

**Powys County Council
Scrutiny Report Template**

Committee:	Economy, Residents Communities
Date:	11.12.23
Subject:	Homes in Powys – General Overview

1. Who will be the Lead Officer(s) / Lead Cabinet Member(s) presenting the report?

Name:	Role:
Cllr Matthew Dorrance	Portfolio Holder for a Fairer Powys
Andy Thompson	Interim Head of Housing
Richard Batt	Service Manager – Housing Communities

2. Why is the Scrutiny Committee being asked to consider the subject?

Gain an understanding of how the current allocation policy ‘Homes in Powys’ is used to allocate all social housing in Powys, regardless of landlord, according to the housing needs of the people of Powys.

3. Role of the Committee:

The role of the Committee in considering the subject is to:

Consider the appropriateness of ‘Homes in Powys’ in making sure that social housing provided by both the Council and housing associations is allocated equitably, with particular regard to the relative priorities accorded to households.

4. Key Scrutiny Questions:

What Key areas should the Committee focus on:

The relative priority accorded to different housing needs.
The role of all social housing providers in meeting the housing needs of those registered with ‘Homes in Powys’.

5. Guiding Principles for Scrutiny Members:

To assist the Committee when scrutinising the topic:

- 5.1 Impact the matter has on individuals and communities :
- 5.2 A look at the efficiency & effectiveness of any proposed change – both financially and in terms of quality **[focus on value]**
- 5.3 A look at any risks **[focus on risk]**
- 5.4 Looking at plans and proposals from a perspective of:
- Long term
 - Prevention
 - Integration
 - Collaboration
 - Involvement

[focus on wellbeing and future generations]

5.5 The potential impacts the decision would have on:

- protected groups under the Equality Act 2010
- those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage in their lives (when making strategic decisions)
- opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language [focus on equality and the Welsh language]

[focus on equality and Welsh Language]

Key Feeders (tick all that apply)

Strategic Risk		Cabinet Work Plan	
Director / Head of Service Key Issue	Y	External / Internal Inspection	
Existing Commitment / Annual Report		Performance / Finance Issue	
Suggestion from Public		Referral from Council / Committee	
Corporate Improvement Plan	Y	Impacting Public / other services	Y
Service Integrated Business Plan	Y		
Suggestion from Members			
Partnerships	Y		

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

Economy, Residents & Communities Scrutiny Committee 11th December 2023

Report Author: County Councillor Matthew Dorrance
Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for a Fairer Powys

Lead Officer: Richard Batt, Service Manager – Housing Communities

Report Title: Homes in Powys – General Overview

Report For:	Information
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1.0 Purpose

1.1: The purpose of this report is provide a summary of ‘Homes in Powys’ and its impact on meeting housing need across Powys.

2.0 Background

2.1: The allocation of all social housing in Powys is managed through ‘Homes in Powys’, a common allocation scheme which has been in place since 20214 that also offers a one-stop shop for people looking for a home. It is an on-line system making it easy for people to apply and amend their applications as and when needed. One application is all that is needed for someone to be considered for all social housing provided in Powys by the Council and 7 Partner Community Landlords¹.

2.2: Each applicant as outlined in the ‘Homes in Powys Allocation’ Policy is placed in one of five Priority Bands , depending on the type and urgency of their housing needs and requirements. A description of these Priority Bands is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: ‘Homes in Powys’ Priority Band Descriptions

Band One – includes urgent moves for safeguarding needs community safety and extraordinary medical needs.

Band Two – includes under-occupation of a current social housing tenancy, service personnel and key workers and homeless households who have been given a Section 75 ‘Full’ Homeless Duty

Band Three – includes people ready to move and with a clear housing need, this includes households who are threatened with homelessness/homeless (Section 73 ‘Relief’ Homeless Duty)
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Band Four – ready to move but housing need no covered by Bands One to Three

Band Five – housing need but not ready to move.

2.4 When a property becomes available for allocation, applicants are considered in strict order according to the ‘Homes in Powys’ Allocation Policy, until an eligible applicant accepts the available property. A central requirement of the policy is that applicants are ‘Ready to Move’ when they are offered a home. If applicants are not

¹ The 7 Partner Community Landlords are Clwyd Alyn HA, Grwp Cynefin, Melin Homes, Barcud, Newydd HA, Wales & West HA and Stori (Hafan Cymru)

'Ready-to-Move', they may find that their social housing options are reduced and they could be placed in the lowest Priority Band.

3.0 Advice

3.1 Meeting Housing Need

3.1.1 The provision of social housing in Powys that provides quality, affordable accommodation on a secure contract has a clear impact on achieving the aims of the Council's Strategic Equality Plan as give the people the stability to create a home and settled into a neighbourhood and become part of a community.

3.1.2 As noted in Table 2 at the end of September 2023, there were 4007 households on the Common Housing Register. Of those households, 1921 (47.9%) were in housing need (either in Priority Band 1, Band 2 or Band 3). In terms of size of property required, the greatest need is for one bedroom accommodation of the registered households 2204 (55%) require such sized accommodation. This is not matched by the current social rent stock (both Council and partner Community Landlords) where only 19.9% (1758) of that stock (8829) is one bedroom.

Table 2: Breakdown of applicants on the register by minimum bed size and priority band @ 30.09.23						
Min bed size	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Grand Total
1	28	138	832	957	249	2204
2	28	56	466	450	105	1105
3	11	17	239	208	41	516
4	3	3	86	50	14	156
5	1	1	10	7	1	20
6			2	3		5
7					1	1
Grand Total	71	215	1635	1675	411	4007

3.1.3 As noted in Table 3, the lettings by the Council and Partner Community Landlords over the last 6 months have predominantly been to those in housing need (95.2%), while as noted in Table 4, only 33% have been to applicants requiring a 1 bedroom property.

Table 3: Lettings by Partner and Priority Band: April to September 2023 (inclusive)					
Partner	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Grand Total
Barcud	3	21	16	2	42
Clwyd Alyn	1	4	2		7
Grwp Cynefin			1		1
Melin	1	1			2
Newydd		4	2		6
Pobl	2	2	2		6
Powys CC	22	63	77	8	170
Wales and West	3	15	17	3	38
Grand Total	32	110	117	13	272

Table 4: Lettings by property type and size: April to September 2023 (Inclusive)						
Size	Bungalow	Flat	House	Maisonette	Studio	Total
1 Bed	31	58			1	90
2 Bed	39	39	46			124
3 Bed	1		47	3		51
4 Bed			7			7
Total	71	97	100	3	1	272

3.2 Homelessness

3.2.1 As noted in the Council's 2023-28 Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, it could be argued that the primary contribution of social housing to addressing homelessness in Powys is preventative and with that in mind the importance of allocations through the Common Housing Register to preventing future housing crises should not be underestimated. The social housing sector provides reasonable quality, affordable accommodation to households in housing need on a secure contract basis and that security of tenure (compared to the private rented sector) is a key attraction for households.

3.2.2 The importance of social housing in addressing homelessness is recognised in a 2022 amendment to the Homes in Powys Allocation Policy which gives additional preference (Priority Band 2) to Section 75 (S75) homeless households on the Common Housing Register. This coupled with a more recent policy amendment (August 2023 (which enables S75 homeless households to remain in suitable temporary accommodation through 'flipping it' to a secure contract is having a positive impact on meeting the needs of this particular group. This is exemplified by the fact that of the 272 allocations made to applicants on the Common Housing Register between April and September 2023, 102 (37.6%) were made to S75 homeless households. In addition, a further 24 (8.8%) were made to applicants who we threatened with homelessness/homeless.

3.2.3 Giving increased priority to homeless households via 'Homes in Powys' may lead to the unintended consequence of households in need of secure, affordable housing seeing homeless as a quicker way to secure a tenancy of social housing. However, since the introduction of the above policy amendments there does not seem to have been a significant increase in homeless presentations which can be attributed to this policy change.

3.3 Temporary Accommodation

3.3.1 The Council has an ongoing high reliance on Bed & Breakfast (B&B) provision to help meet the requirement for temporary accommodation for homeless households. The use of such provision increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic and at present continues to be at historically high levels. The Council has strived to off-set the use of B&B by making increased use of its housing stock and currently approximately 39% of Council properties that become available for allocation are used as temporary accommodation rather than being let via the Common Housing Register. As of 29th October 2023, the Council provided with its own stock 78% (156 properties) of the self-contained temporary accommodation while having 62.42% (5,511 properties) of the total social housing stock and by comparison Partner Community Landlords provide 14% (28 properties) while having 37.58% (3,318 properties) of the total housing stock with the other provision being met through expensive private rented sector temporary accommodation. There are ongoing discussions with Partner Community Landlords to achieve a more equitable split of this provision and in doing so enable a greater proportion of available council properties to be let via the Common Housing Register.

4.0 Resource Implications

4.1 It is envisaged that the recent Homes in Powys Policy changes will continue to have a positive impact on reducing the cost of homelessness. During 2022/23, the Council Homeless Service incurred a £1,242,940.58 net cost which was met from the Council's General Fund (both Housing and Benefits budgets). A key contributory factor to this net cost was the high use of Bed & Breakfast (B&B) which attracts much higher net weekly cost than self-contained temporary accommodation. The projected number of households that will be placed in B&B during 2023/24 indicates a similar level of net cost despite an increase in special Welsh Government funding to help local authorities manage the rising levels of homelessness.

5.0 Legal implications

5.1. The allocation of social housing is governed by the law most notably the Housing Act 1996 and Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) act 2014 and due consideration needs to be given to the Welsh Government's 'Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2016 but there is scope for local needs and priorities, and these are included in the Homes in Powys Allocations Policy.

6.0 Data Protection

6.1 The proposals and recommendations contained in this report do not involve the processing of personal data.

7.0 Comment from local member(s)

7.1 The matters covered in this report have equal effect across all Council wards.

8.0 Integrated Impact Assessment

8.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed for previous Homes in Powys Allocation Policy amendments which identified no adverse equalities impact through their implementation.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 The contents of this report are noted

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