

Date:	10 November 2022
Title:	Housing Allocations Policy
Purpose:	Present an Interim Report
Contact Officer:	Carys Fôn Williams, Head of Housing and Property
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Craig ab Iago

## 1. Introduction

1.1 At a meeting on 29 September 2022 the Care Scrutiny Committee agreed that the following aspects needed to be considered:

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

1.2 What is presented here, with the agreement of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Care Scrutiny Committee, is an interim report with a view to presenting a full report to the Committee in the new year. This is on the basis that potential changes will be underway as a result of changes in Government policy and/or legislation, along with the need for the Council to prioritise certain aspects relating to homelessness. However, this is an opportunity to give the Committee a broad overview of progress since the implementation of the Housing Allocations Policy two years ago.

## 2. Background and Overview

2.1 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 housing allocations policy) for setting priorities and the process to be followed when allocating housing. The Act and statutory guidance from the Welsh Government sets out the rules that must be followed in formulating and implementing the policy.

2.2 On 25 June 2019 the Council's Cabinet decided to adopt a new Housing Allocations Policy which prioritizes the needs of applicants on the basis of placing them in a priority band rather than the previous system of awarding points to each application. A definition of the bands is included in the table below:

Band	Degree of Housing Need
Band 1	a. Applicants in Urgent Housing Need with a Gwynedd connection
	b. Applicants in Urgent Housing Need (without a Gwynedd connection)
Band 2	Applicants in Housing Need with a Gwynedd connection
Band 3	Applicants in Housing Need without a Gwynedd connection and Applicants with reduced priority
Band 4	Applicants with no housing need with a Gwynedd connection

2.3 The band in which an applicant is placed will depend on their housing need and whether or not they have a connection with Gwynedd. Although it is important to note, applications without housing need and without a Gwynedd connection will not be included in any of the priority bands and as a result such applications will not be registered.

- 2.4 The new Policy became effective during the Autumn of 2020. During the formulation of the current Policy the Welsh Government challenged the use of local connections which was in the first draft of the Policy. The content therefore had to be slightly modified to comply with Government expectations, but also to recognize that the Council had sought to maximise the use of local connections.
- 2.5 Since the implementation of the Policy, 1237 family units have received social housing. 1194 of those applications had a Gwynedd connection (as defined in the Policy) which is 96.5% of the allocations. Prior to the implementation of the new policy the number of allocations to people with a Gwynedd connection was 90.0%.

### **3.0 Work Programme**

- 3.1 With the Policy having been in effect for two years, there is now an opportunity to review elements of its implementation. From the perspective of the use of local connections (as detailed above) it is recommended that the Policy does not need further modification. It is highly likely that any attempt to strengthen this element would result in a challenge to the legality of the Policy that would be difficult to defend. In addition, as noted above the percentage of allocations to applicants who have a Gwynedd connection (as defined in the Policy) has been very high since the change in policy.
- 3.2 A desktop review of the Policy has already commenced to ensure that all operational aspects of the Policy meet the requirements of the Government's Code of Guidance and also ensure that we are properly addressing the housing needs of Gwynedd residents.
- 3.3 These elements will be fully addressed and form part of the report that will be presented to the Committee in the new year.
- 3.4 Committee Members will be well aware of the significant increase in the Council's Homelessness services over the past few months which has in turn had an impact on the Housing Register, with the number of applications for social housing having increased by 49.3% in the last 2 years.
- 3.5 The effects of this are now visible with the number of vulnerable homeless applicants staying in temporary accommodation having increased significantly to the point that temporary accommodation capacity is no longer available in the county. Spending on temporary accommodation is also significant and therefore there is a real need to move these vulnerable applicants on to long-term stable accommodation.
- 3.6 There is also a need to recognise the Welsh Government's national strategy which aims to avoid the use of temporary accommodation for long periods of time. This approach - Rapid Rehousing - is based on the principles of moving people into stable accommodation quickly, with temporary accommodation a key, but limited, part of the process. The Housing Allocations Policy will need to reflect this national shift in emphasis. A number of authorities in Scotland have maximized the percentage of allocations for homeless applicants as part of the Rehousing scheme and we are aware that authorities in Wales also considering this approach.
- 3.7 It is likely that there will also be changes to legislation and we will be in discussion with the Housing Associations about how we can maximise allocations to people who are homeless and facing homelessness.

#### **4.0 Recommendations**

- 4.1 We are currently aware that a number of authorities in Wales are looking at the need to review housing allocations policies as a result of the homelessness situation (specifically the significant increase in the use of temporary accommodation). The department will discuss with our colleagues in other authorities together with regional and national forums to ensure that the policy remains current and aligns with the field's priorities.
- 4.2 Formal discussions are planned with the Housing Associations early next month about the extent of the potential change and what aspects of the current arrangements will need to be modified.
- 4.3 Taking into account that the proposed changes may have a significant impact on the implementation of the policy in the coming months, we request that committee members accept the contents of this report and agree as well for the Department to submit a further comprehensive report that will be presented to the Committee in the new year.