




## 1. Introduction

It is not hard to love where you live if that place is safe and secure, clean and tidy and makes you proud to be part of the community. Powys County Council provides homes for just under one in ten of all households living in the county and is ideally placed to help people love where they live. Love Where You Live is the Council's strategy for our estate and tenancy management services to help make the experience of living in a Council home something of which to be proud. There is a clear interdependence of understanding what makes our homes and estates good places to live with how we help people make the most of their homes and how we create places where people are proud to live. That is why Love Where You Live is an all embracing approach to tenancy and estate management and sustainability.

### 1.2 What is Love Where You Live?

Love Where You Live focuses on how tenancy and estate management can help people enjoy their homes and neighbourhoods

-  **Understanding.** To continually improve we need to continually know what to improve by understanding how our services and estates are experienced by tenants and residents.
-  **People.** To help people be able to enjoy their homes and communities, we can support, encourage and help people to play an active part in their communities and economy as well as improve their own personal well being
-  **Place.** To give people reasons to love where they live, we need to make sure that the environment is green and thriving, clean and tidy – in short, a pleasant place to be

Love Where You Live will contribute to the new Service Standard for all Powys Housing Services:

- ✓ **Clear.** we will be easy to contact and do what we say we do
- ✓ **Respect.** we will treat you and your home with respect
- ✓ **Understand.** we will understand the issue or question you have
- ✓ **Resolve.** we will resolve your issue where ever possible the first time
- ✓ **Learn.** we will learn from complaints, issues raised and feedback

The Council's values and guiding principles will define the way we work:

- ✓ **Professional.** We act with professionalism and integrity
- ✓ **Positive.** We take a positive attitude in all we do
- ✓ **Progressive.** We take a proactive and responsible approach to planning for the future
- ✓ **Open.** We keep each other informed, share knowledge and act with honesty and integrity
- ✓ **Collaborative.** We work constructively and willingly on joint initiatives

Love Where You Live will make a substantial contribution to 'Powys 2025'<sup>1</sup>:

- Economy and Learning and Skills: 'there is significant investment in the development of affordable and sustainable housing'
- Health & Care: 'there is an increasing supply of housing with care'

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<sup>1</sup> Powys 2025: Our Vision for the Future – Powys County Council, 2018

- Residents and Communities: ‘communities have access to a choice of both affordable and market housing’

### 1.3 Next Steps

Love Where You Live brings together and recognises a lot of Housing Services work already under way, while at the same time suggesting challenge from an ‘experience’ perspective and offering proposals for different or new activity that will enhance the way people experience our services and neighbourhoods.

It is divided into three sections – Understanding, People and Places. Each section outlines the current state of play and sets out ideas for the future. As Love Where You Live goes into action it will evolve to reflect the feedback we get from our communities and residents and the opportunities and challenges that come about as society and the economy develop and change.

There is an overall Action Plan, to deliver the outcomes desired. This Action Plan assumes no changes to the current structure of Housing Services. That does not mean that change should not be considered if upon further development of Love Where You Live, changes in the way we work are needed to improve the way our housing services are experienced.

## 2. Understanding

*“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel”. Maya Angelou (Poet and Civil Rights Activist)*

The concept of home is as much about emotion as it is about logic<sup>2</sup>. This means our understanding of our services needs to reflect the experience people have of the Council and the work it does in providing them with a home. This means we need to gather and be able to understand a mix of objective and subjective intelligence and be able to use it wisely and effectively to shape services so that people are better able to enjoy the experience of where they live. We also need to consider the future tenants of the Council which means finding out more about the needs and aspirations of younger people.

### *Current Status*

A Tenancy Engagement Team of four officers is responsible for leading on engagement and feedback across the service, with a Tenant Liaison co-ordinator and two Tenant Liaison Officers dedicated to the engagement needed to make the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) investment a success.

There is considerable contact between housing team members, in particular First Contact Officers (FCOs), Homelessness Prevention and Options Officers (HPOOs), Housing Management and Options Officers (HMOOs), Tenancy Support Officers (TSOs) and Surveyors, with current and potential tenants (for example housing applications, allocation and letting of homes, income recovery, repairs inspections and general enquiries) that open up avenues for feedback to be continuously gathered either directly or indirectly. Other contacts occur as result of the existing tenancy visit practice of Introductory Tenancy Visits (starting with a settling in visit after two months), Mutual Exchange Visits and Transfer Request Visits. However, there are many tenants with whom we have no contact at all from year to year.

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<sup>2</sup> The Idea of Home – Social Research, John Hopkins Press, 1991; Home – Blunt and Dowling, Routledge, 2006

Social media, including Facebook, is being used more and more to reach out to residents, opening up new avenues for constant and real-time engagement, intelligence gathering and promoting closer tenant-landlord relationships.

Information is gathered about why offers of accommodation are refused, providing us with some insight into the desirability of particular areas and property types and the appropriateness of our allocations policy and practice. However we do not always gather enough detailed information about why tenancies are ended to be able to understand fully why people choose to leave the Council. Increasing our understanding of why people choose where they wish to live – and where they do not – and why they terminate their tenancies is included in the Common Housing Register Action Plan, which will complete its work in spring 2019.

Housing Services has in place a wide and comprehensive range of formal consultation and customer research processes in place. These have been guided by the Local Tenant Participation Strategy (LTPS) introduced in 2014 and revised for 2018-2020 with an ambitious Action Plan running for same period. The LTPS includes a Service User Engagement Strategy which will be monitored by a Local Tenant Participation Strategy Sub Group.

A number of the current approaches to consultation and engagement rely to a lesser or greater extent upon there being an explicit and potentially time hungry commitment by tenants to participate. Not all our tenants are in a position to make such a commitment but all will have valuable insights into how our services are experienced.

Housing Services has a number of performance indicators and a single Service Standard. These are collectively used to set out what residents can expect of the Council, guide the way we manage our work and assess how effective are our services. Of the formal performance indicators, only the measures of repairs, adaptations and major works satisfaction can be said to relate directly to how our services are experienced by residents. In the case of day-to-day repairs, the repairs contractor Heart of Wales Property Services (HOWPS) is carrying out satisfaction surveys of those tenants who have had a repair undertaken. There is currently no independent monitoring of tenant satisfaction with repairs and adaptations, covering all tenants who request repairs. A review of management and performance indicators and the eleven Services Standards began in June 2018.

The Council's Communications Team consults with local people on the work of the Council. Intelligence gathering and engagement undertaken by Housing Services, which provides homes for 10% of Powys households, could usefully be used to complement and support this corporate activity.

### *Next Steps*

Capturing the views of all our residents is essential to give us more of the intelligence we need to constantly shape and reshape our policy and practice to reflect the needs and desires of our tenants.

The intelligence we gather should:

- ☺ Reflect the views of as many of our tenants, clients and neighbourhoods as possible
- ☺ Be used to shape policy and practice
- ☺ Be shared with those who share it with us

To keep our approach to consultation and engagement relevant and productive, we need to constantly review the effectiveness and impact of all our consultation and engagement work, and our service standards and customer facing performance indicators, against four criteria:

- ? *How representative of the community – be that a local estate, a specific group of tenants or clients or all tenants – is the intelligence we receive?*
- ? *How does the intelligence help us constantly understand how our services (and those delivering services on our behalf) are experienced by the community, tenants and clients?*
- ? *How is the intelligence we are gaining being tangibly and practically used to shape policy and practice?*
- ? *How cost effective is the way intelligence gathered, understood and translated quickly into policy and practice?*

A framework for assessing current engagement and intelligence gathering activity has been developed to support Love Where You Live.

#### *Understanding Action Plan – Overview*

- Review all current engagement and consultation using the four criteria set out above, drawing also on the expertise and knowledge of other services, most importantly Youth Services (to make sure we capture the views of the tenants and households of tomorrow) and Communications (to make sure we are exploiting effectively all avenues of communication and contributing to corporate intelligence gathering)
- Use an understanding of best practice and the outcome of the review to identify options to increase the effectiveness of engagement and intelligence gathering, assessing all proposals against our criteria
- Introduce any necessary changes to our approach to engagement and gathering and using intelligence
- Revise and amend our management and performance indicators (including how we understand the actual impact of our contractors and service providers on clients and tenants) to focus our attention on the client experience, when we shape and deliver services directly or indirectly
- Develop and introduce simple and easy-to-access approaches to continually gain feedback on how our services are experienced
- Establish an appropriate resource to support, develop and manage intelligence and understanding, to make sure our consultation and intelligence gathering are able to constantly inform improvements to services (see Appendix B).

#### *Concepts and Proposals*

- 👁️ **Housing Services Service Standard.** A single service standard for Housing Services and an appropriately relevant set of management and performance indicators. *Proposal within 'Tenant Satisfaction and Improving Service Standards Action Plan 2018-2019' - under discussion by SMT.*
- 👁️ **Tenant Satisfaction Survey.** SMT has agreed to carry out a tenant satisfaction survey every year/every two years. This survey will be carried out by an external company using an existing methodology like Housemark's STAR survey. *Proposal within 'Tenant Satisfaction and Improving Service Standards Action Plan 2018-2019' - under discussion by SMT.*
- 👁️ **Three Yearly Tenancy Visit and Housing MoT.** Every tenant getting a visit once every three years would give us the opportunity build a relationship and capture intelligence from as many tenants as possible about services and perceptions of the Council as a landlord and help us maintain up to date information about the condition of our homes and commission preventative repairs and maintenance. This approach guarantees that every tenant will have the opportunity for a face-to-face conversation with members of the housing team. Conversations during such a visit could encompass experiences of all Council services, health and well-being, safeguarding, financial security, access to other services (e.g. digital

communication), fuel poverty, housing options (e.g. under occupation, suitability of property for people with mobility or health related needs), property condition, garden maintenance, and where there is a potentially adverse health and safety impact, hoarding. It would also allow us to highlight to other agencies risks, such as 'cuckooing'. A pilot project to test the feasibility and effectiveness of visits to all tenants has been prepared for Powys but has been put on hold since July 2017 due to concerns about the capacity of HMOOs to undertake such visits (one hour per on-site visit plus one hour follow up equals 11,000 hours – 5.2 FTE per annum for an annual visit) and the risks of generating demands, for example around repairs and maintenance, that the Council may not currently be able to meet.. *Pilot stage – next stages are to agree a timescale for progressing the proposal, the nature of the visit and conversation, test and validate with the help of a pilot and the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and assess outcomes before considering a full roll-out*

- 👁️ **Tell Us By Text.** Post activity surveys by text of matters such as how housing applications are managed and the satisfaction with the standards of a new home upon letting, would allow for direct understanding of how services are experienced by tenants and inform management of both the Council itself and its service providers with first-hand intelligence. *Concept stage – next stages are to agree the concept as one to develop, formalise the questions to be asked, test and validate with the help of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and agree the roll-out programme.*
- 👁️ **Customer Call-backs.** A quick call to gather feedback after a service has been delivered will provide useful intelligence and demonstrate a commitment to customer service. Estimates suggest this will need around 2,700 calls using current technology. If the service becomes more digitalised more efficient ways than phone calls could be deployed (see above). *Proposal within 'Tenant Satisfaction and Improving Service Standards Action Plan 2018-2019' - under discussion by SMT.*
- 👁️ **Question of the Month.** A question that all officers ask everyone they meet, the question being changed every month (could also be used on e-mails, Facebook and texts), to prompt conversations, relationships and gather useful information about ad hoc issues. *Concept stage.*
- 👁️ **Why Did You Say No?** Improving the information we gather about tenancy terminations and property refusals will help us shape the way we allocate and manage homes around the experiences of our residents, reducing the time taken to allocate homes, reducing the risk of avoidable tenancy terminations and establishing stable communities. To target investment where it is most needed, both spatially and socially, such intelligence will also help inform new development programmes for both the Council and other developers. *Proposals under development.*

### 3. People

For people to enjoy where they live, they need to feel safe and secure in the knowledge that they can maintain and enjoy their home. Not everyone finds that easy to do which is why we need to make sure we are able to help everyone sustain their tenancies. Understanding what we do will help us shape our services but there will be a need for more intensive and targeted support for some people who, because of their circumstances, life chances or background are at risk of rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, economic dislocation and social isolation, may be at greater risk of tenancy failure or an unhappy experience in their home.

One of the most important aspects of sustaining a home is having the financial capacity to do so, a point recognised by the Welsh Government's vision: 'to provide affordable homes and sustainable communities with excellent services to tenants and customers'<sup>3</sup>. Around four in ten adults in Wales

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<sup>3</sup> Financial Inclusion Strategy for Wales - Welsh Government, 2016

do not manage their money day-to-day as well as they might and only a quarter of working-age adults in Wales have a savings buffer equivalent to three months income or more.<sup>4</sup> Encouraging and supporting financial capacity and capability is therefore an important part of a landlord's role helping support people to retain and enjoy their homes.

Housing organisations have for many years worked to help reduce unemployment amongst their tenants<sup>5</sup>. The need for housing organisations to be involved in helping people find work and navigate changes to social security and so sustain their tenancies and homes is growing in the context of 'Welfare Reform'<sup>6</sup>.

### *Current Status*

The day-to-day work of HMOOs includes a lot of one-to-one activity to help individuals find a home if they are homeless, through Personal Housing Plans, general support and drawing upon the resources provided by the Supporting People service. This personal support continues at a less intense level to those people who are given a home in property owned by the Council, primarily through contacts prompted by income recovery work, requests for home moves and help resolving anti-social behaviour. The introduction of HPOOs in summer 2018 and the introduction of TSOs in autumn 2018 will increase the resources available to support those looking for a home and those trying to sustain their tenancies in the face of financial hardship.

Changes will be made to the way Supporting People services are provided after April 2019, with a move to a locality model of support. The way this service is shaped and then provided will be an important component of the overall approach taken to sustaining tenancies.

Considerable additional investment is now being made, as part of the preparation for the introduction to Powys in autumn 2018 of Full Service Universal Credit, in tenancy sustainability, with an immediate focus on helping people manage the transition to the new social security arrangements. The immediate focus of this work is by necessity focusing on financial management and income recovery in the context of wider social security changes. However this work is laying a solid foundation for developing a wider approach to tenant sustainability.

There is little direct work currently undertaken by Housing Services to help people secure employment or if working, where practicable increase their income. However, there are numerous examples across the United Kingdom of social landlords using their local knowledge and purchasing power to support employment, some of which could be considered by Powys County Council.

While anti-social behaviour (ASB) has little or no effect on the quality of life of the majority of people living on our estates, it does have a significant impact on the lives of a minority of people who are in locations where ASB takes place. Prevention of ASB is the most effective option but there is a balance to be struck between prevention and enforcement<sup>7</sup>. This needs to take account of the differing perspectives of people on ASB and the impact on the sustainability of individual tenancies – both those affected by and those responsible for ASB - and communities which can suffer reputational damage and loss of social confidence as a result of ASB. Of particular concern is the recent growth of 'cuckooing' and 'county lines' activity in Powys, in which organised criminal groups from the West Midlands and Merseyside conurbations are extending their marketing of illicit

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<sup>4</sup> Financial Capability in Wales - Money Advice Service, 2015

<sup>5</sup> Ends & Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England - ESRC, 2007; Employment and Skills Development Initiatives Provided by Housing Associations in Wales - Community Housing Cymru, 2016

<sup>6</sup> Review of Impacts of Welfare Reform - Learning & Work Institute, October 2017

<sup>7</sup> Anti-social Behaviour Strategies: Finding a Balance - Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005

narcotics into Powys. The Council is a member of the Powys Community Safety Partnership and developing the involvement in this by Housing Services will be an essential component in helping to reduce crime in Powys and our housing estates.

### *Next Steps*

Tenancy sustainability policy and practice, interventions and services, should be designed to support the core principals set out below:

- ☺ Enjoy Life – helping applicants and tenants have the advice and support they need to make the most of their home and take advantage of social opportunities to improve their health and well-being.
- ☺ Financial Stability – supporting applicants and tenants to have sufficient financial resilience and employability to take advantage of employment and career opportunities and successfully manage the impact of changes in social security and the ups and downs of economic life.

Interventions will therefore need to reflect reasonable and community-friendly individual aspirations on how people want to enjoy and use their home and become part of the wider community.

Work that does provide people with a secure income that is sufficient to cover their basic living costs is generally recognised as being beneficial to overall social well-being. The Council's 'Health and Care Strategy' makes a commitment to: "grow the Powys workforce through local training and development"<sup>8</sup>. Many landlords have initiatives designed to help people achieve this goal<sup>9</sup>. However, it is difficult to gauge the tangible success or effectiveness of many of these interventions. It will for example be necessary to understand the impact of displacement arising from a fixed pool of work being redistributed amongst a fixed pool of people rather than additional work being created.

The design and deployment of any training and employment interventions to be supported by Housing Services will need to recognise the changes in work over the past few years. At the lower end of the income scale, wages are no longer keeping pace with inflation. The increasing use of zero hours contracts and other forms of insecure employment tenure have made it harder for people to manage their lives around a predictable and secure income. Since the introduction of changes in 2012 under the 'Welfare Reform' programme the social security system has become less generous and more prescriptive for many people with low incomes, both employed and unemployed. People in Wales endure the lowest take home pay in the United Kingdom<sup>10</sup>. It will therefore be necessary to consider the extent to which insecure, poorly paid work increases overall well-being compared to relatively predictable social security payments and how to increase the amount earned by tenants, an area of increased focus<sup>11</sup>.

The interventions we develop and offer – and crucially how we make them available - should reflect:

- Understanding the causes of the need for a specific type of intervention
- Understanding how and when an intervention will help – and when it will not or could exacerbate existing or cause additional problems

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<sup>8</sup> The Health and Care Strategy for Powys - Powys County Council, June 2017

<sup>9</sup> Delivering Change - Housing Associations and Employment and Skills – Centre for Cities, June 2015; Worklessness, Welfare and Social Housing – Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, July 2015

<sup>10</sup> Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings – Office of National Statistics, October 2017

<sup>11</sup> Moving Up Higher Wages for Social Housing Tenants - Social Market Foundation, October 2016

- Deciding and agreeing with both client and all relevant agencies what the intervention should be and its expected outcome
- Being able to make sure interventions offered are ready to roll when they are needed by the client
- Being able to maintain an understanding of how effective are our interventions in raising well-being and supporting financial security
- Being able to move quickly to amend and alter interventions if they are not helping the clients or preventing problems escalating

To keep our approach to supporting and encouraging tenancy sustainability relevant and productive, we need to constantly review the effectiveness and impact of this work, against four criteria:

- ? *Can we effectively measure the success or otherwise of an intervention?*
- ? *Are our interventions complementary to, and do not displace, other available activity that will contribute to individual sustainability?*
- ? *Do our interventions recognise and offer mitigation of the impact of unintended consequences?*
- ? *Are the interventions we are offering to individuals cost effective when assessed against the outcomes achieved?*

#### *People Action Plan – Overview*

There are a number of initiatives already underway, as part of current tenancy management and as part of the preparations for the introduction of Full Service Universal Credit. A number of these initiatives can be assessed against the objectives and criteria set out above and where they will contribute positively to improving the lives of our tenants, be further developed and supplemented by new initiatives and interventions.

#### Summary of Tenancy Sustainability Activity – Current and Proposals

Activity	Outcome	Current	Proposals
<b>Key</b>	<i>Part of Full Service Universal Credit preparations</i>		
Supporting Applicants	Every homeless client has adequate information, support and guidance to make informed choices about their future housing provision	Personal Housing Plan (PHP)	Continue to make sure the information, support and guidance to all CHR applicants helps them make informed choices to improve the likelihood of a successful tenancy. Make greater use of the PHP beyond the initial period of support, to shape tenancy management
		Homelessness Prevention and Options Officers	
	Risk of tenancy failure reduced	A Financial Well-being Assessment' triage is being introduced for CHR applicants and homeless households to help understand and manage financial risks.	Extend the triage assessment to include assessing other elements that may increase the risk of tenancy failure or reduce the ability of future tenants to make the most of their home as a foundation for general well-being.
		Vulnerability Assessment – to safeguard against	



		exploitation of vulnerable residents (e.g. county lines, cuckooing)	
		Mixed provision of redecoration of voids and decorating packs	Develop a framework to consistently deploy redecoration options and resources in a way that supports tenancy sustainability
		Furnished tenancies	Develop the range of furnishing options to encourage recycling, self-help and schemes specifically targeted at first-time-tenants
		Tenant Ready Training	
Supporting Tenants	To understand and prevent problems arising with tenancies, strong and enduring relationships developed with all tenants	Introductory Tenancy Visits (starting with a settling in visit after two months), Mutual Exchange Visits and Transfer Request Visits	More frequent 'settling in visits' for tenants who have been identified as being vulnerable and/or at risk of tenancy failure.
			Tri-Annual Tenancy Visit and Housing MoT - to include a vulnerability assessment to identify and respond promptly to the support needs those who will need additional support to sustain their tenancy and encourage financial independence
	To be able to provide full tenancy support to all tenants, make sure that area team resources are deployed when and where they are most effective	Patch sizes and composition reviewed and revised summer 2018	Encourage early intervention to prevent breaches of tenancy around home and garden condition and social behaviour.
Advice and Understanding		Tenancy Support Officers	
	Powys has a comprehensive network of financial advice and access to affordable, low risk financial services	Map current provision of benefit, debt and financial/money management advice and financial services in Powys.	Fill gaps in provision where it is needed to support tenants unable to access services
	Tenants can reduce the cost of living their home		Housing staff able to spot signs of fuel poverty and with support from the Affordable Warmth and Renewable Energy Officer offer or signpost basic energy saving advice (including wiping debt from meters, accessing low-income tariffs and reducing energy needs)
	Understanding and managing the risks	Triage process being introduced to help assess	'Financial Well-being Assessment' to be used for existing tenants

	to tenancy sustainability that may arise from the transition to Full Service Universal Credit	the needs of each tenant, including a 'Financial Well-being Assessment', for CHR applicants and homeless households.	who face financial disruption or difficulties matching income and expenditure
		Sign-up check list amended to ensure full understanding by applicants of UC – including the requirement to arrange payment of rent to PCC – and what actions are to be taken to successfully make and maintain a UC claim	
Independence and Resilience	Help people increase their incomes and independence from the social security system by encouraging work and skills progression	Understand the scope and provision of current work and skills initiatives available in Powys. Understand the routes by which tenants can take advantage of these initiatives.	Develop a comprehensive and locally sensitive Housing Services 'Highways to Work' Action Plan
		Increased access to the internet to manage UC claims on line and facilitate easier access to employment and training opportunities.	
Rent	Making sure tenants understand when and how to claim and maintain Universal Credit awards	TSO and HMOO meetings/visits to explain Universal Credit to tenants, assess risk to PCC and mitigate as necessary using the 'Financial Well-being Assessment'	
	To maintain income to the Council, align our income recovery work with the changing nature of social security payments to tenants arising from UC	Communication texts amended to reflect social security changes and are succinct, direct and easy to understand Thirty-one direct debit due days to be introduced	
	Prevention of arrears	Income recovery process to be refined to include earlier contact, intervention, support and where needed rapid enforcement action on arrears.	
		New performance indicators to support HMOOs income recovery work with tenants	

- 👁 **Reward Programme.** A number of landlords have introduced reward schemes which are designed to encourage and reward sustainable tenancy management on the part of tenants themselves<sup>12</sup>. Sustainable tenancy management can include making rent payments in full accord with the terms of the tenancy, allowing prompt access for annual gas or other compliance checks, keeping gardens clean and tidy, having no rechargeable repairs and no incidences of anti-social behaviour. Rewards can be financial (for example rent credits) or in-kind (for example vouchers to spend at local shops or to receive higher standards of service). Some schemes extend beyond the tenant's home and include contributions to wider community life. The extent to which such schemes encourage more sustainable tenancies and communities depends very much upon the schemes being adapted and tailor made to the local circumstances in which they are introduced, the service culture of the landlord and the engagement at the design stage of tenants and residents. For an area as large and diverse as Powys, it will be necessary to undertake extensive and evidenced research within our communities to understand what rewards schemes would be of interest to residents and which would help achieve sustainable communities and tenancies. *Concept Stage*.
- 👁 **Highways to Work.** Develop a comprehensive and locally sensitive Housing Services 'Highway to Work' Action Plan. Powys is a diverse area with many different employment markets. A 'Routes to Work' activity will need to be designed to recognise this and also the intensive work being undertaken by DWP, as part of the Claimant Commitment, to encourage people to find, keep and increase paid work. Housing Services will therefore need an understanding of what employment opportunities are available, what skills are in short supply and what is already available to help people with employment before it shapes its own bespoke 'Routes to Work' programme. This will mean close working with the Schools, Youth and Regeneration and Development services of the Council, the Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations, the DWP and those housing associations working in the county. To increase the chance of success, all proposals will need to be sense checked by comparing them against the initiatives of other housing agencies in Wales, not just those programmes currently operating but also those that have ceased to work.

#### 4.0 Places

Clean and tidy places encourage pride by individuals and communities in where they live and have been proven to reduce anti-social behaviour crime, encourage community interaction and support self-help and reliance by individual households. That is why effective estate management is critically important to giving people reasons to love where they live. There is also evidence to demonstrate that the presence of greenery in residential areas, such as trees and planted areas, helps improve the quality of the air and reduce the incidence of depression and people feeling low. Encouraging people to take part, either collectively or as individuals in maintaining and improving their environment can also help develop stronger and more sustainable communities. The Council's 'Health and Care Strategy' makes a commitment to: "make best use of community strengths and the physical environment to support people to maintain their health and wellbeing"<sup>13</sup>.

Tidy, green and flourishing gardens help improve the overall ambience of a neighbourhood and encourage people to take pride in where they live. Pride in your home and neighbourhood are integral to being able to live where you live. Overgrown and untidy gardens can not only make an area look uncared for but can in some cases pose a danger to the health and safety of local people if they contain items which may be harmful to health or a nuisance for example rotting food waste which may create smells or attract vermin or abandoned cars with inflammable fuel in their tanks

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<sup>12</sup> Tenant Reward Scheme: An Options Appraisal - Simon Inkson Ltd in partnership with, Anne Delaney Associates Ltd and Arnold Phillips Associates Ltd, March 2012

<sup>13</sup> The Health and Care Strategy for Powys - Powys County Council, June 2017

and oil leaking into the soil. There is however much to gain for individual and community well-being from encouraging tenants to look after their gardens. Gardening in itself has been shown to have beneficial effects, including improving the health and well-being of the gardeners<sup>14</sup> and encouraging stronger social bonds<sup>15</sup>.

Now that the Council is once again building new homes, the design and layout of both homes and communities needs to take into account what will give people a sense of social ownership. Appropriate emphasis should be given to reducing the opportunities for anti-social behaviour, discontent amongst and between members of communities and high cost or complex maintenance and management liabilities. The desires and preference of current and future residents should influence design and appearance – homes last for a lot longer than architectural fashions and mistakes have been made in the past in the way social housing has been designed<sup>16</sup>.

### *Current Status*

The current aesthetic and amenity of a number of the Council's estates is very poor, with residents regularly citing as part of the current Estate Action Plan scheme and resident surveys litter, unkempt streets, car parks and footpaths, poor quality grass cutting, over-grown hedges and greenery, poor condition garage sites and drying areas and diminishing play facilities as matters of concern. Some areas of fencing and boundary works, kick boards for example in Ystradgynlais, are in some cases broken and decayed. A substantial initial investment in cleaning up and restoring order to the maintenance of our estates is now urgent both to demonstrate commitment to the principle of Love Where You Live and to make future maintenance as trouble free as possible.

Attempts to encourage and where necessary enforce improved maintenance of gardens are floundering because of the poor condition of the areas for which responsibility rests with the Council.

The exterior of some properties that have not benefitted from WHQS works can be poor, with soffits, fascia and barge boards and other external timber such as cladding not having benefitted from recent painting although this work is now being undertaken. Tenants of rendered properties, where painted, have in some cases had a relatively limited choice of pallets, restricting the opportunity to gain greater ownership by tenants of their homes and to brighten up with colour the appearance of estates.

Housing Services is currently undertaking on an area-by-area basis a review of individual garage sites, in response primarily to concerns expressed by residents about condition. To provide a framework to allow for an objective consideration of the Council's role in providing garages it would be helpful to have an understanding of the financial impact of garage provision, both income and estimated expenditure to maintain the estate.

Community-based events take place as part of the general engagement work, primarily related to Estate Action Plans. In an increasingly fragmented society, encouraging people to come together is difficult but doing so can help promote more sustainable communities and tenancies. Working together to improve the local environment can be a catalyst for encouraging greater community togetherness.

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<sup>14</sup> Six Unexpected Health Benefits of Gardening - Earth Easy, September 2014; Gardens and Health - Implications for Policy and Practice – The Kings Fund, May 2016

<sup>15</sup> The Social Benefits of a Garden - Irish Food Board, 2018







<sup>16</sup> Never Again: Avoiding the Mistakes of the Past - Young Foundation, March 2012

## *Next Steps*








To help make it easier for people to love where they live, become involved in their communities and have a positive relationship with Housing Services on other matters such as payment of rent, the Council needs to make tangible investments to bring its estates up to a high standard. It also needs to have in place the mechanisms and resources to maintain them to a high standard, with some general principles established to guide the standards to be provided.

## *Effective Estate Management*


### Feeling Good

-  To encourage neighbourhood pride, community events and activity that bring together people in pursuit of a common and widely recognisable outcome, should be promoted.
-  Wherever possible, localised, dedicated teams should be deployed for work on housing areas to encourage focus on quality through local ownership
-  Environmental activity, such as gardening, should be encouraged with the back-up of tenancy condition enforcement in respect of gardens
-  Play areas should be focused on areas where there is clear demand and where they can be managed with the involvement of or directly by the community to avoid being focal points for anti-social and criminal behaviour.
-  To create aesthetically pleasing environments, external decoration of council-owned properties should offer residents wherever possible a varied choice of colours, materials and finishes.
-  To engender a sense of care and support for residents, fly-tipping, graffiti and abandoned cars should be removed as soon as they are seen.

### Looking Good

-  Greenery (grassed areas, trees, planted areas, shrubberies, hedges) should be cut, pruned and otherwise managed so that they are not overgrown, unsightly or in poor health.
-  Grassed areas in and around homes should have grass clippings removed after cutting.
-  Paths and pavements should be kept clear of weeds and other plant growth, litter and debris, have clearly delineated borders and have surfaces on which people are safe to travel.
-  Car parks and un-adopted highways should be kept clear of weeds and debris in gutters and drains, abandoned vehicles and fly tipping and have surfaces that are safe to drive on.
-  To make roads and pavements safer and less congested, wherever possible off-street in-curtilage car parking should be encouraged and facilitated.
-  To be able to act as effective boundaries to the areas they are protecting, fencing and walls should not be unsightly and should be in good condition.
-  Unsightly non-residential structures, such as garages, should be removed to create space for new activity and improve the appearance of neighbourhoods. A policy to determine the future of garage provision is currently under development.

## *Concepts and Proposals*

-  **Eyes Open.** With many members of the Housing Services team out and about on estates and in communities where the Council provides homes, there is a great opportunity to gather intelligence about what is happening in these places. Intelligence that can help resolve problems as quickly as possible such as litter and fly tipping, poor quality grass cutting, graffiti, garbage not put in refuse bins, changes in the way properties and communal areas are being used and exterior repairs. It can also help identify unusual tenancy patterns, which may be useful in the work to prevent antisocial behaviour and county lines/cuckooing. An

‘Eyes Open’ policy, in which all team members are encouraged to note and report things they notice could help us resolve such issues promptly, nipping problems in the bud before they escalate and adversely affect the quality of life and well-being of our residents and their communities. *Concept Stage.*

- 👁️ **Gardening for Good.** Tenants have a responsibility to help make the neighbourhoods in which they live pleasant places to be. They can contribute to this by keeping gardens tidy and free from rubbish that endangers health to themselves and their neighbours. Not all tenants, for example those with mobility impairments can do this, so provision needs to be made to help these residents keep their gardens tidy. For others it may be necessary to take stronger action, including undertaking works by default and recharging tenants. To establish a solid basis for a garden enforcement policy, it will however be necessary to have achieved first a high standard of grounds maintenance across our estates so that the Council is leading by example. *Concept Stage.*
- 👁️ **Rainbow Homes.** A wider choice of pallets for render painting schemes will introduce brighter estates and give tenants the opportunity to have a greater involvement and proprietorial feelings about the way their homes look. *Concept Stage*
- 👁️ **Places to Play.** A Play Area Strategy ‘Places to Play’ for municipal housing estates will help the Council to make the most of the opportunities available to the Council to develop desirable and user friendly play areas where they are most needed. This is currently being developed by Housing Services and the Council’s Leisure and Recreation Service.



