

County Hall
The Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

30th June 2015

Notice of Special Joint Meeting of:

**Adults Select and Strong Communities Select
Committees.**

**Wednesday, 8th July 2015 at 10:00am
Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA**

There will be a pre meeting for Committee Members at 9.30pm

AGENDA

Item No	Item
1.	Election of Chair.
2.	Apologies for absence.
3.	Declarations of Interest.
4i.	Scrutiny of the performance of the Joint Housing Solution Service (Monmouthshire and Torfaen Councils) - Report attached
4ii.	Scrutiny of performance in reducing Homelessness - Report attached.
4iii.	Scrutiny of a policy change to the Housing Register and progress to date - Report attached.
5.	Scrutiny of activities being undertaken to prepare the public for further Welfare Reform - Presentation attached. Discussion on Welfare Reform and Anti-poverty with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Monmouthshire Housing Association- Melin Housing- Charter Housing

**Paul Matthews
Chief Executive**

Strong Communities Select Committee

County Councillors:

D. Dovey
S. Jones
P. Jordan
A. Webb
S. White
A. Easson
S.G.M. Howarth
V.E. Smith
K. Williams

Adults Select Committee

County Councillors:

R. Chapman
R. Edwards
P.S. Farley
R.G. Harris
M. Hickman
P. Jones
P. Jordan
P.A. Watts
A.M. Wintle

Co-opted Members:

D. Hill
D. Hudson

Sustainable and Resilient Communities

Outcomes we are working towards

Nobody Is Left Behind

- Older people are able to live their good life
- People have access to appropriate and affordable housing
- People have good access and mobility

People Are Confident, Capable and Involved

- People's lives are not affected by alcohol and drug misuse
- Families are supported
- People feel safe

Our County Thrives

- Business and enterprise
- People have access to practical and flexible learning
- People protect and enhance the environment

Our priorities

- Schools
- Protection of vulnerable people
- Supporting Business and Job Creation

Our Values

- **Openness:** we aspire to be open and honest to develop trusting relationships.
- **Fairness:** we aspire to provide fair choice, opportunities and experiences and become an organisation built on mutual respect.
- **Flexibility:** we aspire to be flexible in our thinking and action to become an effective and efficient organisation.
- **Teamwork:** we aspire to work together to share our successes and failures by building on our strengths and supporting one another to achieve our goals.



**SUBJECT: Housing & Communities Medium Term Financial Plan
Project Mandate – Integrated Approach to Housing Options**

DIRECTORATE: Enterprise

MEETING: Adults Select Committee

DATE: 8th July 2015

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All Wards

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update on the delivery of the joint Housing Solutions Service with Torfaen County Borough Council. The proposal supports the implementation of the Housing & Communities Medium Term Financial Plan project mandate, as agreed by Cabinet on 8th January 2014.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note and comment on the content of the report.
- 2.2 To receive a presentation updating on the new Housing Solutions Service.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Members will be aware from previous committees (most recently March 2015) that the Council has established a joint Housing Solutions services with Torfaen CBC, integrating the homeless functions of both Council's. The agreed model for the service has been implemented with effect from 2nd March 2015 and is operating on a pilot basis for one year. The focus for delivery of the proposal has been the creation of two new integrated teams:
- A Housing Solutions Team, responsible for the statutory homeless and homeless prevention functions and
 - A Private Sector Housing Team which is responsible for procuring and managing (where applicable) and engaging with private sector landlords.
- 3.3 Although the new service is now operational, the implementation of the agreed proposal is still in progress. Changes necessary to deliver the new joint service are being implemented alongside changes necessary to ensure the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 relating to homelessness prevention are met. The following provides an overview of the current position:
- Both teams can be accessed by separate telephone and email and both provide a daily duty service. The Housing Solutions team provides a telephoned based advice service.
 - Both teams share IT systems. The Council now shares Torfaen's data base.
 - The Private Sector Housing Team has introduced patch management
 - Other shared arrangements include furniture storage, out-of-hours and pooled accommodation, such as hostels, private leasing and shared housing
 - In May 2015, a dedicated Financial Inclusion Officer has been appointed to replicate the provision available in Torfaen.
 - Accountability remains with each Council will continue to report separately
 - Considerable training and staff development has been undertaken

3.4 The following are current Monmouthshire specific benefits of the new service

- The staffing complement has provided increased resilience and capacity
- The new Private Sector Housing Team and the Financial Inclusion Officer appointment provides dedicated provision that didn't previously exist.
- The new model is delivering financial savings. In addition to savings relating to shared storage and out-of-hours, savings are being realised from the new structure of £13,334 and from IT rationalisation of approximately £4,000.
- The model supports on-going expansion of the Shared Housing Scheme to 37 units facilitating further income generation and less reliance on B & B.
- The shared accommodation pool has provided additional flexibility for providing rehousing and further mitigates against the need to use B & B.
- Shared learning through joint training and sharing individual practices
- The Council has secured £182,485 funding through joint funding bids with Torfaen to support the delivery of both the new service and new legal duties.
- A specific benefit to Torfaen has been the impact of a long-term sickness absence being minimised.

3.5 The following are current priorities for the on-going development of the service:

- The continued process of reviewing business procedures, mainly relating to the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.
- Developing a landlord offer to encourage partnerships with private landlords
- Establishing a joint process for engaging with service users
- Establishing a joint approach with regards to performance management
- Future marketing and publicity including possible alternative branding.
- Continuing to expand the Shared Housing Scheme
- Review of partnership arrangements eg Bond Scheme

4 REASONS:

- 4.1 The new service forms part of the Housing & Communities Cabinet project mandate. It is also part of the Council's actions for responding to the new statutory duty to prevent homelessness under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 which came into effect on 27th April 2015.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 The project will save £55,000 over 3 years, starting in 2014/15. Year 1 target of £15,000 was achieved and the Year 2 target is projected to be achieved.

- 5.2 The Council has secured £182,485 to support the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 responsibilities. This in turn will support the on-going development of the joint Housing Solutions Service. **See Appendix**

6. **CONSULTEES:** Cabinet Member for Environment, Public Services & Housing; Chief Officer for Enterprise; Head of Housing – Torfaen County Borough Council

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS:** None

8. **AUTHOR:** Ian Bakewell, Housing & Communities Manager

9. CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: 01633 644479 E-mail: ianbakewell@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Appendix

Implementing the Housing (Wales) Act: National Grant Funding Allocation

Local Authority: Torfaen County Borough Council & Monmouthshire County Council
Bakewell

Contact Name: Elke Winton & Ian

Contact email: elke.winton@torfaen.gov.uk ianbakewell@monmouthshire.gov.uk
766174 / 01633 644479

Contact Telephone Number: 01495

Local Authority Allocation (Yr 1)

Project Focus (e.g. Developing the PRS, increasing prevention fund, ICT development, etc.)	Amount of allocation to be utilised	What will the funding be utilised for? (e.g. 1 FTE post, rent in advance, deposits, external ICT provider, etc.)	How do you envisage the project becoming sustainable in the longer term? (E.g. through income generation, through cost savings, etc.)
Housing Solutions Development Officer (TCBC hosted post)	£40,000	Develop revised policy/ procedure linked to new act re seamless transition	Seamless approach for officer to continue work. Development work re putting in place new policies and procedures that meet the new legislation.
Financial Inclusion Officer (MCC hosted post)	£40,000	To support a more consistent service across both Counties regarding financial inclusion.	Review project link in with SP re funding Utilise SP outcomes framework & homeless prevention PIs to monitor impact and cost benefits
IT Costs	£25,000	Update system to record data for both LAs	Ongoing upgrades to IT systems to

		Update Abrisas system to ensure consistent use across counties and that ICT reflects changed legislative systems needs	support changes and data collection
PRS Accommodation Assistant (MCC hosted post)	£25,000	Expansion (particularly in respect of Torfaen) of shared housing scheme and support landlords/tenants	Develop housing solutions and options for each local authorities and consider integration in wider PRS Housing team role/ income generation opportunities
Prison Links Housing Officer	£10,000	Develop regional approach to prevention of homelessness	Planned prevention of homelessness/property allocation on a regional/local basis before release feed into Gwent SP planning and commissioning framework, Probation service, CROC and Shelter Cymru
Prevention Spend to Save	£50,000	Bond/rent in advance/ arrears	Assist access into PRS on recyclable/ spend to save basis
Landlord incentive/package and enforcement	£40,000	To increase number of landlords that will work with the authority	Assist access into PRS through an attractive landlord offer, explore income generation opportunity Link with environmental health departments
Maintenance/ Furnishing for shared housing	£25,000	To set/create and monitor and develop shared housing	Assist access into PRS through PRS stock that better meets housing demand
Re-branding and marketing of new joint Housing Solutions Service and private sector housing	£5,000	To raise awareness of new joint housing solutions service and promote as a service for all housing advice to educate customers/clients/partners regarding homelessness and access to housing	Raising awareness about private sector housing being a viable option and the lack of affordable housing and be more equipped to house people with housing need
Training	£7,896	To enable the new Financial Inclusion Officer and	ome one-off expenditure

		<p>Monmouthshire Housing Support Gateway staff to be accredited under the Institute of Money Advisors and TCBC FI team as applicable.</p> <p>Support staff whose roles and responsibilities will be changing through the restructuring to establish the new joint Housing Solutions Service.</p> <p>MH Capacity Act training for staff</p>	work with homeless network/ WLGA
Gypsy Traveller Survey/ needs assessment (TCBC Only)	£10,000	To meet housing need requirements of Torfaen and Monmouthshire's Gypsy and Traveller communities	Link with Planning departments, Gwent SP Gypsy and Traveller 2014/15 scoping exercise re housing and support needs research and Gwent HaVGHAPs health needs assessments
Total	£277,896		
Prisoner Release Funding	£51,434	The purpose of the funding is to support ex-offenders leaving prison where accommodation needs have been identified	The funding will be used flexibly to assist offenders. The resource provides seed funding to trial potential options. Exploring links with private landlords will be a key priority



SUBJECT:	Homeless Prevention Improvement & Housing (Wales) Act 2014 Priorities
DIRECTORATE:	Enterprise
MEETING:	Adults Select Committee
DATE:	8th July 2015
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	All Wards

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise the Committee about the homeless prevention requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (**See Appendix 1**) and steps being taken to meet the requirements of the legislation which came into effect on 27th April 2015. The report also updates on prevention related activity, performance and baseline information, including feedback from clients about the former Monmouthshire Housing Options service.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To receive a presentation providing an overview of the homeless prevention statutory duties and updating on homeless prevention related performance.
- 2.2 To use this report and the associated indicators to scrutinise whether services are being delivered in line with expectations and are contributing to agreed outcomes.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 The improvement of homeless prevention has been a priority of the Council for a number of years. The scrutiny of related activity, therefore, has been a feature of the Committee's work-plan. This is particularly relevant since prevention became a statutory duty on 27th April 2015. Preparing to implement the new legislation has been a focus for the Council, which has essentially resulted in establishing the joint Housing Solutions Service with Torfaen County Borough Council. The progress of this is covered through a separate report. A key action for the new Housing Solutions Team has been (and continues to be) to implement the new legislation.
- 3.2 The implementation of the new duties present an on-going challenge to the Council, particularly in the context of on-going demand and permanent and temporary accommodation supply issues, which has resulted bed & breakfast use. In addition to implementing the new joint Housing Solutions Service, the following are key themes which are being given attention and further information is detailed in **Appendix 2**.
- Allocation Policy – This needs to be reviewed to fully comply with the legislation.
 - Test of homeless intentionality – the new legislation gives the Council the power to apply the test of intentionality. Cabinet agreed on 24th June 2015 to continue to apply the test and review in six months time.
 - S.60 duty to provide information, advice and assistance in accessing help – the Council will look to improve the availability and quality of information and advice
 - S.62 duty to assess – robust procedures need to be in place if there is any request for accommodation, or help in retaining or obtaining accommodation and the Council has a reason to believe that the applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

- S.66 duty to prevent – the Council ‘must help to secure that suitable accommodation does not cease to be available for occupation.....’
- Property impact assessment - there is a need to ensure that offers of accommodation are suitable for an applicant.
- Supporting People funding - There is a need to ensure that Supporting People funding is fully aligned and preventing homeless to maximum effect
- Partnership working – it is recognised that preventing and tackling homelessness needs to be embraced corporately and by other agencies. Exploiting roles and partnerships and overcoming barriers is an on-going priority
- Landlord Offer & Incentives – due to the shortage of social housing, the aim is to encourage landlords to work with the Housing Solutions Service

3.4 At the end of 2014/15, the Council was able to demonstrate continued improvement in performance and positive trends in terms of tackling homelessness and improving prevention. The performance provides assurances that actions implemented have had an impact. The Month 2 position projects a possible levelling out of performance, but account needs to be taken of this being purely based on April and May activity. Equally, the ‘change in the rules’ in April creates a level of uncertainty in terms of projecting performance, due to demand changes arising through the new legislation.

3.5 The following provides a headline overview, but please see **Appendix 3** for more detail:

- % of Potentially Homeless Prevented for at Least Six Months has increased. Performance has increased from 21.4% (12/13), 24.15% (13/14) to 46.8% (14/15). [This statutory PI has been withdrawn for 15/16].
- Homeless applications are falling. Homeless determinations have reduced from 417 (12/13), 388 (13/14) to 249 (14/15). The 15/16 projection is 240 determinations.
- Homeless acceptances are falling. Acceptances have reduced from 220 (12/13), 170 (13/14) to 112 (14/15). The 15/16 projection is to reduce further to 90.

4 REASONS:

4.1 The Council is required to comply with the duties of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 There are no budget implications for this report. The former Housing Options Service was delivered within budget for 2014/15. For 2015/16, a within budget outturn is again forecast. The Council and Torfaen County Borough Council have received grant funding from Welsh Government which is being jointly administered. **See Appendix 4**

6. CONSULTEES: Cabinet Member for the Environment, Public Services and Housing; Chief Officer for Enterprise; Head of Housing Torfaen County Borough Council

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

8. AUTHOR: Ian Bakewell, Housing & Communities Manager

9. CONTACT DETAILS:

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Appendix 1

Overview of Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – Homeless Prevention

Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, amends and consolidates all previous homelessness legislation.

The Act has introduced new legislation that ensures a much greater emphasis on homeless prevention and will deliver more help to more people.

Key features of the new legislation include:

- A new duty to help anyone threatened with homelessness within the next 56 days
- A duty to provide help to any homeless person to help them secure a home
- A power rather than a duty to apply the intentionality test
- New powers for Council's to discharge their homelessness duties through finding accommodation in the private rented sector
- Stronger duties on housing associations to support Councils in carrying out their homelessness duties

The legislation aims to achieve the following:

- Fewer households experiencing the trauma of homelessness
- Better and more targeted homeless prevention
- Increased help, advice and information for households who receive limited assistance under the legislation
- More focus on the service user, helping them to address the causes of homelessness and make informed decisions on finding solutions to their housing problem
- More effective use of the private rented sector as a solution to homelessness
- A stronger emphasis on co-operation and multi-agency working
- Greater protection provided for children in households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness as well as additional help for children leaving care

The main changes to the homeless legislation came into effect from 27th April 2015.

Welsh Government are supporting local authorities with the transition to a more prevention focused approach. The Council has been awarded grant funding to support this. **This is detailed as a further appendix to this report.**

Appendix 2

Implementation of Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – Overview of Key Priorities

Review of the allocations policy

There is a need to implement some short-term changes to ensure the policy is fully aligned with the legislation. The Committee has received a separate report on this. In the medium term it is proposed to undertake a more involved review that facilitates a more service user and case management approach to delivering the Housing Register, which if implemented will result in the better and more be-spoke/tailored advice and information for individual applicants.

S.60 duty to provide information, advice and assistance in accessing help

The following are key actions that are in place or being developed to improve the availability and quality of information:

- Personal housing plans are provided to all applicants setting out the mutual actions of the Council and the applicant
- The establishment of the new Housing Solutions Team and the Private Sector Housing Team which offer duty officer rotas
- The above proposal to improve and develop the Housing Register to support this duty

S.62 duty to assess.

If there is a request for accommodation, or help in retaining or obtaining accommodation and the Council has a reason to believe that the applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

The main area of risk relates to the Housing Register. Procedures, therefore, have been agreed with Monmouthshire Housing Homesearch team who will notify the Housing Solutions Team in the event of identifying any such applicants.

S.66 duty to prevent

It is a priority of the Council to continually look to expand the Monmouthshire toolkit. In addition to the Housing Solutions Service itself, the list below gives a flavour of some of the interventions available to Monmouthshire residents:

- Housing Solutions Service prevention fund – to provide financial assistance to applicants with regard to costs such as rent in advance; agency fees etc
- Discretionary Housing Payments through Housing Benefits
- The Seren Bond Scheme
- Llamau Family Mediation service for 16/17 year olds
- Access to accommodation options such as the Melin Homes Private Leasing scheme, the Council's Shared Housing Scheme and the Solas supported housing schemes
- Arrangement with an independent financial advisor to assist with debt, such as mortgage arrears
- The recent appointment of a Financial Inclusion Officer
- Mortgage rescue service provided by Melin Homes
- The re-modelling of the Housing Support Gateway by Supporting People Commissioning to reduce waiting times
- The further development of the Housing Support Gateway Prevention Intervention initiative
- A range of lettings type benefits for private landlords eg assistance with inventories; provision of letting agreements

- Independent housing advice through Shelter

The following are pending actions that aim to continue strengthening homeless prevention:

- A full review of the Housing Register
- Review arrangements with the Seren Bond scheme and establish a service level agreement
- The Council is involved with the development of Gwent Integrated Offender Management protocol with Gwent Police, which is close to being finalised. This will provide an assessment of an individual's needs and will provide early notification of prisoner release.
- The development of a regional or sub-regional prison 'prep' officer to support the Police, the Prison Service and Probation with regards to establishing a planned approach to prisoner release.
- Further development of benefits that can be passed on to landlords and how it can be effectively marketed.
- Reviewing the alignment and procedures of housing support in relation to Housing Solutions case management

Property Impact Assessment.

There is a need to ensure that offers of accommodation are suitable for an applicant. Ideally, there is a need for all accommodation to be visited prior to an offer being made, which then needs to be compatible with the circumstances of applicants. The concept of suitability has been broadened (eg to include wants, wishes, feelings etc) and creates a level of uncertainty for the Council. A procedural template will be established as a basis for the assessment.

Supporting People

There is a need to ensure that housing support is working to maximum effect as part of the wider prevention toolkit. A short-term priority will be to review procedures and the alignment of housing support in relation to Housing Solutions case management.

Partnership Working. This a core theme of the legislation. A number of services are provided locally that are an important part of the Monmouthshire prevention toolkit eg the Seren Bond Scheme, Monmouthshire Housing, Llamau etc. These arrangements are currently being reviewed.

Landlord Offer & Incentives

The Council has a number of services in place that are available to private landlords, which it is hoped, make the Council an attractive partner to work with. The current availability is based, partly on evolving activity over recent years and partly on some initial consultation with landlords last year through the Landlord Hub.

The Private Sector Housing Team will further consult with private landlords about the benefits that can be offered to further understand how attractive they are regarded by private landlords and identify scope for introducing additional benefits. Local lettings agencies will also be engaged with to better understand their expectations in order to work with the Council.

Appendix 3

Homeless Prevention & Homelessness Performance Overview

Indicator	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16 Projection	Comments
Annual Contacts	-	704	758	-	Assistance from the Council has risen since this started to be monitored. It is expected that this demand may continue to increase due to the Housing (Wales) Act 2014
Homeless Applications Determined	417	388	249	240	The number of applications determined has fallen because the Council is better able to prevent homelessness
Homeless Acceptances	220	170	112	90	Ditto
% of Applications Accepted	52.8%	43.8%	44.9%	37.5%	This trend has not been analysed
% of Families Accepted	40%	40%	32%	-	There was a positive reduction in 14/15. This trend has not been analysed but it is likely that the fall is linked to the improvements in homeless prevention
B & B Placements	116	69	11	12	Three households have been placed in B & B to date. One household was a an ex-offender and the placement was considered to be a high risk placement and the other two placements were due to there not being any vacancies in either Monmouthshire or Torfaen's temporary accommodation
Families Placed in B & B	116	69	11	12	There is currently no current projection due to Monmouthshire case-work now being recorded on a new data-base. The Council now utilises Torfaen's homeless

					data-base.
Completed Prevention Casework	191	267	405	402	The improvement in prevention is due to on-going strengthening of the homeless prevention toolkit. Key successes include assisting people into the private rented sector and the expansion of the Shared Housing Scheme and
Successful Case Prevention	64	164	302	-	Ditto
% of Potentially Homeless Prevented for at Least Six Months%	21.4%	24.2%	46.8%	-	Ditto
No. of housing support referrals	664	903	1077		The demand for Housing Support has increased due to Housing Support being part of the prevention toolkit. Working protocols have been reviewed to strengthen the links.

In addition to the above the Council undertook a survey of Housing Options applicants between October 14 and February 15. This provided very positive feedback. A headline summary of the findings is detailed below:

- **‘What Matters’ to people accessing the Housing Options Team**
 - 61% - the provision of accommodation
 - 8% - personal safety
 - 10% - help and/or advice
 - 8% - the Council to listen
 - 13% - other
- **Overall level of satisfaction with service received**
 - 82.8% - very satisfied or satisfied

- **‘What Mattered’ to people accessing accommodation**
 - 73% - the provision of accommodation
 - 27% - safety

- **Overall level of satisfaction with accommodation received**
 - 83.3% - very satisfied or satisfied

It is important to note the survey feedback has not been correlated to those applicants where the Council accepted a duty and, therefore, provided temporary accommodation and to those applicants where a duty was not accepted.

Budget Overview 14/15

Activity	Budget	Outturn	(Under)/Over
Homelessness	352,399	291,401	(60,998)
Hostel	(4,882)	(6,258)	(1,376)
Shared Housing	0	(50,961)	(50,961)
Prevention Fund	29,306	24,700	(4,606)

Appendix 4

Implementing the Housing (Wales) Act: National Grant Funding Allocation

Local Authority: Torfaen County Borough Council & Monmouthshire County Council
Bakewell

Contact Name: Elke Winton & Ian

Contact email: elke.winton@torfaen.gov.uk ianbakewell@monmouthshire.gov.uk
766174 / 01633 644479

Contact Telephone Number: 01495

Local Authority Allocation (Yr 1)

Project Focus (e.g. Developing the PRS, increasing prevention fund, ICT development, etc.)	Amount of allocation to be utilised	What will the funding be utilised for? (e.g. 1 FTE post, rent in advance, deposits, external ICT provider, etc.)	How do you envisage the project becoming sustainable in the longer term? (E.g. through income generation, through cost savings, etc.)
Housing Solutions Development Officer (TCBC hosted post)	£40,000	Develop revised policy/ procedure linked to new act re seamless transition	Seamless approach for officer to continue work. Development work re putting in place new policies and procedures that meet the new legislation.
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IT Costs	£25,000	Update system to record data for both LAs Update Abris system to ensure consistent use across	Ongoing upgrades to IT systems to support changes and data collection

		counties and that ICT reflects changed legislative systems needs	
PRS Accommodation Assistant (MCC hosted post)	£25,000	Expansion (particularly in respect of Torfaen) of shared housing scheme and support landlords/tenants	Develop housing solutions and options for each local authorities and consider integration in wider PRS Housing team role/ income generation opportunities
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Training	£7,896	To enable the new Financial Inclusion Officer and Monmouthshire Housing Support Gateway staff to be	ome one-off expenditure work with homeless network/ WLGA

		<p>accredited under the Institute of Money Advisors and TCBC FI team as applicable.</p> <p>Support staff whose roles and responsibilities will be changing through the restructuring to establish the new joint Housing Solutions Service.</p> <p>MH Capacity Act training for staff</p>	
Gypsy Traveller Survey/ needs assessment (TCBC Only)	£10,000	To meet housing need requirements of Torfaen and Monmouthshire's Gypsy and Traveller communities	Link with Planning departments, Gwent SP Gypsy and Traveller 2014/15 scoping exercise re housing and support needs research and Gwent HaVGHAPs health needs assessments
Total	£277,896		
Prisoner Release Funding	£51,434	The purpose of the funding is to support ex-offenders leaving prison where accommodation needs have been identified	The funding will be used flexibly to assist offenders. The resource provides seed funding to trial potential options. Exploring links with private landlords will be a key priority



SUBJECT: Monmouthshire Homesearch Housing Register - Minor Policy Amendments & Delivery Update

DIRECTORATE: Enterprise

MEETING: Adults Select Committee

DATE: 8th July 2015

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All Wards

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To propose minor amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy to meet the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and to provide a delivery update.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To recommend to Cabinet that the policy amendments be approved.
- 2.2 To note the contents of the report and receive a presentation providing an overview of the Housing Register

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Allocation Policy was introduced in 2011 and was last reviewed in 2013. The Policy facilitates a common housing register and allocation policy between the Council, Monmouthshire, Charter and Melin Housing Associations, and more recently with Derwen and United Welsh who have joined the partnership. The Allocation Policy, the Housing Register and the CBL scheme under the banner of Monmouthshire Homesearch, is administered by Monmouthshire Housing Association, through a dedicated team, on behalf of the Council and the other partners, thereby, creating a single point of access for service users.
- 3.2 The Policy utilises a Banding system (**see Appendix 1**) to assess housing need and determine an applicant's priority. Property allocations are made through the Choice Based Letting (CBL) Scheme whereby applicants actively express an interest (bids) for vacancies which are advertised through a range of methods.
- 3.4 Since the establishment of the current policy there have been a number of enhancements introduced to improve delivery. These include: the introduction of a welcome pack; the option of telephone interviews for applications and bidding; engaging with non-bidding applicants; enhanced information (eg bidding advice) for clients and streamlined business processes.
- 3.5 The following provides an overview of the situation at April 2015 and further information is detailed in **Appendix 2**:
- There are 2,737 (June '15) applicants registered with Homesearch. 1940 new applications were received. 23% of applicants are aged 60+ and 29% are single person households under 60.
 - Approximately 28% and 50% are in Band's 4 and 5 respectively and are considered to be in low or **no** housing need.

- Approximately 7% of applicants have a high or urgent need. This includes **112** households accepted as homeless in 14/15.
 - 406 households were rehoused during 14/15
 - During 14/15 232 applicants were excluded from the Register and 65 demoted to a lower band due to ‘unacceptable tenant-like behaviour,’ the majority for current or former rent arrears.
 - The main reasons of housing need are:
 - Band 2 – 58% are awaiting a transfer due to under-occupation; 9% for high medical need and 11% for high welfare need
 - Band 3 – 60% within the band are lacking 1 bedroom
 - Band 4 – 28% within the band are sharing facilities. 68% are regarded to be adequately housed
 - Band 5 – 44% within the band are homeowners and 44% don’t have a local connection
 - Non-bidding by applicants is an on-going issue, particularly those in Band 3
- 3.4 Earlier this year, the Council undertook an independent health-check of the Register and its administration. The health-check confirmed that the service was fully compliant with statutory and regulatory responsibilities and that Monmouthshire Housing were providing the Council with an ‘excellent service.’ **See Appendix 3.** The health-check identified recommendations for further improvement, which will be considered in a full review due to be completed later this year and proposals will be agendaed for a future meeting of the Committee.
- 3.5 Subsequent to the health-check, to ensure the Policy reflects the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, a number of minor amendments to the policy are needed, which will have a neutral impact. **See Appendix 4**, which references the purpose of the amendments. There are no equalities issues arising from the proposal. **See Appendix 5.**
- 4 REASONS:**
- 4.1 Part I of the Housing Act 96, requires all authorities to have a published scheme, which determines the priority and procedure for the allocation of housing accommodation.
- 5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**
- 5.1 Monmouthshire Housing Association administer the policy on behalf of the Council. The annual cost is £40,000 per annum.
- 6. CONSULTEES:** Cabinet Member for Environment, Public Services & Housing; Chief Officer for Enterprise; Homeseach Partners
- 7. BACKGROUND PAPERS:** Welsh Government Code of Guidance for the Allocation of Accommodation & Homelessness, April 2015; Allocation of Housing Register Health-Check, January 15 – Andy Gale
- 8. AUTHOR:** Ian Bakewell, Housing & Communities Manager
- 9. CONTACT DETAILS:**
Tel: 01633 644479 **E-mail:** ianbakewell@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – Summary of Current Bands

Band 1	Urgent Housing Need
Priority within this Band will be by date of entry into Band 1 not original date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Special Management Lettings ➤ People Occupying Unsanitary or Unfit Housing ➤ Exceptional Medical Need ➤ Exceptional Welfare Need ➤ RSL Tenants Requiring Decanting ➤ National Witness Mobility Scheme Referrals
Band 2	High Housing Need
Priority within this Band will be by date of entry into Band 2 not original date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Homeless Households (full duty) ➤ Lacking 2 or More Bedrooms ➤ Lacking Basic Amenities ➤ Care Leavers / Child in Need ➤ Vacating Adapted or Disabled Property ➤ Tenants Under-occupying by 2+ Bedrooms ➤ Successors who are Under-occupying ➤ Move on from Supported Housing ➤ High Medical Need ➤ High Welfare Need
BAND 3	Medium Housing Need
Priority within this Band will be by date of entry into Band 3 not original date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Non-Priority Homeless ➤ Lacking One Bedroom ➤ Intentionally Homeless ➤ Medium Medical Need ➤ Medium Welfare Need ➤ Leaving Armed Forces ➤ Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents ➤ Split Families ➤ Children in Flats ➤ Occupying one bedroom/bedsit accommodation with resident child(ren)
BAND 4	Low Housing Need
Priority within this Band will be arranged in order of date of application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Low Medical Need ➤ Low Welfare Need ➤ Sharing facilities ➤ Refusals Owed a Reasonable Preference ➤ Transfers Under-occupying by one Bedroom ➤ Minor Disrepair ➤ Caravan Dwellers
BAND 5	No Housing Need
Priority within this Band will be arranged in order of date of application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Home Owners ➤ Adequately Housed Tenants ➤ Serving Armed Forces Personnel ➤ Serving Prisoners ➤ Sufficient Financial Resources ➤ Refusals not Owed a Reasonable Preference ➤ No Local Connection

Appendix 2

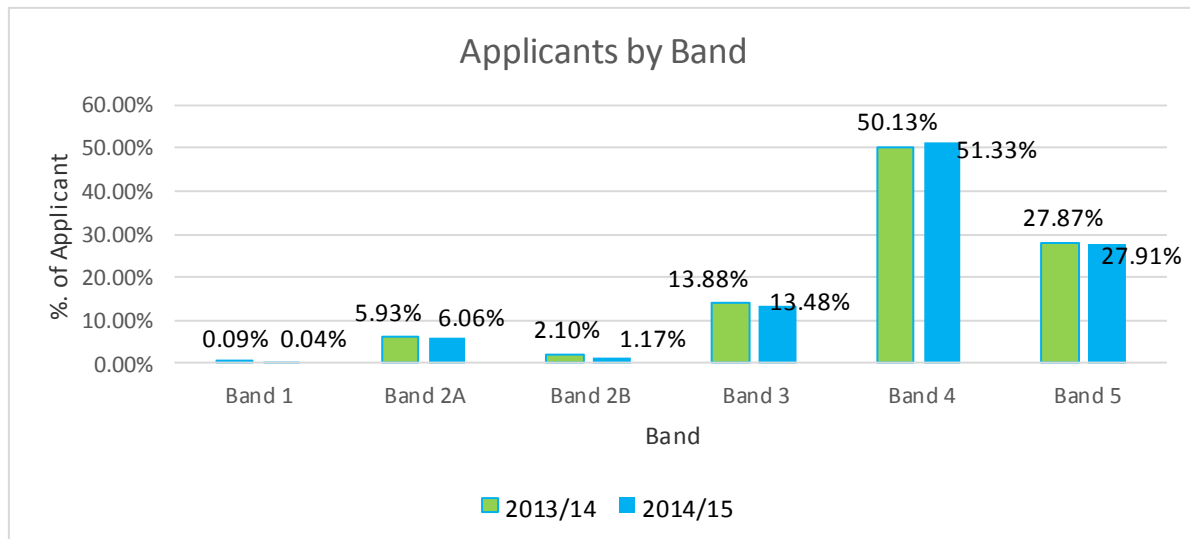
Monmouthshire Housing Register

Statistical Overview 2014/15

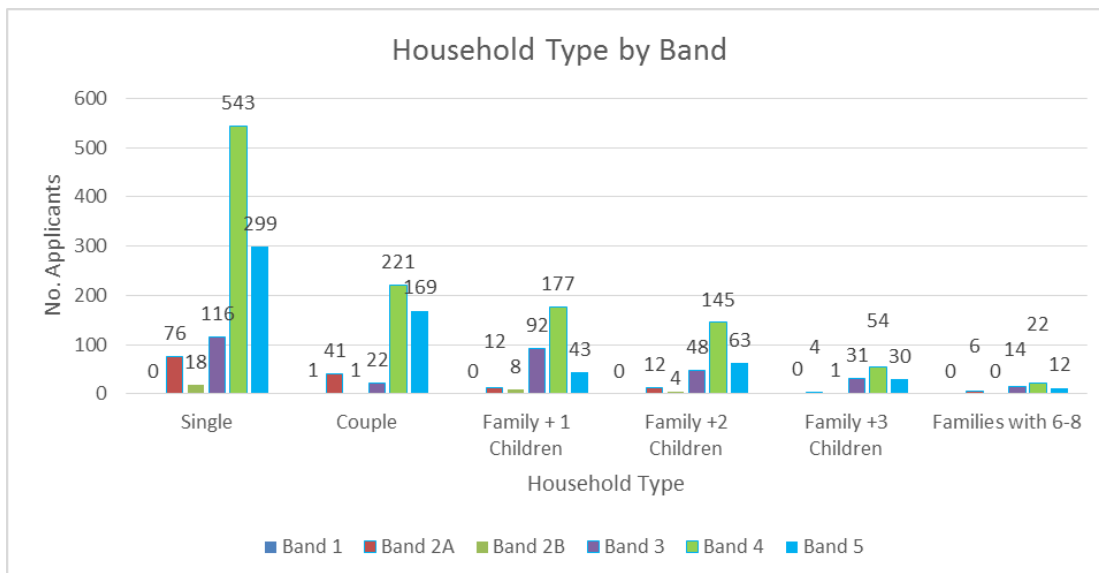
1. Applications

There are 2737 applicants live as at June 2015. The following provides a profile

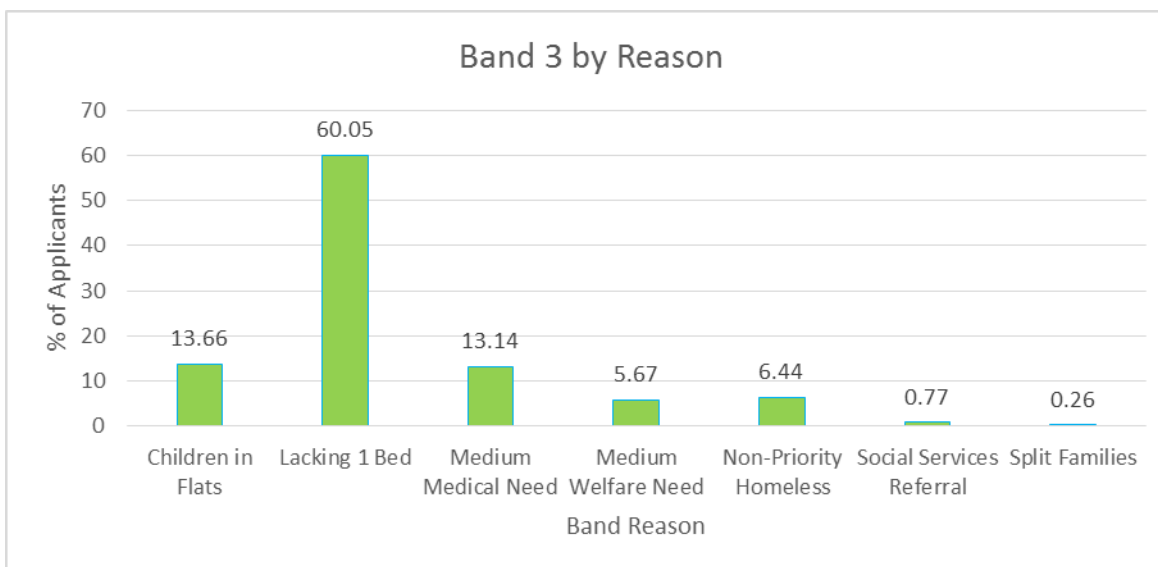
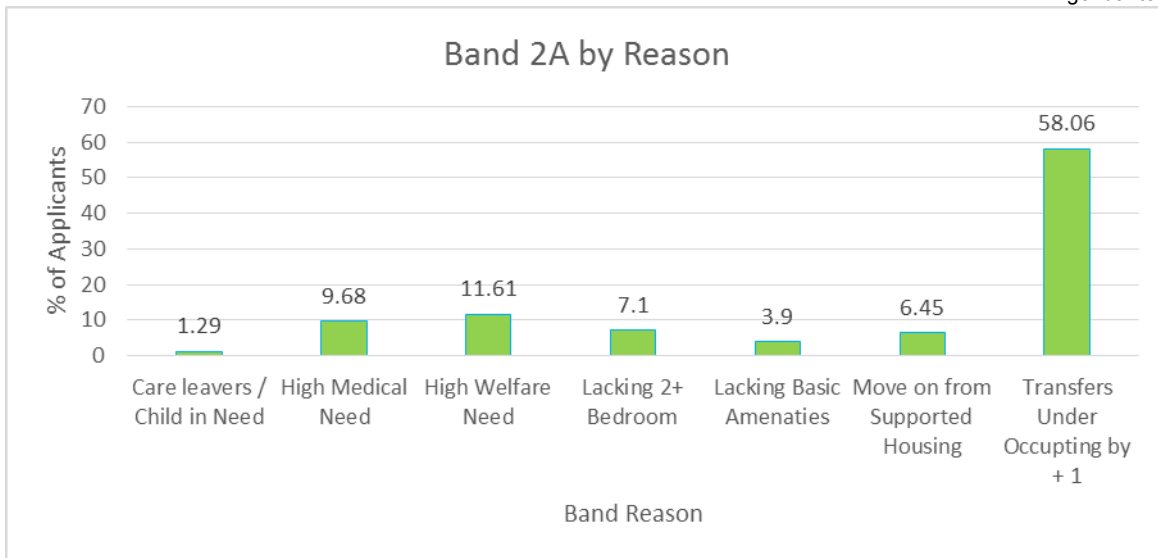
Number of Applicants per Band:



Household Type per Band



Breakdown of Band 2 & 3 by Reason



2. Bidding

During 2014/15, Homesearch received 11,186 bids on properties advertised. This is a decrease of 5,040 bids from 2013/14. On average there were 466 bids per cycle. The decrease is likely to relate to the reduced number of lets from 2013/14.

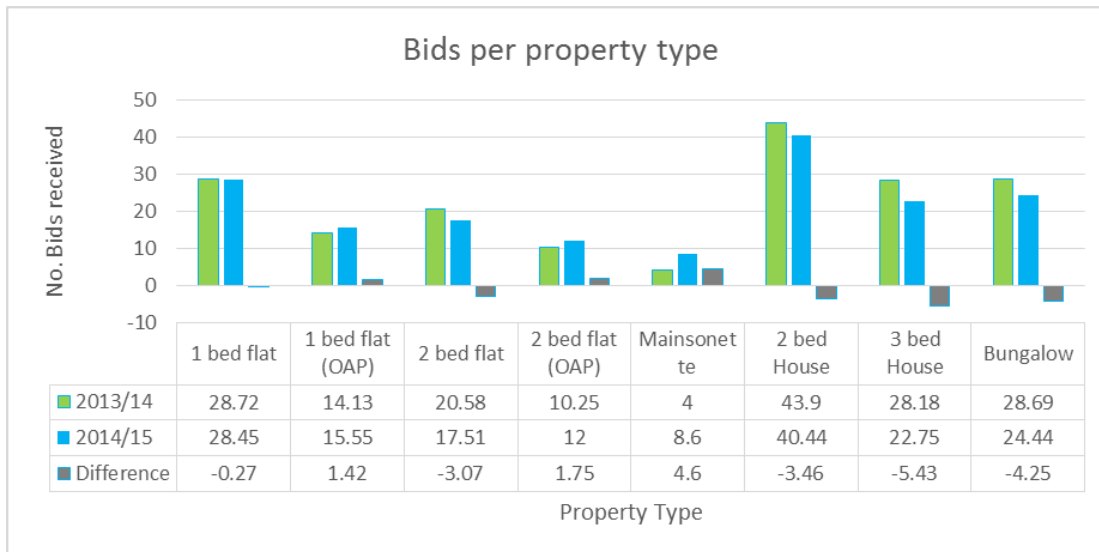
Bidding via the internet continues to be the most popular method of bidding with an average of 90.08% of bids being made per bidding cycle.

The average bids made by staff per cycle was 9.99%. This will be in relation to assisted bidding and bidding for homeless applicants as per the policy.

The use of text bidding continues to be very low, although this has slightly increased to an average of 1.59% per cycle.

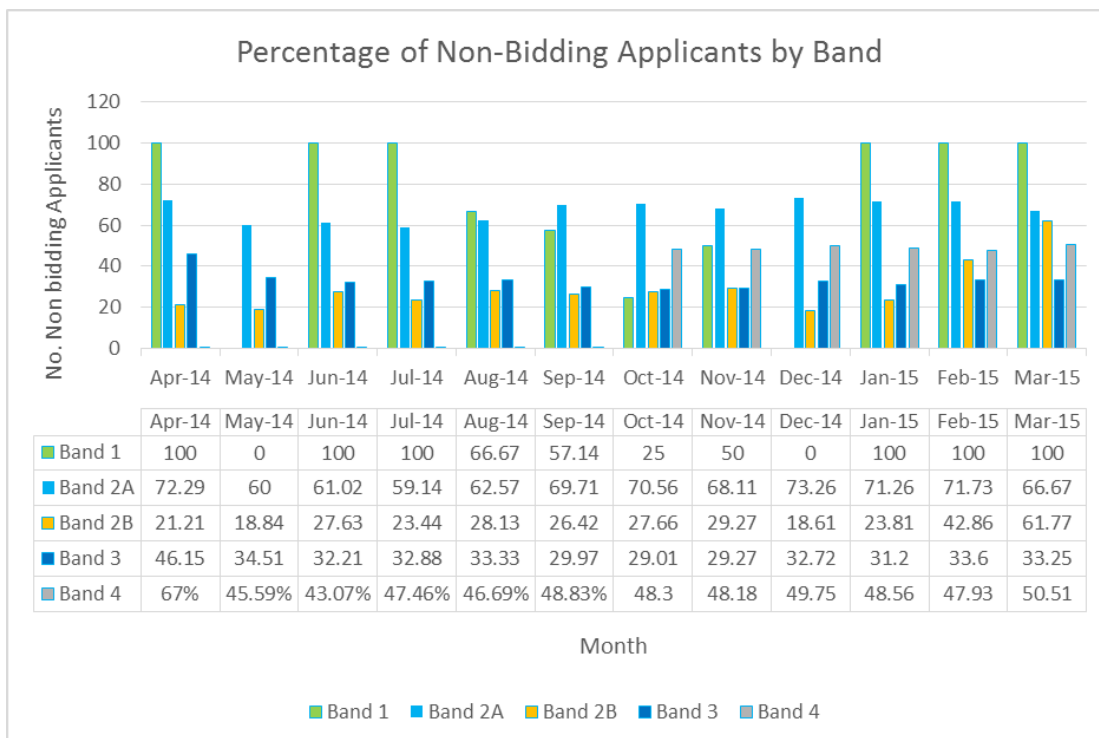
There has been a nil use of the coupon facility

The following table profiles the bids per property type:



3. Non-Bidding

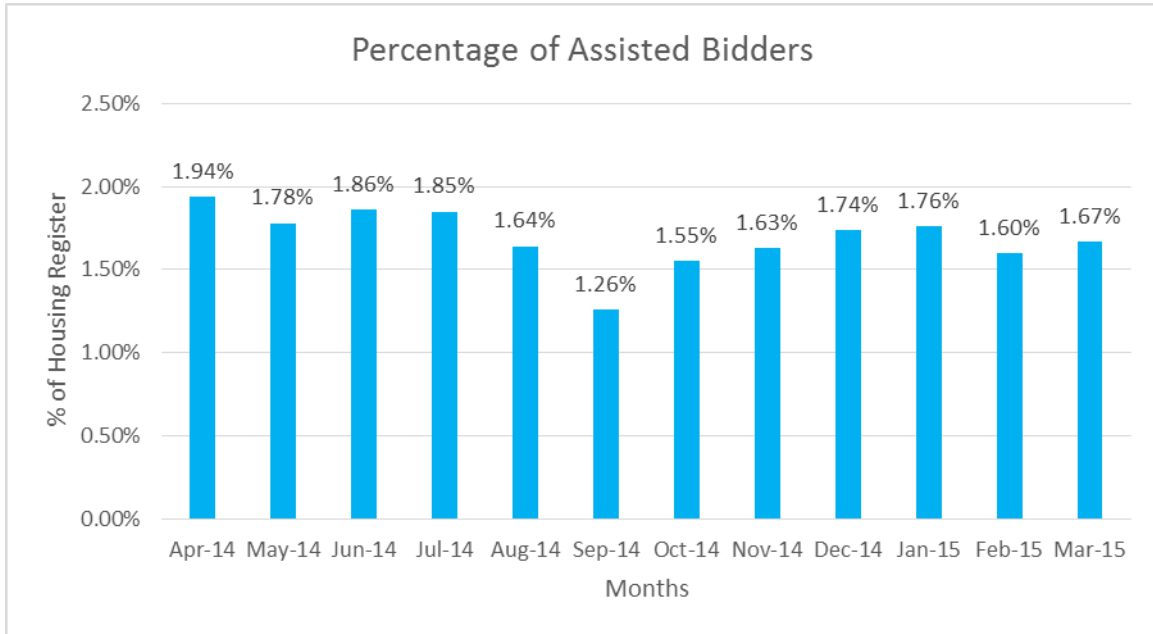
Non-bidding by applicants is an on-going trait of the registered applicants. The table below highlights last years activity. Overall applicants in Band 3 show consistently the lowest percentage of non-bidding applicants. Band 3 contains the most applicant whose households are lacking 1+ bedrooms



4. Assisted Bidding

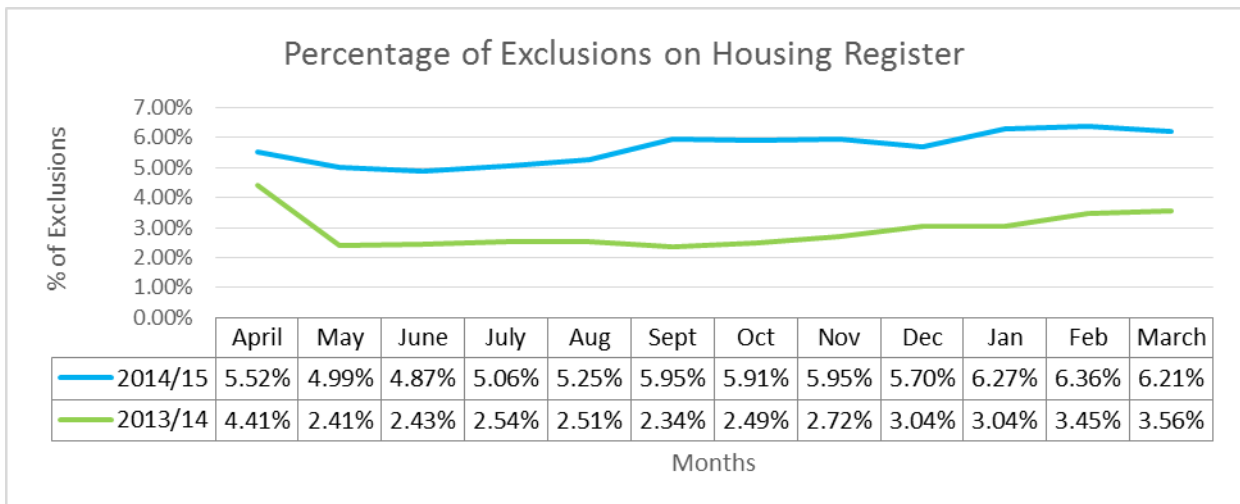
To ensure that all applicants are able to participate in the scheme Homeseach offers an assisted bidding service for vulnerable applicants, who are sent a freesheet before being telephoned by Homeseach staff to discuss available properties. The graph

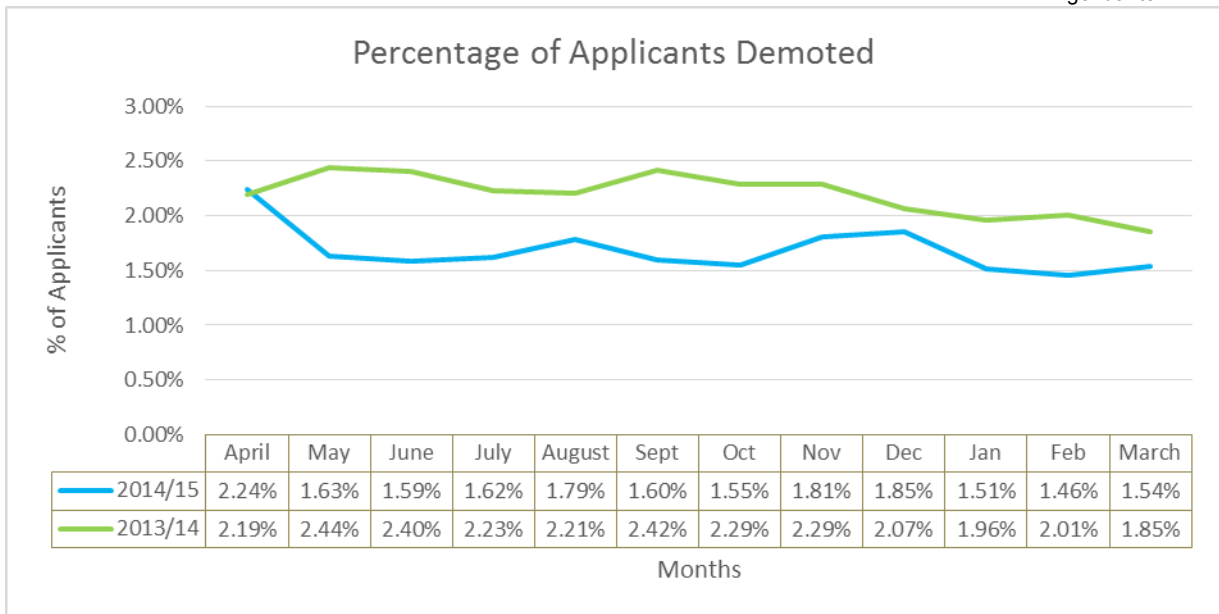
below illustrates the percentage of assisted bidders on the register throughout the year:



5. Exclusions & Reduced Preference

The Homesearch policy has a sub-policy that determines that in certain circumstances, an applicant can either be excluded from the register or have their allocation band reduced. Exclusions occur when an applicant has been assessed and but for their behaviour would have been accepted on to the register. The tables below summarise the trends for exclusions and demotions:

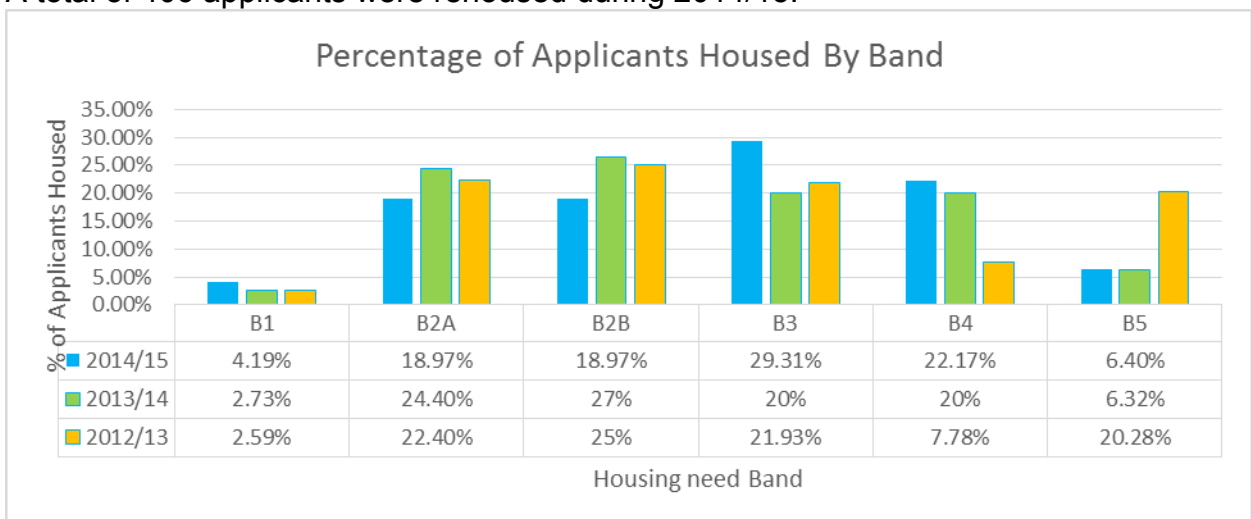




At June 2015 there were 186 applicants excluded and 37 demoted.

6. Re-Housing

A total of 406 applicants were rehoused during 2014/15:



In order to ensure that all groups of applicants are given an opportunity to

move under this scheme, (based on housing need) and to further promote sustainable communities, letting quotas are applied. The general needs lettings quota outturn for 14/15 was:

- Transfer – 29%
- Homeseeker – 47%
- Homeless – 24%

7. Local Connection

As at June 2015, 87.17% of applicants on the register had a local connection with Monmouthshire.

Appendix 3

Report for Monmouthshire County Council Housing Register Health Check

February 2015

Summary Findings

Introduction

The Monmouthshire Housing Register is delivered by Monmouthshire Housing Association under a 5 year service level agreement which has just entered the final year.

Monmouthshire Housing are keen to renew the agreement.

To help inform the decision, the Council has undertaken an independent health check of the Housing Register and Letting Homeseach contract delivered by Monmouthshire Housing and to address the following questions:

1. To check that the contractual arrangements are allowing the Council to meet its statutory obligations under the Housing Act 1996 and the regulatory Code of Guidance.
2. To consider whether the current arrangements are fit for purpose in relation to supporting the Council to implement the new statutory duty to prevent homelessness under the Housing Act (Wales) 2014.
3. To check whether the SLA arrangement with Monmouthshire Housing Association provides the Council with value for money in relation to the Council's financial contribution and set against the overall cost of administering the Housing Register.
4. To consider the performance of Monmouthshire Housing Association in delivering the contract and specifically to consider the effectiveness of any improvements made during the period of the SLA
5. To identify opportunities to improve the management and delivery of the service particularly from a service user perspective

Observations and Recommendations

- 1) The health check concludes that Monmouthshire Housing Association in administering the housing register and lettings service, on behalf of the Council provides an excellent service
- 2) The service is fully compliant with the legal and regulatory requirements placed upon the Council for assessing housing applications and letting social housing, and

- 3) Fully supports the Council to meet its current statutory and regulatory responsibilities under the Housing Act 1996. This includes the council's responsibilities to the homeless.
- 4) The Council receives considerable 'added value' beyond the strict terms of the contract and this would be at risk if a decision were to be taken not to continue with the contract.
- 5) The Council obtains excellent value for money when set against the cost of the contract and the Council's contribution as a proportion of the total budget, and
- 6) There is strong evidence to demonstrate that Monmouthshire Housing Association have learnt from and acted on feedback to improve the service

Recommendations to further improve the Service

- 1) Homesearch should deliver more housing advice at the point of a housing application to support the Council to successfully implement the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 prevention duty.
- 2) Monmouthshire Council should on behalf of Homesearch consider purchasing the Locata 'Targeted Housing Options' Module
- 3) Homesearch should evolve into a bespoke assisted choice and options service providing a case management service to all applicants on the register resulting in a more personal and individual focused service.

More minor recommendations are:

1. Rationalise the number of Band 2a cases that are under-occupying social housing
2. Build further on the successful process for undertaking rolling reviews
3. Extend the courtesy phone call process to applicants in Band 4
4. Improve the information provided to applicants on estimated waiting times.
5. Extend the remit of the Exclusion panel
6. To consider whether further efficiencies can be achieved through the introduction of automated banding

Comments on the current Allocation Policy.

The Monmouthshire Housing Allocation policy fully meets the Council's legal and regulatory responsibilities set by Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and the regulatory code of guidance.

The findings from the health check

Question 1: To check that the contractual arrangements are allowing the Council to meet its statutory obligations under the Housing Act 1996 and the regulatory Code of Guidance.

Part 6 & 7 of the Housing Act 1996 place a number of statutory and regulatory responsibilities on the Council in respect of the assessment of housing application, and the delivery of a housing register and lettings system.

The legal position is that Monmouthshire Housing Association is a partner to the common allocation policy but the policy remains the responsibility of the local authority.

The health check conclusion is that Homesearch fully supports the Council to meet its statutory and regulatory responsibilities under the Housing Act 1996. This includes the council's responsibilities to the homeless. This is a critical area as without a good supply of social housing the number of homeless households in bed and breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation could have a significant financial impact on the council.

The health check also concludes that MHA, in administering the housing register and lettings service, are fully compliant with the legal and regulatory requirements placed upon the Council for assessing housing applications and letting social housing. The requirements set by the legislation and the regulatory code are summarised below. A local authority must ensure:

- ✓ There is a system in place to enable applicants to apply for housing accommodation
- ✓ Information is available on how to apply and help available to assist those that need it
- ✓ That all applicants have their housing needs accurately assessed under the allocation policy
- ✓ That applicants are not unlawfully excluded from the allocation scheme and that where exclusions apply these are clearly documented and fall within the requirements of the legislation
- ✓ That there are no delays in assessing applications
- ✓ All decisions are made strictly according to the policy and never outside of the policy
- ✓ That there are clear working procedures attached to the policy which explain exactly how the policy will be applied
- ✓ Applicants are treated fairly
- ✓ That performance is kept under review and feedback is given to applicants on their housing prospects and outcome of any bid for accommodation.
- ✓ That the statutory right of review is always granted for any decision made to determine whether an applicant is eligible for help and the priority to be granted.

All of the above requirements are fully met. In addition:

- ✓ There is clear information on how to make an application. The on-line form is easy to understand and complete. Help is available for any applicant who may need help in completing the on-line form and a telephone application interview is provided to

elderly or vulnerable applicants who either have difficulty in using or cannot access the on-line service.

- ✓ Applicants are only ever excluded using the criteria and tests set by the legislation and regulatory guidance.
- ✓ Despite high numbers of new applications per month (130) applications are processed quickly and well within the SLA target time set. The team are experienced and very proactive, contacting applicants by phone to confirm and check information to ensure that assessments can be completed as quickly as possible.
- ✓ Critically applicants are correctly assessed according to their stated housing needs and strictly according to the policy itself despite the allocation policy being complex with numerous bands and awards.
- ✓ Clear working procedures have been developed to ensure applicants are strictly assessed according to the policy.
- ✓ Feedback is welcomed and actively sought from applicants and used to further improve the service with performance published in a regular newsletter.
- ✓ Where the law requires a statutory right of review to a decision this right is fully complied with.

The conclusion to this question based on clear evidence is that the contractual arrangements are allowing the Council to meet its statutory obligations under the Housing Act 1996 and the regulatory Code of Guidance

Question 2: To consider whether the current arrangements are fit for purpose in order to support the Council to implement the new statutory duty to prevent homelessness under the Housing Act (Wales) 2014.

From April 2015 the Council will have a statutory duty to prevent homelessness as a result of new legislation enacted by the Housing Act (Wales) 2014. The Council is taking considerable steps to strengthen its approach to preventing homelessness.

The Council is exploring whether Homesearch has a potential role to play in supporting the implementation of the new prevention duty and therefore wish to obtain a view on how the scheme is currently contributing to prevention work and how in the future Homesearch might further contribute and support the new duty. There are a number of opportunities for Homesearch to support the Council to implement the new duty.

It is recommended that the prevention role that Homesearch could play should be extended resulting in Homesearch playing an enhanced role in providing housing advice and preventing homelessness to meet the new prevention duty.

This would be achieved through implementing the following:

- 1) The Council should on behalf of Homesearch explore acquiring the Locata 'Targeted Housing Options' Module*
- 2) Homesearch should deliver more housing advice at the point of a housing application to support the Council to successfully implement the Housing Wales Act prevention duty.*

Question 3: Does the arrangement with Monmouthshire Housing provide the Council with value for money in relation to the Council's financial contribution and when set against the overall costs for administering the Common Housing Register.

There are 3 areas where the Council may wish to obtain a view on the value for money aspects of the SLA arrangement:

a) *To obtain a view about the financial value for money it receives from Monmouthshire Housing for the money it pays.*

There is no evidence that the cost to the Council could be reduced. The team consists of a senior lettings manager, 3 lettings officers and an administrative assistant. The team is funded from combining the SLA payment and separate contributions from each partner Housing Association. The cost to MCC is £40k per year excluding VAT plus £10K for system support and this has been a fixed cost (apportioned in year 1) with no increase for inflation throughout the period of the contract. It is very unlikely that any savings let alone significant savings could be achieved if MCC were to undertake the statutory function itself or another provider. The cost to MCC would very likely increase.

The current cost of £40k is the equivalent of 2 scale 6 officers plus on-costs and this would be the bare minimum resource needed by MCC to process housing applications, maintain a register and nominate applicants to vacant housing association properties. It would also require a resource to manage the team and function and this would put additional pressure on the existing management resources in MCC. MCC would also need to purchase the Locata software or alternatively develop new software, such as Abritas.

The costs are kept low as a result of the economies of scale achieved combining resources from the Council, Monmouthshire Homes and 3 other Housing Associations to run Homesearch effectively.

There could be further unintended consequences if the decision were to be taken to terminate the SLA with MHA. There is a risk that the common housing register and common policy partnership would 'fall apart' following a decision to terminate the SLA leading to the Council and each separate housing association operating their own allocation policy and their own register. The Council would need to negotiate a nominations agreement with each housing association.

Any decision to dismantle the common housing register may well lead to a poorer service to the public who could, depending on the arrangements to replace it, may have to register on several housing lists. There may no longer be the funding, or the agreement of all housing providers to operate choice based lettings; a system that is well regarded by Monmouthshire residents based on feedback.

The Homesearch partnership brings benefits to the Council in the form of cooperation, flexibility, and at times compromise and these are the characteristics that make the partnership successful.

b) To also consider the value for money to the Council when set against the total annual cost of running the Homesearch partnership and the contribution made by Monmouthshire Housing and the other partners.

The Council's contribution is £50,000 PA which is approximately a third of the cost with MHA and the other 3 partners, Melin, Charter and United Welsh picking up two thirds of the cost. Each partners contribution is based on their respective stock sizes. At the start of the agreement MHA owned 72% of the social housing stock. The Council therefore is able to deliver a statutory function through a partnership arrangement where the Council contributes approximately a third of the overall cost.

c) To consider any 'added value' Monmouthshire Housing provide to the Council through the contract beyond the terms agreed in the SLA.

There is considerable evidence that the Council receives considerable 'added value' beyond the strict terms of the SLA agreement. Through Homesearch the Council obtains information it needs to on the local housing market and local housing need which is used strategically to make decisions on where new affordable housing is needed as well as the size and type of new housing. Information is also gathered on the support needs of applicants and used by MCC to help plan the funding of housing related support projects.

Added value is also realised through cost saving resulting from the flexibility afforded by the Homesearch partnership to house households owed a homeless duty by the Council at a rate requested by the Council. A return to a nominations agreement would be likely to result in fewer households being housed resulting in bed and breakfast use and the associated costs.

Question 4: To consider the performance of Monmouthshire Housing in delivering the contract and to highlight what improvements, if any, have been made to the service during the period of the SLA

The health check concludes that MH deliver the Housing Register and Lettings function on behalf of MCC to a high standard. The service meets and exceeds the requirements set by the SLA. This conclusion is based on robust management information supplemented by feedback from customer surveys.

There have been significant improvements made by MH to the service throughout the period of the SLA and extensive evidence that MH have learnt and acted on feedback received to further improve the service. The conclusion is based on some key findings including:

- Each aspect of the housing application assessment and lettings system is administered to a high standard.
- The SLA target time of 10 days to assess an application is always met and exceeded.
- There is the right balance struck as to how much information needs to be verified at the point of application and at the point of any offer. Many similar systems waste

time and duplicate work, verifying fully at the point of application only to verify again at the point of offer.

- At the point where an applicant has successfully bid for accommodation there is a full verification check of cases.
- The introduction of a rolling reviews programme which targets applicants who have not bid for 3 or for 6 months with the review timescale based on the priority band they are placed in. This process is very efficient at identifying quickly and removing applicants no longer interested in social housing which saves on the overall cost and time needed to maintain the register.
- The Homesearch Partnership chose an IT partner carefully following a comprehensive options evaluation exercise. The Locata system works well and has potential for further development.
- The Homesearch website is well constructed, clearly laid out and contains helpful information. It is well used by the public as a result. On average there are 1.3 million hits to the Homesearch Website every quarter and 500,000 pages viewed per quarter
- Performance against the service standards set in the SLA is monitored quarterly and reported to the Council, the Homesearch partners and the public. MHA produces and publishes comprehensive performance management information beyond the more limited indicators set by the SLA and do so in order to monitor performance as a whole and improve the service.
- The information produced for service users and the public is good. An annual Homesearch report is published and comprehensive monitoring information is produced each quarter. A new Homesearch newsletter was launched in September 2014 to give applicants more information about the scheme and improvements made. This is intended to be a regular publication.
- Applicant satisfaction surveys were carried out in both 2011/12 and 2013/14 and the results have been used to develop an action plan highlighting areas for improvement. Many of these tasks have already been addressed at the time of the health check. The 2013/14 applicant survey produced 664 completed surveys out of 3258 registered applicants. This is a good response rate of 20.38%.

The Homesearch performance against the SLA requirements and performance measured by customer satisfaction is set out in tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1

Performance against SLA	2nd Q 2014/15	2013/14
Time Taken to Answer Inbound Calls – target 20seconds or 6 rings	8.3 seconds	11 seconds
Calls Answered As a	98.9	Met and exceeded in 11

Percentage of Calls Received 96%		out of 12 months
Percentage of New Applications Validated Within Target	100%	

Table 2

Performance Indicator	11/12 satisfaction	13/14 satisfaction
How easy did you find it to register	84.5	92.5
Did you understand your banding	73.8	86.3 learning led to intro
Did you find the Member welcome pack useful	80.5	93.1
Did you find property adverts clear in order to make informed bids	N/A	83.0
How helpful did you find Homesearch staff	77.9	90.5
Satisfied with Homesearch	65.6	97.3 satisfaction for applicants housed with an 83.1 satisfaction rate for all applicants with main reason for non satisfaction relating to the waiting time rather than the service.

Performance may be good but 2 specific questions to consider is what evidence is there that:

- 1) The service has improved over the 4 years of the SLA, and
- 2) What examples are there to demonstrate how Monmouthshire Homes have learnt from, and acted on, feedback to improve the service

Both questions can be answered positively.

With regard to the first question there have been important on-going improvements made by MHA to the service throughout the period of the SLA. When the contract commenced the register and lettings service was delivered through a complex points based allocation policy and a nominations agreement between the Council and each individual housing association operating in the County Borough. The system was not customer focused and was fragmented with applicants having to register with more than one provider. There were many more households on the housing register than today and no dedicated IT software to support the application and lettings process.

This position has been transformed in the 4 years of the SLA. There is now a modern, efficient and effective choice based lettings system and a common housing register

and all key housing association partners signed up to a common policy for allocation social housing. This is backed by bespoke software provided by Locata. There is a strong, experienced team in place and additional resources have been generated by expanding the number of Homesearch partners. Applicant feedback is excellent with strong support for all aspects of the Homesearch system.

Addressing the second question there is strong evidence to demonstrate that Monmouthshire Housing Association has learnt from and acted on feedback to improve the service. Examples of this learning are considered below:

- 1) Feedback received demonstrated that not all applicants understood the CBL system and how to bid. Homesearch developed a welcome pack sent to every applicant when their application has been fully assessed. This is followed up with a courtesy phone call to applicants in bands 1-3 to check that they have received their pack and whether they have any queries relating to how to use the system.
- 2) Feedback received from some older and vulnerable applicants revealed that some wanted help with completing their housing application and help with making bids. Both issues have been addressed. There is an option of a telephone interview which helps applicants to fill out the on line form and assisted bidding is offered whereby a bid can be made on behalf of an applicant by a member of the Homesearch Team.
- 3) In response to a concern that many applicants were not bidding all applicants in a high need band that have not bid for 3 or 6 months (the timescale depends on the band) are contacted to discuss whether their housing circumstances have changed and the reason why they have not made a bid.
- 4) MH telephone any applicant who expresses in writing any dissatisfaction with the service to seek to resolve their concerns.
- 5) In order to address the main reason expressed for dissatisfaction; the "lack of available properties" the welcome pack and newsletters provide more information on average waiting times for applicants in each band.
- 6) To address feedback that the property adverts did not give sufficient information, there are now more internal photos, a floor plan and description of the interior of properties.
- 7) Homesearch identified there was considerable wasted work through undertaking an annual review of the register and introduced the rolling review system

Question 5: To identify potential opportunities to improve the management and delivery of the register, particularly from a service user perspective

Despite the evidence that Homesearch operates a good service there are inevitably areas where further improvements can be made which will in turn improve the quality of the service to the public. Improved processes will also result in time being saved allowing resources to be re-allocated to other important tasks.

The health-check feedback makes a number of recommendations that the Homesearch Partnership can consider to further improve the service and increase efficiencies. These will be discussed and considered.

Consideration of any benchmarking information

The brief for the health check requested that consideration be given, to applying any benchmarking information available for the delivery of other Housing Registers in Wales. There are no national statistics that benchmark the Housing Register function, however MHA did attempt to obtain information to benchmark the service in October 2013 as part of a process to learn from other services. What did emerge from the exercise was that the extent of the performance and satisfaction collated through Homesearch appears to be in excess of other services.

Nor is there financial information to benchmark costs but the number of front line staff employed by Homesearch (which is the most significant cost in any service) would appear similar to every other council in the benchmarking exercise based on the relative size of each authority's housing register.

Stakeholder Feedback

Information was sought from the 3 Housing Associations that form part of the Homesearch partnership and from the stakeholders whose clients were most likely to use the scheme. Supported housing organisations that are part of the Monmouthshire Gateway were contacted and asked for any observations or experiences they had regarding the service. Only 2 agencies replied:

Reach found *“Homesearch staff helpful and proactive. The people we support have been able to use the system with ease. We cannot suggest any improvements”*.

Gwalia had no concerns and suggested only one improvement - the availability of paper applications. Paper applications have been phased out and replaced with both on-line and assisted telephone applications that are recognised to be more efficient than paper applications.

Appendix 4

Monmouthshire Common Allocations Policy
Minor amendments re implementing the Housing Wales Act 2014

The proposed **minor** changes to the Common Allocations Policy are listed below:-

Purpose of Change	Text	Minor changes to Policy
<p>2.57 Refer to Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014</p> <p>To provide additional clarity to the test of unacceptable behaviour with regards to exclusions to the housing register</p>	<p>7.3.2 Unacceptable behaviour is defined as behaviour which would, if an applicant or member of their household was a secure tenant of the Council, entitle a landlord to possession under any of the Grounds 1 to 7, Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985. Unacceptable behaviour includes:</p>	<p>Unacceptable behaviour is defined as behaviour which would, if an applicant or member of their household was a secure tenant of the Council, entitle a landlord to possession under any of the Grounds 1 to 7, Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985. To be reasonably classed as unacceptable behaviour there must be a belief that the court would be prepared to grant a possession order based on the behaviour (normally an outright order should be expected). The circumstances at the time of the application must also still mean the applicant is unsuitable. Previous unacceptable behaviour or even an outright possession order, may not justify a decision to treat the applicant as ineligible where that behaviour can be shown by the applicant to have improved. Unacceptable behaviour includes:</p>
<p>3.158 Include statement re The Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976</p> <p>Reflect the legislation and category of applicant in the policy</p>	<p>Add to policy under Section 7</p>	<p>7.5 Displaced Agricultural Workers 7.5 The Rent (Agricultural) Act 1976 (the 1976 Act) requires MCC to use its best endeavours to provide accommodation for displaced agricultural workers s27 of the 1976 Act requires MCC to be satisfied that: 7.51 The dwelling-house from which the worker is displaced is needed to accommodate another agricultural worker 7.52 The farmer cannot provide suitable alternative accommodation for the displaced worker and 7.53 The need to re-house the displaced worker in the interests of efficient agriculture.</p>

		7.54 It is important, therefore, for Local Authorities to include in their allocation schemes
<p>3.2 Section 167 (2) of the Housing Act has been amended by the Wales Act 2014 to include within reasonable preference all applicants now owed the new section 66, 73 or 75 duty.</p> <p>Homeless prevention duty reflected in banding</p>	<p>Band 2B – Homeless Applicants 16.2.12 Applicants accepted as being owed a full duty under Sections 193(2) or 195(2) of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) by MCC</p> <p>Band 3 – Medium Housing Need 16.3.1 Non Priority Homeless Households Applicants who have a reasonable preference because they have been found by MCC to be unintentionally homeless but not owed a priority need under Sections 190 or 192(2) of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) by MCC</p>	<p>Band 2B – Homeless Applicants 16.2.12 Applicants accepted as being owed a duty under Section 73 of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 by MCC, considered to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless 16.2.13 Applicants accepted as being owed a duty under Section 75 of part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless</p> <p>Band 3 – Medium Housing Need 16.3.1 – Applicants accepted as being owed a duty under Section 66 of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 by MCC, who are threatened with homelessness within 28 days and where priority need and/or intentional homelessness remains under investigation by MCC 16.3.2 Applicants accepted as being owed a duty under Section 73 of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 by MCC, and where priority need is not considered likely, and/or intentional homelessness remains under investigation by MCC 16.3.3 Applicants previously accepted as being owed a duty under Section 73 of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 but remains homeless following Section 73 duties ending</p>

<p>Who can and can't register (Allocation Policy)</p> <p>Update of eligibility criteria</p>	<p>Add to 7.2.4</p>	<p>The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations 2014 amends the eligibility of persons for allocation of social housing and the eligibility of homeless applicants for housing assistance under Parts 6 and 7 of the 1996 Act (effectively bringing eligibility in line with England).</p> <p>These regulations govern applications for social housing made on or after 31 October 2014. Applications made before that date need to be considered under the Housing Act 1996.</p> <p>Applicants subject to immigration control who are/aren't entitled to go on the register (also are/aren't entitled to homelessness assistance) are contained in the The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations.</p>

<p>Choice and Preference Options (Allocation Policy)</p> <p>To encourage non-bidding applicants who are being assisted by the Housing Solutions Team, under the homeless prevention and homeless duties of the Act.</p>	<p>9.1.5 Applicants who are owed a full homeless duty by MCC and fail to bid appropriately within 13 weeks of the date of acceptance of the homeless duty will still be entitled to bid, however, Monmouthshire County Council’s Housing Options Team will bid on properties which are considered to be suitable for that applicant’s household. Any suitable offer from bids placed by MCC’s Housing Options Team will be deemed to be an offer under this scheme.</p>	<p>Applicants who are owed a Section 75 duty by MCC and fail to bid appropriately within 13 weeks of the date of acceptance of the homeless duty will still be entitled to bid, however, Monmouthshire County Council’s Housing Solutions Team will bid on properties which are considered to be suitable for that applicant’s household. Any suitable offer from bids placed by MCC’s Housing Options Team will be deemed to be 9.1.5 Applicants who are owed a full homeless duty by MCC and fail to bid appropriately within 13 weeks of the date of acceptance of the homeless duty will still be entitled to bid, however, Monmouthshire County Council’s Housing Solutions Team will bid on properties which are considered to be suitable for that applicant’s household. Any suitable offer from bids placed by MCC’s Private Housing Sector Team will be deemed to be the Council’s final offer under Section 75, Part 2 Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The banding would then be re-assessed and as per the allocation policy, section 11.1.4 would then apply – See Section</p>
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<p>Offers and Refusals (Allocation Policy)</p> <p>To encourage non-bidding applicants who are being assisted by the Housing Solutions Team, under the homeless prevention and homeless duties of the Act.</p>	<p>11.2.2 Homeless applicants will generally be expected to bid for advertised properties in the same way as other applicants, but bids may also be submitted for suitable properties on behalf of homeless applicants at the discretion of MCC's Housing Options Team. This will be applied if in the opinion of Monmouthshire County Council's Housing Options Team, the applicant has not maximised their bidding for a period of 13 weeks following acceptance of duty or at any period after the initial 13 weeks.</p> <p>Accepted homeless applicants will therefore be expected to bid on all properties that are suitable for the needs of their household.</p> <p>11.2.8 If a homeless applicant refuses to accept two suitable offers of accommodation, MCC may decide to cease its homeless duty to them. The homeless applicant has a right of review of this decision.</p> <p>11.2.10 Add to policy</p>	<p>Homeless applicants will generally be expected to bid for advertised properties in the same way as other applicants, but bids may also be submitted for suitable properties on behalf of homeless applicants at the discretion of MCC's Housing Solutions/Private Sector Housing Team. This will be applied if in the opinion of MCC's Housing Solutions/Private Sector Housing Team, the applicant has not maximised their bidding for a period of 13 weeks following acceptance of duty or at any period after the initial 13 weeks.</p> <p>Any suitable offer from bids placed by the team will be deemed to be a final offer under S75, Part 2 Housing (Wales) Act 2014, to discharge its statutory duties. If the offer is refused and the homelessness duty is ended, the Council will automatically remove the reasonable preference awarded for homeless. The application will be reassessed and the applicant placed in a band that reflects their newly assessed need. Accepted homeless applicants will therefore be expected to bid on all properties that are suitable for the needs of their household.</p> <p>If a homeless applicant refuses to accept one suitable offers of accommodation, MCC may decide to cease its homeless duty to them. The homeless applicant has a right of review of this decision. Then after being reassessed, Section 11.1.4 would apply</p> <p><i>There may be circumstances when a Housing Association partner may bypass an applicant who is next in line to be offered accommodation. Refer to Appendix 3 for a list of these circumstances.</i></p>
<p>Appendix 2 Exclusion and Reduced Preference Policy (Allocation Policy)</p>	<p>Add to 3.1.3</p>	<p>To be reasonable there must be belief that the court would be prepared to grant a possession order (normally an outright order) and the circumstances at the time of the application must also still mean the applicant is unsuitable.</p>

<p>Appendix 2 Exclusion and Reduced Preference Policy (Allocation Policy)</p> <p>Updates the legal framework which provide context for the policy</p>	<p>Add 3.1.5</p>	<p>ASB Crime and Policing Act enables the partners of the Monmouthshire Housing Register (MHR) to treat an applicant as ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation if that persons' behaviour would be sufficient to entitle a possession order on the grounds of serious Anti-social Behaviour in line with the ASB Crime and Policing Act 2014.</p>
<p>Appendix 3 By passing an applicant (Allocation Policy)</p> <p>In exceptional circumstances it can be appropriate not to make an allocation to an applicant who is next in-line for a property eg because of an identified public protection risk. There is a need to have a formal policy to facilitate such circumstances.</p>	<p>Add to policy</p>	<p>See attached – Appendix 4 to this Committee Report</p>

Appendix 4

Homesearch By-Passing Policy

This appendix to the Monmouthshire Common Allocation Policy sets out the circumstances when a Housing Association partner may bypass an applicant who is next in line to be offered accommodation. It is agreed between the partners of the common allocation policy that:

1. Blanket bans should not be used
2. A decision by the any partner housing association to bypass an applicant who would be next in line for an offer of accommodation will only be taken according to the criteria agreed and set out in this policy.
3. Any local letting initiative that the partner housing association wish to apply must only be applied according to the procedure agreed by all partners and set out in this policy.
4. Where a housing association partner to this policy may wish to retain exception rules that do not form part of the common allocation policy, for example, rules relating to the size of accommodation to be offered, or rules relating to offers of accommodation from applicants with former rent arrears or behaviour that has not yet been address or resolved – these rules should be transparent and will be recorded for each housing association as an appendix to the common allocation policy, so it is clear when a named housing association will bypass an applicant and why.

All parties have agreed, as far as possible, to set a common set of rules and to keep exceptions to a minimum but all recognise the need for each body to manage their dwellings appropriately.

Clearly it is not possible to describe every situation where an applicant due an offer of social housing might be bypassed. The following are the most common situations:

a) **The applicant has a social housing tenancy related debt.**

Where information on former tenant arrears only emerges after an offer has been made, that offer may be withdrawn by that housing association and the policy for arrears applied. This would be where the arrears are above 8 weeks' net rent or £500.00 (a payment plan would also need to be in place and paid for at least 6 weeks).

b) **Applicants who are vulnerable and have high support needs or applicants who require a sensitive letting such as MAPPA cases**

There are a number of circumstances where the housing association partner may need to bypass an applicant who is imminently due an offer of social housing. This may be where:

- An applicant may be vulnerable and considered not yet ready to sustain a tenancy

- It is considered there may be a risk to the applicant or others, where for example, a MAPPA case needs to be housed and a sensitive let may need to be planned.

c) **The applicant is not suitable for the social housing allocation with communal entrances/facilities.**

Applicants who are vulnerable or pose a risk to themselves or others can be bypassed by partners.

It is not possible to describe every situation where an applicant may be bypassed. Individual cases that fall outside the criteria will need to be discussed by the Exclusion Panel. Discussions may have to be conducted via email as the panel only meets once a month

However, it is important that such applicants do not end up being bypassed because of a lack of pre-offer planning, resulting in an offer not being made because of a lack of information, or an appropriate support package. Where there are applicants who are extremely vulnerable or considered to pose a risk to themselves or others, the case should be submitted to the monthly Exclusion Panel meeting (or discussions conducted via email) to decide whether they are ready to sustain a tenancy and what support package is required, so that an offer of accommodation can be made.

The type of information to be considered by the panel may include:

- Details of any long-term illness, health problem or disability that requires specific or specialist housing, care or support.
- Details of other care and support needs, for example because of vulnerability due to learning difficulties.
- Details of proposed, existing and previous packages of care provision provided by statutory or other bodies where known.
- Relevant and reasonable information with regard to previous history of anti-social behaviour that might impact on the safety of the community.
- Type of accommodation moving from and any additional available accommodation history.

It is also important that no individual housing association houses a disproportionate number of vulnerable or MAPPA cases and a system based on transparency and evidence needs to be established. MAPPA allocations will be made as a percentage of offers for each of the partners - based on the percentage of each organisation's housing stock in Monmouthshire. It is recognised that whilst all partners are happy to accommodate MAPPA cases, the location of the housing stock might not be suitable and therefore the offer will be withdrawn. There must be an evidence based justification as to why any property cannot be used for a vulnerable or MAPPA applicant. PPU and Probation must be contacted before bypassing a MAPPA case and reasons noted in journal. This needs to be considered by the panel and recorded where it is agreed a specific property cannot be used or an individual's risk or vulnerability means they will be bypassed for a property which their housing needs status would mean they are due to be offered

Appendix 5

The “Equality Initial Challenge”

Name: Service area: Housing & Communities Date completed: 19 th June 2015		Please give a brief description of what you are aiming to do. 1. Minor amendments to the Allocations Policy to reflect the new Housing Act 14 and the new Code of Guidance for the allocation of housing accommodation – April 2015	
Protected characteristic	Potential Negative impact Please give details	Potential Neutral impact Please give details	Potential Positive Impact Please give details
Age		X	
Disability		X	
Marriage + Civil Partnership		X	
Pregnancy and maternity		X	
Race		X	
Religion or Belief		X	
Sex (was Gender)		X	
Sexual Orientation		X	
Transgender		X	
Welsh Language		X	

Please give details about any potential negative Impacts .	How do you propose to MITIGATE these negative impacts
➤ None	➤ The establishment of the joint Housing Solutions Team with Torfaen County Borough Council is intended to create additional flexibility, resilience and capacity to deal with

	demand and meet the new statutory duty to prevent homelessness
➤	➤ The establishment of the new Private Sector Housing team will increase housing options in Monmouthshire. This includes the Shared Housing & Lodging scheme which is being expanded
➤	➤ The Council will continue identifying new ways to creatively prevent homelessness
➤	➤ Procedural changes have been agreed with Monmouthshire Housing's Homesearch Team in relation to S62 of Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Signed Ian Bakewell **Designation:** Housing & Communities Manager **Dated** 19th June 2015

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM

What are you impact assessing	Service area
1. Minor amendments to the allocation policy	Housing & Community Services
Policy author / service lead	Name of assessor and date
Ian Bakewell	Ian Bakewell – 19 th June 2015

1. What are you proposing to do?

- To make minor amendments to the allocation policy to reflect the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Welsh Government Code of Guidance for the Allocation of Accommodation & Homelessness, April 2015. The amendments will:
 - Provide additional clarity to the test of unacceptable behaviour with regards to exclusions to the housing register
 - Reflect displaced Agricultural Workers under the Rent (Agricultural) Act 1976
 - Reflect the new homeless prevention duty in the banding
 - Update the eligibility criteria effectively bringing in line with England
 - To encourage non-bidding applicants assisted by the Housing Solutions Team to bid
 - Update the legal framework which provides context for the policy
 - Formalise procedures for by-passing applicants in the exceptional circumstance of an offer being inappropriate eg for public protection reasons

2. Are your proposals going to affect any people or groups of people with protected characteristics in a **negative** way? If **YES** please tick appropriate boxes below.

Age		Race	
Disability		Religion or Belief	
Gender reassignment		Sex	
Marriage or civil partnership		Sexual Orientation	
Pregnancy and maternity		Welsh Language	

3. Please give details of the negative impact

The decision, which is reviewing the current practice, will have no negative impact on the basis of current practice

4. Did you take any actions to mitigate your proposal? Please give details below including any consultation or engagement.

None undertaken due to no negative impact

5. Please list the data that has been used to develop this proposal? eg Household survey data, Welsh Govt data, ONS data, MCC service user data, Staff personnel data etc..

Housing Register statistics

Signed Ian Bakewell

Designation Housing & Communities Manager

Dated 19th June 2015

The “Sustainability Challenge”

Name of the Officer completing “the Sustainability challenge” Ian Bakewell		Please give a brief description of the aims proposed policy or service reconfiguration Minor amendments to the Allocations Policy to reflect the new Housing (Wales) Act 14 and the new Code of Guidance for the allocation of housing accommodation – April 2015	
Name of the Division or service area Housing & Communities		Date “Challenge” form completed 19 th June 2015	
Aspect of sustainability affected	Negative impact Please give details	Neutral impact Please give details	Positive Impact Please give details
PEOPLE			
Ensure that more people have access to healthy food		X	
Improve housing quality and provision		X	
Reduce ill health and improve healthcare provision		X	
Promote independence		X	
Encourage community participation/action and voluntary work		X	
Targets socially excluded		X	
Help reduce crime and fear		X	

of crime			
Improve access to education and training		X	
Have a positive impact on people and places in other countries		X	
PLANET		X	
Reduce, reuse and recycle waste and water		X	
Reduce carbon dioxide emissions		X	
Prevent or reduce pollution of the air, land and water		X	
Protect or enhance wildlife habitats (e.g. trees, hedgerows, open spaces)		X	
Protect or enhance visual appearance of environment		X	
PROFIT			
Protect local shops and services		X	
Link local production with local consumption		X	
Improve environmental awareness of local businesses		X	
Increase employment for local people		X	
Preserve and enhance local		X	

identity and culture			
Consider ethical purchasing issues, such as Fairtrade, sustainable timber (FSC logo) etc		x	
Increase and improve access to leisure, recreation or cultural facilities		x	

What are the potential negative Impacts	Ideas as to how we can look to MITIGATE the negative impacts (include any reasonable adjustments)
➤ None	➤
➤	➤
➤	➤
➤	➤

The next steps

- If you have assessed the proposal/s as having a **positive impact please give full details** below

N/A

- If you have assessed the proposal/s as having a **Negative Impact** could you please provide us with details of what you propose to mitigate the negative impact:

N/A

Signed Ian Bakewell

Dated 19th June 2015

Universal Credit

Operational preparations in Monmouthshire

Richard Davies
Head of Shared Benefits Service

What is Universal Credit (UC)?

- UC is a new benefit for people who are looking for work or on a low income.
- It will replace 6 main working age benefits (including child tax credit, Income Support, income-based Jobseekers Allowance Employment and Support allowance (income –based and Housing Benefit)
- It is administered by the Jobcentre Plus and is being introduced in phases .
- UC aims to simplify the benefit system and to make work pay increasing work incentives for those who are unemployed or working part-time.
- Under UC it will no longer be necessary to make a number of claims for different benefits instead only one claim will need to be made and one payment issued on a monthly basis.

The rollout of UC across the UK

- It is now available to single people, couples and families in some areas of the country mainly in the North West of England and is being rolled out to single claimants nationally between February 2015 – April 2016 in tranches.
- It was introduced for single jobseekers from 13 April 2015 in Torfaen, also part of the shared Benefits service delivered on behalf of the Council.
- **Monmouthshire is included in the 3rd tranche and UC will be introduced for single claimants from 21 September 2015.**
- Those in receipt of the legacy benefits will move onto to UC from January 2018, this process should be complete by 2019.

UC in Monmouthshire

-who does it apply to?

- **UC will only apply to single jobseekers** i.e. new claimants claiming Jobseekers Allowance (income-based) who meet the certain conditions on their date of claim.
- This means from 21 September 2015 single jobseekers in Monmouthshire will have their housing costs met through UC not HB.
- **Claimants still have to make claim direct to the Council to claim a Council Tax Reduction.**
- We estimate that **15** claimants per month will be affected by the introduction of UC in Monmouthshire.

UC - Who will not be affected?

- It will not apply to all single jobseekers, some will continue to claim HB including those who
 - are homeless or live in temporary or supported accommodation
 - are not fit for work
 - have caring responsibilities
 - have more than £6,000 in savings
 - have a mortgage or own their own home
- Once a person is in receipt of UC they will remain on that benefit e.g. if they gain a partner they will need to claim UC as a couple or if they start work and are on a low wage
- **The vast majority of existing claimants in Monmouthshire will not be affected by the change, for example, 53 per cent of our Housing Benefit claimants are pensioners outside of the scope of this arrangement.**

Universal Credit –The claim process

- Most claims will be made online.
- Support will be provided by the Council for those who are unable to claim online e.g. a Benefits officer will assist them in making a claim.
- After the claim is made the customer is required to attend an interview at the local jobcentre Plus where details of their claim will be verified . They will also be required to agree their claimant commitment. (This sets out the responsibilities the claimant has accepted in return for receiving UC)
- The JCP officer will assess whether the claimant requires Budgeting and/or digital support will also available to help claimants adapt to the key changes UC brings

Budgeting and digital support

- Job Centre Plus will contact the Shared Benefit Service to advise if budgeting support is required
- The Shared Benefit Service will then arrange for the support to be provided.
- It has been agreed locally that Torfaen's Communities First Team will provide the budgeting support in Monmouthshire. If a customer is engaged by their registered social landlord support will be provided by them.
- Feedback will be provided via the benefits team re the support provided /progress etc.

Payments of UC

- If the claim is successful the claimant will usually get the first payment **five weeks** after their claim is made thereafter it will be paid on a monthly basis into the claimant's bank/building society account etc.
- UC payments will include all eligible housing costs – which means that claimants will be responsible for paying their rent themselves.
- Alternative payment arrangements (APA's) are available in limited circumstances to assist claimants to adapt to the changes UC brings .These include
 - Having the housing costs element paid direct to the landlord.
 - Being paid twice monthly instead of monthly
 - Splitting the payment between the claimant and their partner.
- APA's will be reviewed by the DWP and are intended as short-term measure.
- Claimants can also request an emergency advance e.g. if they have to pay a bill urgently before their UC payment is due.

RSL preparations for UC

- The DWP tested the impact of the implementation of UC on housing organisations in pilot schemes across the UK including at Torfaen. This helped to develop a safeguard policy so that payments can be switched to the landlord to protect a tenancy.
- RSLs are concerned about the potential impact on rent arrears due to non-payment as other household expenses compete for priority
- They are working to put in place appropriate arrangements to support tenants, to ensure they can manage their money and obtain the assistance required

RSL preparations for UC – working with the Benefits team

- Monmouthshire Housing Association – has identified a group of existing working age tenants across the county to be paid Housing Benefit directly. They were profiled and interviewed as part of the sign up to the project. New tenants are also being included. Over 90 tenants are now receiving their Housing Benefit via payment arrangements closely aligned to Universal Credit.

RSL preparations for UC – working with the Benefits team

- Charter – selected tenants are in receipt of partial Housing Benefit. Two tranches of tenants selected to date have been included in the project. Over 70 tenants are now part of the direct payment scheme including new tenants. A further 50 profiled tenants are set to be included by mid-September.

Lessons learnt from Torfaen

- Universal Credit trial started – 15/4/15
- Claims notified to the Council – 32, a further 6 have not been notified but we became aware of them, 11 have received UC
- 21 have made Council Tax Reduction claims
- 3 have been referred for personal budgetary support as it is considered they may have difficulty managing their finances
- The numbers are small but administrative arrangements have generally worked to plan although this is the most straightforward claim type
- There are communication issues, particularly with RSLs, a new direct arrangement has been put in place by DWP
- Not all customers are being invited to claim help with their Council Tax from the Council