

<b>MEETING</b>	Care Scrutiny Committee
<b>DATE</b>	21 November, 2024
<b>TITLE</b>	Social Housing field
<b>REASON FOR SCRUTINY</b>	Contained in the annual workshop document
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<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	Coun. Craig ab Iago

## 1. Introduction and context

- 1.1. The social housing field has been identified as a specific field for scrutiny, and specific questions have been posed to the Department for response.
- 1.2. Two reports have been presented on the Gwynedd Housing Allocations Policy over the last couple of years – one in November 2022, and the other in September 2023. These reports can be referenced for context for this meeting.
- 1.3. This time, Housing Associations active in Gwynedd, namely Adra, Clwyd Alyn, Grŵp Cynefin and North Wales Housing, have been invited to join the meeting and respond to Members’ questions.

## 2. Response to Member’s questions

### 1) Can you remind members:

- **What are the ‘priority bands’ in the current Housing Allocations Policy?**
- **What exactly is the ‘Gwynedd Connection’ and how are individuals with families and Gwynedd connections prioritised within each band?**
- **Why is the Council not purchasing former council houses with a 106 clause?**

### **“What are the ‘priority bands’ in the current Housing Allocations policy?”**

- 2.1. It is a statutory requirement, in accordance with section 167 of the Housing Act 1996, that all local authorities in Wales have a housing allocation plan (or a housing allocation policy) for prioritisation and the process which must be followed when allocating housing. The Act and the statutory guidance by Welsh Government determines the rules which must be followed when creating and executing the policy.
- 2.2. On 25 June 2019, the Council’s Cabinet resolved to adopt the new Housing Allocation Policy which prioritises applicants’ needs based on 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
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Band 1	a) Applicants in Urgent Housing Need with a Gwynedd connection
	b) Applicants in Urgent Housing Need (with no Gwynedd connection)
Band 2	Applicants in Housing Need with a Gwynedd connection
Band 3	Applicants in Housing Need with no 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 depends on their housing need and whether they have a Gwynedd connection or not. However, it's important to note, applications with neither a housing need nor a Gwynedd connection will not be placed in any priority band and as a result no such applications will be registered.

2.4. More information about the priority band can be found in part [3.5 of the Allocations Policy](#).

**“What exactly is the ‘Gwynedd Connection’ and how are individuals with families and Gwynedd connections prioritised within each band?”**

2.5. A Gwynedd connection is created by any one of the following:

- Has been resident in Gwynedd for 5 years (at any time)
- Has family associations in Gwynedd. Family association normally arise when the applicant or household member has either a parent, adult child, brother or sister who live in the local Authority area, and have done so for at least 10 years, at the date of application. Both the applicant and locally residing relative must indicate a wish to be near each other
- Provides support for or receives support from some person or specialist provision in the local authority area
- Has been in employment in Gwynedd for the last 5 years
- Has been offered a job in Gwynedd but have a disability and are unable to take up the job offer because of the difficulty of finding adequate accessible housing in the area
- Needs to move to Gwynedd so that a member of their household with a disability can attend a school or receive specialist support but are unable to do so because of the difficulty in finding adequate accessible housing in the area. The need must be as a consequence of the disability and the need to move to Gwynedd must be evidenced
- Is serving in the Armed Forces in Gwynedd
- Is a former member of the Armed Forces, not currently employed or resident in Gwynedd who served in Gwynedd whilst in the Forces

2.6. Members are reminded that the Council has statutory requirements and duties in terms of homeless applicants where a local connection cannot be considered when allocating housing. Specifically in cases of fleeing abuse or threat of abuse, including domestic abuse.

2.7. However, the latest data shows that 97% of social housing allocations are made to a person with a Gwynedd collection, and this is a constant pattern that can be seen over the last couple of years. The corresponding figure when the previous Policy was in force was 90%, so there is a significant and notable increase as a result of the current Policy.

- 2.8. The Policy also includes an extra layer of 'local connection' in the form of the 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 the priority band, above applications in the same band without the community connection. This reinforces the opportunity for people to be housed in their local area.
- 2.9. Looking at a representative sample of the latest housing allocations, we see that 62.5% of new tenants have a community connection. Looking at the number who had a community connection with the community that borders the one in which they live, the percentage rises to 71.5%. If we then look at the wider area, i.e. Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd, the figure rises again to 88%.
- 2.10. Considering the natural demand among residents to move from one area to another, and the availability, or lack of, specific types of accommodation in every community, these figures are significant and is proof that the Policy prioritises local people wherever lawfully possible and within the Council's powers.
- 2.11. In terms of how applications are prioritised within the bands, applications which appear in bands 1A, 2 and 4 will have a Gwynedd connection, and although band 3 will include applicants in housing need without a Gwynedd connection, several of these applications in band 3 will be there because their priority has been decreased from bands 1A and 2.

**“Why is the Council not purchasing former council houses with a 106 clause?”**

- 2.12. Through the Buy to let Scheme (part of the Housing Action Plan), the Council is purchasing properties from the open market (including purchasing former social housing) in order to let them to locals in housing need.
- 2.13. To date, 32 houses have been purchased, of which 10 have been let to applicants on the Tai Teg register.
- 2.14. Properties that have 106 clauses are already protected for Gwynedd people, and as a result our purchases are not limited to these types of properties only, as extra opportunities are available to Gwynedd residents by purchasing properties without current limitations.
- 2.15. It's also important to note that we take great care to avoid competing against local residents when purchasing properties, and if we are informed of any local interest, we withdraw from the process immediately.

**2) Can you provide data and information (on ward or Community Council level) showing if local people are benefitting or not as a result of the housing allocations policy? Is there a way of comparing the data with the old points system to see how the new banding system compares?**

- 2.16. As previously noted, 97% of social housing allocations go to applicants with a 'Gwynedd Connection' as defined in the Policy ([part 3.1 of the Housing Policy](#)).
- 2.17. The Policy also gives priority on the basis of residency in a Community Council area, and this is what determines which half of the band an applicant appears in. The criteria

is residency for 5 years, either currently, previously, or a combination of both, in the Community Council area where they are housed.

- 2.18. Because of the nature of the data and the way it is currently recorded, it would be extremely difficult to export the information for each allocation that has been made. To do this, details of each applicant's application who have been housed through the register would need to be individually looked at to determine what their connection with the community is – a process which would take a significant amount of officers' time. However, to respond to the question, a sample of 200 random applications were scrutinised. We believe a sample of this size is reasonable and reliable, and therefore, the results are representative of the entire register.
- 2.19. From the sample, as has been noted already, 62.5% of new tenants had a community connection. If we look at how many had a community connection with a community which borders where they live, it increases to 71.5%. Looking at the wider area, i.e. Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd, this rises to 88%.
- 2.20. It's important to note that several factors influence the need to move between communities, and these include:
- People who are homeless and who live in unsuitable temporary accommodation
  - Need to move to provide or receive family support
  - Need to move for employment reasons
  - Need to move for education needs
  - Need to move for social reasons including being subject to anti-social behaviour
  - Lack of suitable properties for some categories of applicants within a community meaning that they must move to another community for their needs to be met, e.g.:
    - Properties for older people e.g. specifically designated bungalows
    - Properties with support e.g. sheltered housing with support service
    - Properties for single people e.g. flats
    - Properties for large families e.g. properties with 5, 6 or more bedrooms
    - Properties for specific physical needs e.g. adapted housing or purpose-built properties
- 2.21. With 97% of allocations going to a local person (who has a Gwynedd connection), and furthermore, 62.5% goes to a person with a community connection, and higher when looking at nearby wards, this proves that the current Policy is successful in ensuring that Gwynedd residents are given every chance possible in terms social housing allocations.
- 2.22. Compared to the old 'points system' which was in operation before the current Policy's banding system, the percentage of allocations for people with a local connection was 90%.

### **3. Further considerations**

- 3.1. At the end of 2023, Welsh Government published a White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales, which included recommendations which could have a significant effect on our Housing Allocations Policy.
- 3.2. The Council has already sent a response to the Government to note support in principle to the direction of the White Paper, however we have highlighted our significant concerns regarding the necessary resources (both human and financial) needed to realise the proposed changes, as well as concerns about some specific elements such as local connection, changes to the intentionality test etc. The report submitted to the Cabinet as well as the Council's official response can be found [here \(item 8\)](#).

#### **4. Next steps**

- 4.1. When we receive clarity from the Government on the details and direction following the publication of the White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales, we will review what effect that will have on our current Policy and go through the processes associated with that.