



Denbighshire
Housing &
Homelessness
Strategy
2021 - 2026

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Introduction



The Strategy is introduced to you by Councillors Tony Thomas in his role as Lead Member for Housing & Communities and Councillor Bobby Feeley in her role as Lead Member for Well-Being and Independence.

The Housing Strategy was adopted on 1 December 2015 and had a lifespan of five years. It set out the Council's vision and aims for housing in the County during this period.

Over the past five years' different issues have taken prominence and the Strategy has been fully revised to take account of Denbighshire's Corporate Plan, climate and ecological change, homelessness and young people's challenges with housing.

To reflect the greater emphasis on addressing homelessness in this revised Strategy it has also been renamed the Housing & Homelessness Strategy and a theme has been dedicated to the main concerns and projects in relation to homelessness.

The Strategy has two visions:

'Everyone is supported with pride to live in homes that meet their needs, within the vibrant and sustainable communities Denbighshire aspires to'

And

'End Homelessness in Denbighshire'

The aims of Strategy are providing more housing to address the housing needs of Denbighshire residents, ensuring that housing is of good quality, supporting people with their

housing issues, addressing homelessness and supporting communities.

These issues have been divided into six themes

Theme 1: More Homes to Meet Local Need and Demand

Theme 2: Creating a Supply of Affordable Homes

Theme 3: Ensuring Safe and Healthy Homes Theme 4: Preventing & Ending Homelessness in Denbighshire

Theme 5: Homes and Support for Vulnerable People

Theme 6: Promoting and Supporting Communities

The Housing & Homelessness Strategy comprises of:

The Strategy - which provides the context for the approach and identifies the high level outcomes

An Action Plan – which will be regularly monitored and updated throughout the lifespan of the Strategy

It is recognised throughout the Strategy that both Housing & Homelessness are the responsibility of a range of departments across the Council. Solutions are often developed with external partners, as well as through the Authority. A partnership approach is embedded into the projects which aim to deliver the Strategy.

The Housing & Homelessness Strategy for Denbighshire has been developed following extensive consultation both within and outside Denbighshire County Council. The Strategy will be closely monitored through the Strategic Housing & Homelessness Monitoring Group and progress updates as required to committee.

Tony Thomas Bobby Feeley

Executive Summary

Denbighshire's Housing & Homelessness Strategies have been developed around the visions of: *'Everyone is supported with pride to live in homes that meet their needs, within the vibrant and sustainable communities Denbighshire aspires to'*

And

'End Homelessness in Denbighshire'

Denbighshire's Housing & Homelessness Strategies have been blended into one overarching Strategy to reflect the fact that all the issues they seek to address are connected and need to be addressed by sectors across the Council and third sector partners.

To deliver these ambitious visions the overarching Strategy has been devised under six themes, all of which are linked:

1. More Homes to Meet Local Need and Demand
2. Creating a Supply of Affordable Homes
3. Ensuring Safe and Healthy Homes
4. Ending Homelessness in Denbighshire
5. Homes and Support for Vulnerable People
6. Promoting and Supporting Communities

Increasing the housing supply across Wales is an issue Welsh Government are keen to address and have developed the 'Taking Wales Forward, 2016 – 2021' programme this has the ambitious aim of delivering 20,000 affordable homes

Research indicates that Denbighshire, in line with the rest of Wales has a shortage of new build development, affordable homes, homes for older people and homes for vulnerable adults. Denbighshire aims to address this shortfall through a range of measures.

These will include an additional 170 Council homes; 260 affordable homes provided through private developers and Registered Social Landlords; bringing 500 empty properties back into use and providing additional Extra Care housing.

This is reflected in Denbighshire's Corporate

Plan 2017- 2022 with the priority of 'Ensuring access to good quality housing' and the target of the development of 1000 more homes across the County during the life of the plan.

Welsh Government commissioned an Independent Affordable Housing Review in 2019. This has made recommendations which will considerably affect the delivery and quality of affordable housing in Wales in coming years. This needs to be incorporated in the new Housing & Homelessness Strategy.

Denbighshire declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and is in the process of drafting a zero carbon action plan. One of the key actions of this plan will be the commitment to upgrade Council building assets, such as Council houses and offices to meet the zero carbon pledge commitment by 2030. The climate emergency is a major influence on Council decisions and will also effect the Council's compliance with the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Theme One: More Homes to Meet Local Need and Demand addresses the issue of low development rates in Denbighshire, and the need for more housing across the County.

To help stimulate the development market we have introduced site development briefs and a housing development prospectus which provides clarity and general information for developers and investors about allocated housing sites.

We are currently developing a Replacement Local Development Plan which will include land

allocations for housing development up to 2033. The new development will lead to a boost in the supply of affordable homes which is addressed in the next theme.

Theme Two: Creating a Supply of Affordable Homes, through this theme we investigate the issue of the limited supply of affordable homes in the county and what initiatives we can take to increase it. Research shows there is a clear need for affordable housing in the county, with 57% of first time buyers and new households being unable to afford to purchase a 2 bedroom house on the open market.¹ Decreasing and stagnant incomes in the county, are a contributing factor to the slow housing market, and underline the importance for more affordable housing to be created.

We have established an affordable housing delivery and investment programme for Denbighshire. This has been developed through the Housing Revenue Account thirty-year business plan and also by taking advantage of other funding sources such as the Innovative Housing Programme of funding and Housing and Health Funding. Working with a range of development partners, both other social landlords and the private sector, and access for Local Authorities to Social Housing Grant from 2021/22 will also open up another stream of funding to develop more affordable housing.

Theme Three: Ensuring Safe & Healthy Homes, examines the issue of improving and maintaining the standards of both public and privately owned accommodation, to ensure that residents live in a well maintained and safe home.

Denbighshire has undertaken a large programme of renewals and major works to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standards and will through the work of the Major Repairs Programme, continue to improve. There are also pilot schemes being implemented on renewable energy

measures, which will be rolled out to the rest of the housing stock, where possible. The decarbonisation of social housing stock has been made a priority by Welsh Government and needs to be factored and financially accounted for in any housing management plans going forward.

Denbighshire has also been instrumental in implementing the Landlord Registration Scheme, which will also help to address poor quality housing standards in the private rented sector.

Theme Four: Preventing & Ending Homelessness in Denbighshire there is a need to review the emergency accommodation options for families affected by homelessness. Presently there is a reliance on the private rented sector to provide this accommodation, but the quality, suitability and location varies considerably. Denbighshire will investigate alternative options to provide this accommodation. This will ensure that people, who are experiencing very difficult situations, are able to access good quality emergency accommodation whilst receiving the most appropriate advice and support.

Theme Five: Homes and Support for Vulnerable People, the information available showing the demographics of Denbighshire, reveals there is a considerable need for increased housing options, for the rising older people sector in the county and also for vulnerable adults.

We have committed to providing a further three Extra Care Facilities, working with partners which will address the changing needs of residents. We have also reviewed the existing housing accommodation options; which has ensured that accommodation choices, such as Supported Independent Living schemes have a range of support options, suitable for varying needs

¹ Denbighshire Local Housing Market Assessment July 2019

Theme 6: Promoting and Supporting Communities

Denbighshire aims to be a place where people aspire to live. To achieve this vision, we need to create vibrant and sustainable communities. By redeveloping neighbourhoods and addressing 'eyesore' sites and empty homes, we can give our residents an environment they can be proud of. We can also help Council residents improve their communities by helping set up neighbourhood groups and activities, to address issues and create community cohesion. For this to be truly sustainable they will need to be people led rather than organisation led.

Housing and Homelessness related issues are dealt with by various different departments across the Council and Third Sector organisations across the county. The Housing & Homelessness Strategy draws together all the issues and work required to address them, in a more strategic way, maximising resources and outcomes for Denbighshire's residents

Vision

Housing is one of the five Corporate Priorities for Denbighshire and is reflected across several departmental business plans.

The vision for the Housing Strategy for Denbighshire was developed through a consultation exercise facilitated by Glyndŵr University in June 2013 with housing partners, third sector organisations and the public. This vision was reviewed and supported by Councillors at a workshop in January 2020.

The Homelessness Strategy vision was developed following a comprehensive review of homelessness across Denbighshire in 2016

The visions are supported through the six themes of the Housing & Homelessness Strategy and the Action Plan to ensure that the County's aspirations are fulfilled.



Monitoring & Governance

The Housing Strategy (2016-2021) was produced, coordinated and led by Planning, Public Protection & Countryside Services. The operational responsibilities for delivering a range of housing issues contained within the Housing Strategy are delivered via the relevant Services, for example, Local Authority Social Housing is developed and maintained by Finance & Property Services and managed by Customers & Communities. Addressing Homelessness is delivered and managed by Community Support Services.

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Community Support Services have led on the production of the original Homelessness

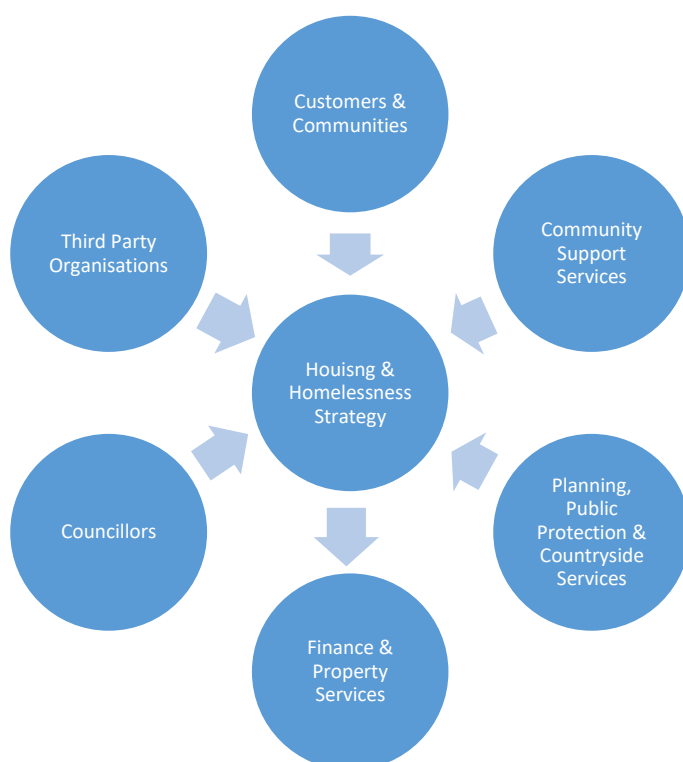
Strategy and associated Action Plan.

Homelessness however is a corporate issue best addressed through effective partnership working across all relevant DCC Services and partner organisations.

Moving forwards, the Housing and Homelessness Strategy will provide the strategic framework for addressing homelessness, and will be the vehicle for agreeing homelessness priorities and monitoring progress against them. This will enable better integration and provide more corporate ownership to the work on homelessness.

The new Housing & Homelessness Strategy will be monitored primarily by the Strategic Housing & Homelessness Group - a Lead Member and Officer Group which meets bi-monthly and enables a more strategic/corporate approach to Homelessness and Housing across the County.

The Group monitors and reviews progress on the delivery of identified actions through the action plan with regular progress reports to Scrutiny and other committees as necessary.



Local Context

Population and Households



95.3k

2018 Mid-year population estimates for Denbighshire



42,608

2026 Mid-year estimate of Denbighshire households



1954

Forecasted increase in households 2015² - 2026



£27,395

Median household income in Denbighshire in 2019



£2092

Decrease in median income since 2007/08



21%

Population in Denbighshire aged 65 and over



24%

Population of Denbighshire with an activity limiting illness or disability



51%

327 households threatened with homelessness 2019-20 (Up 111 from previous year)



12%

Areas³ of Denbighshire classed as being in the top 10 of the worst deprived areas in Wales (WIMD 2019)

Housing Market



196

New properties completed 2018/19 up 15 on 2017/18



57%

New households cannot afford a 2-bedroom open market house in Denbighshire



371 affordable homes provided 2015 - 2020



69%

Households in Denbighshire who own their own homes outright or with a mortgage



6.4k

Households renting in the private rented sector



5.2k

Households in Denbighshire renting from Registered Social Landlords & the Council in 2011

² Earlier Housing Strategy spanned period 2015- 2020

³ Lower Super Output Areas as defined by Office of National Statistics

The Welsh language is an inseparable part of the social fabric of Wales and is spoken by 24,425 residents in the County (24.6% of the population). This makes Denbighshire the sixth highest Welsh speaking County in Wales.

Alongside the key demographic and housing related data it is also important to recognise how this Strategy influences and is influenced by other key Council Plans and Strategies.

The Denbighshire Corporate Plan 2017 -2022 sets out the key priorities for the County with the corporate priority of Housing being one of the Council's main commitments.

The Strategy recognises the link to the Economic & Community Ambition Strategy 2013 – 2023. In particular, two of its six themes, high quality skilled workforce and vibrant towns and communities.

The Local Development Plan is the key delivery vehicle for delivering open market and affordable housing. The plan classifies available land use in Denbighshire and allocates enough development land for housing for a period of 15 years. The current plan expires in 2021 and work is underway for its replacement which will take into account forecasted population trends, both numbers and demographic which translate into the projected housing need for the County.

There are other important Strategic plans which have fed into this Strategy, principally amongst them is the Local Commissioning Plan 2019 – 2022 and the Strategic Equality Plan. These plans recognise the role housing associations also play in delivering better

housing and supporting vulnerable people within the County.

Key Achievements of the Denbighshire Housing Strategy 2015 – 2020

- 371 affordable homes provided 2015 – 20
- Commencement of Council House development programme
- Development of an Empty Homes Delivery Plan
- Development of the Local Housing Market Assessment
- Housing Prospectus produced to promote development sites
- Neighbourhood Plans developed with the community
- Affordable Housing Commuted Sums process reviewed
- Implementation of a Common Housing Register (SARTH)
- Implementation of an Affordable Housing Register Partnership (Tai Teg)
- Housing First pilot commenced for complex homelessness cases
- Homelessness Service re-focused their approach through Prevention, Duty and Move-on teams
- Homelessness Strategy was developed and adopted
- An Extra Care development is underway in Denbigh with a planned extension to an existing development in Ruthin in the process of being brought forward

Theme one

More Homes to Meet Local Need & Demand Outcomes

1. An increased supply of new homes of all types and tenures to meet the needs and demands of households and communities in Denbighshire as defined by the two-yearly Local Housing Market Assessment
2. Better use of the housing stock by continuing to target empty homes across the County
3. Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs are identified and addressed

Background

1.1 This theme aims to address how to deliver more homes to meet local need and demand. Housing need is largely identified through the statutory Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA). This must be carried out every two years as mandated by The Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This enables the strategic planning of housing development and supply across the County.

Increasing the supply of homes includes all types of accommodation: -

- Open market housing and low cost home ownership schemes
- Private, intermediate and social rented accommodation
- Gypsy and Traveller pitches

1.2 All these types of accommodation are supported by government initiatives and targets to help stimulate their supply and ensure good quality housing standards.

1.3 The economic benefits of good quality housing are well established, providing increased benefits in health and well-being and sustainable communities that people aspire to live in.

1.4 To enable our towns and villages to become more vibrant, prosperous and sustainable, the Council has produced its Economic and Community Ambition Strategy,

which is clearly linked to the Housing & Homelessness Strategy. Both Strategies encourage growth in these communities and so increase the availability and affordability of accommodation in the area.

1.5 We are also currently developing an Infrastructure Plan for the County, which will identify any infrastructure issues for allocated development sites and ensure that all housing sites are successfully delivered with the appropriate infrastructure in place.

1.6 The construction industry is also a key employer and increased housing development will create more jobs for local people. The Council will work with developers and Housing Associations to ensure that jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities are made available for local people.

1.7 As part of this commitment we have successfully recruited and trained three building trades apprentices who are transitioning into full time qualified employees within the Council. We will be looking to repeat this exercise in the coming months. We will also be exploring opportunities to increase apprenticeships within the industry via the social housing development programme. The Welsh Language Standards ensure that the courses and placements are promoted bilingually.

Outcome One

An increased supply of new homes of all types and tenures to meet the needs and demands of households and communities in Denbighshire as defined by the two-yearly Local Housing Market Assessment, which provides current need and demand data for the County.

Issues & Challenges

- A two-yearly completed Local Housing Market Assessment is a statutory requirement

- 64.5% of the households in Denbighshire are single or couple households with no dependents
- Population profile of older people is increasing; currently 21% of Denbighshire's residents are aged 65 or over
- Decrease in number of new build dwellings since 2007
- Low levels of planning applications for residential development
- Delivering the allocated housing sites within the Local Development Plan
- Decrease in the volume of house sales in the County since 2007 and static house prices
- Promoting Welsh language and culture
- Impact of coronavirus Covid-19

1.8 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has made it a statutory requirement for each local authority to conduct a Local Housing Market Assessment, every two years, to ensure that adequate planning is made for changing accommodation needs.

1.9 The last assessment of housing need in Denbighshire in 2019 established that the availability of suitable housing to meet the needs of the population is an issue. There is an oversupply of 4 and 5 bedroom⁴ houses in the County and not enough smaller, good quality housing.

1.10 Older people are a significant group in the population profile of the County with 21% being aged 65 and over. This is in line with our neighbouring counties to the West⁵ whilst Flintshire & Wrexham to the East however, have a stronger employment market and consequently have a younger population profile. This proportion of older people needs a wide range of housing options to be

⁴ Update of Housing Need, Demand and Affordability in the Local Housing Market Areas of Denbighshire. Source: Glyndŵr University

developed, which will promote independence, social inclusion and reduce the number of people in residential placements, in line with the aims of the Corporate Plan and Welsh Government legislation⁶.

1.11 The slump in the housing market and the tightening of mortgage lending criteria for all potential buyers, following the banking crisis has meant that not only are many people unable to access finance to buy their first home, but many others are unable to sell, as a consequence and move to more suitable accommodation. The majority of the residents of Denbighshire own their own homes either with a mortgage or outright.⁷

1.12 It is difficult for a local authority to influence the lack of development, but there are some local measures it can take to enable conditions, once markets start to improve. A key method of enabling development is to have a clear and current Local Development Plan (LDP). Denbighshire adopted its LDP in 2013, it has a life span from 2006 – 2021 and has identified enough land to bring forward 7500 houses in this period. Work is underway for the successor plan which will have a lifespan from 2018 to 2033.

1.13 Another method to encourage development to take place quickly is to reduce the commencement period condition on planning permissions and provide gap funding for stalled sites. The latter would be especially effective for bringing forward affordable housing units. The Council has undertaken a review of the allocated sites included in the LDP, this information will form part of the assessment process for sites which will be taken forward in the Replacement LDP.

1.14 We have developed Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and pre-planning application advice is available to developers. This is to try and ensure that any applications

⁵ Table 1 in Appendix (i)

⁶ Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

⁷ Source: ONS- Tenure type in Denbighshire

submitted will meet local requirements and are more likely to be granted and so speed up the planning process.

1.15 We have devised a series of development briefs for sites allocated in the LDP. The development briefs assist in advising the kind of development which is sought for a particular site and have been consulted on with members and the local community.

1.16 An Infrastructure Plan is being developed and this will provide further information on any infrastructure requirements for allocated sites and how these can be addressed. The Council will be taking action to address the issue of stalled sites – these are sites which are allocated for development, have planning permission in place or in some cases where development has started but not progressed.

1.17 There have been some concerns that development of large allocated sites, may encourage excessive inward migration to the County, which could have a negative impact on Welsh culture and language. In 2011 Denbighshire & Conwy surveyed the characteristics of residents of new built dwellings. There were 180 respondents and it was established that 68% of the non-Welsh speaking households had moved to the area from other areas within Denbighshire and 27% were Welsh speakers.

1.18 This exercise was repeated in 2017 and it was found that 67% of all new build housing was occupied by people who were already living in Denbighshire. This indicates that the impact of large developments culturally is not as great as initially thought.

1.19 The LDP requires Linguistic Impact Statements to be submitted with planning applications for any developments of 5 or more homes. As a minimum, development proposals should seek to use locally relevant Welsh names. A Street Naming and Numbering Policy was adopted in May 2014, which aims to preserve Welsh language identity and local

history of the County, by making the requirement that all new street names must be Welsh or bi-lingual and consistent with the local heritage of the area. This will help ensure that Denbighshire retains its Welsh identity, by promoting the language in everyday use.

1.20 The impact of coronavirus Covid-19 is as yet unknown. However, the housebuilding industry is very sensitive to fluctuations in the housing market which will inevitably occur as a result of the freezing of the ownership market due to the regulations introduced to try and manage the outbreak. These regulations have now been relaxed in England, but it unknown as yet when this will happen in Wales and how the housing market will operate going forward.

1.21 The introduction of social distancing regulations had the effect of closing down most construction sites and the prohibition of travel unless it was essential means that many sites couldn't be prepared in readiness for the regulations being lifted.

1.22 The suspension of construction activity has meant, a sharp reduction in house building and completions for 2020/21 is expected. Developers will be looking for ways to reduce risk going forward and will likely, as in previous recessions, embrace partnership working on sites with social landlords. This could mean that affordable housing could benefit from the current health crisis.

Outcome Two

Better use of the existing housing stock by continuing to target empty homes across the County.

Issues & Challenges

- 780 residential empty properties in Denbighshire (based on April 2018 Council Tax records)
- Difficulty in engaging owners to bring empty homes back into use
- Complexity of legislation and the risk of additional costs to the Council

1.23 The Council in its Corporate Plan has committed to bringing 500 empty homes back

into use by 2022. If an empty dwelling can be brought back into use, it not only removes a wasted asset, it has far wider benefits for the local community, by improving the amenity of the area, as well as the health and well-being of local residents.

1.24 The Empty Homes Delivery Plan was developed and adopted by the Council in 2019. In it we utilise the Welsh Government's targeted funding, through the Houses to Homes recyclable loan scheme, in conjunction with grants and loans also made available through the Council.

1.25 Through this scheme, owners are offered advice and support on how to deal with a problematic property. This can range from providing repayable loans for works to enable the property to be sold, to signposting for assistance to rent the property out. Properties progressed through this route can become affordable housing for a minimum period tied to the loan repayment schedule. Loans are repaid directly to the Council, so that the money can be recycled into other empty home projects.

1.26 An Empty Homes Project Group has been established to oversee the delivery of the plan and its actions. One of the key actions of the plan is to set up a matching service between willing developers and empty home owners to work on specific properties and areas to drive the agenda forward.

1.27 The Empty Homes programme has also been integral to providing affordable housing and through its 'eyesore' site work contributes to regeneration, more information about this is contained in themes two and six respectively.

Outcome Three

Gypsies and Travellers accommodation needs are identified and addressed

Issues & Challenges

- The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 makes it mandatory for all Councils to carry out an assessment of Gypsy & Traveller

accommodation needs and take action on the findings.

- We have regular unauthorised encampments although generally small, indicating there is some need
- We have no authorised sites in the County

1.28 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation needs have to be re-assessed every 5 years and submitted to Welsh Government, with a planned response for how the authority intends to meet the need. A Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessment was carried out in 2011 by Bangor University, on behalf of the North Wales authorities (excluding Wrexham). This suggested that at the time there was a need for two residential pitches and a transit site in the County. A new assessment was undertaken in 2016 and needs were identified for a permanent residential site for 5-6 pitches for an existing extended family in Denbighshire and a transit site of 4-5 pitches.

1.29 The period 2016- 2017 saw 46 unauthorised encampments in the County reported to the Council. These encampments are largely in Rhyl and Prestatyn but there is evidence there are smaller encampments in more rural areas such as Ruthin and Llangollen.

Headline Actions for Theme One

1. Review existing Local Development Plan policies and land allocations to progress a Replacement Local Development Plan to adoption
2. Produce an Infrastructure Plan for Denbighshire and address infrastructure issues
3. Maintain and update a two-yearly Local Housing Market Assessment
4. Undertake an up to date Gypsy & Traveller accommodation assessment and take action on its findings.
5. Implement the Empty Homes Delivery Plan

Theme Two

Creating a Supply of Affordable Homes

Outcomes

1. Improved supply of affordable housing of all types and tenures across the County
2. Working with partners to maximise affordable housing development
3. An increase in applicants on the Affordable Housing Register

Background

2.1 This theme aims to examine the issues surrounding Affordable Housing and the affordability of the housing market for local residents. Affordable Housing is defined by Denbighshire County Council⁸ as housing provided to those who cannot afford general open market housing and is retained as affordable for first and subsequent occupiers.

2.2 Affordable Housing should meet the needs of eligible households, include availability at low enough cost for them to afford, determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices.⁹

2.3 The Council can influence the supply of Affordable Housing through its planning policies, the strategic management of Social Housing Grant and the use of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

2.4 Affordable Housing can be divided into three types of housing tenure: -

- Social Rented Housing - Affordable Housing for rent which is provided by Local Authorities and Housing Associations with rent being set in accordance with Welsh Government's benchmark rents. This is usually the cheapest available rented housing and has the biggest demand.
- Intermediate Rental Housing – whereby rents are above those of social rented housing but normally no higher than 80%

of an open market rent of a comparable property. This kind of housing can be provided by private developers and Social Landlords.

- Low Cost Affordable Home Ownership - normally Shared Equity schemes, where a proportion of the property is bought by an eligible applicant and a proportion of the equity is retained on behalf of the Local Authority by a Housing Association, it is possible to 'staircase' these properties so the purchaser owns them outright with the money paid being recycled into further affordable housing.

2.5 It does not include the 'Help to Buy' mortgage guarantee, deposit or ISA schemes, as there is no facility for these properties to remain affordable in perpetuity, no income assessment or facility for the advance of money available when repaid to be recycled to facilitate further purchases.

2.6 The credit crunch of 2007 had a significant effect on the housing market with home ownership steadily declining from a peak of 73.3% in 2007 to 65.1% in 2019¹⁰. The main reason for the decline is that incomes have not risen in line with house prices and the lending criteria for mortgages has been tightened following the crisis and reduced the amount of people who can qualify for one.

2.6 It was reported in 2016 that the UK experienced the largest fall in home ownership of any EU country, since the financial crisis. 43% of people born in the late 1970's owned their own home by the age of 27, however of those born in the late 1980's only 25% are in the same position.¹¹ The same report also concluded that over the past 20 years, average house prices have grown seven times faster than the average incomes of young people.

⁸ DCC Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance 2014

⁹ Welsh Government Planning Technical Advice Note 2 (TAN 2) – Glossary definition

¹⁰ Trading Economics January 2020

¹¹ Institute for Fiscal Studies Chapman.B. 16/2/2018

2.7 Home ownership affordability in Denbighshire has not improved. In 2011 almost 24% of the population could not afford to buy a 2-bedroom house on the open market but by 2017 this figure has risen to 57%¹².

2.8 The open market price of a property has not increased greatly between 2011 and 2017, but income levels have been recovering

slowly since the credit crunch and have still not in the majority of Denbighshire achieved the levels of 2007. The table below illustrates the median income levels in Denbighshire and Wales.

2.9 It can be seen from this table that Denbighshire incomes in 2019 are still lower than incomes in 2007.

Median Income Levels

	Denbighshire	Wales
2007	£29,492	£25,400
2013	£23,866	£24,721
2015	£23,923	£24,788
2016	£24,574	£24,944
2017	£26,126	£26,580
2018	£26,717	£26,931
2019	£27,395	£27,962

Table 1 Median Income Levels Source: CACI Paycheck data

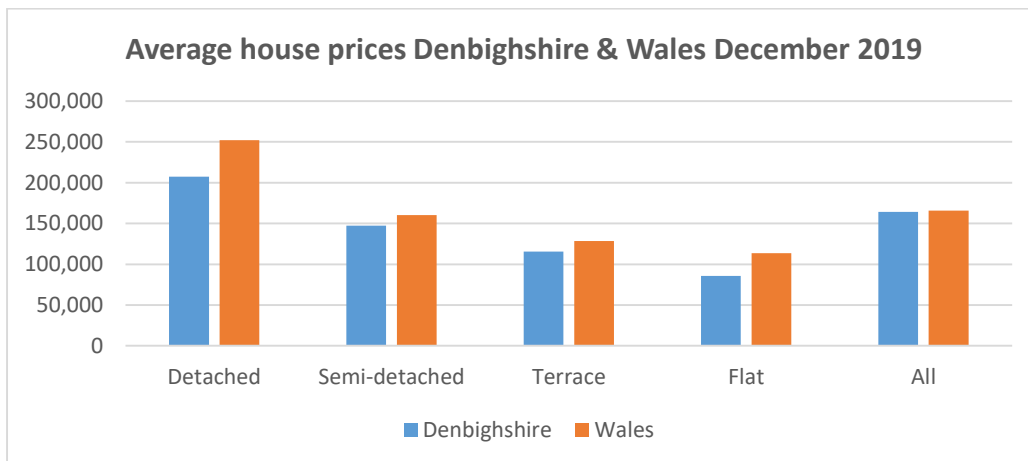


Figure 1 Average House Prices Dec 2019 Source: Land Registry

¹² DCC Local Housing Market Assessment 2019

2.10 As a result of the changes in median income, the affordability of home ownership accommodation in Denbighshire has recovered from in recent years, from 63% in 2015 being priced out of the market to 57% in 2019. Although this County view masks the huge inequalities of unaffordability which ranges from 45% of the population in the Corwen & Llangollen Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) area to 66% of the population in the Rhyl & Coast LHMA area.

2.11 Intermediate Rental has as a consequence of uncertain housing markets due to issues such as Brexit has risen considerably as a tenure of choice for applicants requiring affordable housing. Applications to the Tai Teg Affordable Housing Register have increased considerably since July 2019 with 454 applicants now approved and waiting for a suitable home¹³.

2.12 An Independent Affordable Housing Review conducted by Welsh Government in 2018 made 48 recommendations to facilitate affordable housing delivery in Wales. These related to the implementation of improvements in the following eight areas:

1. Housing Need
2. Housing Quality Standards
3. Modern Methods of Construction
4. Rent Policy
5. Local Authorities as Enablers and Builders
6. Public Sector Land
7. Financing Affordable Housing
8. Dowry and Major Repairs

Outcome One

An improved supply of affordable housing of all types and tenures across the County. Issues & Challenges

- Personal income levels have recovered slowly since the credit crunch with many areas still experiencing severe deprivation notably areas in Rhyl and Denbigh

- Significant gap between affordable housing need and supply
- Affordable Housing provision through planning obligation is 10%
- Housing in hamlets and open countryside has to meet affordable housing criteria
- Financial Challenges being faced by the Council and partners
- Low turnover of Council/Housing Association stock
- Welfare Reform changes combined with a changing population profile necessitating a need to build smaller properties.
- Affordable Housing Review implementation



Figure 2: Clwyd Alyn scheme in Llanbedr DC © Clwyd Alyn



Figure 3: Clwyd Alyn scheme Llanbedr DC © Clwyd Alyn

2.13 All supply is influenced by planning policy, the viability of 'private' housing development to provide some affordable

¹³ Tai Teg Report March 2020

housing. Welsh Government funding and the developments by Housing Associations.

2.14 The time limited funding stream for the Welsh Government Innovative Housing Programme has led to the development of new Modern Methods of Construction housing in Denbighshire. Clwyd Alyn have developed a 38-unit scheme in rural Llanbedr which aims to address the issue of fuel poverty through its district heating system, whilst providing many units of social housing in a rural area, which traditionally have poor development rates as it is harder to get economies of scale.

2.15 Denbighshire has also been successful in gaining money from this funding scheme and will be developing homes to Passivhaus standard in Prestatyn and Denbigh, shortly utilising pre-fabricated off site components, which will speed up the build process as well as ensuring the properties are very energy efficient.

2.16 The LDP requires housing developments across the County to provide a minimum of 10% affordable housing preferably on the site being developed. There is provision for this percentage to be reviewed if house prices begin to rise and viability can be assured. Developers must provide a commuted sum for affordable housing which cannot be physically provided onsite as the development is for between 3 to 9 dwellings.

2.17 Levels of Affordable Housing provision can vary significantly from year to year.

2.18 A review of affordable housing was undertaken in 2014, to investigate ways of stimulating supply and also to review policies and procedures that were hampering delivery of affordable housing. The review identified a number of improvements which we have begun to address through the Housing & Homelessness Strategy. These measures include:

- Establishing an affordable housing delivery programme
- Reviewed Council held land to assess whether it is suitable to be kept as a land bank for future affordable housing delivery
- Investigated alternative ways of funding alternative housing
- Introduced a new affordable housing commuted sums policy, which allows for the centralising of sums to increase spending options

2.19 We will also be investigating the possibility of developing a standard S106 agreement which will help to speed up the process of delivering affordable housing.

2.20 Availability and suitability of public land for affordable housing are being investigated. Options such as gap funding are being assessed to see if they will bring forward stalled sites and the possibility of selling Council land in some areas to raise funds for developing affordable housing in other areas of greater need.

2.21 The 'Right to Buy' and 'Right to Acquire' was abolished by Welsh Government on 26th January 2019 although Denbighshire successfully applied for it to be suspended in the authority in August 2016, to mitigate against losing further social housing stock through this process.

2.22 Whilst the facility was in place over 4000 social houses were sold whilst only an extra 700 were provided. The net effect of this was that as a County over 3000 properties have been lost as affordable housing in perpetuity.

2.23 Another option for increasing affordable housing stock, regenerating communities and targeting accommodation for specific vulnerable families, is to look at options such as buying back former Council properties or buying and refurbishing empty homes.

2.24 During the period 2016 to 2020, the Council bought back 20 properties and has plans for 14 more by 2023 as part of its Council housing development programme.

2.25 By addressing the issues identified by the affordable housing review, it is anticipated that we will stimulate and increase supply. This will be achieved by:

- Continuing to deliver a targeted programme for both commuted sums and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding,
- Maximising external funding such as Social Housing Grant and associated housing funding schemes,
- Identifying opportunities for collaboration, between Social Landlords so parties can benefit from economies of scale

2.26 This will contribute to an improved supply of affordable housing of all types and tenures. The majority of affordable housing provided in recent years has been delivered by Housing Associations and the Council will continue to work closely with them to develop affordable housing as they are integral in achieving affordable housing at scale.

2.27 The review process of the LDP will allow us to re-examine policies such as 'Housing in Hamlets' and take into account any practical issues that have arisen as part of implementing the policy.

Outcome Two

Working with partners to maximise affordable housing delivery

Issues & Challenges

- Lack of financial certainty for Council & Housing Association partners
- Uncertainty surrounding the Social Housing Grant Programme
- Increasing costs for building
- Public perception of Affordable Housing

2.28 Social Housing Grant (SHG) is currently awarded annually by Welsh Government to

bring forward Affordable Housing by Housing Associations and strategically managed by the Local Authority. This ensures that developments are funded following a local strategic assessment and obtains best value for money. The Council have not been able to access SHG funding directly itself but have been given Affordable Housing Grant alongside an increase in the borrowing limits available using the HRA account to develop new housing, however from 2021 Councils will be able to access SHG funding.

2.29 The Affordable Housing Review recommendations published in 2019 advise that a new grant system should be introduced offering a 5-year model, which favours partnerships and gains greater value for money by providing funding certainty and is more flexible over the grant percentage awarded. Under the current system grant is awarded at either 58% or 25% depending on the tenure of the scheme, the recommendations state that this could be more fluid.

2.30 It also recommended that the current streams of funding should be consolidated into one pot to ensure that housing tenures reflect the local regional and national tenures identified by the housing need assessments.

2.31 It is unknown yet how a more centralised grant system will affect the delivery of affordable housing, but Denbighshire will work with Welsh Government and our partners to ensure that development proposals for grant applications are still compiled strategically to meet Denbighshire's housing need.

2.32 We can look at joint venture partnerships with a Housing Association or private developer where we can provide the land or access to cheaper funding but the development partner provides the building expertise.

2.33 Local Authorities are also increasingly being approached by pension investment

companies. The companies offer to build the properties on 'free' Council land and lease them to the Council for a period of 10 – 15 years. The Council receives the rental income and has the opportunity to buy the properties at the end of the lease period.

2.34 The alternative mechanisms for funding Affordable Housing, do in the main favour schemes, where the Council has large land portfolios. In Denbighshire this is not the case, with much of the land owned distributed around the County in small pockets and not suitable for medium to large scale housing developments.

2.35 The Council's Asset Management Group draws expertise from across the authority to assess the viability of surplus property and land assets and explore alternative uses or disposal. Through this process affordable housing is considered in all cases, however there is pressure in the current climate to achieve the best market price, which then makes affordable housing unviable as it relies on land being made freely available or at low cost.

2.36 Empty homes are also strategically prioritised through the Social Housing Grant programme, as a way of bringing forward affordable housing more quickly. The houses bought under this scheme will remain affordable in perpetuity.

2.37 They also aid regeneration programmes, which supports the Economic and Community Ambition Strategy 2013 -2023. This is often a more cost effective method of increasing affordable housing, especially in more rural areas, where new build developments often encounter viability issues.

2.38 Social Housing tenants who do wish to get on the housing ladder are prioritised through the Affordable Housing Register – Tai Teg for any dwellings which are available for sale. This ensures that home ownership is still

an option for Council and Housing Association tenants.

2.39 The Council has been involved in the setting up of the West Rhyl Cooperative. The co-operative owns a small number of refurbished and new build properties in the West of Rhyl and has alongside Clwyd Alyn and North Wales Housing has been instrumental in remodelling and regenerating this area.

Outcome Three

An increase in applicants registered on the affordable housing register

Issues & Challenges

- Negative perception of affordable housing
- Lack of awareness of different affordable housing schemes
- Complexity of application process

2.40 All the research and information indicates there is a high need for affordable housing in the County, applicants to the Affordable Housing Register – Tai Teg have significantly increased to 458¹⁴ since its relaunch in 2018. It is apparent that the need is not fully translating into affordable housing applications, more work will be undertaken to encourage people to use this avenue as a route to accommodation

2.41 Following the relaunch of the Affordable Housing Register it was seen that there is a considerable increase in demand for Intermediate Rental properties. Currently a third more applicants on the register have chosen this option over home ownership as a preference.

2.42 It is thought that the uncertainties in the housing market brought about by Brexit has had some effect. Mortgages are increasingly difficult to qualify for and confidence in the security of employment is also a factor. As a result, Intermediate Rental is seen as a desirable option particularly for working families with a low to average income,

¹⁴ April 2020 Tai Teg Report

who do not meet the stringent housing need criteria required to qualify for social housing.

2.43 The Coronavirus Covid 19 is also having a negative effect on the housing and employment market in 2020. Early forecasts indicate that the housing market has frozen due to the regulations enacted to try and manage the outbreak.

2.44 Online property portal Zoopla suggests that there will be a 60% fall in property sales in the period April to June 2020. Many mortgage lenders have raised the amount of equity needed to be available in an existing owned property or the amount of deposit required to qualify for mortgages to between 25% and 40% as a result of the crisis. This may have an impact in the short term regarding applicants for affordable housing, as more people may qualify for social housing and opt to apply to the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) which deals with all social housing lettings.

2.45 There are a variety of different affordable housing schemes such as Homebuy and Shared Equity. Welsh Government also recently introduced the 'Rent to Own' model which although not affordable in perpetuity is aimed at people who cannot afford to buy on the open market and money from the scheme is recycled back into it, to enable more purchases. The range of schemes can be off-putting to applicants. Work will be undertaken to see if there is a way of publicising affordable housing in an easily accessible manner.

2.46 The Council is developing an Asset Management Strategy which includes a 30-year house building programme, and a maintenance programme which will incorporate the commitments the Council has made regarding achieving zero carbon status for emissions by 2030. It will also meet the Welsh Governments standards required regarding decarbonisation of existing Council stock.



Figure 4: Dol Hyfryd, Denbigh Intermediate Housing Grŵp Cynefin

Headline Actions for Theme Two

1. Review of Local Development Plan policies such as affordable housing in rural areas and commuted sums
2. Review the current approach and thresholds for affordable housing requirements in LDP policies
3. Active promotion of the Tai Teg affordable housing register to increase applications, as more applicants will evidence need and demand to developers
4. Publicise successful affordable housing schemes
5. Develop a Council Housing Asset Strategy, which includes a house building and maintenance programme, alongside a carbon zero plan for existing properties.
6. Review existing housing portfolio with emphasis on providing suitable accommodation to the future older person demographic of Denbighshire
7. Practical completion of first new homes through Housing Development Programme

Theme Three

Ensuring Safe and Healthy Homes

Outcomes

1. Council and Housing Association accommodation is maintained to Welsh Housing Quality Standards
2. Decarbonisation of social housing stock
3. All DCC houses to be 'C' rated on the EPC by 2022
4. Improved standards in the Private Rented Sector
5. Accommodation will be of good quality and will be adaptable to residents' needs
6. Targeted financial resources to ensure homes are more energy efficient helping the environment, improving housing quality and targeting fuel poverty
7. Unauthorised residential occupation of holiday caravans will be reduced
8. Implement & enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in the private rented sector and address fuel poverty

Background

3.1 This theme aims to address the provision of safe and healthy homes in Denbighshire. This needs to be tackled across all types of accommodation; affordable housing, private rented accommodation and owner occupied homes including mobile home sites.

Outcome One

Council and Housing Association accommodation is maintained to Welsh Housing Quality Standards

Issues & Challenges

- Maintenance of homes to the recommended standards

3.2 Welsh Government set a target of meeting Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) by 2020 for all social rented housing stock in Wales. The standard included issues such as:-

- Ensuring properties are adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated

- Contain up to date kitchens and bathrooms
- Are in a good state of repair
- Are safe and secure

3.3 Denbighshire County Council and the Housing Associations which operate in Denbighshire met these standards before the deadline and are now the maintenance period.

3.4 The programme represents an investment of £51m for DCC owned properties to achieve these standards. Kitchens and bathrooms are regularly condition reviewed and on a rolling programme replaced as necessary to ensure that the Council remains compliant.

3.5 Current emphasis of property maintenance for the Council is on external works including major enveloping schemes which include energy efficiency measures such as external insulation.

3.6 As part of the upgrading and renovating work carried out on properties owned by Clwyd Alyn, solar panels were installed on some suitable properties. Denbighshire County Council was unable to access the funding through Welsh Housing Quality Standards to implement renewable technology sources; however, we have been successful in bidding for eco funding which has provided targeted energy efficient initiatives to some Council properties. This option will continue to be pursued and complemented by investment from the Council.

Outcome Two

Decarbonisation of social housing stock

Issues & Challenges

- Establishing a baseline of required works
- Financing & maintenance of work
- All DCC houses to be 'C' rated on the EPC by 2022

3.7 The Affordable Housing Review made recommendations which included a large scale programme of decarbonisation of social housing stock.

3.8 Denbighshire's declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency in 2019, has led to several commitments in an attempt to mitigate the harm we are causing to the environment. One of these commitments is to ensure all DCC housing stock is energy rated 'C' by 2022.

3.9 All new Council housing being built is to EPC energy rated 'A' standard. Air source heat pumps are now being installed to off gas council homes, which assists with both fuel poverty and decarbonisation.

3.10 The removal of the cap on borrowing for the Housing Revenue Account will assist in funding the works needed, however any borrowing must be sustainable and as part of the Asset Management Strategy being drawn up an agreed borrowing business plan will be drawn up.

Outcome Three

Improved standards in the Private Rented Sector

Issues & Challenges

- Challenges in developing good relationships with landlords
- Establishing an accurate database of landlords in the County
- Poor quality multi-occupation dwellings
- Improving the quality of private rented sector stock

3.11 The Denbighshire housing market has a high percentage of privately rented properties. In 2011 private rented sector accommodation accounted for 13% of accommodation in North Wales but in Denbighshire this figure rises to 16.5%. In fact, Denbighshire has the highest proportion of privately rented accommodation in Wales outside of Counties which contain a University.

3.12 It is anticipated that by 2020 the private rented sector will make up 20% of the total housing stock in Wales. Wales private

rented sector stock is also the oldest in the UK with 43% of stock dating from before 1919¹⁵

3.13 Private landlords make up a significant proportion of the housing offer in the County. Private landlords can vary from individuals who rent out a single property to landlords who have a large property portfolio. Across the spectrum the majority of landlords maintain their properties in good condition and provide a good quality housing solution. However, some landlords are either not 'fit' or 'proper' or rent out properties in poor condition and/do not maintain their properties adequately and so provide substandard accommodation.

3.14 The most problematic rented properties are those which have been subdivided, particularly former guest house/holiday accommodation in the coastal area of the County. Many of these have been poorly converted into residential flats. These properties are often referred to as Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

3.15 Some of these properties have been converted without the requisite planning permission but can become lawful after four or more years, if the authority is unaware of the change. The Council's licensing procedure would seek to ensure minimum standards are adhered to both in terms of the quality of the property and its actual management, however converted premises may not require a licence and licences cannot prevent conversion.

3.16 With the changes to Housing Benefit under Welfare Reform and the introduction of Universal Credit, house sharing arrangements are becoming more common, especially for single people under the age of 35, as it is frequently the only affordable option. Whilst such uses are unlikely to require planning permission, they may require licensing. It is in any event important that this expanding form

¹⁵ ONS – Private Rented Sector Release 2018

of accommodation is regulated and monitored to ensure that it is safe and fit for occupation.

3.17 Additional licensing was introduced in Rhyl to ensure that more informal house shares were regulated and managed correctly. This has proved successful and plans are underway to extend the scheme to Llangollen and Denbigh, where it is known there are smaller house share arrangements, ensuring that tenants and landlords benefit from the standards set for these types of properties.

3.18 We currently deal with approximately 500 complaints a year regarding private sector housing, ranging from poorly maintained properties to illegal evictions. Some of these complaints arise due to the fact landlords are not aware of their responsibilities. The Rent Smart Scheme has been designed to address this and has been actively promoted by the Council particularly at Landlord Forum events.

3.19 There are currently 2045 landlords registered on Rent Smart Wales in Denbighshire with the figure increasing year on year¹⁶. The compulsory registration scheme was introduced as part of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Outcome Four

Accommodation will be of good quality and will be adaptable to residents changing needs
Issues & Challenges

- Response to the changing demographic of the County (smaller household size, disabilities and increasing older person profile)
- Large scale regeneration projects such as Rhyl West End

3.20 The introduction of minimum floor space standards has been implemented by the Council through planning policy. This policy applies to new build properties and conversions to ensure that homes remain fit for purpose and can accommodate basic adaptations as needed for older and

vulnerable residents. This approach means that people will be able to remain a part of their community for much longer, which will in turn strengthen the community through having a diverse range of residents and have positive effects of Welsh speaking communities.

3.21 The Affordable Housing Review made the recommendation that any S106 properties should be built to Development Quality Requirements (DQR). This is the standard to which any affordable housing dwelling needs to be comply with and is a higher standard than that required for open market housing. By building to these standards it will give more tenure options to the properties obtained through planning gain on a development as they will be suitable for intermediate and social rent as well as affordable home ownership.

3.22 The regeneration of the West End of Rhyl through a partnership comprising of Welsh Government, Denbighshire County Council and the Housing Associations has meant the large scale demolition and repurposing of many properties. Abbey Street and Gronant Street have been largely demolished and replaced with modern family housing which is sympathetic to the existing character in the area. The new properties have replaced the large Victorian style buildings which had previously been boarding houses and latterly poor quality flats and HMOs. The properties are managed by the West Rhyl Cooperative, which has replaced the West Rhyl Community Land Trust.

3.23 The regeneration programme has been enabled by an investment of over £16m in the area notably through Welsh Government, Clwyd Alyn and North Wales Housing who have built new properties and refurbished and remodelled existing dwellings. This has ensured that properties meet space standards and Welsh Housing Quality

¹⁶ Rent Smart Wales Report April 2020

Standards. It has also helped reduce the density of the population in the area and so changed the community from comprising of largely single people often with a low or no income to attracting families back into the area and so help revitalise the community.

Outcome Five

Maximised use of limited financial assistance to support the private housing sector

Issues & Challenges

- Capital grant schemes reducing
- Need to introduce more innovative loan schemes
- Publicity of available resources

3.24 There are several types of assistance that Welsh Government and Denbighshire County Council offer to help maintain good quality private housing or facilitate people's independence to remain in their own home for longer. The range of assistance includes:

- Disabled Facilities Grants
- Relocation Assistance (to enable disabled residents to buy and adapt as home suitable for their needs)
- Welsh Government Home Improvement Loans

Outcome Six

Properties will be more energy efficient helping the environment, improving housing quality and targeting fuel poverty

Issues & Challenges

- Challenges with securing funding to support projects
- No dedicated capital budget
- The reduction of fuel poverty requires funding for energy efficiency measures

3.28 We have secured circa £4.5m to date to improve the energy performance of 853 homes in Denbighshire. 100% of this funding has been secured externally from Welsh Government, European Regional Development Funds and Energy Company Obligation funding (ECO).

3.29 Projects are reliant on uncertain funding streams, however any successful bids for funding are targeted to areas of assessed need

- Welsh Government Houses to Homes Loans
- Houseproud Assistance

3.25 The range of financial assistance for property repairs and adaptations is designed to promote inclusiveness by being available to those on the lowest incomes or certain benefits and help owner occupiers maintain their property to a good quality and safe standard.

3.26 The Council has designated a Housing Renewal Area in South West/East Rhyl. Funding is made available from the Welsh Government and may be available to assist in improving the condition of domestic properties in the area.

3.27 We also initiate Group Repair Schemes and organise the work to improve the external fabric of a group of properties within the boundary area of a designated Renewal Area to address the decline of the built environment. The Council have had a number of successful Renewal areas across the County, most notably in South West/East Rhyl and Denbigh.

(concentrations of low incomes and energy inefficient houses), based on statistical data.

3.30 Funding for energy efficiency is ephemeral and subject to change. A considerable proportion of funding is allocated towards reducing fuel poverty (where the household spends >10% of household income on energy bills). By improving the energy efficiency, we also reduce fuel poverty.

3.31 Denbighshire County Council works with partners such as NEST Cymru and Arbed (Welsh Government fuel poverty initiatives) to provide energy efficiency measures for properties and sign posting to other time limited or targeted schemes. Partnership working is critical to delivering benefits as organisations in isolation have insufficient funding to deliver projects, and has become more important as Denbighshire declared a Climate & Ecological Emergency and seeks to mitigate against it.

Outcome Seven

Unauthorised residential occupation of holiday caravans will be reduced

Issues & Challenges

- Occupation of holiday caravans as permanent homes
- Some are longstanding and/or include unsuitable accommodation
- Pressure on local public services as they are not being funded through local taxation

3.32 There are over 6000 static caravan pitches in Denbighshire and 900 touring pitches, but only 70 pitches on 2 mobile home sites have been granted residential planning permission. The use of holiday caravans as accommodation for permanent living is unacceptable.

3.33 The main issues include the suitability of the caravan as a home and the fact there appears to be a 'hidden' population accessing public services such as Community Support Services, health and education resulting in pressure on these services and resources, whilst no council tax is being paid.

3.34 Officers in the Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Service continue to address issues of unauthorised residential occupation of holiday caravans. The corporate project has enabled a multi-team approach to monitoring people using caravan parks as their main or sole address. Officers are able to access multiple databases which show where people have provided a caravan as their address. Regulatory Officers can then follow this up with park owners.

3.35 The regulatory work has been complicated during periods where holiday caravans have had to be used as temporary emergency accommodation. Examples of this have been during flooding incidents and the Covid-19 crisis. More work will need to be done when we come out of the Covid-19 crisis to assess how holiday caravan parks are complying with their planning and licensing conditions.

Outcome Eight

Implement & enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in the private rented sector and address fuel poverty

Issues & Challenges

- Need to establish a baseline of all the properties affected
- Fuel poverty measures and eligibility for schemes and funding constantly changing
- Enforcement measures and process needs to be adopted

3.36 The Council has been raising awareness regarding the changes in Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) which applies to all domestically privately rented properties and came into force in England and Wales on 1st April 2018. Under the regulations from this date a landlord can no longer grant a new tenancy if the property is rated 'F' or 'G' or below and from 1st April 2020, the property cannot be let at all. The minimum letting standard for a domestic privately rented property from this date is an 'E'.

3.37 The Council would always prefer that once the problem is brought to the attention of the landlord that the issue is addressed with no need to further recourse, but in the case of persistent and blatant disregard of the new regulations, then enforcement action will be taken.

3.38 If this standard is not met and the local authority believe the landlord has failed to fulfil their obligations under the MEES regulations, a compliance notice can be served. If a breach is confirmed, a financial penalty can be imposed by Denbighshire County Council.

Headline Actions for Theme Three

1. Welsh Housing Quality Standards are maintained
2. Decarbonisation of social housing stock
3. Develop and adopt a new Housing Revenue Account borrowing strategy
4. Rent Smart Wales landlord licensing scheme is supported
5. Work directly with landlords to improve standards in the Private Rented Sector
6. Target financial resources to ensure housing will be more energy efficient helping the environment and improving housing quality
7. Implement & enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in the private rented sector
8. Implement Additional Licensing for HMO's scheme now extended to Prestatyn, Denbigh & Llangollen
9. Unauthorised residential occupation of holiday caravans will be reduced



Figure 5: Private property improved through Enforcement action

Theme Four

Preventing & Ending Homelessness in Denbighshire

Outcomes

1. Independent advice accessible at an early stage to help prevent homelessness
2. Households at risk of homelessness are engaged through partner agencies to prevent and relieve homelessness
3. Young people at risk of becoming homeless identified and engaged
4. Suitable accommodation options are available to prevent homelessness
5. Those that are declared homeless are provided with appropriate emergency and temporary accommodation
6. Those that are declared homeless are assisted in finding suitable long term accommodation
7. To end entrenched rough sleeping in Denbighshire
8. Provision of support provided through the Housing Support Grant is based on level of need

Background

homelessness services that are available and what changes need to be taken in light of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, Housing Act (Wales) 2014 and the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016.

4.2 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has placed more emphasis on prevention of homelessness duties for local authorities, to achieve this we need to work in greater partnership with private landlords to source affordable, sustainable accommodation for vulnerable people.

4.3 The Act also makes it a statutory requirement for Councils to review the homelessness situation in their area and develop and implement a Homelessness Strategy to address the identified issues by 2018, which is reviewed every four years from 2018 onwards.

4.4 Households presenting as homeless has increased in Denbighshire primarily as a result of implementing the provisions of the Housing Act.

Financial Year	Households presenting as homeless
2015/16	1215
2016/17	1199
2017/18	1394
2018/19	1579
2019/20	1777

4.5 Not all households who present as homeless are accommodated in emergency and temporary accommodation. This is due to a variety of reasons which include:

- Lack of local connection
- Successful mediation with family or landlord
- Financial assistance, such as Discretionary Housing Grant
- Support worker assigned to help tenancy sustainment
- Voluntarily left area

Financial Year	Number of households accommodated	As a % of those presenting as homeless
2015/16	228	19%
2016/17	239	20%
2017/18	515	37%
2018/19	372	24%
2019/20	445	25%

4.6 The impact of Welfare Reform has had an effect on homelessness with the introduction of Universal Credit.

4.7 With the introduction of the Benefit Cap, the total amount of benefits, which an applicant can qualify for, cannot exceed £384.62¹⁷ per week. This means that some benefits are tapered to ensure the cap is implemented and has the effect of limiting the housing costs element of any benefit awarded.

4.8 Welfare Reform also removed the facility for landlords to receive benefit payments for tenancies directly unless in

¹⁷ April 2020 rate – www.gov.uk

exceptional cases. This has made some landlords more reluctant to take tenants who receive benefits. This in turn reduces options for housing for benefit tenants.

Outcome One

Independent advice accessible at an early stage to help prevent homelessness

Issues & Challenges

- Making information and advice available in a variety of formats so it is accessible to all
- Encouraging people to access advice when first at risk of homelessness

4.9 Advice and information on the Corporate website has been reviewed but work is ongoing to ensure that it is as accessible as possible, whilst not being too simplistic. Homelessness is a complex heavily regulated issue and it is difficult to provide advice which encompasses most situations, without being misleading.

Outcome Two

Households at risk of homelessness are engaged through partner agencies to prevent and relieve homelessness

Issues & Challenges

- People accessing services at an early stage
- Perceptions that social housing is available if you are made homeless

4.10 Working with partners across Denbighshire is crucial to ensure citizens threatened with homelessness engage with services as quickly as possible when they are at risk of homelessness

4.11 Funding has been provided from the Housing Support Grant for Citizens Advice Denbighshire, Civica in partnership with Department of Work & Pensions and Working Denbighshire to engage citizens and provide specialist support to relieve homelessness. They also help manage citizen's expectations around the availability of social housing and the need to secure accommodation in the private rented sector.

Outcome Three

Young people at risk of becoming homeless are identified and engaged with

Issues & Challenges

- Hard to reach group
- Often sofa surf and make up a substantial proportion of hidden homeless

4.12 Welsh Government made a commitment to end youth homelessness in Wales by 2027 in 2017 and set up the 'End Youth Homelessness Cymru' coalition. Funding of £10m from Welsh Government in 2019-20 for projects which address youth homelessness has also been allocated to assist in achieving this aim. The 'End Youth Homelessness Cymru Coalition' has focussed its work in four areas:

1. Ending Youth Homelessness within the LGBTQ+ community
2. Understanding and reducing the links between educational disengagement and youth homelessness
3. Understanding and reducing the links between the care system and youth homelessness
4. Support for those with mental health issues experiencing youth homelessness in Wales

4.13 To assist young people in the LGBTQ+ who are homeless, we are working in a partnership with Llamau to provide dedicated support. Workshops on 'Healthy Relationships' and 'Housing & Young People' are being delivered to year 7,8 & 9 school children. The workshops look closely at the potential causes of homelessness and raise awareness of support services available. The aim is roll these workshops out across all the secondary schools in Denbighshire.

4.14 Denbighshire has been successful in obtaining funding under the Young Homeless Prevention fund, which will target young people in partnership with Denbighshire Leisure Services through out-of-school community based activities. This will run alongside life skills training on budgeting and managing a tenancy for young people at risk of homelessness, to equip them with the tools they will need to live independently.

4.15 Training is also being developed for professionals to identify the early signs of youth homelessness, so that citizens at risk can be recognised and be given help and support quickly.

4.16 Supporting young people focuses on employability and training, to emphasise the fact that working people have more accommodation options open to them.

Outcome Four

Suitable accommodation options are available to prevent homelessness

Issues & Challenges

- Sourcing suitable accommodation which meets general and specialised housing needs
- Additional duties placed on local authorities through the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, regarding homeless prevention measures
- Accessing pet friendly accommodation

4.17 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 introduced a range of new powers and responsibilities for local authorities to tackle homelessness in Wales. It also recognises that local authorities cannot meet all the accommodation needs of affected households from their own range of housing stock. The Act allows authorities to discharge their homelessness duties by facilitating private tenancies for those in need. This requires greater collaboration between local government and private landlords.

4.18 The Act ensures that homelessness prevention services have a greater emphasis on saving a tenancy where possible rather than resettling a homeless household. Work has been refocussed on mediation between landlord and tenant where possible, supporting tenants and also referrals to NEST Cymru which can assist with energy efficiency measures, including new boilers for tenanted properties¹⁸

4.19 Innovative ways of encouraging landlords to work with the homelessness team have had to be devised. One which has proved successful, is where six months' rent is paid in advance by the Council to the private landlord. This is then repaid by the applicant over the six-month period, with the understanding that, if at the end of the six-month period, there have been no issues the landlord will continue the tenancy.

4.20 Denbighshire County Council has relied heavily on the private sector in the past to provide emergency and temporary accommodation, for people affected by homelessness. This has frequently involved Bed & Breakfast and holiday flatlet accommodation being used as emergency solutions.

4.21 Although this accommodation has been invaluable especially when dealing with out of hours calls. Increasingly for people with complex needs, it is not suitable for long term living as its primary purpose that of short term holiday stays.

4.22 Accommodation which is staffed and suitably designed for the purpose of alleviating homelessness needs to be provided in-house and by increasing the options made available by our social landlords.

Outcome Six

Those that are declared homeless are provided with appropriate emergency and temporary accommodation

Issues & Challenges

- Suitability and availability of appropriate, temporary accommodation across the County for complex and general housing needs.
- Covid-19

4.23 In response to the Covid-19 crisis Welsh Government has provided funding available to address homelessness. The funding has been available in phases.

¹⁸ Providing the tenants are in receipt of a qualifying income related benefit

4.24 In March 2020 Welsh Government launched Phase One which made a funding stream, totalling £10m for all Local Authorities to bid for, to address homelessness. This was to ensure that people with no home, could safely self-isolate and follow the public health guidance over hygiene and social distancing and have a safe space in which to live.

4.25 Homelessness presentations increased during the crisis, in part due to people not being able to sofa surf, with family and friends due to shielding and safe isolation. Also priority need has been suspended during this time, to ensure that households who needed help have been able to access it.

4.26 This has meant using hotels and B&B's in Denbighshire to provide emergency accommodation, as there are no Council owned or managed homelessness accommodation in the County and a scarcity of suitable temporary and permanent accommodation generally.

4.27 Utilising the private sector for emergency and temporary accommodation solutions in this way has been common practice for many years, but the volume of homelessness presentations and need for accommodation has been unprecedented since March 2020 due to the Covid-19 virus.

4.28 To support these establishments the Homelessness Prevention team and their partners are either working from larger premises or are working alongside the owners of the accommodation who may often find themselves being approached for support by homeless clients who are unaware of the business relationship between the Council and the owner.

4.29 The accommodation provided tends to be concentrated in the north of the County, as this is where the need is most acute. Support services are also based mainly in the North to meet this demand.

4.30 Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic temporary accommodation was utilised after assessing a homelessness application and a

homelessness discharge duty to the citizen has been found to apply. Under the provisions of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014, a discharge of duty will be achieved when suitable, available and affordable accommodation is sourced.

4.31 The preferred option is usually social housing or supported housing of which nationally there is a shortage. Whilst citizens await a suitable property, they are often allocated temporary accommodation which is sub-let from private landlords.

4.32 Finding landlords who are willing to work with the authority can be difficult. There are negative perceptions to housing people affected by homelessness. Also charges can be prohibitively expensive in some areas of the County, which restricts the availability of accommodation and means that people are not always placed in their preferred area.

4.33 Another issue is that landlords often have a blanket ban on pets at their accommodation but many single people living rough and families have pets. As a Council we recognise the well-being benefits owning a pet can have and try to get permission from the landlord at the outset of a tenancy, for pets. At the Ty Golau centre pets are also welcomed and a pet bed is supplied. We also support people in their budgeting to allow for vets bills or assist with kennel fees where they have to be used.

4.34 It will be more financially viable and provide a better service for homeless households for the Council to provide its own emergency accommodation. Scoping work is currently underway to see what the exact need is and how this would function for the Council, with the aim of providing an in-house option for both families and single persons.

Outcome Seven

Those that are declared homeless are assisted in finding suitable long term accommodation

Issues & Challenges

- Suitability and availability of appropriate affordable general needs accommodation

- Challenge of finding suitable accommodation suitable for large families and single young persons
- Low income levels particularly in the North of the County
- Increase in personal debt levels
- Covid-19

4.35 Accessing suitable long term accommodation is an issue across the County. Welfare Reforms introducing Universal Credit have meant some landlords are reluctant to take on tenants who rely wholly or partly on benefits to pay their housing costs.

4.36 Secure tenancies in social housing are often what people affected by homelessness seek, as they offer security of tenure and are amongst the lowest rents available. Unfortunately, these tenancies are highly sought after and the Council allocates them through the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH), which categorises applications into bands applicants in accordance with need.

4.37 The scarcity of social housing combined with limited choice over location and size of properties, means that the private sector must also be utilised and is often a positive housing choice for those affected by homelessness.

4.38 The Council routinely check all properties being considered as long term accommodation to ensure that the properties meet the required standards and are suitable for the applicant's needs.

4.39 A joint pilot scheme has been set up with Conwy County Council, to rent properties on a long term lease. These properties are then sublet to those affected by homelessness. The scheme is being funded by Welsh Government. This allows for properties to be maintained to ensure when they are returned to the landlord, in the same condition of them as it was originally let. It is hoped that this incentive will encourage new landlords to come forward.

4.40 Many tenancies if they breakdown, tend to do so in the first three months. This can be due to a variety of factors, but is often because of the length of time it takes to process benefits or because tenants have often struggled to get a deposit together and may have done so by deferring other payments, and then find themselves having to sort out their finances after taking on the tenancy. This scheme seeks to assist in those difficult first few months when new tenants are financially settling into a routine.

4.41 In August 2020 Welsh Government announced Phase two of its response to the pandemic with an extra £40m made available, to ensure that citizens are provided with safe, secure homes and no one returns to homelessness.

4.42 This funding stream is focussed more on finding long term solutions, such as building accommodation and transforming services to enable permanent housing solutions to be found.

4.43 The charity Stepchange in its 2019 Wales in the Red report, stated that 8% of adults living in Wales are facing severe debt problems compared to 6% in the rest of the UK. This equates to approximately 193,000 people in Wales. The estimate that a further 16% of the Welsh population are experiencing financial distress.

4.44 The charity also advises that 54% of its Welsh clients fall in the 18 -39 age range illustrating that young people are struggling financially. The most common reasons for debt are reduced income, injury or illness and unemployment

4.45 Across the four countries that make up the UK, over the last 10 years Wales has consistently had the highest poverty rates, in both working age and child groups, however pensioner poverty in Wales is the lowest of the four nations.¹⁹

¹⁹ Joseph Rowntree Report 'Poverty Levels and Trends in the UK' 2019

4.46 The low incomes and personal debt levels contribute to making it difficult for people to obtain and sustain affordable accommodation. The Bank of England's illustrative scenario forecasting the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic states that unemployment may rise to over 8% during the summer of 2020, which may also have an impact on the affordability of accommodation for people²⁰.

4.47 Part of the Welsh Government response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been to fund an early alert scheme delivered through Citizens Advice Cymru. In conjunction with this a temporary increase on the length of notice required to evict tenants has been introduced and a Tenant Saver Loan Scheme. The loan scheme is available to those who were not in significant arrears before March 1st 2020, and aims to reduce evictions whose primary cause is as a result of the pandemic.

Outcome Eight

To end entrenched rough sleeping in Denbighshire

Issues & Challenges

- Lack of confidence in Councils and third party organisations
- Poor health physically and mentally
- Lack of suitable available accommodation

4.48 Rough sleeping contrary to popular opinion is not the most common form of homelessness, however it is often the most difficult form to solve. Many rough sleepers have poor mental health and addiction problems and have often slipped through the cracks for services. This has often led to a lack of confidence in service providers, to address their issues.

4.49 The Housing First Pilot is a joint project funded by Welsh Government undertaken by Denbighshire and Conwy County Council, which addresses a person's accommodation needs first and then provides an intensive wraparound support service, to help people to

adjust to sustaining a tenancy. In its first year it has successfully helped ten people into accommodation and the pilot has now been extended for a further year.

Outcome Eight

Provision of support provided through the Housing Support Grant is based on level of need

Issues & Challenges

- Reduction in funding levels
- Sourcing suitable support options from providers

4.50 Housing related support is provided through the Housing Support Grant programme. The Housing Support Grant is currently being reviewed by Welsh Government. The key issues being examined are variations on how the grant can be utilised and the formula of the distribution of the grant. The new grant regime is expected to be brought in from 2022 and amalgamate Housing Support Grant funding with Homelessness Prevention and Rent Smart Wales Enforcement money.

4.51 Due to the introduction of a new funding regime, current housing support projects must be reviewed to ensure that they provide a full range of support for those in need. This support needs to include a full range of assistance from high level intensive support to low level enablement of citizens to manage their own housing needs.

²⁰ Bank of England Monetary Policy Report & Interim Financial Stability Report – May 2020



Figure 6: HWB Youth Homeless Accommodation & Training Centre Denbigh

Headline Actions for Theme Four

1. Develop easily accessible information and advice for prevention of homelessness
2. Develop an early intervention and prevention service, involving a wide range of partners to support households at risk of homelessness
3. Develop a homelessness hub with access to wrap-around services through multi-disciplinary interventions for those experiencing homelessness
4. Establish in-house emergency accommodation facilities for homeless citizens
5. Develop a rapid rehousing model for citizens affected by homelessness with appropriate support
6. Review services provided internally & externally through Housing Support Grant (HSG) to ensure a range of support is available
7. Deliver workshops to secondary school aged children on homelessness and available support
8. Identify young people at risk through training of professionals working in their environment
9. Extend Housing First Project
10. Development of the Youth Service digital youth work to promote and engage young people in the issue of Youth Homelessness in Denbighshire.

Theme Five

Homes & Support for Vulnerable People

Outcomes

1. A range of housing choices for older people
2. A range of housing choices and support placements for vulnerable and young people
3. Vulnerable people are assisted to lead independent lives in appropriate accommodation to meet their needs

Background

5.1 Vulnerable people can be supported to maintain their accommodation through the Housing Support Grant programme which provides housing related support services to people over the age of 16.

5.2 Reductions in Housing Support Grant funding have meant that many services have been remodelled to achieve cost savings and target support more effectively, although the range of services available to vulnerable people has been maintained. Housing Support Grant have also been exploring opportunities to deliver cheaper models of low level group support, such as delivering life skills and volunteering courses

5.3 The Welfare Reform agenda discussed in more detail in theme four has brought in several changes. One of the changes included the introduction of The Social Sector Size Criteria (SSSC), commonly known as 'Bedroom Tax'. This means that social tenancies are treated in the same way as private tenancies, as benefit is only awarded for the size property needed and has meant a reduction in benefits for some social tenants. The introduction of SSSC had an impact on allocations policies and income collection procedures for most social landlords.

5.4 Nationally, Wales has been disproportionately affected by this austerity measure than the rest of the UK. This is due to the fact that Welsh social housing stock tends to be of the family housing type, with relatively few flat complexes built.

5.5 The Housing & Homelessness Strategy supports the Council's Corporate Plan in its aim

of building Resilient Communities by empowering and enabling residents through services it provides. A key approach to Community Support Services implementation is the change in emphasis from dependence to enable residents to live independently, having control and choice over their care needs and encouraging people to be a part of their personal care decisions. This aim is consistent with the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014. The Act's primary aim is to 'promote people's independence, to give them a stronger voice and control... also encourages a renewed focus on prevention and early intervention'.

Outcome One

A range of housing choices for older people

Issues and Challenges

- There is now more emphasis on people retaining independence by remaining in their own homes
- Older people require a greater range of housing options to meet their varied need

5.6 There are several housing models in current use for older people including specifically designed retirement apartments - normally available for sale on the open market and Supported Independent Living (SIL) – for those needing an element of support. These extra care facilities are becoming increasingly popular, as people live longer in retirement and their care needs change.

5.7 Older people remaining in their own homes is aspirational and does largely depend on successful reablement process to maximise independence alongside funding for adaptations and equipment and the availability of trained carers to assist in delivering complex care packages.

5.8 Residential and Nursing Home/EMI care is also generally available within the County and demand for this is likely to grow as the numbers of older people in Denbighshire increase. The North Wales Social Care & Well-being Services Improvement Collaborative have published a market shaping statement to plan for care home services, which analysed

the provision within the County. It can be seen from the work undertaken for the position statement, that whilst there is some capacity within the care home system, there are areas which need improvement principally Residential EMI and Nursing EMI care.

5.9 A recent Housing Learning & Improvement Network report commissioned

by Welsh Government predicted that Denbighshire had the estimated demand as detailed in the table below. The report is good indicator of the need but as it has not taken into account the schemes which are underway in Denbighshire, such as the Extra Care scheme 'Lon Ganol' in Denbigh which will provide an additional 70 extra care units from 2021, the figures cannot be relied on.

Denbighshire estimated net demand (shortfall in units/beds) to 2035²¹

	2025	2030	2035
Housing for Older People	322	461	589
For Rent	242	346	441
For Sale	81	115	147
Housing with Care	72	121	173
For Rent	54	91	130
For Sale	18	30	43
Residential Care	0	0	0
Nursing Care	102	154	205

5.10 Many people want to remain in their own home for as long as they can and this is supported through the accommodation support service provided by the Council. This service can be accessed by residents in Denbighshire irrespective of their tenure status, i.e. tenant, owner occupier, private rental etc

5.11 The Council recognises that Extra Care facilities are also an important housing choice for older people and in addition to the three already built in the County, in Rhyl, Prestatyn and Ruthin are looking to expand the facilities. A new site is currently being constructed in Denbigh which is predicted to be completed by 2021, an extension to the facility in Ruthin is planned and options for the Corwen area are currently being explored. To deliver these Extra Care homes we are working with our housing partners – the Housing Associations.

5.12 Developing more schemes is a priority for Denbighshire and is supported in the Corporate Plan with its aims of having fewer people in residential care homes and living in their homes for longer. Extra Care housing is a flexible accommodation option for older parents with older children with disabilities.

5.13 There is also a need to provide different types of care within care homes. Care homes are often utilised to provide respite/short term breaks for carers, but a step-up/step-down facility is also needed to help those who can take advantage of reablement opportunities and continue living safely in their own homes.

5.14 Accommodation needs to reflect age related illnesses, such as increase in cases of dementia. Future accommodation choices developed for older people will take into account the changing health and social needs of residents.

²¹ Assessment of the demand for specialist housing and accommodation for older people in Wales – January 2020 R Hastings, I Copeman & J Porteus

5.15 The Community Assistance Team are a specialised service with fully trained staff from the North Wales Fire & Rescue Service, who respond to vulnerable people who experience a fall. Approximately 250 people per month in Denbighshire suffer a fall in the home. The aim of the initiative is to reduce the number of people needing to attend hospital as a result of the fall. The team is supported by Denbighshire Council and members of the public can access the service using the emergency number or through the telecare service.

5.16 Denbighshire also offers a falls prevention service for anyone over 65 who has had a fall or fearful of having a fall. which offers a range of options such as: -

- Exercise classes
- One to one Community physiotherapy
- Community activities such as tai chi, gentle circuit classes
- Home safety assessment & adaptations
- Medication reviews by the GP or pharmacist
- Referrals for podiatry or optometry services

to help reduce the risk of a fall in the future.

Outcome Two

A range of housing choices and support placements for vulnerable and younger people Issues & Challenges

- Supply shortage of Community Living Schemes
- Reactive housing options rather than proactive
- Financial insecurity for supporting organisations
- Need for varied work and care placements for vulnerable adults of all ages

5.17 There are currently over one hundred vulnerable young adults waiting for more suitable accommodation in Denbighshire

across the County. These include an increasing number of younger adults with learning, physical and behavioural difficulties who reside at home with their parents.

5.18 There is an opportunity of prioritising Extra Care placements for these complex families. As the parents get older they often have care needs of their own and an Extra Care facility can offer care and support for people with differing needs and cater well for these family groups, for which Sheltered Housing is not suitable.

5.19 Community Living schemes, whereby people with similar support needs are located closely together but with separate accommodation or house share schemes are also very successful. There are issues with how quickly vacancies in these kind of accommodation options can be filled, as care and support packages have to be commissioned, but voids need to be filled quickly to minimise loss of income.

5.20 Tailored models of support have been implemented, such as 'hub & spoke' which provides onsite support alongside telecare supported models. This maximises resources and also reduces the risk of over provision, as this can lessen a person's independence.

5.21 Work has also been undertaken to prepare vulnerable people for a move to more suitable accommodation, so that when a move is possible, issues are minimised and it keeps the accommodation sustainable

5.22 The Keyring Support model is based on people living in their own homes but sharing their skills and talents with each other and their communities. This is carried out in conjunction with Community Support Volunteers, Community Support Workers and Supported Living Managers.²²

5.23 These schemes encourage more independence and are often more sustainable in the long term, as they are client driven.

²² <http://www.keyring.org/what-is-keyring>

There are currently schemes operational across all social providers in the County and we are working with them to develop more to meet the accommodation needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

5.24 To empower service users a citizen directed support model is used whereby the citizen has control over their individual support budget. This is regularly monitored to ensure that providers are not negatively impacted by this.

5.25 As the service users get older they have differing needs and one of the challenges the Council faces is finding new and engaging work and care placements which will cater for all abilities and ensure that vulnerable people get the opportunities they need. These placements provide a real life working environment to help those with learning difficulties develop life skills and promote independence. This development can in turn lead to a change in the level of support or type of accommodation they need. Placements include working in retail environments, offices and gardening. All of which promote social interaction for the service users.

5.26 Community Support Services are also looking to increase the involvement of learning difficulties clients with their local community by participating in community based initiatives such as time banking and small scale social enterprises. This will provide informal support as well as facilitate community cohesion.

5.27 A move on panel has been set up so that people who are ready to leave supported accommodation and take up a social tenancy can apply to be moved into Band 1 of the SARTH register, if it is felt that the person is ready and the banding change is appropriate. This will help to free up vacancies in supported housing whilst ensuring the vulnerable person still has stable accommodation. The move on panel has been particularly successful in care leaver cases, where market accommodation is difficult to source.

Outcome Three

Vulnerable people are assisted to lead independent lives in appropriate accommodation to meet their needs

Issues & Challenges

- Financial insecurity for the organisations providing advice and support
- Welfare Reform challenges such as 'Bedroom Tax' and the introduction of Universal Credit
- Increase in personal debt levels

5.28 The Housing Support Grant programme commissions housing support which is delivered through a range of organisations across Denbighshire. These organisations have a different focus of the lead need of a citizen and tailor support accordingly. Projects they support include

- Domestic Abuse Services
- Mental Health Services
- Young people with support needs
- Substance misuse
- Learning disabilities
- Vulnerable older people
- Families with support needs
- Chronic illnesses

5.29 Access to these services is made via a referral to the Housing Support Grant Pathway Team, who will refer the applicant to the most appropriate support service. Applicants can self-refer, or be referred via an agency, family friend, social worker or health professional. A range of support mechanisms are available including group sessions which deliver life skills as well as intensive individual support.

5.30 Early indications of the review of Housing Support Grant show that the new formula for allocating the money, if adopted would have a significant effect in Denbighshire as it may reduce by 15.8% which equates to approximately a reduction of £1m. This will inevitably effect the delivery of services.

5.31 As referenced in theme four personal debt levels in Wales are rising. The Bank of

England Monetary Policy report in May 2020 has also warned that the economy could shrink by as much as 30% over the summer of 2020 due to the effect of the Covid-19 virus, but the illustrative scenario published also states that the economy should pick up quickly once lockdown measures are eased.

5.32 Projects funded include:

- 18 Supported units for those fleeing domestic violence
- 109 Community Living units for people with learning disabilities
- 18 Supported housing units for people with mental health issues
- 4 Nightstop emergency placements for young people aged 16-21
- 18 Supported units for single people and families with a history of offending
- 11 units at Ty Golau which offers a 3 step process of emergency, hostel and Housing First accommodation

5.33 There are also projects which provide floating support to people who are experiencing issues due to domestic violence, mental health, substance misuse, families with support needs, learning disabilities, young and older people generic support. The support is often around accommodation needs and these organisations will liaise closely with the Homelessness teams.

5.34 There are also concerns with the stricter lending criteria brought in to regulate payday loan companies, that people with debt problems will be driven to loan sharks to resolve their money issues. Front-line staff have received awareness training on spotting the signs of people accessing money in this way from the Welsh Illegal Money Lending Unit, to try and ensure timely referrals are made to combat the rising threat of loan sharks.

5.35 The Financial Inclusion Together project in 2014 undertaken with Conwy Council under the Joint Local Service Board trained over 1000 support professionals in the principles of Financial Inclusion. This was to

ensure they had the essential skills and knowledge to support clients. The work was continued both in the Council and partner organisations and is now embedded into any housing support role, with the aim of helping people to sustain their tenancies.

5.36 Housing Support officers are also trained to signpost tenants to work and training opportunities, debt and benefits advice, applications for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). They are also able to assist with mutual house exchanges and transfers within social stock, which can better utilise the housing stock and keep accommodation affordable for people.

Headline Actions for Theme Five

1. Three Extra Care facilities in development or completed by 2022
2. Investigate more 'own front door' schemes for vulnerable people



Figure 7: Awel Y Dyffryn, Denbigh Extra Care units under construction

Theme Six

Promoting & Supporting Communities

Outcomes

1. Neighbourhood based activities help people remain safe and independent
2. Sustainable communities are maintained through innovative 'eyesore' site projects
3. Council housing estates are regenerated to help create and sustain desirable neighbourhoods
4. Community initiatives are supported and maintained with partner organisations
5. Creating affordable and sustainable communities

Background

6.1 The aim of this theme is to consider and examine promoting and supporting sustainable local communities. We will be working with housing and third sector partners to develop communities where people want to live and work and have a sense of ownership by the people who live there.

Outcome One

Neighbourhood based activities help people remain safe and independent

Issues & Challenges

- Retaining the motivation of residents
- Contacting and involving hard to reach groups such as young people
- Neighbourhood disputes between residents
- Residents taking ownership of projects in their area

6.2 Community engagement through neighbourhood based activities is an integral part of revitalising or regenerating an area. When successful it can bring communities together and create a sense of belonging and ownership of an area, which in turn develops more neighbourly communities and reduces anti-social behaviour.

6.3 One example of a successful engagement project run by Wales & West Housing Association (WWHA) in Denbighshire, is the development of a community garden

scheme at Older Persons scheme at Buxton Court in Rhyl. The garden was designed with full involvement of the residents at all stages, together they have created a raised flowerbed garden with a greenhouse for growing vegetables and a shed for the tools and equipment needed to maintain the garden. The project has led to the development of additional skills in gardening, team work, negotiation and fundraising.

6.4 The project has allowed access to gardening for residents with mobility issues and encouraged social enterprise, through the selling of some of the produce. It has also increased the mental and physical well-being of the residents as they engage with each other at social events such as BBQ's and benefit from the increased activity gardening brings.

6.5 The success of Buxton Court led to Wales & West creating a Butterfly and Sensory Garden at their affordable housing and supported housing development at Cil Y Coed in Henllan. The residents were successful in gaining a grant from Cadwyn Clwyd and from Welsh Government. The garden forms part of a patchwork of five wildlife gardens in the area and work to ensure that they remain bee and butterfly friendly rather than just overgrown is undertaken by the residents who are part of the Henllan Conservation Group. The key for success in the two projects is that they have been resident led.



Buxton Court Community Garden

6.6 Denbighshire Council recognised that more needed to be undertaken with regards to

community development with our residents. Whilst traditional tenant groups operate well, they can be too formal for all residents to engage with. Denbighshire has expanded its community development team and has delivered many events with residents and also redeveloped greenspace in partnership with residents to improve the environment they are living in.

6.7 Denbighshire Council have also assisted residents with community garden projects across the County. A community garden has been built at the Phoenix Centre in West Rhyl, a community allotment improvement project has been completed in Corwen and a community growing area set up at Pengwern in Llangollen.

6.8 These facilities have been complemented by Nature for Health events which have been run throughout the year and delivered in partnership with Denbighshire Countryside Services. These sessions have included trips to Ty Mawr Country Park, the Brenig Reservoir and visiting the Little Terns in Prestatyn. There has also been willow weaving, stargazing and bushcraft sessions.

6.9 These projects all help the community to come together and can also be used to publicise information amongst residents about other upcoming Denbighshire projects, such as scheduled large scale maintenance of Council properties and changes on how the housing service operates.

Outcome Two

Sustainable communities are maintained through innovative 'eyesore' site projects

Issues & Challenges

- Viability of sustainable schemes
- Challenges in engaging owners to enable a solution to be found

6.10 'Eyesore' sites are residential and commercial properties in Denbighshire which are derelict or at risk of becoming derelict in the near future. They blight the community

area and are often dangerous and become magnets for anti-social behaviour. Through a multi-agency task force, the properties have been prioritised and work has been undertaken to remedy the situation.

6.11 The task force had considerable successes with properties on Pendyffryn Road, Rhyl, Smithfield Road, Denbigh and Mwrog Street in Ruthin being repurposed into affordable accommodation. In the case of the Denbigh property, the commercial property was redeveloped providing supported living accommodation for local young people and a community facility providing courses and meeting rooms to rent.

6.12 The redevelopment of these sites brought forward a total of 20 units of affordable housing including 2 learning disabilities units, 3 mobility designed bungalows and 6 supported living units for young people in addition to the general needs housing on the sites. Without the support of the Council, this range of uses would not have been achievable through targeting the private sector to bring forward the properties alone.

6.13 This work is now part of the Empty Homes Delivery Plan, which was adopted in 2019. Properties are scored according to a matrix and owners are targeted with a range of options, such as sale or facilitating loans for necessary repairs so the properties can be rented out. This is try and ensure properties are brought forward as accommodation again.

Outcome Three

Council housing estates are regenerated to help create and sustain desirable neighbourhoods

Issues & Challenges

- Capacity and ability of residents to participate
- Achieving commitment from residents and sustaining the projects without external involvement
- Prioritisation of areas to be developed

6.14 Many of the Council estates in Denbighshire were built in the inter war years and even the newer dwellings date from the 1980's, so are already around 40 years old. They are in need of improvement works and bringing up to modern day energy standards as well as adapting to how people live today.

6.15 The Welsh Housing Quality Standard for Council properties was met in Denbighshire by 2016 and the RSLs have now also fully complied with this standard. The challenge now is to maintain these standards and where possible improve the properties and green space on the estates further.

6.16 A review of the estates has been carried out with the tenants, residents, housing associations, third sector organisations and other Council departments, such as Countryside Services who have an interest in the area, to establish exactly what is wanted and needed in the community.

6.17 Smaller local environmental improvements have been made on the estates already. As part of the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with Glyndwr university, we have developed an environmental toolkit, which is now used when planning any improvements. This aims to prioritise improving the housing environment for residents with their involvement, which will then help to build sustainable communities, where residents feel safe and secure in.

6.18 Environmental improvements have been developed in collaboration with council tenants to improve the local community. Working this way has brought forward environmental improvements across the County: -

- Llandyrnog - Raised vegetable beds
- St Asaph – Improvements to the Community Centre garden
- Ruthin – Traditional Welsh fruit trees and associated allotment planting
- Geufron & Rhydwen Drive, Rhyl and Pengwern, Llangollen have seen

projects growing produce for the community

6.19 Council tenants are encouraged to become Green Rangers. They help assess the grounds maintenance service, which includes grass cutting and tree and shrub maintenance by completing regular feedback forms, which are then used when evaluating contractors' services during performance reviews.

6.20 Developing a 5 year rent policy in line with the Affordable Housing Review's recommendations will ensure that budget planning for these improvements and general housing maintenance can be implemented.

6.21 Denbighshire County Council has recently carried out environmental improvements on some areas of the estates, as part of its normal landlord function of developing and maintaining the housing estates. These improvements were planned and implemented with the help of local residents which promotes a sense of ownership for their area, to ensure any changes are accepted and maintained by the community.

Outcome Four

Community initiatives are supported and maintained with partner organisation

Issues & Challenges

- Capacity and ability of residents to participate
- Achieving commitment and sustaining the projects

6.22 The West End of Rhyl undergone significant environmental and housing improvements as part of a partnership project to regenerate the area. Over £16m has been invested in the area by Welsh Government to bring forward the West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project, in association with Clwyd Alyn Housing Group, North Wales Housing and Denbighshire County Council.

6.23 Large areas of former poor quality housing have been demolished to help reduce

the housing density of the area and to create a green space named Gerddi Heulwen for local people to use. By introducing the open space and redeveloping properties, this has made the district a more attractive and desirable place to live and will change the negative perceptions of the area. This work has been undertaken with the aim of attracting families and long term residents, who will help sustain the community, rather than the traditionally high turnover residents in poorer quality smaller accommodation, which has contributed to the issues in the area.

6.24 To ensure that these improvements are not undermined, a co-ordinated approach to management of the area has been set up by the formation of the West Rhyl Neighbourhood Management Partnership. The group comprises of North Wales Police, officers from Denbighshire County Council, North Wales Housing and Clwyd Alyn Housing Group.

Outcome Five

Creating affordable and sustainable communities

Issues & Challenges

- Lack of affordable accommodation
- Challenging tenants disrupting community cohesion

6.25 The implementation of Single Access Route to Housing (Common Housing Register) SARTH in 2017 has been very successful and the policy is reviewed regularly to ensure that the bandings are still meeting the housing need priorities. The triage element of making an application to the register has enabled the Council to offer additional advice and assistance regarding accommodation problems. Housing Enforcement are contacted if an applicant reports problems with disrepair, Homelessness Prevention teams are contacted if the loss of accommodation is a possibility, Tai Teg – Affordable Housing Register if an

applicant can afford intermediate rented accommodation.

6.26 It is also recognised that the supply of social and affordable housing is not enough to satisfy demand. There are currently over 1200 applicants on the register but in 2018/19 there were only 183 general needs vacancies and 145 vacancies for people over the age of 55²³. Some applicants have no immediate prospect of being housed and as part of a solution to this, there are investigations underway into the feasibility of a social lettings agency, which may be able to assist in sourcing affordable accommodation.

Landlord	Percentage of vacancies in 2018/19	Number of vacancies
Denbighshire	64%	211
Clwyd Alyn	17%	56
Grŵp Cynefin	13%	41
Wales & West	4%	13
Adra	2%	7

Figure 8: SARTH Vacancies

Source: DCC

6.27 Regular meetings are held between the Council and the RSLs to discuss general housing management issues as the RSLs often have properties on our estates and similar issues with tenants and tenancies. This is a good way of sharing learning and resources as well as ensuring a consistent approach to common problems. These meetings tend to be operational in nature and work is underway to also have strategic meetings so amongst other issues community work can be more streamlined and complementary.

6.28 A third of Denbighshire Housing stock is of the sheltered housing type with the introduction of extra care housing combined with the fact that our complexes don't have lift facilities, so only the ground floor units are accessible for people with mobility issues, has seen a drop in demand for this kind of accommodation. A review of the sites will be

²³ Source – DCC Housing data

undertaken to establish whether they can be repurposed into general needs accommodation, or can be upgraded to meet the needs of the older person demographic in Denbighshire or if they have come to end of their life entirely and the site needs to be wholly redeveloped. This review will be part of the Council's Housing Asset Strategy which has been referenced in *Theme Two*.

Headline Actions for Theme Six

1. Implement Resident Inclusion strategy
2. Review of SARTH
3. Develop a 5 year rent policy
4. Work with police, registered social landlords & other partners on focused neighbourhood management in West Rhyl