

Date:	21 September 2023
Title:	Common Housing Allocation Policy
Purpose:	Present an Update
Contact Officer:	Carys Fôn Williams, Head of Housing & Property
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Craig ab Iago

1. Introduction

1.1 In the meeting on 29 September 2022 the Care Scrutiny Committee agreed that the following aspects should be considered:

- Has the policy served its purpose which is to maximise the number of houses allocated to Gwynedd residents with a local connection?
- Have there been problems with the new policy?
- Do further modifications need to be made to the policy?

1.2 An interim report was presented to the Committee on 11 November 2022 with the intention to then bring proposed changes to the Common Housing Allocation Policy to the Committee in 2023 for members to provide their input.

1.3 It is a statutory requirement, in accordance with section 167 of the Housing Act 1996, for all local housing authorities in Wales to have a housing allocation scheme (or allocation policy) for setting priorities and the process to be followed when allocating housing. The Act and statutory guidance from the Welsh Government set out the rules that must be followed in formulating and implementing the policy.

2. Update

2.1 During 2022 the Welsh Government established a panel of experts in the field of homelessness and housing with a view to making recommendations on amending homelessness legislation to the Minister for Climate Change by the end of August 2023. Local authorities have contributed to the work of the Expert Review Panel with monthly meetings being held with Government officials during 2023 to gain the views of professionals in the field on the proposed reforms. Reviewing the housing allocation legislation referred to above is part of this area of work. Following the submission of the recommendations of the Expert Review Panel the Government will publish a White Paper on the fundamental reform of homelessness legislation, which is due to be published on 10 October 2023.

2.2 The content of this White Paper will clearly significantly influence any changes that can be made to allocation policies. We eagerly anticipate reading its contents and its impact on what can be done in terms of reviewing our allocation policy in Gwynedd.

2.3 **Has the policy served its purpose which is to maximise the number of houses allocated to Gwynedd residents with a local connection?** The Policy has been in operation for three years now, and in that time over 1700 public sector tenancies have been let through its use.

Priority band	Number of new tenancies
1A – Applicants in urgent housing need with a Gwynedd Connection	805
1B – Applicants in urgent housing need (without a Gwynedd connection)	26
2 – Applicants in housing need with a Gwynedd connection	680

3 – Applicants in housing need without a Gwynedd connection and Applicants with reduced priority	91
4 – Applicants without housing need with a Gwynedd connection	105

2.4 Applications that appear in bands 1A, 2 and 4 will have a Gwynedd connection, and whilst band 3 includes applicants in housing need but without a Gwynedd connection, a large proportion of applications in band 3 will be there because their priority has been reduced from band 1A or 2. Of the 1707 new tenancies, 1651 were allocated to an applicant who qualified for a Gwynedd connection in accordance with the definition in the Policy. This is 96.7% of all allocations. The corresponding figure when the previous Policy was in use was 90.0%, so there has been a significant increase as a result of the implementation of the current Policy.

2.5 Gwynedd Connection can be obtained for any of the following:

- Live in Gwynedd for 5 years (at any time)
- Family connection in Gwynedd for over 10 years. A family member with a parent, adult child, sibling who lives in the county, and has done for at least 10 years, at the date the application was made. The applicant and relative must need to live close to each other
- Providing support or receiving support from a person or provision in Gwynedd
- Working in Gwynedd for the last 5 years
- Offered a job in Gwynedd but with a disability and unable to accept the job due to difficulty finding accessible accommodation
- Need to move to Gwynedd so that a family member with a disability can attend school or get specialist support but it is not possible to do so due to difficulty finding accessible housing
- Serving in the Armed Forces in Gwynedd
- A former member of the Armed Forces, not currently in employment or living in Gwynedd who served in Gwynedd while in the Forces

2.6 It should also be considered that there may be statutory duties on the Council to homeless applicants where local connection cannot be considered as a factor. Specifically so in cases of fleeing violence or treats of violence including domestic violence. Having taken this into account, the figure of 96.7% clearly shows that Gwynedd's current Policy maximises as much as possible the opportunity for people with a Gwynedd connection to access social housing.

2.7 The Policy also includes an additional layer of 'local connection' in the form of an applicant's connection with a community. An applicant who has lived for 5 years in a Community Council area where they wish to move to will appear in the top half of their priority band, above applications in the same band without the community connection. This reinforces the opportunity for people to be rehoused in their local area. By looking at recent housing allocations we see that 54.7% are made to an applicant who has the community residency. This is significant, particularly given the natural demand there is for people to move from one area to another, and the availability - or lack thereof - of particular types of accommodation in each community.

2.8 **Have there been problems with the new policy?** Prior to the adoption of the Policy officers from the Council together with officers from the Housing Associations had tried to anticipate any problems that might arise from operating the new Policy. When there are significant changes to an allocation policy with a view to giving more priority to certain groups of applicants, it will inevitably be that some other applicants will miss out. This led to an increase in the number of complaints about the service when starting to implement the Policy, although the number of

complaints has now decreased significantly. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the staff at Gwynedd Housing Options for their dedication to their work since the adoption of the Policy and to making its implementation a success.

- 2.9 As the Council does not have its own housing stock, working in partnership with the Housing Associations is vital, and a healthy working relationship exists with daily contact between us. We have also set up a Specialist Housing Group which meets monthly. The Group's purpose is to review applications for specialist properties, for example properties for people with disabilities, where the general social housing stock does not meet their needs. The Group is looking at how these complicated needs can be met either through adapting existing properties or building new homes. There have been a number of positive solutions that have emerged from the Group's work which have produced positive outcomes for Gwynedd residents.
- 2.10 **Do further modifications need to be made to the policy?** With the housing market constantly changing our arrangements will also need to be flexible and we will therefore consider any changes in the context of the Policy which are possible within the statutory framework. As noted above, fundamental changes to homelessness and housing allocation legislation will be announced shortly, and therefore those recommendations will need to be analysed before reaching a final decision on a further review of the Policy.

3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 Accept and note the report.
- 3.2 Officers to report back to the Committee in due course on any potential implications for the Policy following assessing the contents of the Government's White Paper.