

Report to: Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 23rd February 2012

Lead Member: Lead Member for Regeneration and Tourism

Report Author: Head of Housing Services

Title: Housing Services

1. What is the report about?

The performance of the Council's Housing Services' Department in the four areas identified by the Committee for scrutiny

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The Committee requested that information be provided to it on the Department's performance in following four areas:

- Delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS);
- Waiting Lists and Allocations;
- Tenancy Agreements; and
- Rent Arrears

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee:

- 3.1 considers the information provided on the Housing Services Department's performance in the four areas outlined in the attached reports and comments accordingly;
- 3.2 provides feedback to the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) Steering Group on the progress to date with the development of this initiative; and
- 3.3 based on the information provided determines whether any of the above areas merit further detailed scrutiny.

4. Report details.

- 4.1 In June 2011 the Committee requested to be provided with information on the performance of the Council's Housing Services' Department in the following areas: Delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), waiting lists and allocations, tenancy agreements and rent arrears.

4.2 As each of these subject areas required some considerable background details, in order to do justice with each topic individual reports have been compiled on each one. These reports are attached as annexes to this report. They are:

- Delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) (**Annex A**);
- Housing Allocations and Choice Based Lettings Pilot (**Annex B**);
- Tenancy Agreements (**Annex C**); and
- Rent Arrears (**Annex D**)

4.3 Although the Committee did not specifically request a report on the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) Project, information on this Project has been included at **Annex E** to this report. The reason for its inclusion is that this initiative represents a potential way forward to address future social housing needs across the North Wales region. The Committee is therefore asked to comment on the development of this initiative.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

See each individual report

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

See each individual report

7. What consultations have been carried out?

See each individual report

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

See each individual report

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

See each individual report

10. Power to make the Decision

Article 6 of the Council's Constitution

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Report to: Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 23rd February 2012

Lead Member / Officer: Lead Member for Regeneration and Tourism

Report Authors: Head of Housing Services/Design and Construction Team Manager

Title: Delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard

1. What is the report about?

To update Performance Scrutiny Committee on progress in meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The report provides an update on progress to date in delivering WHQS and outlines the forward programme of works to bring all stock up to the same high quality standard.

Details relating to customer satisfaction, wider regeneration benefits and progress compared with other Local Authorities are provided to enable members to compare and contrast the performance of Denbighshire compared with that of other Local Authorities in Wales.

An overview of the costs of the programme to date and some of the challenges faced as a result of asbestos works, changes in regulation and specification and exceptional works are also outlined for information.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That members note the good progress being made to deliver the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.

4. Report details.

The Housing refurbishment programme commenced in 2005 and was allocated into a number of "lots" in order to spread the work more evenly across the geography of the county, to provide better value for money and to ensure the works could be effectively programmed by the building industry. Five housing contract "lots" were successfully tendered through the housing refurbishment framework contract with contracts 1-4 now complete and Contract 5 due for completion in May 2012.

Since 2009 DCC have completed refurbishment to 992 properties to bring them up to the WHQS standard. There are currently 103 properties outstanding on contract 5, and once completed this will bring the total number of properties refurbished between 2009 and 2012 up to 1095 dwellings.

Prior to 2009, a further 1,500 properties were refurbished which brings the total number of properties now fully improved up to **2500** units.

2.2 Future Works Programme. Please refer to Appendix 1

Following the success of Contracts 1 to 5, Contracts 6, 7 and 8 are scheduled to be tendered utilising the housing refurbishment framework agreement.

The following delivery programme has been agreed for contracts 6 to 8 :-

Contract 6	No. of properties to be refurbished	229
	Proposed Tender date	20 th Jan 2012
	Proposed site start date	19 th Mar 2012
Contract 7	No. of properties to be refurbished	193
	Proposed Tender date	29 th Feb 2012
	Proposed site start date	26 th Apr 2012
Contract 8	No. of properties to be refurbished	195
	Proposed Tender date	30 th Mar 2012
	Proposed site start date	26 th May 2012

Contracts 6, 7 and 8 also include for window and external door replacement and new heating installations. (These items of work were not required in Contracts 1 to 5). Currently a number of detailed surveys are being completed to identify properties which may require additional improvements. Accurate information can then be included within the tender documentation to ensure expenditure on future contracts is accounted for prior to the work starting.

Costs

Whilst the improvement programme has been delivered within its total costs ceiling there have been a number of additional costs experienced through the programme which were not originally planned for. A summary of additional costs are outlined below for information.

Asbestos

An area of concern with contracts 1 to 5 was asbestos removal works. At the time of tendering, the Council utilised type 2 asbestos surveys which were subsequently superseded during the course of the contract by the much more stringent requirements under CAR (Control of Asbestos Regulations) revised 2010, with the introduction of updated requirements and, in conjunction with DCC policies, all properties surveyed now have a refurbishment type survey.

Therefore, despite initial sample testing being carried out pre-contract on 15 – 20% of stock on contracts 1 to 5, the level and quantity of asbestos encountered during the course of the works (particularly during 4 & 5) resulted in additional costs to the contract. As it could not be demonstrated that asbestos was not present in the properties not surveyed, the contractor (in line with HSE guidelines) had to assume that asbestos was present.

This change in regulation midway through a contract meant that a significant increase in expenditure arising from asbestos removal was incurred which resulted in the Council incurring £142,000 of additional costs. As a result of this within contracts 6-8 refurbishment type surveys have been carried out in line with HSG 264 legislation and the sample survey percentage has been increased to survey 50% of the stock and the tender specification shall assume that all properties will contain asbestos which should ensure that tendering contractors allow for this work in their tender thus presently a more efficient and cost effective way of dealing with asbestos on future contracts.

Proposed Changes to CAR 2006

There are proposed changes to the UK Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006, these have come about so that they are brought in line with the current EC directive on asbestos. The revised regulations will mean that more employers carrying out some types of lower risk, short duration maintenance and repair work involving asbestos will have to:

- 1) Notify the HSE of this asbestos work,
- 2) Keep records
- 3) Carry out medical examinations for workers.

From a date yet to be confirmed, there will be three categories of work with asbestos as opposed to two.

1) Licensed works - As now, the duty holders will have to comply with all of the existing requirements' a new definition of "licensed works" is being introduced for clarity.

2) Non-licensed works - As now, the duty holders will be exempt from some requirements.

3) Notifiable non-licensed works -

This is a new category where the duty holders will be exempt from some of the requirements in Category 1, but will be required to comply with certain other requirements.

Notification will be required before work starts and medical examinations will need to be carried out before exposure begins and then at least every three years after.

This category is effectively created to ensure full compliance with the EC directive.

Category 2 – Non-licensed works will apply where:

- a) The exposure of employees to asbestos is sporadic and of low intensity; and
- b) It is clear from risk assessment that exposure to asbestos will not exceed the control limit; and
- c) The work involves: short, non-continuous maintenance activities in which only non-friable materials are handled, or
- d) Removal without deterioration of non-degraded materials in which the asbestos fibres are firmly linked in a matrix, or
- e) Encapsulation or sealing of asbestos-containing materials that are in good condition, or
- f) Air monitoring and control, and the collection and analysis of samples to ascertain whether a specific material contains asbestos.

If the above conditions (a to f) can not be fully met then the asbestos work must be carried out in accordance with either Category 1 – Licensed Works or Category 3 – Notifiable non-licensed works (depending on the type and level of asbestos involved etc...).

Impact on Contracts 6, 7 and 8

Contract 6, 7 and 8 have made allowances for the removal of non-notifiable asbestos, following the refurbishment surveys, if asbestos is found to be present and is in accordance with the levels quantified in the tender document and is confirmed as :-

- 1) Licensed works – the impact on the contract would be as it is currently. The removal of the asbestos would require an approved licensed contractor to carry out these works. However the asbestos encountered on the previous contracts has in the main been non-notifiable and this is deemed a small risk. Within the new tender documentation, rates have been included for the removal of licensed asbestos and therefore the risk of an over spend is reduced.
- 2) Non-licensed works – the contracts will have made an allowance for this type of asbestos removal works, therefore there should be minimal risk to the authority.
- 3) Notifiable non-licensed works – the contracts will have made an allowance for this type of asbestos removal works, therefore there should be minimal risk to the authority financially, however there would be additional duties put onto contractor with regards to notifying the

HSE, this may result in delays to the contract depending on when the survey information is passed onto the contractor; if the duty holder can provide the asbestos survey information in a timely manner this should mitigate any delays; the authority will be required to keep records and carry out medical examinations on its employees before exposure begins and then at least every three years after.

It should be noted that these amendment were originally planned to come into effect in April 2012, however we understand from the HSE that further guidance notes are required and the implementation date will be confirmed once these guidance notes are prepared and issued, therefore the above amendments should be treated as provisional at this stage and are intended for information purposes.

Electrical Works

For a property to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, the specification stipulates a minimum number of light fittings and sockets to be provided within each room of the property.

During the works to Contract 4 and 5, the existing number of light fittings and sockets within the properties exceeded the minimum requirements of the WHQS, due to the enhanced specification at the time of build. As an authority we had a duty to not only provide the minimum requirements but also to upgrade the additional older fittings which were additional to the contract works. Variations to complete this additional work have increased expenditure by £57,000 on spend across 190 properties within contract 4 of the programme. Due to the increased number of surveys and age of the stock for contract 6/7/8 it is not expected that additional electrical works beyond the specified WHQS standard would be required.

Additional tiling

The original tender documentation included for partial tiling only to bathrooms in accordance with the specification. Part way through Contract 4, full height tiling was instructed to four streets (64 properties) and for the whole of Contract 5. All of these properties formed part of sheltered schemes and resulted in additional costs of £37,000. A total of 200 bathrooms now benefit from additional tiling which shall enable them to convert more easily into an adapted bathroom such as a wet room or removing the bath and providing a shower. These works are carried out more costs effectively as part of a planned programme of works rather than through reactive maintenance or the disabled adaptation process. Based on an average bathroom of 19sq meters of available wall space it is estimated that these works would have cost £98,800 had they been completed through one off reactive works or individual disabled adaptations.

The level of tiling on future contracts will be significantly less given the properties on contracts 6/7/8 being predominantly general needs rather than sheltered housing.

Void Properties & additional variations

There were extensive additional works to 11 void properties within Contract 4. These were additional to the original scope of works and as a result have cost an extra £187k to complete. The high cost of these works arose from the extensive damage caused as a result of vandalism, the lack of improvement works to a number of the void properties and enhanced works to bring the properties up to a lettable standard including upgrading windows, central heating systems and completing fire safety improvements to Maes y Cwm. Two of the void properties also required an extensive deep clean by a specialist contractor prior to works commencing.

Disabled Adaptations

Due to the number of sheltered accommodation within Contract 5, the number of disabled adaptations that were required post contract were much higher than in previous contracts. This resulted in additional costs to the contract however due the adaptations being capitalised and programmed the Council have been able to undertake these works more cost effectively and the works undertaken should significantly reduce the number of adaptations required in future and reduce the time taken for them to be completed. The level of increased costs are presently being finalised, however based on the number of properties completed to date on Contract 5 and making an assessment on the number of remaining properties that are likely to require disabled adaptations (i.e. adapted bathrooms). It is estimated that in total 116 properties will require these additional disabled adaptations at an additional cost of £2,084 per property. The total cost of these additional works is estimated at £241,744.

Budget

Whilst significant cost pressures have been experienced in contracts 1-5 it is worth noting that costs have not exceeded either the business plan assumptions or pre-tender estimates.

That said the service is constantly striving to improve efficiency and value for money and the work being undertaken to extend the percentage of pre tender surveys and enhance their quality and robustness for contracts 6,7 and 8 should ensure that the contract sum is more closely aligned to final account for future contracts. The following items have been identified as contributing to the previous over spend on contracts 1 to 5, therefore the following measures have been taken to reduce the potential risk of an overspend on Contracts 6, 7 and 8:-

Asbestos - To minimise risk to the authority and provide greater cost certainty, the tender documentation for Contracts 6, 7 and 8 have assumed

that all ceilings and floor tiles contain asbestos. This will ensure that the tendering contractors make an allowance in their tender for all associated asbestos removal. However, if subsequent asbestos surveys indicate no asbestos to be present, this will lead to a cost saving on the contracts.

Electrical Variation - The current properties presently fall below the minimum WHQS for electrical installations. Therefore all proposed works associated with the re-wires and upgrade of the electrical installations will be included within the new tender documents. This should minimise the risk of any future over spend in this area.

Tiling to Bathrooms - Following the receipt of tenders on Contract 5, a late instruction was received to include full tiling to bathrooms at a substantial cost to the contract. It has been agreed pre-tender that all bathrooms are to be partially tiled only.

OT Requirements - A provisional assessment of the requirements for special needs bathrooms has been made during the initial surveys of the properties and an allowance for adapted bathrooms has been incorporated into the new tender documents. This will provide greater cost certainty going forward.

General Variation - The specification and bills of quantities have been revised, following the regular reviews of the common variations present in Contracts 1 to 5. These common variations have been included within the new tender documentation for Contracts 6, 7 and 8. This should assist in eliminating the majority of unforeseen variations which have occurred on previous housing contracts.

Contract 1 to 5 Cost Reports

Project	Refurbishment contract 1 (Rhyl)	Refurbishment contract 2 (North)	Refurbishment contract 3 (South)	Refurbishment contract 4 (South 2)	Refurbishment contract 5 (North 2)	Total
Client budget	2,400,000	2,100,000	2,200,000	2,000,000	1800,000	10,500,000
Pre tender estimate	2,200,000	1,980,500	1,855,519	1,900,000	1,758,631	9,694,650
Contract sum	1,463,731	1,579,819	1,563,094	1,646,798	1,714,680	7,968,122
Anticipated final account	1,580,251	1,902,246	1,309,320	1,928,117	2,235,543	8,955,477
Number of properties (tender stage)	212	218	209	237	233	1,109
Number of properties (current)	197	218	213	232	229	1,109

Examples of added value

Local Suppliers

The improvement works programme has enabled contractors to support local supply chains for example kitchens are purchased from Howden's Joinery based in Denbigh. As part of our agreement, Howdens supply a free kitchen design service within the contract which ensures that kitchens are specified in line with WHQS and take into consideration tenants own requirements. The components required to improve bathrooms and other associated building works are also sourced from local supply chains with the Denbighshire vicinity.

Local Labour

Adever Construction were appointed for contracts 2,4 & 5 and have so far recruited 8 apprentices including joiners and wet trades since starting on the improvement programme in 2010. Adever have also employed two locally based office staff, both of who were unemployed prior to their placement with the company.

All sub-contractors working for our current principal contractor are locally based firms in North Wales. A high percentage of site personnel currently working on the improvement programme also have a Denbighshire postcode.

Bramall Construction delivered contracts 1&3 and whilst they did not directly appoint any apprentices they did work with electrical sub-contractors, JDE (Mold) who took on two apprentice electricians to work on the improvement programme. The local labour level fluctuated throughout contracts 1&3 , however on average 69% of site personnel were from a Denbighshire postcode with 12% having a Welsh postcode, the remaining 19% were out side of the area but included management staff from their Liverpool based office.

Mansell Contractors were awarded a 3 year contract and directly employed 4 local Joiners and 2 local multi skilled operatives. They also employed two Tenant Liaison Officers from the locality. All domestic plumbing was completed by a local Rhyl firm (Total Trade) with approximately 50% of the rewires also being completed by a North Wales firm. (JDE, Mold).

Heating Programme - All works were completed by Clwyd Heating ensuring that 100% of the work was completed by local labour.

Window & Door Programme - All installers were directly employed by Solar Windows from South Wales - Solar employed one local storeman during the contract who was DCC tenant from Denbigh.

Smart Waste

Adever Construction are committed to improving the way in which they process site waste through their own smart waste policy. All site waste is transferred from site immediately to reduce the amount of skips use during the refurbishment. All waste materials are recorded to ensure their recycling targets are met which also minimises the amount of waste going to landfill. Adever Construction are currently in discussion with a community recycling organisation to further improve the way in which they handle waste and to support community inclusion and third sector enterprise.

Loft & Cavity Insulation Programmes

All fully improved homes also benefit from loft and cavity wall insulation. This is at no cost to the authority as CERT & CESP funding is obtained for these improvements. This improves the thermal efficiency of our homes, improves the RdSap rating and significantly reduces energy costs for tenants.

Environmental Improvements

As part of the WHQS improvement programme, Housing Services has also been investing a £500,000 per annum budget to improvement the environmental standard of estates. Within the last financial year 15 major improvement schemes have been completed varying from large scale fencing schemes to improving playground facilities.

The benefits of Participatory Budgeting are recognised by Housing Services and a pilot project has been undertaken in Henllan which utilises £2,000 of the Environmental Improvements budget which has been added to £14,000 committed through the area member budget which has to date levered a further £2,500 from local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and businesses to replace play equipment in Henllan park.

Using the Council's investment to lever further resources to invest in communities is a key priority for the Service. Participatory Budgeting and other techniques will be increasing utilised as the Service seeks to optimise its investment in infrastructure and communities.

Tenant satisfaction

Detailed surveys are undertaken following each improvement contract with satisfaction rates of 90% + being recorded on contracts.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard is a key priority for both the Council and Welsh Government and failure to deliver the standard could potentially result in punitive regulatory action being recommended from Welsh Government.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The costs of delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard are contained within the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and include a combination of Major Repairs Allowance, Usable Capital Receipts and prudential borrowing. The works are funded through a capital works programme and the Housing Revenue Account is viable and sustainable over the 30 year business planning period.

It should be noted however that the Business Plan was predicated upon a stock condition survey that was undertaken in 2004 which requires updating. A fresh stock condition survey shall be commissioned in February 2012 which shall enable the business plan sensitivities and assumptions to be predicated upon robust and current data.

7. What consultations have been carried out?

Regular reporting to scrutiny committee has taken place and tenants have been heavily involved in the improvement works through a series of working groups dealing with environment improvements, WHQS and the selection of preferred contractors.

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The housing improvement programme has been a major investment of almost £50m since 2005 and forms a significant element of the 30-year Housing Stock Business Plan. The financial viability of the Plan is monitored every month and reassessed in detail annually as part of the budget and rent setting process. The cost implications discussed in this report have been factored into the latest update of the Plan and it remains robust and financially viable. A key event in 2012 will be the updated stock condition survey and this will provide more reliable forecasts of future capital expenditure. The impact of the results will be modelled through the Business Plan and reported to back to elected members

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

There is a risk register relating to delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard however the risks associated with failing to deliver the standard are considered low with all stock expected to reach the standard by August 2013.

10. Power to make the Decision

Article 6 of the Council's Constitution

APPENDIX 1

WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME SCHEDULE 2012/13 LOT 6

Street	Town	Numbers	Age	Units
Bryn Garth	Denbigh	7,8,11,12,15,17,19,21,27,30,31,33,34, 43,45,46,48~51,53,56,59	1949	23
Bryn Stanley	Denbigh	1,9,14,15,20,25~27,29,31,36,40,48	1962	13
Clwyd Avenue	Denbigh	20,22,25,27,30,31,33~40	1958	14
Factory Place	Denbigh	Cartref	1930	1
Henllan Street	Denbigh	Glasfryn	1900	1
Henllan Street	Denbigh	78,84,88,92,98,123,125,127	1962	8
Lon Llewelyn	Denbigh	2, 3~6,9,14~16,19,21,22,23,26,27,29,30,36	1927	18
Maes Hyfryd	Denbigh	1~5	1924	5
Maes y Goron	Denbigh	5~8,11,16~22,24,26,29,30,32,35,37~39,41~45, 47,48,51~55,57~61,64,66~73,76~80,83,84,86,89	1953	56
Myddleton Avenue	Denbigh	1~4,6~8,10,12,13,15,17~24,26,30,32,34,36, 42,44,46,48,58,62,64,66	1925	32
Myddleton Avenue		25~35(odd)	1961	6
Smithfield Road	Denbigh	8	1921	1
Maes yr Efail	Henllan	2,6,11,12,14,16,17	1951	7
Maes Sadwrn	Henllan	2~5,7,8,9,13~19,21~25	1956	19
Maes Gruffydd	Trefnant	2,10,16,23,26,28,32,34,36,37,39 43,44,45,46,47	1930	16
Maes Teg	Trefnant	1~10	1970	10
				230

LOT 7

Bryn Haul	Ruthin	1~4,6~8	1959	7
Canol y Dre	Ruthin	1~3,5~8,10,11,13,15~17,21,22,25,26,30~33	1937	21
Haulfryn	Ruthin	2,8,9,11,14,17,19,24,27,32,33,42, 43,45~47,51,52,59,62,66,82,85,86	1954	25
Mwrog St	Ruthin	89,91,93	1912	3
Pant Glas	Ruthin	1~4,6~8	1963	7
Parc y Dre	Ruthin	52,58,61,63,68,69,74,79,100,101, 109,111,111A,112,112A,114,115,115A,116, 116A,124,131,132	1949	25
Porth y Dre	Ruthin	1,2,14,29,35,36,38,41,47,59,67	1934	11
Rhos St	Ruthin	50~62(even)	1900	7
Bryn Awelon	Llandyrnog	1,2	1964	2
Berth Glyd	Llandyrnog	1~4,1a~4a	1963	8
Maes Clwyd	Llandyrnog	11,12,13,16,17,20,21,23,26	1951	9
Maes Llan	Llandyrnog	11,12	1948	2
Bryn Llan	Llanrhaeadr	2,5	1948	2
Maes y Felin	Llanrhaeadr	4,6,9,11,17, 20,21	1953	7
Maes Hafal	Gellifor	1,4,5,6,6a, 7~10, 11,14,15,16, 17	1964	14
Bro Clwyd	Rhewl	3,9,13	1948	3
Cilgwyn	Rhewl	16,17,21,23,26	1955	5

Dolydd	Rhewl	1~15	1965	15
Glyn Castell	Llanynys	2,3,4,5	1952	4
Bro Gynan	Llanfair	2,3,4	1934	3
Bron y Clwyd	Llanfair	4, 7,10,13,16, 17~20	1951	9
Maes Hyfryd	Graigfechan	2	1953	1
Colomendy	Cyffylliog	1,4,5	1949	3
Maes Caenog	Clocaenog	3,6	1951	2
Pen y Gelli	Bontuchel	3	1951	1
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LOT 8

Bryn Alwen	Bettws G.G	1	1966	1
Berwyn House	Corwen	Berwyn House	1919	1
Maes Afallen	Corwen	70,71,74,77,81,82,84~89, 97~99,101,104,105, 107~114,119,121~126	1956	33
Uwch y Dre	Corwen	4,14~17,19~22,23~25,27,29,33,34,37,39,41,47 52,53a,54,55	1933	25
Maes y Llan	Carrog	5, 12~19,22	1950	10
Maes y Waen	Carrog	1	1938	1
Godre'r Coed	Cynwyd	4,5,8~12	1970	7
Hendre	Cynwyd	Hendre	1919	1
Llandrillo Rd	Cynwyd	6,7	1936	2
Maes Hyfryd	Cynwyd	1,4,6,12,19,20,22,23	1937	8
Pig y Bont	Cynwyd	Pig y Bont	1919	1
Aber View	Gwyddelwern	Aber View	1919	1
Beuno Terrace	Gwyddelwern	2,6	1919	2
Bryn Domwy	Gwyddelwern	4,9~11,16,18	1955	6
Deunant	Gwyddelwern	5,7~9	1967	4
Maes yr Efail	Gwyddelwern	2~6	1967	5
Maes Owain	Glyndyfyrdwy	1,8,10,11,15	1948	5
Rhoslan	Llandrillo	6,9,14,16, 22,24~26	1938	8
Llidiart Annie	Llantisilio	3,5,7	1963	3
Erw Deg	Llangollen	1~10	1962	10
Maes Pengwern	Llangollen	10,12,16,25,27,34,44,45,48,50,51,52, 53,54,56,57,59~61, 62~65,71	1967	26
Park Avenue	Llangollen	5,6,7,9,14	1927	5
Pengwern	Llangollen	3,9,18,23,24,27,31~33,36,39, 58,62,65,72,76,97,101,105,107,108	1950	22
Tan y Coed	Llangollen	1,3,4,5,10	1967	5
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Welsh Audit Office Social-housing landlords' progress towards the WHQS

Landlord (Number of homes at 31 March 2010)	Percentage of homes meeting, or projected to meet, the WHQS in full			Notes
	31 March 2010	31 March 2013	31 March 2017	
Local Authorities				
Isle of Anglesey (3,814)	30	80	100	In its monitoring report, the Welsh Government based its overall analysis for local authorities on figures showing that 71 per cent of the Council's properties complied in full with the WHQS at 31 March 2010 and that 100 per cent of properties would comply by 31 March 2013. However, the 2010 figure represented the overall percentage of all of the main elements of the WHQS that had been delivered across all 3,814 properties and not the percentage of homes complying with all of these elements. And the projection of full compliance by 31 March 2013 did not account for the fact that the Council had indicated that only 80 per cent of properties were expected to comply with the external works requirements. In any event, the Council is now projecting that all necessary work, including external work, will be completed by 31 March 2013.

Caerphilly (10,987)	1	10	20	Awaiting a tenant ballot on stock transfer in early 2012. The Council has indicated that it could now achieve the WHQS in full by 2019-20 in the event that tenants vote against stock transfer.
Carmarthenshire (9,125)	9	69	100	Agreed an extension to 31 March 2015 – the Council has projected 100 per cent compliance by that date.
Cardiff (13,719)	40	100	100	
Denbighshire (3,470)	50	100	100	
Flintshire (7,443)	0	5	10	Awaiting a tenant ballot on stock transfer in early 2012. The Council has revised these projections and now expects no more than 26 homes to meet the WHQS in full by 31 March 2017. The Council has revised its WHQS strategy following consultation with tenants. If tenants vote against stock transfer, the Council will be targeting its future investment on central heating, kitchens and bathrooms.

Landlord (Number of homes at 31 March 2010)	Percentage of homes meeting, or projected to meet, the WHQS in full			Notes
	31 March 2010	31 March 2013	31 March 2017	
Neath Port Talbot (9,276)	0	-	-	Housing stock transferred to NPT Homes in March 2011. In its monitoring report the Welsh Government included figures for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council for 31 March 2013 and 31 March 2017 as part of its overall analysis for local authorities. However, we have included these projections as part of the figures for LSVT associations because the figures provided by the Council assumed compliance with the WHQS by 2016-17 and were clearly based on expectations in light of the tenant vote in favour of stock transfer in March 2010.
Pembrokeshire (5,701)	60	100	100	
Powys (5,454)	28	52	95	Agreed an extension to 31 March 2018.
Swansea (13,643)	0	0	0	Tenants voted no to stock transfer in 2007. In its monitoring report, the Welsh Government indicated that figures for the City and County of Swansea Council were not available. However, its overall analysis for local authorities was based on assumptions that none of the Council's properties complied in full with

				the WHQS, due to the Council still being in the process of identifying external works requirements.
Vale of Glamorgan (3,939)	1	12	25	Tenants voted no to stock transfer in April 2011. In its monitoring report, the Welsh Government indicated that figures for the Vale of Glamorgan Council would not be available until after the release of the results of the tenant ballot. However, its overall analysis for local authorities was based on these projections provided by the Council in advance of the tenant ballot. After reworking its business plan, the Council now anticipates being able to achieve full compliance with the WHQS by 31 March 2017.
Wrexham (11,538)	1	1	2	Tenants voted no to stock transfer in 2004.
All Local Authorities (98,109)	15	42	51	

Report to: Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 23rd February 2012

Lead Member: Lead Member for Regeneration and Tourism

Report Author: Head of Housing Services

Title: Housing Allocations and Choice Based Lettings Pilot

1. What is the report about?

To update members on the introduction of the new allocations procedure and to outline a pilot project to deal with low demand housing.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The report is for information and provides the opportunity for members to feedback their comments on the low demand pilot project.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That members note the contents of this report and provide feedback on the low demand pilot.

4. Report details.

Following a review of the Housing Allocations policy and procedure recommendations have been made to minimise the extraneous processing of application forms and resultant maintenance of a lengthy waiting list (with the effect that there is often little prospect of helping many applicants) and to refocus the service to improve pathways to housing through the provision of a more focused and proactive housing options and housing outcomes service.

The system has been overhauled to develop clearer roles and responsibilities for staff involved in the allocation and waiting list process with the new allocations system adopting a points based approach which reflects local conditions to promote sustainable communities.

To enable the council to relet vacancies efficiently and effectively with minimum rent loss and to enable strategic and local priorities to be better delivered the new allocations process shall include a triage system to identify levels of housing need, with 3 distinctive categories being utilised : low, medium & high.

The new allocations system will provide for a more dynamic process whereby applicants can more easily move between bandings as their needs and housing conditions change. The systems shall also move away from a focus upon supporting information and documentation which in effect clogged the system from applicants with little chance of being rehoused to a smarter and more targeted approach to checking and verifying information at the point of home visit rather than seeking additional information at the application stage.

This process has in-built safeguards for those applicants who may be vulnerable and require a safeguarding response. Any applications where there is reason to believe that the applicant meets the safeguarding criteria and may need assistance with their application will be able to access the following support

- contact via telephone, via representative (i.e. carer, support worker or social worker)
- If vulnerability criteria is engaged and warranted then a home visit or if appropriate office appointment can be arranged.
- Where the applicants circumstances demand an urgent response these applications are to be forwarded without delay to the appropriate housing options/home visiting officer for assessment.

Throughout the process all applicants can expect to be treated fairly, sensitively and the policy will be consistently applied to find solutions for everyone who is applying for housing to Denbighshire County Council. In many cases the Council is unable to assist applicants in their application for Council housing therefore the purpose of the new allocations system is to encourage applicants to consider all housing options and to take a more active part in making their own decisions on their housing future options with support, advice and assistance from the housing options team.

Unfortunately for the majority of housing applicants who are requesting social housing the outcome will be disappointing as the number of applicants far outstrips the number of empty properties that are available. A range of housing option tools have been developed to help applicants access housing within the county, these include an options website, drop-in sessions, individual interviews, information packs and referrals to other services within the enhanced housing options framework. Low cost home ownership and affordable rent models shall also be promoted.

Whilst the majority of the Council's housing stock is desirable there are some properties which are less popular for a range of reasons and therefore are designated as much more difficult to let. In order to address this issue a pilot project is being developed to utilise a range of tools to let the stock once a number of defined triggers have been activated.

Trigger Definition:

A low demand or 'hard to let' property is a dwelling where one or more of the following symptoms are exhibited:

- a small or non-existent waiting list for the property;

- tenancy offers on a property frequently refused for reasons other than personal reasons;
- higher than normal rates of tenancy turnover for a property in an area.

Certain types of Properties are more likely to exhibit the above criteria. They are:

1. Rural sheltered stock
2. Some rural general needs stock
3. Some non-core sheltered urban stock

New Pilot Policy

Where properties are identified as meeting the above criteria they will be designated a choice based letting pilot dwelling. The aim is to secure a valid letting to a person who wishes to live in the local area, with the usual proviso that the property is appropriate and suitable in terms of size, housing need etc. Research has shown that people that have a connection with an area and make an informed choice to reside in a particular area are more likely to integrate and sustain their tenancies within that community.

The designation of a property as difficult to let will trigger a different approach to allocating the dwelling which could combine some or all of the following measures:

1. Marketing and promotional information will be created specific to the property
2. The information will be released to the Local Member
3. Persons already registered for that type of housing within that locality will receive information regarding the vacancy
4. The marketing campaign shall be initially prioritised within the local area through the local press, community information boards, doctors' surgeries, local shops/post offices etc.
5. Where there is little or no take up, then the area will be widened

The pilot scheme to be reviewed after the first 6 months of implementation pending a formal evaluation after a 12 month period which should link into the finalising of the Housing Stock Asset Management Plan. This should enable informed investment decisions to be made going forward which may include recommendations to re-designate some schemes, remodelling or following a detailed options appraisal may in the most extreme case recommend disinvestment.

A report detailing the outcomes of the review shall be submitted to members for consideration in March 2013.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The efficient and effective allocation and letting of housing stock contributes to a number of wider corporate priorities including meeting the needs of rural

communities, supporting older people to live independent and fulfilled lives and delivering value for money.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The costs of delivering the service are contained within the Housing Stock Business Plan. An annual due diligence assessment by external consultants which was undertaken in February 2012 concluded that the plan and assumptions made within it were viable and sustainable over the longer term.

7. What consultations have been carried out?

Tenants and stakeholders will be consulted as part of the review process.

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

N/A

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

Should the Council fail to adopt a more strategic and proactive approach to dealing with low demand stock it shall adversely impact upon the business plan and could have the effect of “blighting” neighbourhoods.

The pilot project aims to manage and mitigate these risks and shall be subject to appraisal and review to determine its effectiveness

10. Power to make the Decision

Article 6 of the Council’s Constitution

Report to:	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	23rd February 2012
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Regeneration and Tourism
Report Author:	Head of Housing Services
Title:	Tenancy Agreement

1. What is the report about?

To update members on progress being made in revising and reissuing the Tenancy Agreement.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The report is for information and provides members with an update on the process for agreeing and issuing the new Tenancy Agreement.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That members note the contents of this report and comment on the commitment of Housing Services to consult with tenants, members and stakeholders in drafting the new revised Tenancy Agreement.

4. Report details.

The Council's current secure tenancy agreement was issued to tenants in 1996 and has not been reviewed or rewritten since that date. It is considered good practice for Landlords to regularly review tenancy agreements to ensure that they are up to date, reflect current legislation and good practice. Clearly the review of the tenancy agreement is long overdue and the service is committed to completing this work over the next 12 months.

The tenancy agreement sets out the contract between landlord and tenants and therefore needs to be legally enforceable, contain terms which are deemed fair and equitable to both Tenant and Landlord and comply with legislative requirements. It sets out the rights and responsibilities for both Landlord and Tenant which plays a pivotal role in the enforcement of tenancy conditions and the pursuit of legal action by either party.

The Tenancy agreement must be constructed using the above conditions plus the terms and conditions must not breach any "unfair contract terms" in accordance with guidance published by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT).

The Tenancy Agreement is a useful tool available to the Landlord to effectively manage the stock and promote positive community relations. There are presently two types of Tenancy Agreement which are issued by the Council – Introductory Tenancies and Secure Tenancies.

Introductory tenancies are provided to all new non secure tenants. This means that any new tenant is subjected to a 12 month probationary period and will have fewer rights than a secure tenant. A summary of rights which the introductory tenancy will not have are outlined below:

- The right to take in lodgers
- The right to sublet part of the property
- The right to exchange
- The right to improve the property
- The right to claim compensation for improving the property
- The Right to Buy (although the 12 month probationary period will count towards the right to buy discount once the tenancy has become secure)
- Security of tenure

Secure tenants enjoy the full rights afforded under the terms of the tenancy agreement.

Housing Services shall over the next 12 months draft an up to date and fit for purpose Tenancy Agreement for both Secure and Introductory Tenants and introduce a Tenant's Handbook which shall provide further guidance, information and advice in relation to the management of the tenancy and expected standards from both Landlord and Tenants.

As part of this process consultations shall be had with key stakeholders including Tenants, Local Councillors, Police, social services and support services. The new Agreement and Handbook shall be written in plain English and shall incorporate best practice to enable a more robust approach to anti social behaviour – for example whilst the existing Tenancy Agreement contains 5 separate clauses relating to the keeping of pets there is no specific clause to prevent the keeping of dogs in flats for example which is an increasing source of neighbour nuisance and anti social behaviour.

Next Steps

To research and develop a draft Tenancy Agreement and handbook for consultation with Tenants and Stakeholders by October 2012. To undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment and gain Tenant Federation and Cabinet approval for December 2012 and to serve all tenants with a Notice of variation in order to legally change the conditions of tenancy in January 2013 and to issue the new tenancy agreements in February 2013.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Having a Tenancy Agreement which encourages good conduct, effectively tackles anti social behaviour and supports a culture of rights and

responsibilities shall contribute to a number of Corporate priorities and shall support the development of strong, vibrant and sustainable communities.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The costs of producing and distributing the new Tenancy Agreement and Handbook are contained within the Housing Stock Business Plan.

7. What consultations have been carried out?

An extensive consultation exercise shall be carried out in developing and approving the Tenancy Agreement with primary stakeholders being Tenants, Members, Leaseholders and key strategic partners.

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

N/A

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

The main risk relates to the Tenancy Agreement or handbook containing conditions which may be subject to appeal or legal challenge. In order to manage this risk the service shall consider best practice within the sector and engage Legal Services and if required commission specialist legal advice.

10. Power to make the Decision

Article 6 of the Council's Constitution

Report to:	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	23rd February 2012
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Regeneration and Tourism
Report Author:	Head of Housing Services
Title:	Housing Services Rent Arrears Performance

1. What is the report about?

To update members on rent arrears performance and current trends and emerging issues.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The report is for information and provides members with an update on the performance of the service in line with the request from Scrutiny Committee.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That members note the contents of this report, the good performance of the service in this key area of operation and comment accordingly.

4. Report details.

Rental Income is the life blood of any housing organisation and failure to collect rents and minimise arrears would pose a serious question mark over the viability of the business and service plans and would pose a significant threat to both the services that the Council could deliver and the reputation of Housing Services and the Council more broadly.

This report should provide re-assurance to members that the Service is performing well in relation to this key priority but it shall also flag potential dangers arising from the ongoing economic downturn and the potential impact of welfare benefit reform.

Rent Arrears are collected by a team of Estate officers working a 'patch' of Council owned homes. There are 8 patches determined on the levels of need which also incorporate other estate management services such as dealing with anti social behaviour and average out at approximately 430 homes per estates officer. Currently 34% of tenants pay full rent, 50% are on full Housing benefit and 16% on partial housing benefit. Of the tenants who either pay full or partial rent 50% pay by direct debit.

The arrears target for 2011/12 is £185, 000. Arrears levels have reduced year on year for the last 5 years and whilst the service is on track to meet this target it should be noted that generating reductions in arrears are becoming more challenging as the service is now tackling “core arrears” and the impact of changes to welfare benefits is starting to take effect (for example there has been a 27% increase in non dependent deductions in 2011/12. Non dependents are people aged over the age of 18 who live with the tenant but are not the partner of the tenant).

The performance of the Housing Service compares favourably with many other landlords. The current tenant rent arrears as a percentage of total debit stood at 1.68% for 2010/11 which was in the upper quartile for Wales. The Housing Service has recently joined HouseMark UK the leading benchmarking service provider for social housing providers in the UK. With effect from April 2012 the service will commence benchmarking performance against the All Wales Peer Group across a wide range of services with 6 of the key performance indicators being compared relating to current and former tenant arrears.

There has been a continual reduction in outstanding rent arrears for a period of 10 years. The figures at year end for the last 5 years are,

Year	Target arrears	Actual arrears
2006/7	£290,000	£278,979
2007/8	£265,000	£256,433
2008/9	£240,000	£227,028
2009/10	£225,000	£208,656
2010/11	£200,000	£189,932

Whilst good performance has been witnessed to date the service is not complacent. From April 2012 changes to benefits will include Working Tax Credit with couples with children needing to work 24 hours to qualify – one partner needs to work 16 hours. Other changes to this benefit will include loss of the ‘baby element’ which is recoverable child care reduced. This is likely to make some part time jobs untenable.

Amongst other changes it is worth flagging up from April 2013 Housing Benefit will be restricted to ‘rooms needed’ for tenants of working age (to equate with retirement pensions) which is already in place in the private sector. Children of the same sex will not be entitled to their own room until age 16 or if different sex until the age of 10. Families will be subject to increased rent payments if they are unable (or unwilling) to transfer and of course their will be limited properties available.

To meet these challenges and look to further improve performance the Income Management Service Improvement Plan has identified work which will promote financial inclusion by maximising general money/welfare benefit advice. The approach will be to allow Officers to focus the service on preventing debt and financial exclusion e.g. lack of access to a bank or

building society account, lack of access to suitable financial services and credit, lack of advice or education. The aims will go beyond reducing rent arrears level, to include a reduction in evictions, court actions and abandoned properties.

Council House rents in Denbighshire are relatively low compared to that of other social landlords which has led to a 5.65% increase in rent levels for 2012/13 compared with a 5.1% average across Wales. The Housing Service will as mentioned above target support to working tenants and those not in receipt of full housing benefit to ensure that access to benefits and income maximisation initiatives are optimised.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Reducing rent arrears and helping income maximisation is a key priority for the service and supports the Council strategic priorities in relation to sustaining the local economy and delivering area regeneration. Effective performance in relation to rent arrears prevention and recovery also can encourage stable tenancies to be created, enhance community sustainability and prevent costly evictions and resultant void properties.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The costs of delivering the service and provision for bad debt are contained with the Housing Stock Business Plan. An annual due diligence assessment by external consultants which was undertaken in February 2012 concluded that the plan and assumptions made within it were viable and sustainable over the longer term.

7. What consultations have been carried out?

Tenants will be consulted over rent increase for 2012/13 and shall have a significant input into the Service Improvement Plans which shall consider all aspects of rent collection service and the incorporation of best practice.

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

N/A

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

General economic conditions and changes to welfare benefits will continue to present risks in the short, medium and potentially longer term. The Housing Service has recently appointed a Housing Options and Housing Benefit Liaison Officer whom shall work with both statutory and voluntary agencies to mitigate the effects of Housing Benefit and wider welfare benefits changes. Furthermore the Head of Housing has arranged for an internal audit review of rent arrears performance to undertaken in the 2012/13 financial year which shall make further recommendations for improvement and this allied to

identifying best practice through benchmarking should manage and mitigate the risks identified above.

10. Power to make the Decision

Article 6 of the Council's Constitution

Report to:	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	23rd February 2012
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Regeneration and Tourism
Report Author:	Head of Housing Services
Title:	Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) Project

1. What is the report about?

To update members on the development of a Single Access Route to Housing across the North Wales sub region.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The report is for information and provides the opportunity for members to feedback their comments on this important initiative.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That members note the contents of this report and provide feedback which can be shared with the project steering group.

4. Report details.

This report concerns the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) project. The project is a collaboration between the following bodies:

- Denbighshire, Conwy, Flintshire and Wrexham local authorities;
- Cartrefi Conwy, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, North Wales Housing Association and Wales and West Housing Association;
- Glyndwr University.

The project starts from a recognition that the provision of social housing across the region must change and that the best way to do this is to work together. The project intention is to develop, if possible, a common allocations framework.

The SARTH steering group consists of senior representatives from each partner and has agreed the following aims¹:

- To make services more accessible
- To meet housing need with a wider range of solutions

¹ See appendix 2 for a full copy of the agreed aims and objectives of the project

- To use housing stock more effectively
- To encourage balanced and sustainable communities
- To ensure value for money
- To enhance customer service and increase customer satisfaction
- To take account of applicants' individual needs and preferences

This report shall provide members with an update on the broad principles which are guiding the evolution of the project. It is important to preface this by describing the challenges facing social housing providers in the region and to give a better understanding of why certain changes are required.

The challenges facing social housing landlords

In each local authority area the number of people wanting social housing, as evidenced by the numbers on waiting lists, greatly exceeds the number of properties being let (see appendix 1). As a result, the majority of applicants on registers having no realistic chance of being rehoused in social housing for many years and as a consequence their housing needs are not being met via the allocations system.

Because there is little prospect of an increase in availability of social housing, this situation implies that the best option for the majority on registers is to look for alternative housing. However, people in this position do not consistently get timely and useful advice about alternatives. The challenge is to create better alternatives for people in this position and make them aware of them. Analysis of the management of current and past oversubscribed registers reveals that much officer time is spent dealing with people's queries about the application form, their position on the list or their points.² Given that most people on the list unfortunately will not get rehoused, this represents a waste of resources and time, both for the customer and the provider. This waste of resources is compounded by the fact that there are a large number of registers and different allocation systems.

People seeking a home must apply several times to different landlords and their application may be dealt with differently by each partner. This can lead to confusion, inconsistency and a lack of transparency. Housing associations work across county boundaries and people who apply for housing also apply in different counties. This presents a clear challenge to partners in this project to create a framework that delivers consistency across the whole region. However, the advice which people need at the point of application needs to be locally relevant.

We must achieve this consistency and transparency at the same time as ensuring that the framework is sensitive to local needs and the aim of fostering sustainable communities. The new framework needs to ensure that the most vulnerable, including people with special needs, are given the best chance of finding a home

² Partners monitored customer queries over a period of two weeks.

To provide members with an understanding of the weaknesses within the current system two case studies are provided overleaf for illustration.

Case study 1

Our first example is a family of one adult and two children who applied to Denbighshire County Council in March 2011. They were nominated to a housing association in August 2011, following which the council received no information regarding what happened to them. Their file was passed to an estates officer within the council in early November 2011 for a council vacancy, but the officer was unable to contact them. At the end of November the officer received a call stating that the family had been housed by the housing association in Ruthin back in July 2011.

This case illustrates how a single application and allocation system would make the process more transparent and easier to manage and save valuable officer time. It would more importantly ensure that those recognised to be most in need are housed first, whereas now it depends which register you are on. If the council and housing associations shared a register then each would automatically know which applicants were prioritised and what was happening with their cases.

Case study 2

In this case, a family of 2 adults and one child was in need of adapted accommodation in Denbighshire because of the mother's disability. They had registered with the council and with 3 housing associations before 2006, but were unable to find accommodation. This caused them to move out of the region for two years to find social housing before returning in 2008 to live in privately rented accommodation in Denbighshire because they wanted to be closer to family. They had to move house during their time renting privately and were still looking for an adapted property when they became at risk of having to move again in late 2011 because their landlord's circumstances had changed and he was not willing to adapt the house. During this time they had fallen off the housing associations' registers though they were still on the council one. In October 2011 a suitable property became available in a housing association. Luckily, the housing association asked for a nomination because they had no-one else in need of that particular kind of adapted property and needed a nomination to balance their quotas. The family were successfully rehoused by the housing association.

This case highlights the possibility that people in need may miss out because of the multiplicity of registers and the fact that each landlord does not have automatic sight of who else may be in need on other registers. Had the housing association not needed a nomination, the person in need who was waiting longest may not have been rehoused. Such cases may be occurring currently without us knowing.

The case illustrates other issues. At the time when they opted to move out of the area, the family were told that the council had no properties for disabled

people and that they should rent privately or move elsewhere. They felt that they were being turned away because of the mother's disability. They reported later that they were not given information about other options which may have been helpful for them at the time, such as the bond scheme. They think of the system as fair but also stated that one consistent process and service would be preferable instead of different systems with different rules and too many forms and questions.

On the other hand, the eventual successful outcome of this case was helped by the cooperation of officers from different organisations through the specialist housing group, which cooperates on adapted properties. If this type of cooperation was streamlined and made a matter of course across the allocation system it would offer consistency and fairness for all applicants.

Principles guiding the way forward

The challenges described above are well known to most in the social housing sector. The project steering group have identified a number of guiding principles for the project and how we should address them.

- The allocations process must be accessible and consistent and give people confidence that it is fair and effective. This is best achieved by having one system for applicants, shared by providers for the benefit of customers.
- Because partners and applicants cross boundaries, the simplest and most transparent system would be for the register and allocations framework to also be consistent across the region. This would facilitate joint working and ensure those in highest need were prioritised consistently by all partners and the best use of stock made across the region. It would also improve strategic decisions on the creation of new stock. The system should incorporate an accessible register allowing the best use of adapted properties.
- Priority must be given to those in greatest need and must incorporate the statutory requirement to prioritise those in the reasonable preference groups.
- The use of a banding system is preferred to a points system because of its transparency and fairness. Those in highest need will be given the highest banding and those in the same band will be prioritised according to date of application, because those waiting longest have been in need for longest.
- There should be provision for local letting policies and local connection criteria in order to meet local needs and build sustainable communities.
- Because the majority of people are not served by being on housing registers, we need to rethink how we help them. Rather than just going on a list, they need to be helped to solve their housing issues.
- The register should be better managed so that it does not lead to a waste and diversion of resources. We should not simply put someone on the list if they have no chance of being rehoused.

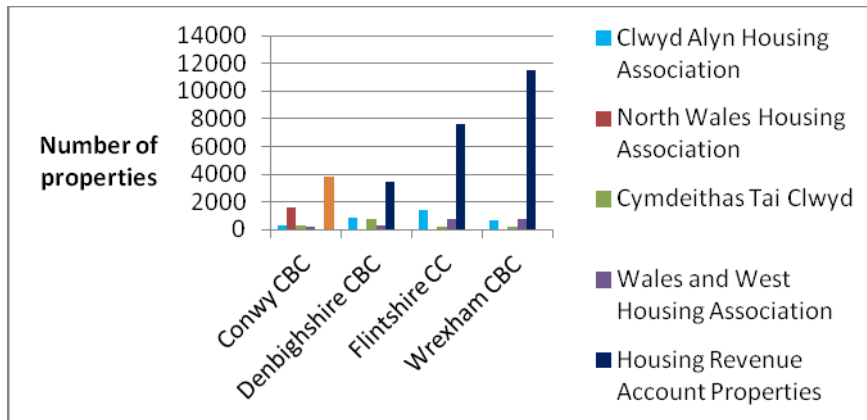
- Instead, we must create a timely and useful housing options advice service, given at the point of application which is locally expert and relevant.
- We should focus effort on creating and promoting better alternatives for the majority who we cannot directly rehouse.
- A telephone application system may be preferred because of its accessibility and the ease with which advice can be given at the point of application.
- The new framework will be consulted on with all stakeholders, including officers, members, residents and applicants.

Next steps in the project

Following the agreement on the project aims and recruitment of the project development officer, the next step is to develop a common allocations framework to be consulted on with all stakeholders and piloted with some partners. This will take place over the next eighteen months.

APPENDIX 1

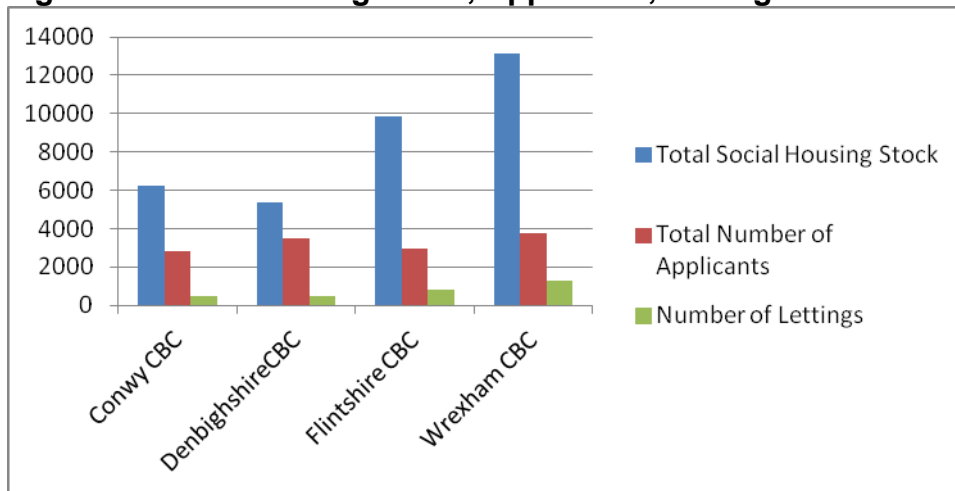
Figure 1. Social Housing Stock by Local Authority Area.



Source: Organisation Returns January 2010, Welsh Assembly Government 2010

Figure 1 illustrates the amount of social housing stock and its distribution across the four local authority areas.

Figure 2 Social Housing Stock, Applicants, Lettings



Source Organisation Responses January 2010; data Unit Wales ; WAG 2010

The data provided in Figure 2, above, suggests that:

1. The demand for social housing across the local authority areas included in the study, as evidenced by numbers on the housing registers, far exceeds supply.
2. The numbers of properties being let represents a small proportion of total stock.
3. Given the reduced number of social housing lettings, it is important to ensure that transparent systems are in place for people in need, to access social housing.
4. There is a need to ensure that customers are provided with timely advice on alternative housing options.

Next Steps

A project officer has been recruited to help drive the initiative forward and a bid has been submitted to Welsh Government to part fund the development of integrated ICT systems, website development and project management costs.

A project plan has been developed and a further progress report shall be provided to scrutiny committee in the autumn of 2012.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The initiative is an excellent example of cross domain collaborative working across the North Wales sub region.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

A bid has been submitted to Welsh Government and project costs are estimated to be in the region of £394, 955 over a 4 year period which would be covered partly by Welsh Government Grant and the remainder being proportionately distributed among partner organisations. The contribution from Denbighshire Council is contained within the Housing Strategy budget. Details relating to costs and impact on IT and other service areas will be worked through over the coming months and reported back to scrutiny committee.

7. What consultations have been carried out?

Feedback from applicants and tenants suggests that the current system is fragmented and disjointed. Further detailed discussions shall be had with tenants, applicants and stakeholders as the allocations policy is firmed up.

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

If the proposal goes ahead, the financial commitment from Denbighshire is not significant and is a pre-existing commitment.

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

There is a risk that Welsh government will not fund the project or that the IT systems prove to disproportionately expensive or complicated to deliver.

Feedback from Welsh Government to date suggests that they strongly support the project and risks associated with IT interfacing should be mitigated through the involvement of IT teams at an early stage in the project.

10. Power to make the Decision

Article 6 of the Council's Constitution

Appendix 2 – Aims and Objectives

The broad aim of the partnership is: **To provide a common access route to a range of affordable housing options which is transparent, legal, efficient and accessible to all sections of the community.**

In doing this the partnership seeks to:

- Make services more accessible
- Meet housing need with a wider range of solutions
- Use stock more effectively
- Encourage balanced and sustainable communities
- Ensure Value for Money
- Enhance customer service
- Take into account applicants' individual needs and preferences.

Objectives

The objectives of the partnership are:

- To meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing as set out in the Housing Act (1996), Homelessness Act (2002) and relevant Code of Guidance.
- To comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and associated legislation.
- To ensure that services are responsive to the needs and aspirations of existing and potential customers.
- To ensure that those with the greatest housing needs have those needs met.
- To ensure that the system is accessible to all potential applicants including access to information, advice, and completion of information requirements.
- To reduce barriers to mobility between local housing markets.
- To ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to respond to the needs of their customers at the community and estate level.
- To ensure consistency in the way in which applicants are treated by all the partner organisations
- To empower applicants and support them to make informed choices about where they want to live
- To provide appropriate, accurate and realistic advice relating to the availability of affordable housing at the point of application
- To provide improved services for vulnerable people who may find it difficult to apply for housing and offer continuing assistance to them in maintaining a successful tenancy;
- Help to tackle homelessness and its causes in the region/ locality.
- To provide a means *for* assessing housing need across the partnership area.
- To facilitate access to alternative housing options including low cost homeownership, intermediate rents and social and private lettings.
- To make best use of existing social housing stock
- To maximise customer satisfaction and improve the customer service housing applicants receive