unnos should play a strategic role in land assembly and compulsory purchase, working in partnership with local authorities, housing associations, and other partners. It could act as a broker across Welsh Government departments to bring land to market and support residential conversions. This could include establishing a 'Register of Relevant Public Land' to identify land owned by public bodies that could be used for housing. The agency should have the first refusal on any proposed sale of this land and the power to acquire it at market value. Furthermore, legislation could enable the acquisition of land for social housing at or near pre-development land values. Alternatively, private developers could be required to gift a proportion of housing sites for social housing development. Local authorities should also immediately halt the sale of land that could be used for social housing, to counter the trend of public assets being divested to the private sector.

Unnos could act as a centre of excellence for good practice in the housing sector, providing expertise to housing associations and local authorities. Initially focused on new builds, this remit could expand to retrofit and maintenance services. The entity should work collaboratively with existing maintenance teams rather than replace them. Unnos should also support local construction SMEs through a national framework contract for housing procurement, directing government financial support to smaller developers with viable projects unable to secure mainstream private finance. This support could include profit caps and be limited to genuinely affordable house prices.

Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), particularly off-site production, should form a core focus for Unnos. With Welsh Government support, the entity, in line with our original vision for Unnos, could establish two production facilities in Wales, one in the south and another in the north, gradually increasing capacity in line with demand. These facilities would enable predictable, high-quality, and environmentally sustainable housing at competitive prices. Homes constructed by Unnos should minimise carbon use both in construction and operation, aligning with Wales's net-zero ambitions. Another approach would be for Unnos to work in collaboration or partnership with existing MMC sites, such as United Welsh's in Caerphilly, to scale up their activities and utilise their expertise and capacity to deliver a pipeline of social homes reflecting local need.

Unnos should also focus on developing a portfolio of housing types to meet the diverse requirements of local authorities and housing associations. This could include offering assistance with planning and Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) Approval Body (SAB) processes and ensuring a coordinated pipeline of demand. By creating Welsh supply chains and supporting local businesses, Unnos could help reinvigorate the local economy, particularly small house builders, who are often marginalised by the planning system's bias towards large developers. Additionally, it could provide training opportunities to expand the skilled Welsh-based workforce.

The potential of Unnos to act as a strategic delivery arm for the Welsh Government, particularly for large-scale development, should be explored further. A committee report on social housing supply has already recommended establishing a national development corporation to lead on strategic sites and align housing and regeneration efforts. Plaid Cymru could task Unnos with fulfilling this role, albeit as an arms-length entity with significant powers that would work in partnership with existing private corporations such as United Welsh. This entity would require the right powers, professional skills, and a long-term vision guided by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and the lawful right to adequate housing, once introduced under a Plaid Cymru-led Welsh Government.

In summary, Unnos should refocus on land assembly, strategic housing delivery, and ensuring a consistent pipeline of social and affordable housing, working in partnership with the private sector. While construction methods and innovative approaches remain important, the emphasis must be on enabling local authorities and housing associations to meet demand sustainably and affordably through coordinated demand and the acquisition of land. Through these efforts, Unnos could be a cornerstone of Plaid Cymru's commitment to ensuring everyone in Wales has access to a decent home.

Concluding Remarks: Additional Considerations

Delivering a step-change in social housing provision in Wales requires Plaid Cymru to be clear-eyed about the challenges ahead. A commitment to expanding social housing stock to make up at least 20-33% of all homes in Wales is an ambitious and necessary goal, but one that must be approached with honesty about the trade-offs involved. The imperative to deliver high-quality, energy-efficient homes must be balanced against the need to build at scale and at speed. While the long-term objective should be to ensure all social housing meets the highest possible standards, the priority must be increasing the number of good-quality, affordable homes available to those who need them. A phased approach may be required, ensuring that tenants are housed in safe and comfortable accommodation while maintaining a clear trajectory towards upgrading stock to net-zero standards over time.

A well-defined strategy must also clarify where social housing sits within the wider housing system and how its expansion will impact the private rented sector. The expectation is that an increase in social housing will reduce demand for private rentals, which will likely lead to a contraction in the sector. While this is a positive step in rebalancing housing towards secure, affordable provision, it must be managed carefully to mitigate disruption. A transition plan will be required to address concerns from private landlords and investors while ensuring that those currently reliant on private rentals are able to move into well-managed, high-quality social housing without unnecessary barriers. Expanding social housing at scale should not only meet the needs of those on waiting lists today but also create a permanent shift in housing provision, reducing reliance on private rentals for lower-income households in the long term.

At the centre of any effective social housing strategy must be a genuine commitment to tenant voice. The influence of social housing tenants in shaping policy and delivery has declined in recent years, and this must be reversed. Plaid Cymru must ensure that tenants are not only consulted but empowered in decision-making processes. A Wales Housing Survey could provide a national mechanism for capturing tenant experiences and priorities, while strengthened representation within housing associations and local authority housing bodies

could ensure that tenants have a direct role in shaping the future of their homes. If social housing is to be expanded at scale, it must be done in a way that actively listens to and respects the experiences of those who will live in it.

While much of the focus in Plaid Cymru's housing policies has been on affordability in rural areas—particularly in Welsh-speaking communities where local people have been priced out—it is critical to recognise that social housing need is just as urgent in Wales's cities and suburbs. Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, and other urban centres face severe shortages of social housing, pushing too many families into overcrowded, insecure, and expensive private rentals. Social housing delivery must address this crisis head-on, ensuring that urban developments are a core part of expansion plans rather than an afterthought. In these areas, the priority must not only be increasing supply but ensuring that social housing is well-integrated within communities, avoiding segregation and creating mixed-tenure neighbourhoods that are socially and economically sustainable.

Addressing the stigma associated with social housing is another essential challenge that must be confronted. Too often, social housing is seen as housing of last resort rather than a legitimate and desirable option. This perception needs to change if Plaid Cymru is to build lasting public support for large-scale social housing investment. High-quality, well-designed developments that integrate seamlessly into their surroundings can play a key role in shifting public attitudes. But just as importantly, there must be a strong and deliberate effort to change the narrative—social housing should be seen as a foundation for thriving communities, not as a mark of failure or deprivation. Plaid Cymru must take a lead in this effort, ensuring that public discourse around social housing reflects its essential role in creating a fairer and more secure Wales.

Finally, the role of Unnos in delivering this vision must be fully developed and embedded in policy. If it is to be more than a symbolic initiative, Unnos must be given the powers and resources to drive social housing delivery at scale. Land acquisition should be a core function, ensuring that social housing

development is not constrained by speculative land markets. Beyond this, Unnos could provide a strategic oversight role, coordinating efforts across local authorities, housing associations, and the Welsh Government to ensure a coherent and efficient approach to social housing expansion. It could also play a role in addressing wider housing pressures, such as supporting disabled individuals in moving from hospital settings into suitable social housing, reducing demand on the health service while improving quality of life. If properly structured and empowered, Unnos has the potential to be a transformative institution in Welsh housing policy.

Plaid Cymru's commitment to a major expansion of social housing is one of the most significant and far-reaching policy proposals for the future of Wales. To make it a reality, the party must set out a clear and compelling vision, address the trade-offs involved, and ensure that tenants are at the heart of the process. By embedding social housing as the backbone of Welsh housing policy—rather than just a safety net—Plaid Cymru can redefine housing in Wales for the long term. The challenge now is to ensure that this ambition is matched by the policies, institutions, and investment needed to deliver it.

Recommendations on Estimating and Meeting Demand

To ensure Wales can adequately estimate and meet its housing demand, Plaid Cymru should:

Undertake a Welsh Housing Survey:

Commit to conducting a national housing survey every three years. This would provide a detailed and consistent picture of housing needs, conditions, affordability, and demographic trends, similar to the English Housing Survey. This data will underpin both national and local housing strategies.

Develop Dynamic Needs Assessment Tools:

Introduce real-time, integrated housing demand assessment tools that draw on data from local authorities, housing associations, and community organisations. These tools will account for overcrowding, hidden homelessness, and unsuitable housing, ensuring a holistic understanding of housing needs.

Ensure Qualitative and Community-Led Assessments:

Incorporate a qualitative dimension into housing assessments, reflecting the lived experiences of communities. Housing strategies must prioritise delivering the right homes in the right places, with active participation from residents.

Create a Long-Term Vision for Social Housing Delivery:

Establish a strategy to increase social housing stock to at least 20% of all housing in Wales within the two Senedd terms. This would require building approximately 60,000 new social homes over 8 years, with incremental milestones to track progress. In the longer term, we should aim for social housing to comprise around a third of the housing stock, meaning an additional 250,000 units in the long term.

Align Housing Provision with Needs:

Address the mismatch between current housing provision and waiting list demand. This includes increasing the supply of one-bedroom homes, homes suitable for retirement-age applicants, and housing that meets the needs of disabled individuals.

Expand the Role of Housing Enablers:

Strengthen rural, urban, and community housing enabler schemes to identify local housing needs and deliver bespoke housing solutions. These schemes can support innovative approaches, such as repurposing empty properties above high streets.

Strengthen Local Housing Market Assessments (LHMAs):

Provide additional resources and updated guidance for LHMAs to ensure they are robust and consistent across local authorities. These assessments should also account for protected characteristics, including age, disability, and household size, to reflect the full diversity of housing needs.

Recommendations to Overcome Barriers to Social Housing Delivery

Plaid Cymru recognises that balancing the need for high-quality, energy-efficient housing with the urgent demand for increased stock is a central challenge in addressing Wales's housing crisis. The following recommendations provide a roadmap for overcoming the key barriers to social housing delivery. A Plaid Cymru Government should:

Adjust Energy Efficiency Standards Temporarily:

Advocate for a phased approach to achieving net-zero housing standards. By setting a temporary target of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating B, rather than A, Plaid Cymru can enable the construction of more homes within existing funding envelopes, ensuring immediate needs are met without sacrificing long-term sustainability goals.

Provide Targeted Financial Support for Existing Stock Improvements:

Lobby for increased funding to help social landlords meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023 (WHQS) without diverting resources from development programmes. This could include grants or low-interest loans specifically for upgrades like flooring, energy efficiency improvements, and water collection systems.

Address Workforce and Skills Shortages:

Develop a workforce strategy to attract new talent and support training in the construction sector. This includes investing in apprenticeships, retraining programmes, and collaboration with further education institutions to ensure a pipeline of skilled workers. Special focus should be given to energy efficiency and retrofit skills to meet the growing demand for sustainable housing solutions.

Streamline Planning and Approval Processes:

Call for reforms to planning and regulatory frameworks to reduce delays and provide clearer guidance for social housing projects. Greater efficiency in these processes would accelerate the delivery of new homes and encourage investment in the sector.

Introduce Greater Flexibility in Standards Compliance:

Support short-term flexibility in housing standards to facilitate the reuse and repurposing of existing properties, particularly in cases where rigid requirements hinder the delivery of much-needed housing. This would enable local authorities and social landlords to maximise available resources while working toward longer-term compliance goals.

Address Construction Cost Pressures:

Work with the construction industry to explore cost-reduction strategies, including bulk purchasing agreements for materials and innovative building methods, such as modular construction. Supporting the sector's transition to sustainable practices can help mitigate cost inflation and improve efficiency.

Strengthen Partnerships with SMEs in Construction:

Provide incentives and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the construction industry to invest in workforce development and modernisation. Plaid Cymru should also advocate for increased government support for SMEs to help them weather economic pressures and contribute more effectively to social housing delivery.

Expand Infrastructure Capacity:

Advocate for investment in local infrastructure that supports housing development, including roads, utilities, and broadband. Infrastructure bottlenecks can delay housing projects and increase costs, limiting the sector's ability to respond to demand.

Recommendations for Finance in Social Housing Delivery

Plaid Cymru recognises that financial barriers are a significant constraint to the delivery of social housing in Wales. To address these challenges, a Plaid Cymru Government should:

Increase the Social Housing Grant (SHG):

Commit to significantly increasing the SHG to meet the scale of the challenge of delivering an additional 60,000 to 75,000 social housing units over the long term. Plaid Cymru should aim to ensure social housing comprises 20% to one-third of the Welsh housing stock, recognising this as essential for tackling the housing crisis.

Extend and Stabilise Transitional Accommodation Funding:

Advocate for the continuation of the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) into a third year and in government, secure a multi-annual funding settlement similar to the Social Housing Grant (SHG). This would provide the financial certainty social landlords need for effective long-term planning and resource allocation.

Establish a 'Community of Practice' for SHG:

Propose the creation of a "community of practice" to facilitate collaboration between policymakers and housing professionals. This initiative would align with the Local Government and Housing Committee's recommendations to optimise the SHG's impact and align spending with housing targets.

Promote Institutional Investment in Social Housing:

Support greater involvement of Welsh pension funds in financing social housing developments, leveraging successful models like those employed by Tirion. By aligning institutional investment with social goals, Plaid Cymru can unlock untapped funding streams to bolster housing delivery.

Strengthen the Role of the Development Bank of Wales (DBW):

Advocate for the DBW to play a more direct and prominent role in financing social housing developments, offering favourable terms for social housing projects to increase the proportion of affordable homes delivered.

Strategically Utilise Borrowing Powers:

Push for the strategic use of the Welsh Government's annual £150 million borrowing capacity for capital projects, with a portion earmarked for social housing development. Plaid Cymru should also call for the utilisation of Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) to leverage private sector contributions toward housing delivery.

Ensure Predictable Rent Policies:

Advocate for greater predictability in rent policy to enable social landlords to plan effectively. Clear and stable policies are essential to alleviate financial pressures on housing associations, allowing them to allocate resources to both decarbonisation and new developments.

Support Decarbonisation Funding:

Call for dedicated funding streams to support the decarbonisation of existing housing stock, ensuring that landlords are not forced to choose between upgrading homes and building new ones.

Develop an Ethical Housing Finance Model:

Promote a sustainable and ethical model of housing finance that balances public subsidy, innovative funding mechanisms, and affordability. Plaid Cymru should ensure that the poorest individuals in society are not disproportionately relied upon to finance housing development through social rent payments.

Recommendations for Planning Issues

To ensure the planning system and strategic planning meets our social housing ambitions, a Plaid Cymru Government should:

Reform Planning Fees and Investments:

Support increasing planning fees and ring-fencing the additional revenue to strengthen local authority planning teams. Plaid Cymru should also advocate for long-term investment in the planning profession to address skills shortages and delivery constraints.

Enhance Strategic Regional Planning:

Explore greater regional working and collaboration among planning authorities, building on Audit Wales recommendations. This approach would streamline decision-making and create efficiencies in social housing delivery.

Maximise the Use of Rural Exception Sites:

Incentivise the use of Rural Exception Sites by introducing planning passports to simplify the process. Plaid Cymru could also explore allowing limited cross-subsidy to make such sites more viable while maintaining affordability.

Streamline the Planning System:

Prioritise reforms to simplify and modernise the planning system, ensuring it is predictable, efficient, and adequately resourced. Addressing silo working across the public sector and improving resources for statutory consultees would significantly enhance housing delivery outcomes.

Recommendations on Land for Social Housing Delivery

A Plaid Cymru Government must address the critical issue of land availability for social housing development. By tackling systemic barriers, ensuring effective use of public and private land, and promoting innovative approaches to land assembly, Plaid Cymru can significantly increase the supply of social housing in Wales. The following recommendations outline key steps to unlock land potential and enable affordable housing delivery.

A Plaid Cymru Government should:

Prioritise addressing the systemic barriers to land acquisition for social housing development by ensuring that land is affordable, available, and suitable for development. Medium-sized sites (20-30 homes) should be encouraged, with more focus on smaller sites for specialist or community-led schemes.

Tackle the challenges presented by privately owned land, including landowners' reluctance to sell and land banking. This can be addressed through the increased use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs), streamlining CPO processes, and granting new CPO powers to Unnos or a similar development-focused public body.

Explore reinstating a national approach to land assembly, potentially through a revitalised role for Unnos, helping secure land for affordable housing and overcoming barriers faced by local authorities and housing associations. This includes promoting community ownership of land through models like Scotland's Community Right to Buy and England's Community Right to Bid.

Ensure that all public sector land with development potential is made available at competitive values for affordable housing development. Legislative mechanisms such as the Local Government Act 1972 should be used more effectively to prioritise social housing over short-term financial returns.

Provide additional support to local authorities to cover high development costs due to abnormal site conditions and prioritise the reuse of public land for social housing. Social value considerations should be embedded into land disposal practices to ensure long-term benefits are prioritised over immediate financial returns.

Promote the redevelopment of community-owned assets, including churches, chapels, and other community buildings, to contribute to affordable housing supply, particularly in central locations with good access to amenities, aligning with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Ensure that Unnos or a similar entity has the resources and authority needed to accelerate the release of public land for affordable housing and to assemble development sites, with a sharp focus on land assembly and meeting high targets for social housing.

Encourage local authorities to adopt innovative approaches for developing smaller sites, including vacant and derelict land, by adjusting grant funding criteria to support the viability of these sites. Successful examples from England, such as the Small Sites Programme, should be used as a model.

Ensure greater transparency in land ownership, expanding access to public land ownership information to facilitate better planning and land use, ensuring that land is developed where it is most needed.

Integrate transport, infrastructure, and housing development in a holistic, coordinated manner, establishing mechanisms such as public-private partnerships or a dedicated entity (potentially Unnos, to ensure housing development is planned alongside infrastructure improvements.

Foster a transformative approach to land use and housing development by addressing private land barriers, empowering communities, leveraging public land, and ensuring strategic planning is integrated, unlocking the potential for a significant increase in social housing supply to meet Wales' urgent needs.

Recommendations on Community-Led Housing for Social Housing Delivery

Community-Led Housing (CLH) has the potential to play a transformative role in addressing the housing crisis in Wales by empowering communities to take control of the development of affordable homes. However, significant barriers exist that must be addressed for CLH to grow and contribute meaningfully to the housing strategy. These recommendations focus on supporting community groups, streamlining access to funding, reforming the planning system, and expanding the enabling network. A Plaid Cymru Government should:

Introduce a revolving loan fund for Community-Led Housing (CLH) to address the difficulty community groups face in accessing affordable and appropriately structured finance. This fund, based on £12.6 million of Financial Transactions Capital, would provide much-needed support for pre-development activities, enabling projects to move from conception to completion more efficiently.

Legislate to establish a community right to buy, empowering communities to acquire land and assets for affordable housing. This would reduce the sector's dependency on philanthropic landowners and ensure that communities have the legal and financial tools to secure land for CLH projects.

Ensure a consistent and supportive approach to CLH across all local planning authorities by providing clear guidance to planners and explicitly integrating CLH into local housing strategies. This will help align local practices with national policies and encourage a uniform approach to supporting CLH initiatives.

Expand the network of Rural, Urban, and Community Housing Enablers to further support the development of CLH. These enablers play a vital role in connecting community groups with expertise, resources, and funding opportunities. A Plaid Cymru Government would prioritise local-level work to inform housing market assessments and develop tailored solutions for each community.

Recognise the diverse forms of CLH and ensure that projects are supported in reflecting local priorities and values. This includes fostering small-scale projects and community-driven developments that

address specific needs, such as housing for older people, young families, or workers in key industries.

Support the broader social benefits of CLH, recognising its ability to strengthen community bonds, improve local wellbeing, and provide opportunities for skill-building and collaboration. These projects foster resilience and sustainability within communities while addressing housing needs that traditional models may overlook.

Ensure that CLH contributes to the target of 20,000 new social homes, with a focus on enhancing financial support, legislative changes, and planning system reform. Plaid Cymru would prioritise CLH as a central component of its housing strategy, ensuring that communities are empowered to lead on housing development.

Foster resilient and sustainable communities by enabling communities to take ownership of housing development, ensuring that housing meets local needs and reflects residents' aspirations. This approach would build stronger communities and create housing solutions tailored to the unique needs of Wales.

Recommendations on Unnos for Social Housing Delivery

Unnos is a key part of Plaid Cymru's vision for transforming housing delivery in Wales. Originally introduced in the 2021 Senedd Election manifesto and adopted in the Co-operation Agreement with the Welsh Government, the full potential of Unnos has yet to be realised. Plaid Cymru's thinking on Unnos is evolving, and a Plaid Cymru Government after 2026 could refocus Unnos to ensure it addresses Wales's housing crisis effectively. The following recommendations outline the steps Plaid Cymru could take to realise Unnos's potential. Plaid Cymru could:

Reinstate Unnos as a publicly owned company that is wholly owned by the Welsh Government, accountable to the Senedd, and self-sufficient through service and product charges. Unnos could attract long-term investment, such as from pension funds, to finance social and affordable housing development, and leverage the Welsh Government's covenant to reduce borrowing costs, ensuring competitive interest rates.

Ensure Unnos plays a central role in land assembly and compulsory purchase, acting as a broker across Welsh Government departments to bring land to market and facilitate residential conversions. This would include establishing a 'Register of Relevant Public Land' to identify public land that could be used for housing. Unnos could have first refusal on purchasing this land at market value and the power to acquire it for social housing development at or near pre-development land values. Additionally, legislation could allow Unnos to acquire land specifically for social housing at lower costs, and local authorities should halt the sale of land that could be used for housing to prevent public assets from being lost to private ownership.

Develop Unnos as a centre of excellence in housing delivery, providing expertise and guidance to housing associations and local authorities. While initially focused on new builds, Unnos could expand its remit to include retrofitting and housing maintenance. The entity could collaborate with existing maintenance teams, ensuring that the skills and capacity of local communities are maximised. Unnos could also support smaller developers through a national procurement framework, providing financial support and opportunities to

meet the demand for affordable housing in their areas.

Prioritise Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) as part of Unnos's core offering. With Welsh Government support, Unnos could establish production facilities in both the south and north of Wales, scaling up capacity as demand for affordable housing grows. These facilities could enable the construction of high-quality, environmentally sustainable homes at competitive prices, in line with Wales's net-zero ambitions.

Focus on developing a wide portfolio of housing types to meet diverse local authority and housing association needs. Unnos could assist with planning processes, including Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) approval, and support a coordinated pipeline of housing demand. By fostering Welsh supply chains and prioritising local businesses, Unnos could provide opportunities for small house builders and help build a skilled Welsh-based workforce.

Enable Unnos to act as a strategic delivery arm for large-scale housing developments, particularly exemplar sites that integrate housing with broader regeneration efforts. Unnos could be empowered with the necessary powers and expertise to oversee such projects, ensuring they align with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the legal right to adequate housing. Unnos could also be tasked with ensuring the effective delivery of new social homes, making the organisation central to coordinating demand and liaising with local authorities and housing associations to meet housing needs sustainably.

Ensure Unnos coordinates demand for social housing across Wales, working directly with local authorities and housing associations to ensure a consistent pipeline of affordable homes. Unnos could take the lead on land assembly, identify exemplar sites, and guide the development of innovative housing solutions that meet local needs while addressing the broader housing crisis.

