

Report to	Communities Scrutiny
Date of meeting	15th May 2025
Lead Member / Officer	Cllr Rhys Thomas Lead Member Housing & Communities
Head of Service	Liz Grieve Head of Housing & Communities
Report author	Geoff Davies Lead Officer - Community Housing
Title	Emergency response to heating loss for vulnerable tenants

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. To outline what support is available for council tenants in the event of disruptive events and emergencies.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To respond to the request for information on what provision is provided for vulnerable tenants who only have electric heating as their primary source of heating.
- 2.2 This report also details the support provided by Community Housing and Property, to tenants and communities, in a wider context.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1 The Committee confirms that it has read, understood the report and to comment on the report if necessary.

4. Report details

- 4.1 Community Housing / Property provides support to our tenants and households on an everyday basis. This ranges from individual support with housing matters, to general life events and emergencies that occur in people's lives. These can be wide ranging and can include domestic abuse, crime, fire and bereavement.

- 4.2 We also provide support for communities and have a track record of supporting groups of tenants or communities through significant events such as localised flooding and a major event the 2020 pandemic.
- 4.3 The service has 24/7 emergency out of hours cover for evenings and weekends for our tenants, which includes staff and contractors able to deal with a wide range of emergencies.
- 4.4 The most common occurrence of a potential major, emergency event is flooding in St Asaph. This impacts on Llys Y Felin, which is a scheme for older people close to the River Elwy. Whilst major flood defence improvements have been completed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), we continue to monitor the risk of flooding at this location, before and during periods of adverse weather and storms. This includes having staff available to attend and support residents with individual flood defences and also to prepare in case evacuation may be necessary. We have also continued to liaise with NRW and Dwr Cymru following near misses to reduce the risk of a further occurrence.
- 4.5 We liaise closely with the Councils Emergency Planning teams during events such as flooding. The council's emergency planning system would also support communities with major events such as power cuts.
- 4.6 The responsibility for leading on power outages, lies with the utility network and providers. The "Widespread Electricity & Utilities Outage Plan" deals with the response. This Plan is owned by the North Wales Resilience Forum (NWRF) and managed by the NWRF Infrastructure and Logistical Preparedness Group.
- 4.7 The plan outlines the responsibility of Scottish Power for the electricity infrastructure and to restore power as quickly as possible. The plan also includes the contingency plans for supporting communities and communication. Organisations such as the British Red Cross are a partner in the plan and would be engaged in the event of widespread and extended power failure. This includes customer support vehicles being sent to deliver blankets and refreshments and to provide advice to communities.
- 4.8 Those customers who may need extra care and support during a power cut are able to self-register with the Priority Services Register (PSR). We have shared a list of addresses with the Regional Emergency Planning service. This is based on schemes specifically for older people.

- 4.9 The council, and also Community Housing, would be able to use our own registers of people in our communities who may need additional support and our own staff would be engaged with contacting and offering support. We also maintain a record of vulnerable customers who may live within general housing stock either alone or within a household. We would target these households in the event of any emergencies
- 4.10 If we specifically experienced a prolonged power outage within our housing stock and it was localised i.e. affecting just a scheme or street, we would instigate emergency planning procedures to open a rest centre as close as possible, to provide a warm place and access to hot drinks and food.
- 4.11 If the outage affected a significantly larger area, we would be a part of a wider partnership response for all residents affected. We could source additional blankets for anyone in need for example, but would work more wider emergency planning partners to provide hot refreshments within communities. Housing staff would target tenants to ensure wide communication. As mentioned earlier, British Red Cross would be a key partner to support communities.
- 4.12 The only heating systems that would be unaffected by a power cut would be solid fuel fires and those powered by PV solar with batteries.

Our approach to knowing our customers

- 4.13 We have recently completed a review of how we manage the information we hold about our customers and as a result have developed a data strategy and action plan. The initial actions are focused on targeting where we have gaps in our data on households. Maintaining an up to date picture of households is not straightforward, as the circumstances within our households change on a daily basis.
- 4.14 We also have a project that will help us understand our customer needs better, to help us develop a bigger picture of our households and the communities in which they live. Further information will be provided on this in due course.
- 4.15 Our Housing Officers are now fully generic in their role, which means they can deal with the whole range of housing management matters such as rent, tenancy management and allocations.

This has resulted in Housing Officers having the smallest possible number of homes to manage (250 – 300 homes) compared to the more specialist Housing roles (800 homes) we had previously. Therefore, Housing Officers are building up a more comprehensive picture of tenants on their patch. We expect this to continue to develop.

4.16 It is worth noting that feedback from Housing professionals in Wales is highlighting that housing staff feel they are more and more having to fill gaps caused by overstretched services, such as social work and mental health services. This generic approach means we are more able to be aware of the potential issues within a household and are better able to identify the most vulnerable.

Heating systems and Standards

4.17 The profile of the heating systems within our housing stock is shown in the following table -

Type	Number of Properties
Gas	2890
Air Source Heat Pumps	219
Oil	27
Solid Fuel (107 Charnwood and 78 multi-fuel – log burner or open fire)	185
Economy 7 (Storage Heaters)	63

The use of all electric heating will increase as we install more systems less reliant on fossil fuels and to increase the use of renewable forms of fuel as part of the new Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS).

Conclusion

4.18 Housing supports our tenants on a daily basis and holds appropriate information on households that are vulnerable. We operate a 24 / 7 service to enable us to respond to emergencies and incidents. The service contributes to emergency planning processes and ongoing risk management to ensure we can support our households and communities in the event of significant incident.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

5.1 A Denbighshire of quality housing that meets people's needs

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

6.1 All costs associated with housing stock are contained within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment and what changes have, or will be made to the project or approach as a result of the assessment?

7.1 This report is for information only.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1 This report is for information only.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 There are no costs associated with this report.

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

10.1 The risks are we fail to respond appropriate to an incident which impacts on our tenants and their communities.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1 This report is for information only.