

Public Document Pack

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Pennaeth Gwasanaethau Cyfreithiol a Democraataidd



To: Cllr Ron Hampson (Chairman)

CS/NG

Councillors: Amanda Bragg, David Cox,
Peter Curtis, Ron Davies, Glenys Diskin,
Rosetta Dolphin, Jim Falshaw, Alison Halford,
George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd,
Mike Reece, Gareth Roberts and Sharon Williams

21 June 2012

Sharon Thomas 01352 702324
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Dear Sir / Madam

A meeting of the **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held in the **DELYN COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNTY HALL, MOLD CH7 6NA** on **WEDNESDAY, 27TH JUNE, 2012** at **10.00 AM** to consider the following items.

Yours faithfully

Democracy & Governance Manager

AGENDA

- 1 **APOLOGIES**
- 2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

- 3 **MINUTES** (Pages 1 - 6)

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 30 May 2012 (copy enclosed).

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The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English
Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawau gohebiaeth yn y Cymraeg neu'r Saesneg

4 **WELSH GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER (HOMES FOR WALES - BETTER LIVES AND COMMUNITIES)**

To receive a presentation on the Welsh Government White Paper (copies sent out under separate cover).

5 **DELIVERING PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL** (Pages 7 - 38)

Report of Director of Community Services

6 **QUARTER 4 AND YEAR END SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORTS**
(Pages 39 - 88)

Report of Environment & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator

7 **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME** (Pages 89 - 96)

Report of Environment & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **30 MAY 2012**

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 30 May 2012

PRESENT: Councillor R.G. Hampson (Chairman)

Councillors: A.M. Bragg, D.L. Cox, P.J. Curtis, G. Diskin, R. Dolphin, J.E. Falshaw, A.M. Halford, R. Hughes, R.B. Lloyd, M.A. Reece, H.G. Roberts and S.P. Williams

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: G.H. Bateman for R. Hughes and S. Jones for R. Davies

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: J.B. Attridge, M. Bateman, P.G. Heesom, H.D. Hutchinson and C.M. Jones

CONTRIBUTORS: Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Cabinet Member for Housing, Director of Community Services and Head of Housing

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

1. CHANGE TO AGENDA

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Facilitator explained that the Quarter 4 Performance report had been included on the agenda in error and would be deferred to the meeting scheduled for 27 June 2012, with the report to be re-issued with the agenda for that meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations were sought for a Vice-Chair for the Committee. Nominations for Councillors R. Hughes and G. Hardcastle were both seconded and on being put to the vote, the proposal for Councillor G. Hardcastle to be Vice-Chair was carried.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor G. Hardcastle be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2012 had been circulated with the agenda.

Matters Arising

Update on the Repair and Maintenance Service - Councillor G.H. Bateman asked if £200,000 had been transferred from the HRA budget to address the backlog of repairs and the Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed this was the case.

Development of the Community Based Warden Support Service - Councillor P.J. Curtis asked if a meeting of the sub-committee would be convened to report on progress with the service and to receive feedback on the changes made. The Cabinet Member for Housing agreed that this would be arranged.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES' TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Environment & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report to inform the Committee of its Terms of Reference, set in the context of Terms of Reference of all of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees. She explained that the Terms of Reference would assist the Committee in determining future items for the Forward Work Programme and took the opportunity to highlight the availability of Overview & Scrutiny training sessions for Members.

Whilst providing an overview of Housing services, the Director of Community Services commented on improved performance during the past two years and suggested that the Committee may wish to consider a consultation paper produced by the Welsh Government (WG) on homes for Wales. He went on to provide information on the five main services within the Housing section:

- Housing Asset Management
- Neighbourhood Housing Management
- Community Support Services
- Housing Renewal
- Housing Strategy

The Head of Housing detailed performance improvements following changes implemented to processes and staffing structures, including work undertaken to reduce the number of empty properties and rent arrears. She also spoke about challenges in the service such as taking steps to address the 25% increase in homelessness presentations which would be further affected by welfare reforms.

The Director listed the priorities for the year ahead:

- (i) increasing the supply of affordable housing by delivering the objectives of the Housing Strategy by 2016;
- (ii) minimising homelessness by offering integrated services and ensuring that no person is placed in temporary accommodation for more than 12 months, by 2016;

- (iii) ensuring that the Housing Landlords service achieves performance in the top quartile by 2016;
- (iv) ensuring that quality standards are raised in the private sector by delivery of the revised private sector improvement policy; and
- (v) completion of the Flint Masterplan and delivery of new homes and services in Flintshire and wider areas.

In response to questions raised by Councillor A.M. Halford, the Director confirmed that the Empty Homes Working Group had been disbanded following agreement of the Members involved and he suggested that the WG paper be circulated to Members with a possible workshop arranged. Following a further query on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), the Leader referred to Council Priority No. 8 carried over from the former Council administration together with other Cabinet priorities. He stressed the importance of understanding subsidy changes and early discussions with officers and WG representatives on how to achieve the WHQS with involvement from Overview & Scrutiny Members.

Due to concerns about increasing pressure on services, Councillor S. Jones asked about monitoring of the Welfare Rights and Homelessness service to ensure that the workload was manageable. On Anti-Social Behaviour, she spoke of the need to involve outside bodies on issues beyond the jurisdiction of the Council. The Director gave assurance that the Welfare Rights service would continue to be monitored and that wider partners would be involved in anti-social behaviour issues.

The Cabinet Member for Housing remarked on a meeting on anti-social behaviour in 2011 in which different groups had signed up to a Compact and said that all parties would need to be accountable.

Councillor R. Dolphin referred to legislation recently introduced where the Police would investigate incidents of anti-social behaviour if at least five complaints had been received and suggested that the Council could adopt a similar approach. Councillor P.J Curtis commented on the need for all complaints to be acted upon. The Head of Housing reassured Members that regardless of the number of complaints, all incidents of anti-social behaviour were investigated and that Members' comments would be taken into consideration as part of improvements to the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

Councillor Dolphin also suggested that a list of meanings for abbreviations used in reports would be useful and the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator agreed to provide this to all Members. In response to a further query, the Director said that the need to encourage more private sector property rentals would be addressed in the new policy.

In response to comments from Councillor H.G. Roberts on empty homes, the Head of Housing explained that a recent audit had identified around 500 empty properties in Flintshire. She referred to £200,000 capital funding from WG to help improve homes and the potential for this amount to double, however some properties would require significant investment. Owner contributions could be made via the Council's loan scheme, allowing the Council to have nomination rights. The

aforementioned WG White Paper included a proposal to allow Councils to increase the amount of Council Tax on properties which remained empty over the longer term.

Due to Members' comments on the WG White Paper, the Director suggested that this could be included in the Committee's Forward Work Programme at an early stage, to be discussed under the last item of the agenda. Members also requested that Anti-Social Behaviour and Empty Properties be included on the Programme.

On Anti-Social Behaviour, Councillor R. Hughes asked if nuisance noise monitoring equipment was still in use and the Head of Housing confirmed this.

The Chairman commented that the backlog of repairs had been a concern of the Committee and asked whether the intention for in-house teams to carry out work on disabled adaptations would affect this. The Head of Housing said that additional posts had been created for the Disabled Adaptations Team and therefore did not affect those working on the backlog of repairs which was expected to have ceased by August 2012.

Councillor Curtis stressed the importance of allocating a completion deadline to repair requests and for tradesmen to undertake repairs at the allotted time. In response to queries on the involvement of Members, the Head of Housing explained that local Members could not be informed of progress on repairs in their wards as a matter of course, as around 40,000 repairs were undertaken each year, however Members who had been specifically involved with a repair issue would receive feedback. Members who were aware of cases where this was not happening were encouraged to pursue with Housing officers.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

6. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator introduced the report which gave Members the opportunity to consider and update the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

A suggestion was made by the Facilitator that the next meeting of the Committee on 27 June 2012 receive reports on the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy, the Quarterly Performance Report and the Welsh Government (WG) White Paper on homes for Wales. The Cabinet Member for Housing pointed out that the latter document was available on the WG website and the Facilitator offered to provide hard copies to Members on request.

The Facilitator also proposed that the meeting arranged for 25 July 2012 be changed to a workshop open to all Members to consider the Common Housing Register and for a workshop to be arranged to discuss the Committee's Forward Work Programme for the coming year which could be informed by the Cabinet's Priorities.

Councillor A.M. Halford referred to previous discussion by the Committee on the collection of water rates from Council tenants and asked that this be included for consideration as a priority, together with loans/mortgages for home owners and the tracker system. Councillor R. Hughes asked that garage surveys also be included.

Following a query by Councillor R. Dolphin on the proposed changes to grass cutting collections, the Head of Housing confirmed that this service would be tendered. Councillor J.E. Falshaw asked if mulching had been discussed and the Head of Housing agreed that this would be taken into consideration.

The Facilitator said that all items listed as 'to be scheduled' in the inherited Programme, together with any new items would be considered by Members at the Forward Work Programme workshop.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Forward Work Programme be agreed on the basis outlined above.

7. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and ended at 11.00am.

8. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

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Chairman

SUMMARY OF DECLARATIONS MADE BY MEMBERS
IN ACCORDANCE WITH FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S
CODE OF CONDUCT

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	DATE: 30 MAY 2012
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MEMBER	ITEM	MIN. NO. REFERS
NO DECLARATIONS WERE MADE		

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 27 JUNE 2012

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: DELIVERING PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING
RENEWAL

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To seek the support of Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee for a revised Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy, including the proposal to introduce equity loans and also repayment loans at an interest rate of 4% for the first year.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The current Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy was implemented on 1st April 2010 and a copy has been provided for comparison. The format of the new Policy has been substantially altered to make it easier to read and understand and also to minimise duplication which existed within the previous Policy.

2.02 The primary purpose of this Policy was to ensure that residents could continue to be supported to repair, improve and adapt their homes, despite the likely budget cuts (particularly Capital Budgets) following Central Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and the resultant reduction in funding to Welsh Government.

2.03 The Policy moved the Council from providing traditional housing grants, to a system of interest free loans for all assistance, with the exception of Disabled Facilities Grant which remain mandatory.

2.04 During the last financial year (2011/12) the Council delivered 50 Home Repair and Renovation Loans, to a value of £421,325. This resource can eventually be recycled back in to the Housing Capital Programme to provide further support to homeowners. This compares with 45 Home Repair and Renovation Grants to a value of £352,086 in the financial year 2009/10 (the final year of the previous grant system).

2.05 This shows that the demand for support has been sustained, despite moving away from an effectively free service. Members have been widely consulted over the last 12 months and have agreed to a proposal to move towards equity and interest bearing repayment loans.

- 2.06 Approval was given to tender for a suitably qualified organisation to manage a portfolio of interest bearing and equity loans. Flintshire approached the other Council's in North Wales and Denbighshire, along with Gwynedd decided to join the project.
- 2.07 The successful organisation who won the tender was Street UK LTD. They have extensive experience of providing loan services to other local authorities and the 3 Council's involved are currently working with them to set up the processes and procedures required for an effective and legally compliant service.
- 2.08 Best practice dictates that when equity and interest bearing loans are to be offered, applicants should have access to independent financial advice. In order to achieve this for our clients, the Council has commissioned a list of local Independent Financial Advisors (IFA's), who can advise on the Council's own products and the whole of the financial market. This latter point is important, as it might act to unlock more private finance for individuals, thereby lessening the call on the Council's Housing Capital Programme.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 The Council cannot offer any new loan products unless they are included within its own Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy. It is therefore timely to review the rest of the Policy and its operation given the experience of the last 2 years; the evidence provided by the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey and the forthcoming changes proposed as a result of the Housing White Paper.
- 3.02 In order to ensure that any new Policy had Member input from an early stage, a Member Task and Finish Group was formed and a series of meetings held on various theme areas, including amongst others; empty homes, disabled adaptations and options to support a high quality private rented sector.
- 3.03 The Task and Finish Group consisted of Councillor Marion Bateman, Councillor Haydn Bateman, Councillor Ron Hampson, Councillor Gareth Roberts and Councillor Patrick Heesom. The Group provided valuable contributions to the formation of this Policy.
- 3.04 The new Policy (attached as appendix 1) is centred around the following four themes: -
- Client focused – targeting vulnerable, older and disabled people living in the poorest housing
 - Theme focused – tackling issues such as empty homes and energy efficiency
 - Tenure focused – improving and encouraging the private rented sector
 - Area based – supporting neighbourhood initiatives including the

Council's Renewal Area

- 3.05 A review of the existing Policy identified that there are gaps in provision which exist; below is a summary of the main changes.
- 3.06 Increasingly an issue for the Service is Disabled Facilities Grant applicants, who cannot meet their means tested contribution. The national means test only takes account of income and savings; an applicants' expenditure is not considered. Increasingly applicants are approaching with outgoings such as repaying household debts, or being the subject of debt management orders, which prevents them from accessing their Grant because they cannot meet their contribution. It is envisaged that this situation will worsen in light of the welfare reform changes and the reduction or removal of benefits such as Disability Living Allowance. The new Policy includes loan support for DFG contributions, where necessary.

3.07 Energy Efficiency Support

- 3.08 In addition the Council has been very proactive in its approach to energy efficiency, in both Private and Council Housing. Successful bids have been achieved through Welsh Government's ARBED Scheme. The Council has also successfully levered in private money through the Community Energy Savings Programme (CESP), which comes to and end on 31st December 2012. Flintshire has 5 of the 10 active CESP areas across the whole of Wales and has the potential to lever in over £3M of utility company funding through the agreement reached with NPower. Flintshire's success in attracting private sector housing involvement rests with its decision to provide top up funding, in the form of an interest free loan, to CESP applicants where the grant falls short of the cost of the work. The new Policy proposes to retain the top up loan, with a new fuel poverty calculation in the event of a need to prioritise the applicants for support.

3.09 Empty Homes Support

- 3.10 The Housing White Paper talks extensively about the need to reduce the number of long term vacant homes on all areas. Welsh Government has committed £10M to an empty homes recyclable loan fund. The fund will provide interest free loans to property owners who wish to renovate an empty property for the purpose of rent or sale. The maximum loan will be £25K per unit of accommodation up to a maximum of £175K and must be repaid within 3 years.
- 3.11 These loans are to be administered on a regional basis and Flintshire has been approached to be the regional lead for the 6 North Wales Council's. The role of the lead would be to hold the capital allocation for North Wales and distribute it to the other 5 Council's when required. The purpose of delivering the loan fund on a regional basis is to ensure that if some Council's are not progressing their empty

property schemes, other Council's in the region who are oversubscribed can apply for the money. Acting as the lead for the region places Flintshire in a good position to identify any under utilised resources, should they exist and apply for their use. This Scheme will be included within the new Policy, along with the offer of repayment loans, to top up the existing loans that Flintshire offers under its existing Policy.

3.12 Addressing Housing Supply

3.13 A further theme running strongly through the Housing White Paper is the increasing contribution that privately rented property is making to households across Wales. The restriction in mortgage finance, the reduction in new build registered social landlord properties and the increase in single person households mean that there is greater competition than ever for privately rented property. Unfortunately the condition of the property in Flintshire's private rented sector, as is commonly the case, is far poorer than the social rented or owner occupied sectors. The stock condition survey identified that over 50% of privately rented properties do not meet the Decent Homes Standard in Flintshire, as compared to approx 30% in the owner occupied sector. The new Policy includes extending interest bearing repayment loans to the sector, to tackle some of the poorest conditions.

3.14 Equity and Interest Bearing Loans

3.15 Prior Approval has been given to invest up to £300K this financial year in equity and interest bearing loans. This resource will be provided in tranches of £100K as the fund depletes and more resources are required, taking account of any repayments made back to the fund.

3.16 The new Policy will ensure that there is earlier recycling of resources through a hierarchy of approach to support. This hierarchy ensures that the first appropriate loan is offered from the following: -

- Repayment Loan (suitable for some applicants with an income, but an insufficient credit rating to obtain support from a mainstream lender)
- Property Appreciation Loan (suitable for those with sufficient free equity within the property once the loan has been made (at least 20%), but no regular income to sustain repayments)
- Flintshire Interest Free Loan (suitable for those who cannot meet the 20% free equity rule), as over time the value of the property should rise and the value of the loan, in inflationary terms, should fall. This loan will also be offered where less than £3K is to be borrowed, as any lesser amount would be disproportionate to the set up cost.

3.17 Discussions have been held with Street UK Ltd and they have recommended that interest rates for the repayment loans be set at 4%. This is approximately half the interest rate charged on personal

loans for people with good credit scores and similarly a quarter of the rate charged by credit cards for a similar client group. Given our vulnerable client group, much higher interest rates exist on the market, as they are deemed to be a higher risk. Therefore, the proposed rate will be highly competitive and should not deter take up. Interest rates will be reviewed annually, in line with the Bank of England base rate.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee support the revised Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy, including the proposal to introduce equity loans and repayment loans at an interest rate of 4% for the first year.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 Approval has previously been given for up to £300K of the Housing Capital Programme 2012/13 to provide to Street UK LTD for the provision of equity and interest bearing loans as per the Council's Housing Renewal and Improvement Policy.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 The revised Policy will allow the Council to support vulnerable residents improve, repair and adapt their homes.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01 The energy efficiency measures installed as a result of the supported provided by this Policy will reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.01 The Policy has been written in consideration of the Equalities Act and no potential applicant is treated less favourably than any other.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.01 There are no staffing implications as a result of the new Policy

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

- 10.01 Members and Officer's require consultation prior to presentation of this Policy

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

- 11.01 Members have been consulted at previous Housing Overview &

Scrutiny Committees.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 One – Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy 2012-2015

A copy of the Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy 2010 is available in the Members Library.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

**Contact Officer: Mr Gavin Griffith
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Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy 2012 - 2015

Visit: www.flintshire.gov.uk

Directorate of Community Services
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Introduction

The Housing Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to consider housing conditions in their area and to take action as appropriate. It is the Government's view that it is primarily the responsibility of homeowners to maintain their own property. However the Government is committed to improving housing quality across all tenures and fully accepts that some owners, particularly the elderly and most vulnerable, do not have the necessary resources to keep their homes in good repair.

Local authorities have an important role to play by providing help in these cases. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 provides the flexibility for Council's to provide assistance in the a way which best suits local circumstances.

This Council wants to ensure that the quality of residential accommodation in the County is as high as possible. This Policy sets out the type of financial help available to homeowners, private sector tenants and landlords to improve property condition, or to provide adaptations for people with disabilities. It includes information on eligibility criteria, procedures and conditions of assistance.

Why do we need this Policy?

The national and local context

The link between health and housing conditions is well established. Research undertaken by Shelter in 2006 found that poor housing conditions increase the risk of severe ill health or disability by up to 25 per cent during childhood and early adulthood. People with asthma are twice as likely to be living in damp homes and 1 in 12 children in Britain are more likely to develop such diseases such as bronchitis, TB or asthma because of poor housing conditions.

Excess cold: The Office for National Statistics reports that nationally there were 2,500 excess winter deaths in 2008/09 and 1,700 in 2009/10. In Flintshire nearly 82% of winter deaths are in the over 75 age group. The key diseases that cause an excess of death in the winter period are cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Many people suffering ill health live in cold damp homes. Making homes affordably warm can improve indoor air temperatures and reduce the incidence of mould growth, so will assist in health improvement.

Accidents in the home: The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents report that every year in the UK, more than 5000 people die in accidents in the home and 2.7 million report to accident and emergency departments seeking treatment. Falls account for 71 per cent of all fatal accidents to those aged 65 and over.

The Housing Act 2004 introduced the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System to address these issues. It identifies and evaluates the risks to health and safety in residential accommodation. Recommendations can then be made to reduce the risks identified. The most common hazards are excess cold, damp and mould growth, falls, entry by intruders and fire.

Dealing with hazards in the home due to poor housing conditions reduces the burden on the National Health Service and other public services.

Demographic Issues:

- Currently 31 per cent of households are headed by someone over the age of 65; by 2026 this is estimated to increase by 48 per cent – an additional 8000 households across Flintshire.
- By 2036 the number of people over the age of 75 living in Flintshire is profiled to be in the region of 8,200, an increase of 184 per cent.
- By 2041, if Flintshire follows the national trend the numbers of older disabled people will have doubled.
- The national trend also suggests that the rural areas will see a noticeably greater increase in the numbers of older people.

Social and economic wellbeing:

- By 2026, 75 per cent of older households will be owner occupiers.
- Whilst many older people have considerable equity in their homes, many also live in the worst housing conditions and have low incomes.
- Recent EU studies show 30 per cent of pensioners are living well below the national average income.

Health and care needs:

- Current trends suggest that living longer means living longer with ill health.
- 13% of the county's population report living with a long term illness or disability, which equates to 21,600 residents.
- 4,150 residents are likely to require a minor or major property adaptation or a move to a more suitable property at this time.
- By 2021, it is estimated that more than 2000 people will be living with dementia in Flintshire.
- Care home costs in Wales average £20,000 per person per annum.

How do we know this Policy is aimed at helping those most in need?

The evidence base and strategic approach for this Policy is sourced from the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey completed in 2010. Flintshire County Council has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of housing conditions across the whole area. This has been achieved by the completion of the Survey, which was conducted in accordance with national guidelines. Full property inspections, including internal and external assessments and a questionnaire survey of households to explore views and attitudes to their housing and local neighbourhood took place.

The findings of the report cover a random sample of 1000 privately owned dwellings across Flintshire. Headline findings are based upon the exploration of information from the sample to represent the overall data of private sector housing in the County.

Some of the key findings from the Report include:

- A total housing stock of 53,860 dwellings containing 52,510 households.
- 68% of the stock is of post 1945 construction
- 76% of homes are in owner occupation
- 9% of homes are privately rented
- 31% of households are headed by a person over the age of 65
- 31% of households are in receipt of a means tested benefit and are economically vulnerable
- 32% of all dwellings are non decent (16,104 dwellings)
- 8.3% of all dwellings exhibit the single failure of disrepair under the Decent Homes Standard, against a national average of 6.5%.
- 38% of vulnerable households (5,980) live in non decent homes.
- The cost to address non decent homes across the County is £120 million, averaging £6,940 per property
- 15% of households (8,200) are in fuel poverty.

The key statistics from the Report are those relating to vulnerable households living in non decent housing and the extent of fuel poverty. Highest levels of non decency were found in the Council's neighbourhood renewal area and areas within the top 20% of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. In terms of accommodation type, pre 1919 housing stock, converted flats and the private rented sector were shown to have the highest failure rates against the Decent Homes Standard.

Based on this evidence and through the implementation of this Policy, the Council intend to target funding to vulnerable households across the County.

How does this Policy fit in with the Council's strategic housing objectives?

This Policy is informed by and contributes to the delivery of a number of strategic and corporate priorities on a regional and national level. The relevant strategies and priorities are as follows:

National and regional housing strategies and priorities

The Welsh Government's national housing strategy '**Improving Lives and Communities**' was launched April 2010. The document sets out the actions for housing over the lifetime of the strategy, which are to: -

- Increase the number of affordable homes for purchase or rent, in the right location and specifically in rural areas.
- Increase the level of private sector investment in housing.
- Improve the quality and standard of all existing houses and rented accommodation, including their energy efficiency.

- Give people more choice by broadening the range of homes and tenancy arrangements to suit people's income and circumstances.
- Give tenants a clear voice in decisions that affect them.
- Make it easier for people to find suitable accommodation, particularly people from minority groups.
- Ensure services reflect the needs of those who use them not the needs of organisations that deliver them.
- Make best use of investment in housing and other regeneration activity to create more jobs and training opportunities, and to improve the look and feel of communities, and the services and facilities available to local people.

The Flintshire Local Housing Strategy 2012 – 2017 aligns closely with the above priorities to ensure that the County can meet the Housing Challenge as set out by Welsh Government.

Our Council priorities

The Council's Plan outlines this organisation's priorities and the specific goals to which we are committed. There are four goals which this Policy contributes to: -

- To meet housing need in the County and to work with partners to ensure a sufficient supply of quality and affordable homes and housing services in the social, mixed tenure and private sector housing markets
- To promote independent, healthy and fulfilled lives in the community with the highest quality personalised and supportive health and social care services
- To make our communities safe and safeguard the vulnerable, with children and older people being priority groups
- To protect and grow the local and regional economy, to be a prosperous County and to provide help and support to those vulnerable to poverty.

Private Sector Housing priorities

- To establish programmes of intervention for private sector housing in line with the findings of the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey and developing initiatives to target action to vulnerable households living in non-decent homes.
- To reduce the health effects of poor housing conditions through a combination of advice, financial assistance, and enforcement action where appropriate, ensuring that residents live in safe, warm and comfortable homes.
- Increasing the proportion of homes that meet the decent homes standard and working with all stakeholders and service providers to encourage this standard of provision in all sectors.
- Assisting vulnerable and lower income homeowners to achieve the decent homes standard through the provision of equity and low cost loans.
- Improving the energy efficiency of dwellings by assisting and promoting householders to take up a range of energy saving measures provided by a range of agencies.
- Assisting elderly and disabled residents to achieve independent living through the provision of disabled facilities grants.
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing by assisting the improvement and conversion of empty residential properties and obsolete commercial buildings to be brought back in to use as homes.
- Achieving a well maintained and managed private rented sector through the All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme by encouraging the professional development of landlords, through incentives, education, and advice.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Service is part of the Community Services Directorate.

Related strategies that contribute to achieving the priorities outlined above and to which this Policy contributes are: -

- **Empty Homes Strategy 2012/15** which aims to tackle the problems caused by long empty properties in the County, which currently stands at approximately 400 in the private sector.
- **Affordable Warmth Strategy (2009/12)** which aims to reduce fuel poverty, increase energy efficiency in the County and reduce the impact of excess cold on health.

How will we achieve our priorities?

The Council, through the Private Sector Housing Renewal Team and Housing Standards Team, has adopted a three pronged approach to achieve the key priorities: -

- The offer of advice and advocacy
- The provision of financial assistance, and
- The enforcement of housing standards

Advice and advocacy

The Private Sector Housing Renewal & Standards Team offer advice to homeowners and private tenants on all aspects of housing issues on a daily basis. Information is also available on our website www.flintshire.gov.uk We are also targeting promotional activity through leaflets and events in areas which fall within the 20% of the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) to raise awareness of the Service. Information and advice is also available from **Flintshire Care & Repair**, the local Home Improvement Agency.

For landlords we hold regular Landlord Forums and encourage membership of the All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme. We are also planning a series of Landlord training events.

Financial Assistance

We aim to provide financial assistance, where appropriate, to those who are unable to fund property improvements themselves.

In terms of assessing an inability to fund property improvements, eligible applicants for a loan under this Policy will be a household on one or more of the following income related or disability benefits: -

- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit (excluding single persons discount)
- Disabled Persons Tax Credit
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance
- Working Families Tax Credit (with a relevant income of less than £15,050)
- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Industrial Injuries Disablement Pension
- War Disablement Pension
- Child Tax Credit (with a relevant income of less than £15,050)
- Working Tax Credit
- Pension Credit

Many of these benefits will be affected by the Welfare Reform Changes. The above list will therefore be subject to change, to account for the introduction of the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment (the successor benefit to the Disability Living Allowance).

The emphasis is on enabling home owners to release the equity available in their homes on an 'equity share' basis, where the owner and the Council share the benefit from any increase in property values in the longer term. Since the Council is not primarily a lending institution, it does not wish to impose loan terms which would 'guarantee' its profit or investment and therefore potentially discourage applicants.

Following an approach to the Council by an eligible applicant, the following loan types will be considered in order, with the first loan that meets the applicants need being offered: -

- Repayment Loan
- Property Appreciation Loan
- Flintshire Interest Free Loan

Repayment Loan: The Council wishes to encourage the early recycling of resources, to enable it to meet demand and its strategic housing objectives. The Repayment Loan, which includes Capital and Interest, is particularly suited to owners of empty properties, or private sector landlords who will be in receipt of a revenue stream to meet the repayment. It may also suit working applicants, who for whatever reason are unable to finance the work through a commercial lending institution, but are able to sustain regular repayments.

Owner occupiers will have the set up cost of this loan (currently £500) funded as part of a professional services grant. In order to meet its strategic housing objectives, empty property owners and private sector landlords will be entitled to a professional services grant limited to 40% of the set up cost of the loan (currently £200). This category of property owner will be required to fund the remainder of the loan set up cost of £300 themselves (which can either be added to the loan; or paid upon acceptance of the loan application).

Property Appreciation Loan: This is particularly suited to older and vulnerable residents of the County, who may have significant equity in their properties, but do not have sufficient income to make regular loan repayments, or carry out improvements themselves. The loan set up cost (currently £500) will automatically be added to the loan, unless the homeowner elects to pay the cost upon acceptance of their loan application.

Flintshire Home Repair Loan: This interest free loan will only be made available in cases where the value of the loan does not warrant the cost of setting up a Property Appreciation Loan or Repayment Loan. Therefore, any application for financial assistance under £3000 will be offered on an interest free basis. In addition, this loan may also be offered where the amount of free equity available within the property does not meet the Council's own rules, which currently state that there must be 20% free equity available within the property once the Council's loan charge is added

Loan packages should be easy to understand, affordable and most importantly non-threatening to customers. Therefore, loans offered by the Council do not carry the threat of repossession. To encourage take up of loans, the Council will provide a grant for professional services, which includes any resource to prepare and tender the work.

Over time, as loans are repaid, resources supporting the Policy will be recycled by the Council, providing further loans for home repair, improvement and adaptation.

Grant assistance may be available to clients aged over 60 for low value urgent repairs through Flintshire Care & Repair's Property Repair Fund (funded by the Council). In addition, Grant assistance may also be available for households where the offer of a loan is inappropriate (e.g. there is no free equity within the property) and there is a serious risk to the health safety and welfare of the occupants.

Enforcement of Housing Standards

The Council will always attempt to improve housing conditions through the offer of advice, negotiation, agreement and the offer of incentives where appropriate. Enforcement action is a last resort and will only be taken if resolution through these other methods has not been possible. However, the Council will not hesitate to take action to protect the health, safety and welfare of occupants when appropriate. For further information please refer to the Public Protection Enforcement Policy, which can be viewed on the Council's website www.flintshire.gov.uk

Key to the overall approach is focusing intervention through: -

- Client focused – targeting vulnerable, older and disabled people living in the poorest housing
- Theme focused – tackling issues such as empty homes and energy efficiency
- Tenure focused – improving and encouraging the private rented sector
- Area based – supporting neighbourhood initiatives including the Council's Renewal Area

Resource implications

Generally, the Council will resource the Policy through a combination of the following: -

- Capital allocations received from the Council's Capital Programme. The provision of loans will enable the Council to recycle a proportion of the funding available for housing renewal.
- Specific Capital Grants made available by Welsh Government for Renewal Areas, Empty Homes and

Energy Efficiency/Carbon Emission Reduction

- Utility company resources through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) for Energy efficiency measures in homes

The award of any financial assistance by the Council in accordance with this Policy is discretionary (with the exception of Disabled Facilities Grants) and is subject to the availability of adequate financial resources.

Policy implementation

The previous Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy 2010 was considered and adopted by the Council's Executive Committee and approved for formal adoption on 1st April 2010. Prior to adoption, the general public and a wide range of stakeholders were consulted and their comments were taken into consideration in the formulation of the Policy.

The revisions to the Policy have been subject to further consultation and will be implemented from 1st July 2012. The Policy is available to download from the Council's website www.flintshire.gov.uk Copies of the document are held within the main Council Offices (which will include Flintshire Connects offices, as and when they open) and members of the public may request a paper copy.

Transitional arrangements

Formal applications for financial assistance received prior to 1st July 2012 will be processed in accordance with the previous Policy. Enquiries received prior to this date and all subsequent applications and enquires will be dealt with under the criteria and conditions detailed in this Policy document.

Review and revision

This Policy shall remain in force until 30th June 2015. During the lifetime of the document, further research will be undertaken to identify specific ways to improve private sector housing within the County. This Policy will be reviewed and revised accordingly.

The Council will advise members of the public of any amendments to this Policy, for example due to minor legislative changes, via press releases and our website as appropriate.

Equality and diversity

This Policy produces significant positive outcomes for vulnerable groups, particularly older people and those with disabilities. It reduces inequalities experienced by those groups in respect of health, housing and income. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken as part of this Policy's development. This will be updated during the course of any Policy revision.

We aim to continuously improve the quality of our services for our residents and are committed to giving an equal service to all members of the public regardless of age, disability, race, religion or belief, gender or sexual orientation. We have arrangements in place to help people who may have difficulty in accessing our services.

Appeals and applications for assistance falling outside the Policy

Although this Policy will be the primary consideration in determining applications for assistance, all such applications shall be dealt with on an individual basis, based on the merits of each particular case. The Council will not refuse to consider an application that falls outside this Policy.

It is recognised that there will always be exceptional circumstances. Exceptional cases will be considered by the Senior Manager and/or Head of Service (depending upon the scale of departure from this Policy).

Any person wishing to make an appeal against a decision made under this Policy, or make an application for assistance outside this Policy, should initially write to the Housing Renewal Manager, Private Sector Housing Renewal, County Offices, Chapel Street, Flint CH6 5BD.

Types of Assistance Available

Please refer to the glossary in Appendix C for definitions of the terms used in this section, for example, 'property appreciation loan', 'owners' interest' or 'category 1 hazard.'

Improvement and Repair Support

Repayment Loan (Renovations)

An interest bearing repayment loan at 4 % annual interest (payable monthly) to cover works which bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard (Appendix A) An example would be, works to remedy serious disrepair, provide modern kitchen and bathroom facilities, improve heating systems and insulation, and to remove any serious hazards which could affect the well-being of the occupier, such as dampness, dangerous stairs or electrical wiring.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has an owners interest • Property non-decent or has category 2 hazards significantly above the average age of the property • Applicants are in receipt of a means tested or disability benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be occupied by the applicant or a family member as their main residence until the loan is released (maximum loan term 7 years) • On completion of the works, property meets the Decent Homes Standard • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £15,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £3,000 • Repayable monthly to the Council's loan administrator

Property Appreciation Loan (Renovations)

A property appreciation loan to cover works which bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard (Appendix A) An example would be, works to remedy serious disrepair, provide modern kitchen and bathroom facilities, improve heating systems and insulation, and to remove any serious hazards which could affect the well-being of the occupier, such as dampness, dangerous stairs or electrical wiring.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has an owners interest • Applicant must have sufficient equity within their property to cover the loan amount and have 20% free equity remaining • Property non-decent or has category 2 hazards significantly above the average age of the property • Applicants are in receipt of a means tested or disability benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be occupied by the applicant or a family member as their main residence until the loan is released • On completion of the works, the property meets the Decent Homes Standard • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £30,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £3,000 • The Council's loan administrator holds a share of the property value, proportional to the cost of the works, as a percentage of the property's unimproved value • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer unless to a person who occupied the property at the time of application • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time

Flintshire Home Repair Loan

An interest free loan to cover works which bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard (Appendix A) An example would be, works to remedy serious disrepair, provide modern kitchen and bathroom facilities, improve heating systems and insulation, and to remove any serious hazards which could affect the well-being of the occupier, such as dampness, dangerous stairs or electrical wiring. This loan is not available to applicants eligible for a Repayment Loan or a Property Appreciation Loan.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has an owners interest • Applicant must have sufficient equity within their property to cover the loan amount • Property non-decent or has category 2 hazards significantly above the average age of the property • Applicants are in receipt of a means tested or disability benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be occupied by the applicant or a family member as their main residence until the loan is released • On completion of the works, the property meets the Decent Homes Standard • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £15,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £500 • The Council holds a share of the property value, to the cost of the works • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer unless to a person who occupied the property at the time of application • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time

Group Repair Grant

A scheme initiated by the Council who organise works to repair/improve the external fabric of a group of properties, so they are in reasonable repair and structurally stable. An example of works might include replacement roofs, windows, doors, pointing, cladding or underpinning.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant is invited to apply by the Council • Applicant has an owners interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proportion of the grant must be repaid if the property is sold or transferred within 5 years. Repayment will be reduced by 20% for each full year elapsed since the completion date • The applicant must contribute 25% to the cost of the works, unless they elect to undergo a means test • Landlords cannot submit to the means test and must contribute 25%. Landlords participating in a Group Repair Scheme will be encouraged to join the All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme and accept nominations from Flintshire County Council. • On completion of the works, the property meets the Decent Homes Standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proportion of the grant is repaid on sale or transfer of the property within 5 years

Flintshire Home Improvement Loan

An interest free home improvement loan designed to help properties reach the Decent Homes Standard. This assistance will only be made available in conjunction with a Flintshire Group Repair Scheme.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has an owners interest • Applicant must have sufficient equity within their property to cover the loan amount • Property non-decent or has category 2 hazards significantly above the average age of the property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be occupied by the applicant or a family member as their main residence until the loan is released • On completion of the works, the property meets the Decent Homes Standard • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £5,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £500 • The Council holds a share of the property value, to the cost of the works • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer unless to a person who occupied the property at the time of application • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time

Energy Efficiency Support

Energy Efficiency Top Up Loan

The Government places an obligation on energy suppliers and electricity generators to meet a CO2 reduction target by providing energy efficiency measures to households. The purpose of the Energy Efficiency Top Up Loan is to bridge the gap between the contribution made by electricity generators and suppliers and the cost of the eligible works, minus any owner contribution.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has an owners interest • Applicant must have sufficient equity within their property to cover the loan amount 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be occupied by the applicant or a family member as their main residence until the loan is released • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £15,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £500 • The Council holds a share of the property value, to the cost of the works • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer unless to a person who occupied the property at the time of application • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time

N:B The Council is exploring the possibility of introducing a means test for this top up loan through the introduction of a fuel poverty calculation for all applicants. This may be introduced at a later date, subject to the resources available as a means of prioritisation.

Empty Property Support

Houses into Homes (Empty Property Loan)

There are approximately 400 long term empty properties in the County. This loan is to help owners bring empty properties back in to use. This is in the form of an interest free loan to cover works which bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard (Appendix A) An example would be, works to remedy serious disrepair, provide modern kitchen and bathroom facilities, improve heating systems and insulation, and to remove any serious hazards which could affect the well-being of the occupier, such as dampness, dangerous stairs or electrical wiring.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has an owners interest • Applicant must have sufficient equity within their property to cover the loan amount • Applicants property must be long term vacant (over 6 months). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be tenanted until the loan is released or sold • Property will be encouraged to become a member of the All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme • On completion of the works, the property must be habitable and of a lettable standard (no category 1 hazards) • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £25,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £500 • The Council holds a share of the property value, to the cost of the works • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer (maximum loan term is 2 years for sale and 3 years for rent) • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time

Empty Property Loan

There are approximately 400 long term empty properties in the County. This loan is to help owners bring empty properties back in to use. This is in the form of an interest free loan to cover works which bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard (Appendix A) An example would be, works to remedy serious disrepair, provide modern kitchen and bathroom facilities, improve heating systems and insulation, and to remove any serious hazards which could affect the well-being of the occupier, such as dampness, dangerous stairs or electrical wiring.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has an owners interest • Applicant must have sufficient equity within their property to cover the loan amount • Property non-decent or has category 2 hazards significantly above the average age of the property • Applicants property must be long term vacant (over 6 months) and the Council satisfied that a housing need exists in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be tenanted until the loan is released • Property owner must agree to the property being managed by a social lettings agency • Property owner must be a member of the All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme • On completion of the works, the property meets the Decent Homes Standard • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £10,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £500 • The Council holds a share of the property value, to the cost of the works • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer unless to a person who occupied the property at the time of application • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time

N:B Applications will also be considered from first time buyers who wish to reside at the property themselves and who are also registered on the Council's Affordable Home Ownership Register. These applicants are not subject to the conditions relating to the management of the property by a social lettings agency and the requirement to become an accredited landlord.

(This loan is suspended until such time as the additional monies provided through the Welsh Government House into Homes Initiative have been utilised).

Empty Property Repayment Loan

An interest bearing repayment loan at 4% annual interest (payable monthly) to cover works which bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard (Appendix A). This loan will be offered where the cost of the work exceeds the £10,000 limit of the Empty Property Loan or the £25,000 limit of the Welsh Government House into Homes Loan.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has an owners interest • Applicant must have sufficient equity within their property to cover the loan amount and have 20% free equity remaining • Property non-decent or has category 2 hazards significantly above the average age of the property • Applicants property must be long term vacant (over 6 months) and the Council satisfied that a housing need exists in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be tenanted until the loan is released • Property owner must agree to the property being managed by a social lettings agency • Property owner must be a member of the All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme • On completion of the works, the property meets the Decent Homes Standard • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £15,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £3,000 • The Council's loan administrator holds a share of the property value, proportional to the cost of the works, as a percentage of the property's unimproved value • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer unless to a person who occupied the property at the time of application • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time

N:B Applications will also be considered from first time buyers who wish to reside at the property themselves and who are also registered on the Council's Affordable Home Ownership Register. These applicants are not subject to the conditions relating to the management of the property by a social lettings agency and the requirement to become an accredited landlord.

Empty Property Grant

This grant is to help owners bring empty properties back in to use within the Council's strategic Renewal Area. This is designed to cover works which bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard (Appendix A) An example would be, works to remedy serious disrepair, provide modern kitchen and bathroom facilities, improve heating systems and insulation, and to remove any serious hazards which could affect the well-being of the occupier, such as dampness, dangerous stairs or electrical wiring.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant is invited to apply by the Council • Applicant has an owners interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proportion of the grant must be repaid if the property is sold or transferred within 5 years. Repayment will be reduced by 20% for each full year elapsed since the completion date • Property must be tenanted for 5 years • Landlords participating will be encouraged to join the All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme and accept nominations from Flintshire County Council. • On completion of the works, the property meets the Decent Homes Standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum grant of £20,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • A proportion of the grant is repaid on sale or transfer of the property within 5 years

Property Conversion Loan

An interest bearing repayment loan at 4% annual interest (payable monthly) to cover works which bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard (Appendix A). This loan is specifically designed to support the conversion of commercial premises, to provide new units of private rented residential accommodation.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant is invited to apply by the Council • Applicant has an owners interest • Account will be taken of any existing town centre Masterplan to establish the appropriateness of conversion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be tenanted until the loan is released • Property owner must agree to the property being managed by a social lettings agency • Property owner must be a member of the All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme • On completion of the works, the property meets the Decent Homes Standard • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £15,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £3,000 • The Council's loan administrator holds a share of the property value, proportional to the cost of the works, as a percentage of the property's unimproved value • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer unless to a person who occupied the property at the time of application • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time

Landlord Support

Residential Landlord Loan

An interest bearing repayment loan at 4% annual interest (payable monthly) to cover works which bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard (Appendix A) An example would be, works to remedy serious disrepair, provide modern kitchen and bathroom facilities, improve heating systems and insulation, and to remove any serious hazards which could affect the well-being of the occupier, such as dampness, dangerous stairs or electrical wiring.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has an owners interest • Property non-decent or has category 2 hazards significantly above the average age of the property • Applicants are in receipt of a means tested or disability benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be tenanted until the loan is released (maximum loan term of 7 years) • Property owner must agree to the property being managed by a social lettings agency • Property owner must be a member of the All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme • On completion of the works, the property meets the Decent Homes Standard • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £15,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £3,000

N:B A prior failure to comply with an enforcement notice under the Housing Act 2004 will automatically bar a landlord from making an application.

Additional forms of Support

Property Relocation Loan

A property appreciation loan for persons required to move as a result of the Council's property clearance action.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant occupies a property that is to be the subject of clearance action • Applicant must have sufficient equity within their property to cover the loan amount and have 20% free equity remaining (in the new property) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be occupied by the applicant or a family member as their main residence until the loan is released • The new property must be free of category 1 hazards • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the loan is repaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £20,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £3,000 • The Council's loan administrator holds a share of the property value, proportional to the cost of the works, as a percentage of the property's unimproved value • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer unless to a person who occupied the property at the time of application • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time

Home Loss/Loss Payments and Disturbance Allowances

Ex-Gratia Payments equivalent to statutory Home Loss Payments, Loss Payments and Disturbance Allowances will be paid in non – statutory Clearance and Demolition Schemes in connection with Strategic Acquisitions within a declared Renewal Area. An exception to this will be that in non – statutory schemes where the level of Home Loss Payments awarded to private tenants will be capped at £1500.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant's property is the subject of clearance action by the local authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owner occupier will be entitled to 10% in addition to the market value of the property • Second premises or business premises will be entitled to 7.5% in addition to the market value of the property • Tenants will be entitled to £1,500 (provided they have occupied the property over the previous 12 months). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% of the total amount of property value for owner occupiers • 7.5% of the total amount of property value for non owner occupied premises or businesses.

Independent financial advice

Owner-occupiers moving from housing clearance areas have the option of receiving Independent Financial Advice to assist in the moving process. The fees incurred in receiving such advice will be paid by the Council as part of the Disturbance Allowance. An appropriately qualified Independent Financial Advisor (IFA) should be sought and a maximum cost of £300 will be payable on production of a valid invoice.

Disabled Adaptations Support

Disabled Facilities Grant

This is a mandatory grant to provide adaptations to enable a disabled person to live as independently as possible at home. Eligible works include improving access to the home and garden, adaptations to allow access to essential facilities within the home. Examples might include stairlifts, level access showers, ramps and kitchen alterations. See appendix (B) for full definition.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral by Occupational Therapist confirming that works are necessary and appropriate • Adaptation is the most satisfactory course of action subject to a reasonable and practicable assessment • Available across all tenures (Separate arrangements apply for Registered Social Landlord tenants) • Work costs in excess of £1,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As set out in the Housing, Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 • Repayment of grant will be required if applicant chooses to move within 10 years of the completion date for any grant above £5,000, up to a maximum repayment of £10,000 • Subject to a means test (except for children) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum of £36,000

Disabled Facilities Relocation Grant

Introduced to help a disabled person move to a more appropriate property where their existing home is unsuitable for adaptation. The grant covers expenses such as removal costs and connection of services as well as bridging the affordability gap between the value of the applicant's existing home and the purchased property.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral by Occupational Therapist confirming that works are necessary and appropriate • Property is unsuitable for adaptation, or it is more cost effective to move rather than adapt • Available to owner occupiers and private rented tenants (not registered social landlords or Council tenants) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be occupied by the applicant as their main residence for a period of 5 years • Purchased property must have no category 1 hazards present • No further grant assistance for a period of 10 years from the completion date (except Disabled Facilities Grant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum of £36,000 available to bridge the gap and carry out any adaptation works at the new property, subject to means testing • Maximum of £2,000 available for removal expenses, subject to means testing. • Availability dependant upon the detail of each individual case.

Disabled Facilities Discretionary Top Up Loan

This loan will be considered in very exceptional circumstances where the required expenditure to provide a disabled adaptation is above the statutory limit (currently £36,000). It will only be provided to owner occupiers and the loan amount registered as a financial charge against the property at the Land Registry.

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant which requires a top up. • Applicant has an owners interest • Applicant must have sufficient equity within their property to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property must be occupied by the applicant or a family member as their main residence until the loan is released • Property must be covered by buildings insurance until the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum loan of £15,000 subject to eligibility testing and loan assessment • Minimum loan of £3,000 • The Council's loan administrator holds a share of the property value, proportional

cover the loan amount and have 20% free equity remaining	loan is repaid	to the cost of the works, as a percentage of the property's unimproved value <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loan is repaid on sale or transfer unless to a person who occupied the property at the time of application • Voluntary early repayment may be made at any time.
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N:B Private rented and Council tenants who do not have an owners interest and therefore cannot take a loan charged against the property will be offered the above assistance in grant form.

Alternative Assistance

HouseProud by the Home Improvement Trust

House Proud offers affordable equity release loans for housing repair, improvement and adaptation through the Home Improvement Trust. The scheme is supported by Welsh Assembly Government and Flintshire County Council. The Home Improvement Trust is a 'not for profit' organisation. Applicants must be aged 55 years or over, or a disabled person of any age who own their own home.

Flintshire Care & Repair

The Council works in Partnership with Flintshire Care & Repair, the local Home Improvement Agency. Flintshire Care & Repair provides a service to older and disabled homeowners, helping them with repairs, adaptations and improvements so that they can remain at home in safety, security and warmth.

The Agency can act on your behalf if you are over 75 years of age and applying for grant or loan assistance, or from aged 60 years and over if you are having work carried out privately. They also offer help and advice on obtaining funding for work, including grants, savings, welfare benefits, loans, equity release and charitable funding. In addition they offer complimentary services, such as a HandyPerson Service, offering small home safety repairs security measures and small scale energy efficiency support, via the Health Through Warmth Scheme.

Their advisory service is free to those over 60 or any age with a disability. They will offer confidential advice and support on how to access the various relevant services and organisations in the area.

Flintshire Care & Repair Property Repair Fund

Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant must be over 60 or disabled • Applicant has an owners interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small scale repairs only (e.g for the removal of category 1 hazards) • Charitable and other sources of match funding will be sought • Owner may be asked to make a contribution to the cost of the work if they are over the maximum limit and no other funding can be sourced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum of £1,500

Flintshire Care & Repair Handyperson Service

This service assists clients who are elderly, vulnerable or disabled, to remain in their homes in a reasonable degree of comfort and security by providing a low cost repair service. There is a nominal charge for this service. The service will arrange for the Handyperson to visit people in their home and provide an estimate for the work required. The Handyperson Service will also offer advice on a wide range of repairs available and will arrange to carry out the works with the minimum amount of fuss. You must be eligible to receive a service from Flintshire Care & Repair to access the handyperson service. A small charge will be levied.

Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency

All householders will be eligible for consideration of energy efficiency grants and advice and will be directed through the Council's Energy Efficiency Manager to access mainstream energy efficiency grants, such as ARBED grants, Nest and Health through Warmth. All vulnerable grant applicants will receive an energy efficiency package on top of the standard grant eligible works. Energy efficiency measures available will top up standards of insulation and heating and help to make domestic fuel consumption more efficient. All energy efficiency measures will be tied into the undertaking of wider works of improvement.

Flintshire County Council is developing its approach to providing assistance for renewable energy sources. Where any application for a Loan is made on the grounds that a house is too cold and the household is a vulnerable household, consideration will be given to the introduction of renewable energy technologies including the provision of solar heating systems and ground source heat pumps.

Crime Prevention

All householders will be eligible to receive crime prevention advice and will be directed through the Council's Crime Prevention Partnership for the provision of advice, assistance and other crime prevention services. All vulnerable grant applicants will receive a target hardening package in addition to the standard grant eligible works. Target hardening will improve window locks and door locks.

Home Accident Prevention

All householders will be eligible to receive information, advice and assistance with respect to the prevention of accidents in the home. Loans will be specifically available to remove safety hazards in and around the home and the Council will work with ROSPA, the Fire Service and other service providers to develop home accident prevention packages which may be available for vulnerable applicants in addition to standard eligible works.

General Process

Making an enquiry

Upon request, we will provide service users with the appropriate information pack. The pack includes information on the eligibility criteria and any conditions of assistance, together with an enquiry or application form and a letter explaining the application procedure.

Application forms and information leaflets setting out a summary of the types of assistance including details of availability, eligibility criteria, levels of assistance and any conditions that apply are available at the location listed below. This information is also available on our website: www.flintshire.gov.uk under the Private Sector Housing tab.

Housing Renewal, Council Offices, Flint, Flintshire CH5 4BD
Tel: 01352 703434

And at any future Flintshire Connects buildings as they open.

Making an application

If you wish to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant, in the first instance, you should contact the Social Services Duty Team, Social Services on 01352 702642. You will be advised whether or not you meet the criteria for assessment by an Occupational Therapist.

Following this assessment, you will be asked to provide financial information for yourself and your family. This will help us to calculate whether you are eligible for a grant. Disabled Facilities Grants are subject to a 'means test' unless the application relates to a child. Your property will also need to be inspected by a Building Surveyor to see whether the works that the Occupational Therapist has recommended can be reasonably and practicably carried out in your home.

If you wish to apply for other types of financial assistance, the first stage is completion and return of an initial enquiry form, or application form, depending upon the type of assistance requested. You may need to provide income and savings details and you may also be asked to describe the problems you are experiencing. Providing photographic evidence will help us assess your case. On receipt of your application form, we will check the details submitted against the qualification criteria for the type of assistance you are applying for.

Enquiries for all loans are dealt with on a first come first served basis. However, in the event of prioritisation being required this will be given to the following client groups: -

- Families with children (under 18 years age)
- Households of older people (over 60 years)
- Those suffering from long term illness and/or disability.

You will be notified if your application has been successful and then asked to confirm in writing whether you wish to proceed. For all types of assistance we will carry out a survey of the property to establish whether it meets the Decent Homes Standard (this English standard has been adopted by Flintshire, as it is easier to achieve than the Welsh Housing Quality Standard but provides an acceptable standard of accommodation in the private sector). We will also check for any safety issues in your home using the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). We will check for hazards that may be a risk to the occupants of visitors to the property. We will advise you in writing of any hazards we find and advise you of any action you should take to remove the hazard, or reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

An assessment to decide the 'most satisfactory course of action' for dealing with the conditions identified is also completed. If your property meets the eligibility criteria we will issue a schedule of repair works necessary to remove Category 1 Hazards and/or meet the Decent Homes Standard. The schedule will be accompanied by the appropriate application forms for you to complete and return.

It is a requirement of all loan assistance that owner occupiers and tenants will use the Council's agency service to assist with completion of the necessary documentation and also to obtain contractors through a competitive tendering exercise. The Council's fees can be included in your application and will be fully funded by the grant or loan.

The Council's agency service will obtain a minimum of three estimates from separate VAT registered contractors, who appear on the Council's approved list, to complete the necessary works. (Separate arrangements apply in respect of Group Repair Grants and some energy top up loans).

Approval of your application

Upon receipt of your application form we will undertake a series of checks to ensure that all documentation received is complete and correct. In the case of Disabled Facilities Grants, a formal test of resources is then undertaken.

The test for financial resources for the purpose of means testing owner occupiers and qualifying tenants will be in accordance with the legislation that governs the means test for mandatory disabled facilities grants. The prescribed regulations are updated on an annual basis.

We will also carry out a costing exercise to determine an eligible cost for the repair works and compare this to the contractor's estimates. Where additional 'non eligible' items of work have been included in the estimate, these are not considered for assistance. Similarly, where contractor's costs are considered to be excessive these will be challenged by the Council's Agency Service. This process helps the Council ensure value for money is achieved for public funds spent in the County.

Please note the approval procedure for property appreciation and interest bearing repayment loans is more complex than that described above. Please refer to the section on loan administration below.

Payments

Once works have commenced, applicants (or their Agents) written request for a release if payment will be considered. All payment requests will require an official invoice. Where works undertaken are of a satisfactory standard and are supported by an acceptable invoice, interim payments can be made, subject to conditions. Other than in exceptional circumstances, grant payments will be made, directly to the main contractors. Grant or loan aided fees will also be paid directly to the Council's in house Agency.

Upon notification of completion of the works, we will undertake a full inspection of the works. We will only release final payment when you and we are happy that all works have been completed satisfactorily and all relevant invoices, guarantees and certificates have been received and conditions met.

In cases of dispute between the applicant and the contractor over the satisfactory completion of grant works, the Council reserves the right to adjudicate and release payment to the contractor if it deems it appropriate.

Loan Administration

Loans administration must comply with all aspects of consumer credit regulation and guidance. The principal regulators are currently the Financial Services Authority (Mortgage Regulation) and the Office of Fair Trading (Consumer Credit Regulation). As the Council has no prior experience of loan administration and regulation is necessarily robust, this element of the service has been outsourced to an FSA registered company known as Street UK Ltd. This company will advise on the Council's products and ensure compliance with regulation, guidance and best practice.

Local authorities can outline their own financial products; however, they cannot offer financial advice on these products or other financial products. Best practice again dictates that applicants should be offered independent financial advice. The Council has therefore commissioned a list of Independent Financial Advisor (IFA's) who can offer impartial while market advice to applicants. Depending upon the loan application submitted this consultation may be funded by the Council.

Street UK Ltd will ensure that recipients of loans have been offered access to received appropriate advice or information on any obligations or conditions arising for the assistance.

Street UK Ltd will set out in writing the terms and conditions under which loan assistance is being given and have regard to the applicants ability to make a contribution or repayment.

Before works go ahead, Street UK Ltd and the applicant will enter in to a suitably drafted form of loan agreement. The applicant will again be advised of the option to receive independent financial/legal advice before entering in to the agreement. With regard to Property Appreciation Loans, if Street UK's level of equity share is in excess of 30% the applicant will be required to take financial advice before the loan is approved.

Street UK Ltd will register its interest in the property as a charge at the Land Registry on behalf of the Council. Before agreeing to the loan the Council will have regard to the number of charges already registered over the property and the amount of equity in the property. In the event of prior charges being registered the Council will take a view on the viability of the proposed loan.

To protect the Council's interest, applicants will be required to provide evidence of a valid house insurance policy. Once the loan has been awarded the applicant must arrange with their insurance company to include Street UK Ltd on the Policy having an interest. Should the Policy lapse, then the insurance company would notify Street UK Ltd. Contact would then be made by the Council with the recipient to determine what alternative arrangements have been made to re-insure the property.

Further information on loan administration is available for the Housing Renewal Service on 01352 703434.

Conditions of assistance

General conditions

All forms of assistance referred to in this Policy document are subject to a number of general conditions. We will set out in writing to each person being provided with assistance, confirmation of the terms and conditions. Applicants should consider these terms and conditions carefully, particularly when applying for loan assistance. The following list is not exhaustive.

- All applications for assistance must be made on the Council's official application forms.
- All applicants for loan assistance will be required to have their property registered with the Land Registry office and will be subject to bankruptcy checks.
- The payment or part payment of grants and loans is conditional on the eligible works being carried out to the satisfaction of the Council and the receipt of an acceptable invoice for the works and any ancillary or professional fees.
- If an interim grant or loan payment has been released before the work is certified as complete and the owner disposes of the property, the owner will be required to repay to the Council the full amount of financial assistance paid. (Separate arrangements apply to Disabled Facilities Grants).

Unless stated otherwise, any loan or grant assistance and related conditions will be secured as a legal charge against the property where breach of a condition would require repayment of all or part of the financial assistance. This charge will not be removed until either the conditions expire or until the financial assistance is repaid.

- Costs (including maximum levels of assistance) include VAT at the applicable rate.
- Applicants for financial assistance will be required to submit a recent utility bill (e.g. gas, electric or water) as proof of address. In addition, applicants will also be required to provide proof of their National Insurance Number. Proof will also be required for the applicant's partner, where applicable. Acceptable evidence includes original National Insurance card, recent wage slips or benefit book.

For assistance subject to a test of financial resources (the means test), applicants will be required to submit the following:

1 If you are working and not self-employed, a certificate of earnings completed and stamped by the employer.

2 If you are self-employed, income details for the 52 weeks immediately preceding the date of application, verified by a qualified accountant. Full audited accounts may be required.

3 If you are in receipt of a state means-tested benefit, a copy of the payment book or relevant documentation. We may contact the appropriate government agency to check and verify the information submitted.

4 Evidence of savings or assets such as a second property.

No assistance will be awarded for works that have commenced prior to the date of formal notification of grant or loan approval.

- Where it is ascertained that an application for assistance has been determined on the basis of inaccurate or incomplete information, we can withhold or demand repayment of monies from the applicant.
- If an applicant knowingly makes a false statement, in respect of any information they provide as part of an application for financial assistance or payment, including details of income and savings, we may refer the matter to the Police with a view to prosecution.
- In exceptional cases, where the property must be vacated in order for works to be carried out, the Council may be able to assist in finding temporary accommodation. Residents must be unable to arrange temporary accommodation privately e.g. with family or friends and will be liable for the cost of any rent, removals or furniture storage incurred. However, if the applicant would suffer undue hardship, the Council may be able to provide discretionary grant or loan assistance.

Exceptions to repayment conditions

There will be no exception to the repayment of any loan as the Council is mindful of the fact that Public money is being used to fund works and would wish to maximise recycling of resources to assist others. However, it is recognised that there will be certain situations where it would be inappropriate or unreasonable for the owner to be required to repay other grant assistance monies on disposal of the dwelling. A written request for a repayment waiver must be made to the Council, explaining the circumstances of the case and the reasons why repayment of grant would cause undue hardship. The particulars of each individual case will be considered on their own merits and the applicant (or agent acting on their behalf) will be notified of the outcome in writing.

Where a property is vested in another individual's name under a will or intestacy, the death of the owner will trigger repayment, unless the property was the inheriting person's main residence at the time of application. In this case the condition to repay the loan or grant assistance and occupy the property will transfer to the new owner.

Fees and charges

For the purposes of this policy, professional fees and charges in respect of applications for financial assistance will include the following:-

- Confirmation, if sought by the local authority, that the applicant has an owner's interest.
- Initial valuation of the property (Property Appreciation Loans)
- Technical and structural surveys.
- Design and preparation of plans and drawings.
- Preparation of schedules of relevant works.
- Assistance in completing forms.
- Advice on financing the cost of the relevant works which are not met by grant.
- Applications for building regulations approval (including application fee and preparation of related documents)
- Applications for planning permission (including application fee and preparation of related documents).
- Applications for listed building consent (including application fee and preparation of related documents).
- Applications for conservation area consent (including application fee and preparation of related documents).
- Obtaining of estimates.
- Advice on contracts.
- Consideration of tenders.
- Supervision of relevant works.
- Disconnection and reconnection of electricity, gas, water or drainage utilities where this is necessitated by the relevant works.
- Payment of contractors.
- Loan charge land registration fees

Requests for extension of time

It is a condition of payment of grant and loan assistance that the eligible works are carried out within 12months from the date of the approval of the application concerned (3months for Residential Landlord Loans). Only in exceptional circumstances will we agree to extend the period of time in which the approved works must be completed. Nonetheless, it is recognised that occasionally there will be valid and genuine reasons, beyond the control of the applicant, for not being able to complete the work on time. Requests for extension of time must be made in writing to the Council, explaining the circumstances of the case and the reasons why the works cannot be completed within the specified timescale, together with the

amount of additional time being requested. The particulars of each individual case will be considered on their own merits and the applicant (or agent acting on their behalf) will be notified of the outcome in writing.

Revisions after loan or grant approval

Where, owing to circumstances beyond the control of the applicant, the eligible works cannot be completed for the estimated costs submitted with the application, we will consider written requests for additional assistance. Requests will be considered in accordance with the following guidelines:

- Where the eligible works cannot be completed without carrying out additional unforeseen works;
- Where the additional costs would place the applicant in undue hardship.
- In all cases, the re-determination of an approval will be subject to the total amount of assistance not exceeding the relevant maximum level of assistance.

Appendix A

The Decent Homes Standard

The Decent Homes Standard is the English Government's standard for housing. Whilst not enforceable by statute, the Council uses it as a target for the standard of accommodation in the County.

The definition of a decent home is one which meets the four following criteria:

a) It meets the current minimum standard for housing
Dwellings below this standard are those defined as having category one hazards under section 2 of the Housing Act 2004.

b) It is in a reasonable state of repair

Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those where either:

– One or more of the key building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair; or

– Two or more of the other building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair.

c) It has reasonably modern facilities and services Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those which lack three or more of the following:-

– A reasonably modern kitchen (20 years old or less).

– A kitchen with adequate space and layout.

– A reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less).

– An appropriately located bathroom and WC.

– Adequate insulation against external noise (where external noise is a problem).

– Adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats.

d) It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

This criterion requires dwellings to have both effective insulation and efficient heating.

Appendix B

Works eligible for Disabled Facilities Grant

Section 23 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 sets out the purposes for which a grant must be approved, which can be summarised as follows:

- a) facilitating access to the home;
- b) making the home safe;
- c) facilitating access to a room used or usable as the principal family room;
- d) facilitating access to, or providing for, a room used or usable for sleeping;
- e) facilitating access to, or providing for, a lavatory, or facilitating the use of a lavatory;
- f) facilitating access to, or providing for, a bath or shower (or both), or facilitating the use of such;
- g) facilitating access to, or providing for, a room in which there is a washbasin, or facilitating the use of such;
- h) facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled occupant;
- i) improving any heating system in the home to meet the needs of the disabled occupant or, if there is no existing heating system in the dwelling, or any such system is unsuitable for use by the disabled occupant, providing a heating system suitable to meet his or her needs;
- j) facilitating the use of a source of power, light or heat by altering the position of one or more means of access to or control of that source or by providing additional means of control;
- k) facilitating access and movement by the disabled occupant around the home in order to enable him or her to care for a person who is normally resident there and is in need of such care; and
- l) such other purposes as may be specified by order of the secretary of state. Since May 2008, local authorities are also required to fund works which facilitate a disabled occupant's access to and from a garden or works which make access to a garden safe for a disabled occupant.

Appendix C

Glossary of Terms

Category 1 Hazard:

Under the Housing Health and Rating System, scores in excess of 1000 are banded A, B, or C and are classified as Category 1 hazards. The Council has a duty to take action to remove or reduce the risks for category 1 hazards. Hazards scoring 999 or less are classified as Category 2 hazards and the Council has discretion to take action in such cases.

All Wales Landlord Accreditation Scheme:

Available to private landlords to certify their properties and management practices as reaching a Council standard which exceeds the statutory minimum.

Decent Homes Standard:

The Government's target standard for housing in England. See appendix C for details.

Disabled Facilities Grant:

A grant to fund alterations to a disabled person's home to improve access, and help them move around within their home freely and safely. Also, to assist them to use essential facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms and services within the home, so that occupants with disabilities can manage as independently as possible. Adaptations of a minor nature (e.g. provision of a handrail, flashing doorbell, ramp etc.), are dealt with outside of this policy. Works costing in excess of £1000 are classed as a major adaptation and can be processed as a Disabled Facilities Grant. If you consider you need a disabled adaptation, we will ask an occupational therapist to assess whether or not you meet the criteria for a Disabled Facilities Grant and that the proposed works will meet your needs.

Equity Loan:

The Council facilitates the lending of money to home owners for property improvements/repairs in exchange for a share in the value of the property. There are no regular repayments or interest added to the loan. The Council recovers its money when the property is next sold or transferred to a new owner. Example: If the unimproved value of the property is £100,000 and the cost of the works required is £10,000, the council or its administrator will take a 10% share of the value of the property (although not a "share" of ownership), repayable when the property is sold. Family member: (of the applicant): Husband, wife, person living with the applicant as wife or husband, son, daughter, step-son, step-daughter, and son-in-law, daughter-in-law, parent, grandparent, grandchild, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, nephew, niece, whether the relationship is by blood or marriage.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS): Introduced by the Housing Act 2004. This is the primary method of assessing housing conditions. A dwelling is assessed for hazards that may present potential harm to occupants, visitors and passers by, across 29 categories. Individual hazards are given a score by reference to a prescribed method of calculation to indicate their severity.

Home Improvement Agency (HIA):

Charitable organisation who work in partnership with the Council to provide advice and assistance with adaptations, improvements and repairs for older and vulnerable people.

House in Multiple Occupation (HMO):

Covers most types of accommodation where there are groups of people living together who do not constitute a family and where these people share amenities and/or common entrance.

Loan Assessment:

By law, to enable you to decide whether the offer of a loan is suitable for you, the council or its partner must give you certain information about the loan and relevant procedures. This information is included in the 'customer information document'. An officer from Street UK Ltd will arrange an interview with you to explain how the loan works, and will issue you with a copy of the customer information document.

OT:

Occupational Therapist - assesses client's needs for disabled adaptations.

Owner's interest:

owning the freehold of the property or having it on a tenancy of which not less than five years remain unexpired at the date of the application.

Priority One DFG Adaptation:

A referral for a Disabled Facilities Grant where the service user and/or carer at immediate high risk needing alternative care arrangements until/unless work is completed.

Reasonable and practicable assessment:

A legal requirement, carried out by Housing Renewal. This must be completed before a Disabled Facilities Grant can be approved. The property is inspected to check that the proposed works are technically feasible, that there are no other reasonable alternative solutions, and that there are no other health and safety issues. The property is assessed using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

Test of resources (means test):

This is an assessment of an applicant's ability to fund works themselves and determines if a contribution has to be made towards the financial assistance offered by the Council. It is carried out in accordance with the legislatively determined means test for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants.

Vulnerable households:

The Government definition of households who are in receipt of one of the following means-tested or disability related benefits: -Income Support; Income-based Job Seekers' Allowance; Income related Employment Support Allowance; Housing Benefit; Working Families Tax Credit; Disabled Person's Tax Credit; Disability Living Allowance, care component; Disability Living Allowance, mobility component; Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit; War Disablement Pension, Attendance Allowance, Pension Credit, Child Tax Credit.

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 27 JUNE 2012

REPORT BY: ENVIRONMENT & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FACILITATOR

SUBJECT: QUARTER 4/YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.01** To note and consider the 2011/12 Quarter 4/Year End service performance reports produced at the Head of Service / Divisional level under the adopted business model of the Council. The reports cover the Quarter 4 period (January to March 2012).
- 1.02** To note the draft year end position of the Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARC) contained within the performance reports.
- 1.03** To note the progress made against the Improvement Targets contained within the performance reports.

2.00 BACKGROUND

- 2.01** The quarterly performance/year end reports seek to provide the reader with the 'narrative' of quarterly performance, which gives the context for overall performance. These reports are a quarterly review of service plans.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01** Copies of the detailed Quarter 4/Year End (January to March 2012) performance reports are attached at **Appendix 1** Housing Services.
- 3.02** A number of issues had been raised in relation to quarterly performance reporting. As a result a group of staff with representation from each Directorate and Corporate Services met to discuss possible solutions to the issues. In addition, two Overview & Scrutiny Committee Chairs attended the meeting to contribute to the discussions. Subsequently a small sub-group (including Member representation) prepared a set of guidance notes for the proposed revised format of quarterly reporting.

The new approach is based on **exception reporting** and splits the reports

into 3 distinct sections:

1. Foreword – to summarise key information that the Head of Service feels Members should be aware of, including both good and poor performance. Emerging issues should also be highlighted in this section e.g. a new SARC identified (as agreed by CMT).

2. Performance Summary – This section contains an ‘at a glance’ summary of performance for the quarter against the following, in a tabular format for each: - **Improvement Plan** – giving a summary of both RAG statuses for the progress and outcome, (as in the first mid year review).

SARC – a summary of the risk RAG status at the end of the quarter **Performance Indicators** – as a minimum this section will include all (PIs) classified as Improvement Targets and those which are aligned to the Improvement Priorities for the purpose of measuring outcomes. The summary will show target and outturn performance with a RAG status and trend.

Improvement Target Action Plan – this section summarises whether actions to support the achievement of Improvement Targets are ‘on track’ or ‘behind schedule’.

Key Actions from the Service Plan – summarises whether key actions/areas for improvement are ‘on track’ or ‘behind schedule’. (This will include other key areas of work not already identified.)

Internal & External Regulatory Reports – summarises regulatory work reported in the quarter and its outcomes and intended actions.

3. Exception Reporting – This section of the report is broken down in the same way as the service plan is sectioned e.g. by Service Teams. This section is to be used to report in detail the emerging issues and poor performance identified in Section 1 and also any poorer performance identified in Section 2 e.g. items which have an amber or red RAG status or are ‘behind schedule’. The detail will include the reason for the issue / poor performance arising and what is to be done to rectify the situation.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 That Members consider the 2011/12 Quarter 4 performance reports produced by the Heads of Service, highlight and monitor poor performance and feedback details of any challenge to Corporate Resources O&S Committee who are responsible for the overview and monitoring of improvement targets.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None as a result of this report.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

None as a result of this report.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

None as a result of this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

None as a result of this report.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None as a result of this report.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

Not applicable.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

Not applicable.

12.00 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Housing Services
Appendix 2 - Q4/Year End SARC Summary

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Contact Officer: Samantha Roberts
Telephone: 01352 702305
Email: samantha.roberts@flintshire.gov.uk

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Quarterly Performance Report – Housing Services

Report Author Head of Housing Services
Report Date 11 May 2012
Report Period Quarter 4: 1 January 2012 to 31 March 2012




Introduction

The report is produced on a quarterly basis and provided to Executive members for review and assurance and will be available for Overview and Scrutiny Committees as part of their Forward Work Programmes.


The report provides managerial assessment as an overview of the key messages within the report and then provides evidence and data to inform that assessment from the following sources:

- Performance Targets
- Monitoring of Key Actions from the Service Plan
- Improvement Plan Monitoring
- Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges
- Internal and External regulatory reports
- Customer satisfaction and feedback
- Awards and accreditations
- Resource Management (HR, ICT, Finance, Assets)

RAG Status

RED equates to a position of under-performance, downward trend, non-achievement of target, non-achievement of action milestones.	
AMBER equates to a mid position where improvement may have been made (i.e. improved trend) but the target for the year is unlikely to be reached, or where action milestones have been deferred or narrowly missed.	
GREEN equates to a position of positive trend on performance, meeting target and achieving action milestones.	

Key Notes



The use of key note boxes is to highlight areas of interest or to respond specifically to enquiries from previous reports.

Record of Amendments

Date	Amendment	Amended by
24/04/12	Draft report for review by Head of Service.	Simon Abbott
08/05/12	Amendments requested by Head of Service	Simon Abbott
11/05/12	Final amendments as requested by the Director.	Simon Abbott

Document Contents

Foreword & Summary Sections

1 Foreword This section contains an executive summary of key information for the Housing Service.

This foreword will also highlight (where relevant) emerging risks that need to be considered as new SARCs and signpost readers to supporting commentary where necessary within the detailed sections for the service areas.

2 Summaries This section presents a summary progress for each of the following:

- Improvement Plan
- Performance and Outcome Indicators
- Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARCs)
- Service Plan

Detail Sections

3-9 Service Area Information A section for each area will be provided for service areas where the summary shows items off-track. Sections may also be included for those areas to report progress and risks on items not included in the summary.

Appendices

Appendix A Performance Graphs Performance graphs for main indicators are shown in this appendix. Only performance graphs showing a red or amber status will be included in the detail sections where explanation of issues affecting performance can be detailed.

Appendix B Supplementary Data Supplementary data such as demand profiles will be contained in this section when required.

1 Foreword

Work continues across the Housing Service to modernise processes, improve performance and develop a customer excellence culture. The programme of projects and initiatives started last year and continued this year are achieving positive change throughout all service areas.

1.1 Review of 2011/12

Housing has led the way in the authority in maturing its approach to performance monitoring and support. The results of this are reflected positively both in our own quarterly reports and by the adoption corporately of a similar reporting format which standardises reporting across the authority. The performance support function has also improved service planning and performance monitoring arrangements within Housing and we plan to build on these solid foundations to further improve the quality of systems and management information to inform better planning and decision making.

We have seen our local area offices develop their neighbourhood management capacity to establish generic housing management teams. This year has also seen the formation of a specialist income team. The team has been created to focus on rent collection and tackling rent arrears. The benefits of this team are already being realised.

We successfully introduced Lean which has underpinned the continued improvement achieved in our performance in key areas including void properties and repairs. Over the last two years we have seen steady improvement in performance across all service areas including:

- Voids reduced to 2% from almost 3% of stock and relet times reduced from 154.20 days to 51.59 days
- Improved and sustained performance in emergency and urgent repairs
- Reduction and early intervention in arrears cases

Achieving annual efficiencies has been a key focus in order to improve services and in 2011-2012 net savings of £0.5m were achieved. In the same period the capital programme has increased to almost £10m per annum and a six-year asset management strategy developed.

Encouraging a culture based around performance and customer service has been and continues to be a key focus for the service. Training and staff restructures have been essential to this.

The Housing Service is taking a key role with the introduction of the Flintshire Connects centres which are aimed at improving accessibility to services. Agile working and hot-desking is being rolled out across the service increasing flexibility and making the most efficient use of office accommodation.

The housing repairs service has seen significant changes over the course of the last year. These have included the introduction of mobile working and the outsourcing of the housing stores. We have trialled extending the working day to augment the

provision of repairs by appointment and introduced text reminders to reduce abortive calls.

A comprehensive review of the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) service has been conducted with improved policies and procedures developed. Both members and tenants have been consulted in the development and testing of these. The new procedures along with a new ICT system to support them are to be rolled out July 2012.

Better customer insight and creating more opportunities for tenant involvement have been a successful focus area for 2011/12 resulting in a new Customer Involvement Strategy. This will be rolled out during 2012/13. Work in this area will be championed through a newly formed Customer Involvement Group which is made of representatives from all teams across the service.

The Housing Strategy Team has continued to secure achievements in a number of areas. The team has been heavily involved in a number of key strategic projects including joint working on the Local Housing Strategy review with Wrexham CBC which has included an update of the Local Housing Market Assessment. Collaboratively working has also included participation in a regional Gypsy Traveller accommodation needs survey conducted with four other North Wales local authorities

Through effective management of the Social Housing Grant (SHG) programme between 2011 and 2014 143 social rented/intermediate rented homes were programmed. Supporting the delivery of affordable housing forms a key part of the strategy team's activities and the highlight for this area this was establishing the Flintshire Gifted Homes model to increase the range of options open to the council to meet local housing need.

Housing Renewal worked well to meet its ambitious aspirations this year with great progress being made in the delivery of the counties renewal area.

Of special mention are the efforts of the Homelessness and Advice teams that form Community Support Services who despite working in an increasingly challenging environment caused by both the current economic climate and the additional pressures from the reform to the welfare system have continued to maintain both high levels of performance and favourable outcomes for an increased number of citizens across the county.

1.2 The Year Ahead

Although we have made significant improvements in the performance of the housing service over the course of the year we retain the ambition of securing top quartile performance across the housing services. There are significant challenges that remain. These include:

- Further improve performance of non urgent repairs
- Implement staff restructure in asset management
- Enhance management of ASB
- Improve estate caretaking service
- Separate housing register and allocations functions
- Improve income collection and reduce arrears cases

- Continue to build a positive reputation for the service, improve customer satisfaction (72% in 2010) and further develop tenant feedback
- Secure more involvement from young people
- Expand expertise in regeneration and community development
- Establish in-house disabled adaptation team
- Improve sickness absence rates
- Reduce budget balances to recommended minimum of 3.0% and maximise capital expenditure from Revenue Account
- Roll out of the community based accommodation support services (formerly the warden service)
- Improve the empty homes service to increase the number of properties brought back into use
- Deliver projects and initiatives to mitigate the effect of Welfare Reform

The core of the strategic work to be undertaken in the coming year which in summary will include:

- Better alignment of planning and housing strategy
- Developing joint venture/partnering projects
- Explore land disposal options to provide intermediate housing options
- Make better use of the existing housing stock and bring empty homes back into use
- Expand the contribution of the private rented sector to increasing housing supply

1.3 Quarter 4 Report Highlights













Report highlights for this quarter are the following items:

Performance	It is pleasing to see that 7 out of the 15 key performance indicators are reported as having a RAG Status of Green and a further 6 of the indicators show an amber status this quarter. The outturns show significant improvements across many of the indicators particularly the relet times for empty properties.
Welfare Reform	Previous reports have warned about the authority wide implications of Welfare Reform. We are able to report that a new SARC has been created with corporate ownership along with a new strategy which will initiate four projects across the Housing Benefit and Homelessness services. These projects will be incorporated into service planning and monitoring for 2012/13.
Complaints Handling	It is pleasing to see that the number of complaints handled within the 10 day deadline increased from 60% (Q3) to 86% this quarter and exceeds the authority wide target of 80%. The outturn is a reflection on the additional focus of attention in this area this quarter.

2 Summaries

2.1 Improvement Plan

The following shows a summary of progress on the areas of the authority's improvement plan undertaken by Housing Services. Commentary will be provided for any areas showing a Red or Amber status in the detail sections.






Council Priority	Target Date	Progress RAG	Outcome RAG (Confidence)	Commentary
7. To promote independent, healthy and fulfilled living in the community with the highest quality personalised and supportive social and health care services				
7.6 Modernise the warden service	March 2012			
8 To meet housing need in the County and to work with partners to ensure a sufficient supply of quality and affordable homes and housing services in the social , mixed tenure and private sector housing markets				
8.1 Lead the Deeside Housing Renewal Area programme (also 5)	March 2021			
8.2 Further improve the Council's housing management and housing repairs service	On-going			
8.3 Increase the supply of affordable housing for first time buyers and people with special needs as a priority (also 7)	March 2021			See page 39
8.4 Extend the range of options in private sector housing	April 2012			See page 36
8.5 Develop a regional housing register and common allocations policy	April 2012			See page 39





2.2 Performance and Outcome Indicators





The status of the indicators are summarised for this quarter below:




Graphs and commentary will be offered in the relevant detail section for only those indicators shown with a RAG status of either Amber or Red. Graphs for all indicators are included in Appendix A – Performance Graphs. An asterisk (*) indicates that the indicator is an *improvement* target.

Community Support Services							
Indicator	Q4 Target	Q4 Outturn	2010/11 Outturn	Annual Target	2011/12 Outturn	RAG	Change (Trend)
HHA/002* Timelessness of discharging homelessness duty	220 days	154.08 days	167 days	220 days	123.73 days		Improved
HHA/008 Homelessness presentations decided within 33 days.	90%	85.29%	95.45%	90%	92.31%		Downturn See page 27
HHA/016* Average number of days families with children spent in B&B	7 days	4.00 days	6.63 days	7 days	9.44 days		Downturn
HHA/017A Average number of days all homeless households spent in B&B	21 days	12.22 days	16.65 days	21 days	9.94 days		Improved
HHA/017B* Average number of days all homeless households spent in other temporary accommodation	250 days	237 days	225.88 days	250 days	209.92 days		Improved
HHA/013 The percentage of all potentially homeless households for whom homelessness was prevented for at least 6 months	N/A	N/A	95.33%	90%	85.52%		Downturn See page 27

Housing Neighbourhood Management (these indicators relate to section 8.2 of the Improvement Plan)							
Indicator	Q4 Target	Q4 Outturn	2010/11 Outturn	Annual Target	2011/12 Outturn	RAG	Change
HLS/006a Rent Collection, Permanent Accommodation	97.50%	95.51%	95.63%	97.50%	95.51%		Downturn see page 16
HLS/012a Current tenant rent arrears	3.00%	3.63%	3.48%	3.00%	3.63%		Downturn see page 17
HLS/013* Percentage rent loss due to empty property	2.00%	2.32%	2.73%	2.00%	2.32%		Improved see page 19
HLS/014* Letting Times	42 days	51.59 days	101.47 days	42 days	51.59 days		Improved see page 20

Housing Asset Management (these indicators relate to section 8.2 of the Improvement Plan)							
Indicator	Q4 Target	Q4 Outturn	2010/11 Outturn	Annual Target	2011/12 Outturn	RAG	Change
HLS/10a Emergency repairs	0.50 days	0.48 days	0.53 days	0.50 days	0.38 days		Improved
HLS/10b* Urgent Repairs	9.00 days	9.31 days	9.66 days	9.00 days	8.62 days		Improved see page 24
HLS/10c* Non-urgent repairs	35.00 days	56.42 days	64.80 days	35.00 days	61.15 days		Improved see page 24
HPMM7 Percentage of gas safety checks completed	99.00%	99.35%	98.05%	99.00%	99.35%		Improved See page 26
IA3.2L1 Number of void properties achieving zero defects on work undertaken	N/A	N/A	96.19	Target Not Set	98.5	N/A	Improved



















Housing Renewal (this indicator relates to section 8 of the Improvement Plan)					
Indicator	Annual Target	2010/11 Outturn	2011/12 Outturn	RAG	Change
PSR/004 Empty Homes	2.00%	1.00%	1.25%		Improved see page 34

2.3 Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARCs)

The table below summarises the position of SARCs at the end of the reporting period.

Commentary will be offered in the relevant detail section for only those SARCS that:

- Are showing a Red RAG status
- Where the RAG status has changed since the last reporting period
- Where the Green Predictive Date has changed since the last reporting period
- Where there has been considerable change or additions of secondary risks and activity

SARC	Previous Status	Current Status	Green Predictive
CL04 Affordable Housing (see page 38 for a general update)			September 2012
CD08 Connah's Quay, Shotton And Queensferry Housing Renewal Area			March 2020
CD12a Housing Strategy (see page 38 for a general update)			May 2012
CD12b Housing Management			TBC
CD12c Housing Repairs And Maintenance Services (see page 26 for a general update)			April 2013
CD12d Homelessness			TBC
CD12e Sheltered Housing			November 2013
CD26 Disabled Facilities Grants (see page 36 for a general update)			March 2013
CD14* Housing Ballot			March 2012

*The Housing Ballot has now been completed a new SARC will be created during Q1 2012/13 to consider the risks and challenges in the authority meeting the WHQS standards on the stock.

2.4 Service Plan

Progress has been made in all areas of the service plan although some slippage has occurred in a small number of areas. The following table shows which areas have incurred slippage or have been subject to a revised timetable and references the page number of commentary where applicable:

Improvement Area	On Track	Commentary
1a) Create a Customer Focussed Service	x	See page 22
1b) Improve Void Re-let Times	✓	
1c) Best use of Housing Stock	✓	
1e) Expanding The Warden (Accommodation) Support Service	✓	
1f) Maximisation of Rental Income	x	See page 22
1g) Restructuring of Neighbourhood Housing Management	✓	
1h) Review Allocations Policy	✓	
1i) Restructuring of Housing Asset Management	✓	
1j) Asset Management Strategy	✓	
1k) Improve Workforce Productivity	x	See page 26
1l) Stores Service	✓	
1m) Fleet Management	x	See page 26
1n) Business Performance Management	x	See page 26
2a) Developing an integrated Advice and Homeless Service	✓	
2b) Homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation	✓	
2c) Planning and developing collaborative working arrangements amongst service providers	✓	
2d) Gypsies & Travellers	x	See page 39
2e) Strategy Development	x	See page 39

2g) Working with Registered Social Landlords	✓	
3a) Quality of Life in Neighbourhoods	✗	See page 23
3b) Development of Neighbourhood Plans	✗	See page 23
3c) Develop The Capacity To Deliver The Renewal Function	✗	See page 35
3d) Develop An Evidence Based Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy	✗	See page 35
3e) Develop A Comprehensive Private Sector Housing Strategy	✓	
3f) Develop & Implement an Empty Homes Strategy	✗	See page 35
3g) Procurement of Loans Administrator	✓	

3 People Indicators

3.1 Sickness & Absence

Within the Community Services Directorate, levels of absence have decreased overall in Quarter 4 to 7.33% in comparison to 7.91% reported in Quarter 3 for period 2011 / 2012. You will note that the Quarter 3 figure has been adjusted from 8.70% to 7.91%. This is due to the data being recalculated at the end of Quarter 4 following the receipt of SCC documentation. Similarly Quarter 4 figures will also be adjusted when the Quarter 1 reports are produced.

The Community Services Directorate Management Team continues to carry out the actions identified in the Attendance Management Strategy. This includes monitoring attendance on a quarterly basis at DMT and identifying areas where Departmental Attendance reviews are to be conducted. Managers continue to work hard to improve attendance levels across the Directorate as a whole.

When reviewing absence levels by service, levels of absence have increased in Housing from 8.29% in Quarter 3 to 8.90% in Quarter 4. When compared to Quarter 4 absence rates for 2010/11 there has been an increase from 5.82% to 8.90% in 2011/12.

At year end the cumulative totals for Housing stand at 15.31 days lost per FTE when compared to 15.52 days lost per FTE in 2010/11; an overall decrease for 2011/12. Community Support Services have the highest levels of absence per FTE at year end of 18.33 days lost per FTE followed by Housing Asset Management at 15.37 days lost per FTE followed by Housing Management at 14.12 days lost per FTE.

A number of long term absences have resulted in the increase in absence levels across Housing services. These absences have been reviewed and actions are in place to manage these individual cases. It is anticipated that this will have a positive impact on the absence levels going forward to Quarter 1.



A review of the 100% attendance pilot in Housing forms part of 2012/13 Housing Service Plan to assess if it has had a positive impact on attendance.

3.2 Training & Appraisals

In the 12 months to 31 March, 2012 Housing Services staff undertook 748 days of training (compared to 933 days for the same period in 2010/2011.)

The changing emphasis continues with much less time being taken up by Qualifications and conversely much more time being taken up on training linked to Customer Service (200 days in comparison to 174 days for the same period in 2010/11) and Knowledge of the Job (279 days in comparison to 201 days for same period in 2010/11)

The following qualifications are currently being undertaken during this quarter:

- 2 x FdSc Housing Studies

- 1 x FdSc Applied Computing
- 1 x BA (Hons) Advice Studied (Distance Learning)
- 3 x NVQ Level 2 - Customer Service







Following the merger of the standalone Housing Services Training Database, into the Community Services Training Database, the extraction of appraisal information is inconsistent. ICT are currently working to address the problems and Workforce Training aim to have robust appraisal data available for the Q1 2012/13 Training Report.

4 Neighbourhood Management

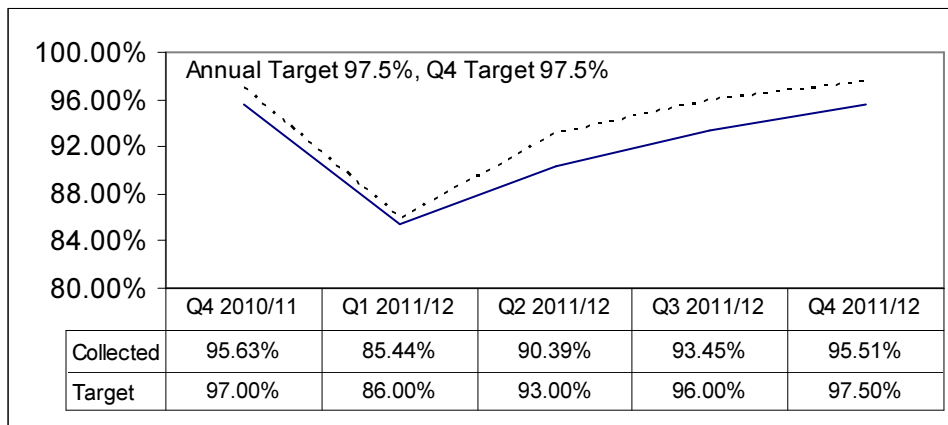
4.1 Performance Commentary

The targets were not met for the following indicators for Neighbourhood Management:

-  **HLS/006a**
Rent Collection, Permanent Accommodation
-  **HLS/012a**
Current tenant rent arrears
-  **HLS/013**
Percentage rent loss due to empty property
-  **HLS/014**
Letting Times

Supporting information for these indicators is provided below:

HLS/006a Rent Collection, Permanent Accommodation



An upward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

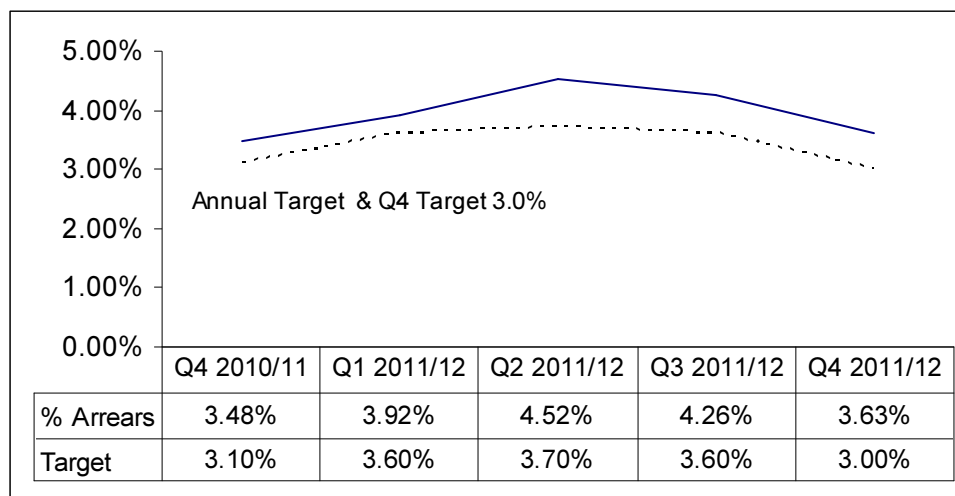
As anticipated, the quarter 4 and year end performance figure of 95.51% shows an improvement against the quarter 3 figure of 93.45%. This is a slight decrease in performance when compared to the quarter 4 performance figure for 2010/11 of 95.63%.

The total rent collected for 2011/12 was £28.2m. This is broken down as £13m in rental payments and £15.2m in Housing Benefit payments. This represents both an increase in rental payments (by 3.85%) and Housing Benefit payments (by 4.8%) when compared to the previous year.



The delay in formation of Income Team has stalled improvements in this area and it was agreed in the target setting exercise with members that the target of 97.5% be carried forward to 2012/13.

HLS/012a Current tenant rent arrears



A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

The quarter 4 end-of-year performance figure of 3.63% shows a decrease in performance when compared to the end-of-year performance figure for 2010/11 of 3.48%.

This equates to a 2011/12 end-of-year current tenant arrears figure of £1.05m, compared to a 2010/11 figure of £966k, which is an increase of £90k. As previously noted, the Income Team came into place in July 2011 and subsequently set about reviewing accounts in rent arrears and introducing a new rent arrears procedure. Since the end of October 2011, the level of rent arrears has reduced by £150k. It is anticipated that the level of rent arrears owed during 2012/13 will continue to decrease steadily.

Arrears Band	No of Accounts WK 52 10/11	No of Accounts WK 52 11/12	Total Amount Outstanding WK52 10/11	Total Amount Outstanding WK52 11/12
0-300	1698	1311	£154,382.81	£119,216.63
300-600	400	368	£169,314.04	£159,966.50
600-1000	212	228	£162,795.33	£176,151.99
1000-2000	172	220	£239,398.53	£301,534.89
2000-3000	65	64	£155,672.24	£153,489.66
3000-4000	16	28	£54,399.32	£94,438.21
4000-5000	6	9	£25,120.36	£39,815.19
5000-6000	1	1	£5,070.00	£5,760.63
6000-7000	0	1	0	£6,011.35
Grand Total	2570	2230	£966,152.63	£1,056,385.05

The above banding table shows that between 2010/11 and 2011/12:

- The overall number of rent accounts in arrears has reduced by 340 cases
- The number of rent accounts over £1,000 has increased (260 to 323)
- The number of rent accounts owing less than £300 dropped by 387 cases and £35k

- The average cost per case in arrears has increased from £375.93 in 2010/11 to £473.72 in 2011/12

It is also important to note that for quarter 4:

- 31% of tenants were showing as being in arrears compared to the same quarter last year of 35% (a 4% reduction)
- Of those tenants in arrears, 59% owe less than £300
- 4.5% of current tenants owe more than £1000 in rent arrears
- The eleven arrears cases owing over £4000 have been to court and are subject to a court order for them to pay rent plus a small weekly figure off their arrears. At this rate some of these accounts would take 16 years to clear.

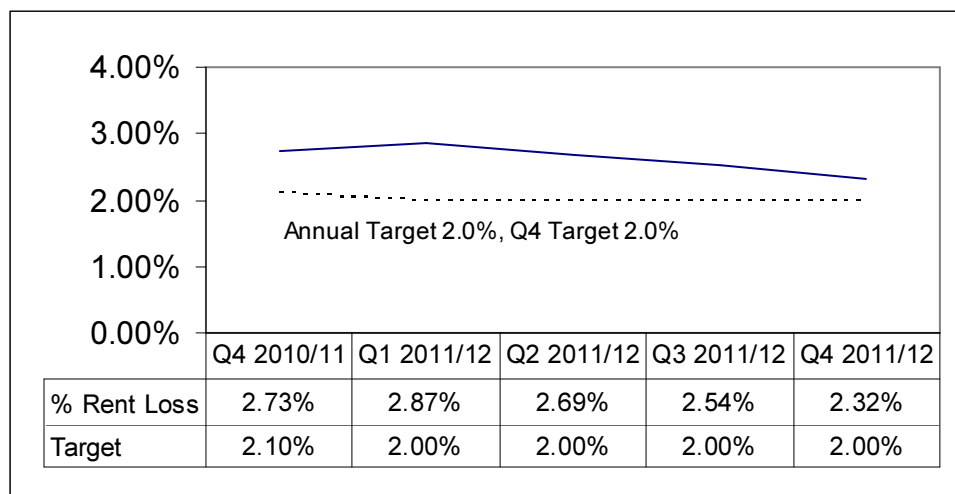
The Income Team will be concentrating on two particular areas during 2012/13:

- Continuing the good work in tackling low level rent arrears cases;
- Reducing the number of arrears cases owing over £1k.

The 2012/13 targets for both individual and Income Team levels has been set at a 10% reduction in the end of year figure. This equates to a target figure of £950k, which would be a reduction in monetary terms of £105k. Whilst this is seen as challenging, the reduction in rent arrears over the past 5 months would indicate that this is an achievable target.

As contained within the 2011/12 Service Plan, work is continuing with the Procurement Unit to tender for an outside collection agency to recover former tenant rent arrears. Work is also due to recommence on investigating potential incentive schemes for tenants to keep their rent accounts clear throughout the year.

HLS/013 Percentage rent loss due to empty property



A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

It is again pleasing to note that the quarter 4 performance shows an improvement against the quarter 3 and the quarter 2 performance figures (as shown in the below table). This is also a significant improvement on the quarter 4 figure for 2010/11.

Quarter	2010/11	2011/12
Q1	3.11%	2.87%
Q2	3.03%	2.69%
Q3	2.82%	2.54%
Q4	2.73%	2.32%

The Q4 figure shown above is cumulative for the year (rather than just for the quarter). The % of stock that was vacant at the end of Q4 was 1.84%.

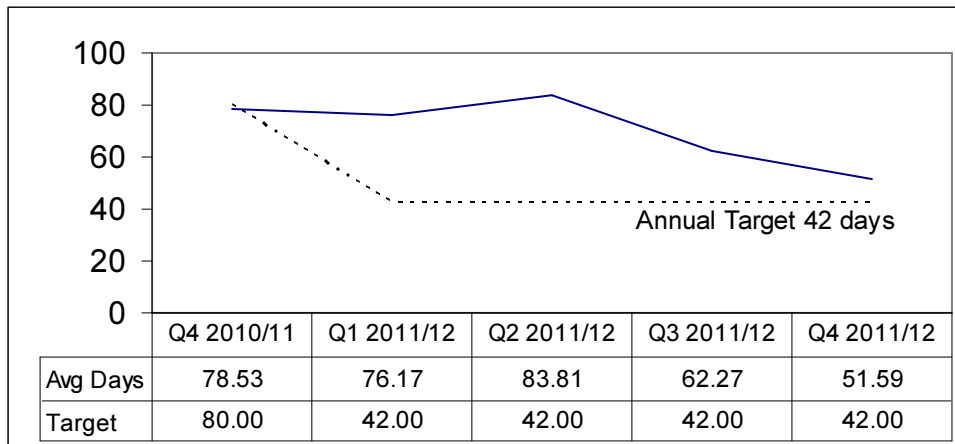
As can be seen from the below table, the total number of lets for quarter 4 has remained at a similar level when compared to quarter 3, which included 70 difficult to lets.

Quarter	Total Lets	Normal Lets	Difficult To Lets*	% Difficult To Lets
Q4 11/12	156	86	70	45.0%
Q3 11/12	160	102	58	36.0%
Q2 11/12	125	86	39	31.0%
Q1 11/12	115	85	30	26.1%
Q4 10/11	128	94	34	26.6%
Q3 10/11	120	99	21	17.5%
Q2 10/11	154	138	16	10.4%

* Difficult to let properties also include properties that have had major repairs or have taken longer than normal to let i.e. due to involvement of Occupational Health

It is acknowledged that continuing to improve performance in this area remains a priority for the Housing Service.

HLS/014 Letting Times



A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

It is very pleasing to note that the overall figure for the turnover on day to day voids has again improved from Q3 to Q4 by over 10 days. Overall performance improved by 50 days when comparing 2011/12 year end with 2010/11.

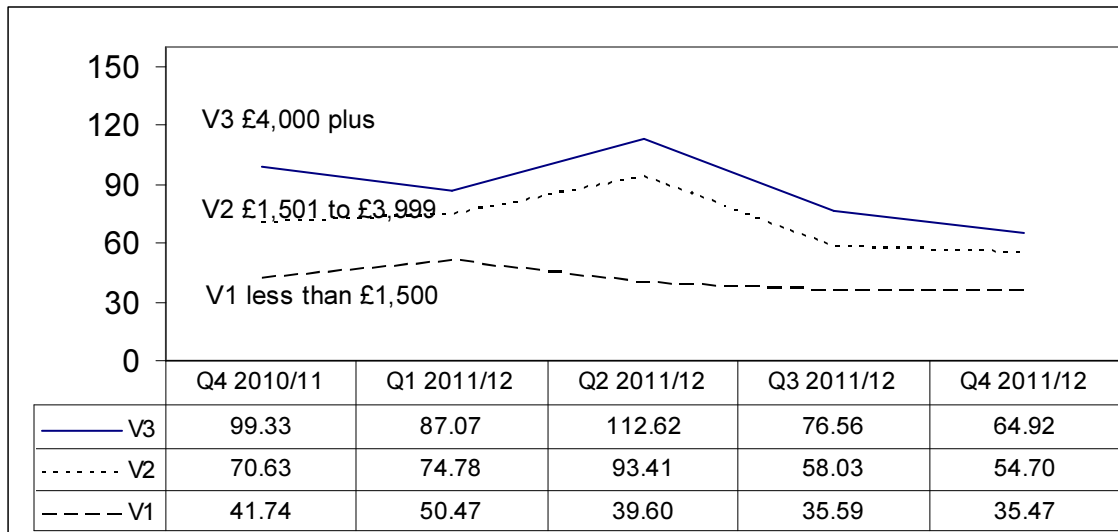
As reported in Q3, the reason for this improvement can be largely attributed to no longer replacing kitchens automatically in empty properties. At the end of October 2011 the decision was made to leave existing kitchens in situ and repair where required. A full replacement would be a last resort. These new measures ensure the voids team are working to the same standard as responsive repairs, which have been assessing the condition of kitchens in tenanted properties and prioritising them. Capital works, dependant on funding, will then place as many of the worst kitchens into the currently funded year and all others will be modernised as part a six year programme.

The table below shows the numbers of days (rounded) for each stage of the letting process:

	Waiting Days	Work Days	Letting Days
Q4 2010/11	24	32	22
Q1 2011/12	30	30	15
Q2 2011/12	37	31	16
Q3 2011/12	25	26	11
Q4 2011/12	18	22	11
Reduction from Q3	7 (28%)	4 (15%)	-

As can be seen above, the average duration of both the time waiting for inspection and the works being undertaken have both reduced, whilst the average days to let has remained the same.

The following graph shows the biggest improvement in V3's:



Following a review conducted after the Q3 figures, it was agreed to reduce the figure whereby a property would be considered a major repair (for the purposes of the above figures) down from £9k to £6k. For Q3, 18 void properties were subsequently classed as major repairs.

V2 properties (costing between £1,501 and £3,999 to repair) were the biggest group in Q4 with 47 properties, compared to 12 x V3 properties and 19 x V1 properties.

The table below shows that by reducing the amount of work in each property, the capacity to work on more properties at any one time has continued to remain at a high level.

Month	Number of properties with voids team	Number of properties not started	Number of properties being worked on
July	92	38	54 (58%)
August	78	38	40 (51%)
September	85	36	49 (57%)
October	88	19	69 (78%)
November	80	11	69 (86%)
December	70	9	61 (87%)
January 2012	46	9	37 (80%)
February	47	1	46 (98%)
March	50	7	43 (86%)

Whilst the number of empty properties does fluctuate it can be seen that the number of properties waiting for work to start has remained significantly reduced since October 2011 and as a result there has been an increase in the percentage of properties being worked on.

In conjunction with the above, the following table shows that the average refurbishment costs have also steadily reduced over the course of the year:

Period	Average Cost	Total Voids Returned
Q1 11/12	£4,736	149
Q2 11/12	£4,739	139
Q3 11/12	£3,705	170
Q4 11/12	£3,237	136

It is worth noting that although it is anticipated that costs will continue to reduce as the new process takes full effect, there will still be properties which will need major refurbishment as stated above where previously there has been little investment/repair work.

It is anticipated that there will be further improvements on turnaround time for all stages including letting times which have remained at the same average in Q4 as Q3 (11 days.)

Neighbourhood Housing Officers are continuing to let properties and give one rent free week where necessary to ensure the tenant has time to decorate, connect to gas and electrics supplies, and order oil without impacting on void times.

Neighbourhood Housing Managers are continuing to focus on the letting of historically difficult to let properties.

4.2 Service Plan Updates

Work continues to deliver all areas of the service plan being led by the Neighbourhood Managers. Below is commentary on areas of deviation from the timetable of delivery of the service plan.

Improvement Area 1a – Create a Customer Focussed Service

Work continues to develop options for enhanced mechanisms for customers in rural locations to access services. A Housing Management, Maintenance & Repair, Welfare Benefit and Money Advice service has been delivered in rural Flintshire to test the response to service delivery from the Family Centre in Gronant. It was felt that take up of the services was slow however further sessions need to be carried out in order to better understand the demand. Discussion are now taking place to determine how best to deliver services to meet the needs of the rural communities.

Improvement Area 1f

Following a recent meeting with Welsh Water, a number of areas for further investigation have been identified with a view to improving the Council's water collection rates. Further meetings are planned with Welsh Water to review/discuss this.

We are working with the Procurement Unit to tender for an outside company to collect former tenant rent arrears on our behalf.

In regards to charging for some services, there is a detailed Estate Caretaker review currently being undertaken. This action will be incorporated into the expected Estate Caretaker action plan.

Improvement Area 1h - Review Allocations Policy

The new allocations policy is now fully implemented. The information Booklet for applicants has now been translated and is in the process of being printed.

Improvement Area 3a – Quality of Life in Neighbourhoods

The deadline for the implementation of the ASB system has been delayed to better accommodate testing, staff training and the rollout of a CRM system which will interface to the ASB module and allow staff other than housing officers to log potential ASB complaints. The system is due to go live in July 2012.

Improvement Area 3b - Implement Neighbourhood Plans

It is now the intention to develop neighbourhood action plans in conjunction with the WHQS Environmental Standard so that neighbourhood planning is meaningful and delivers exactly what communities need. A steering group will be established during the summer made up of representatives from Housing, Street Scene, Communities First and Regeneration.

The group will take an incremental approach to managing the process, firstly by optimising existing services to enhance efficiency and then if and when the concept proves viable, extend it by integrating a range of key stakeholders and external agencies to identify further service improvements.



4.3 Internal and External Regulatory Reports

No reports for this section.

5 Housing Asset Maintenance

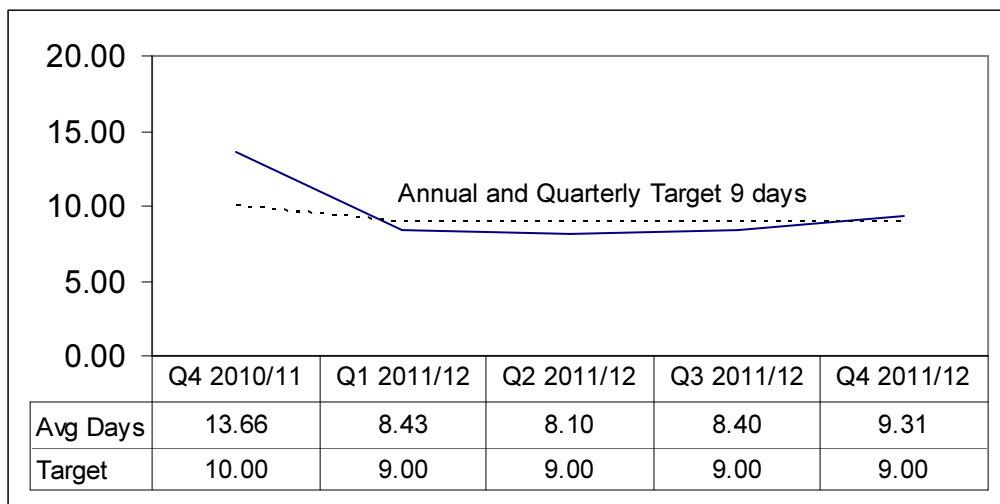
5.1 Performance Commentary

It is pleasing to note that performance in the emergency and gas servicing has improved from quarter 2. Quarterly targets were not met for the following indicators for Housing Asset Management:

-  **HLS/10b**
Urgent Repairs
-  **HLS/10c**
Non-urgent repairs

Supporting information for these indicators is provided below:

HLS/10b Urgent repairs



A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

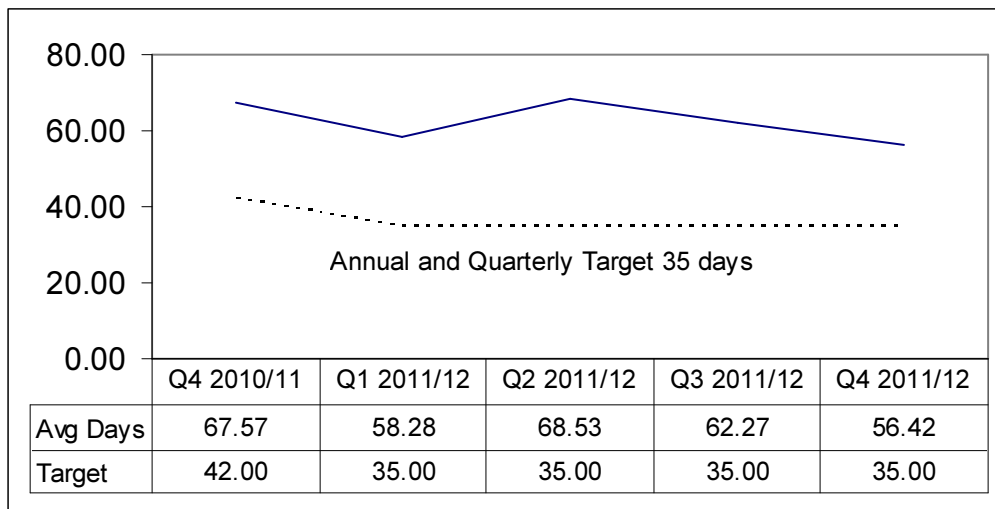
It is disappointing to see that the target this quarter has been narrowly missed, however the outturn is a considerable improvement on the same quarter of last year (13.66 days) and the annual average of 8.62 exceeds the 9 day target and shows a 1 day improvement against last years outturn of 9.66 days.

The reason for the downturn in performance this quarter is due to the introduction of mobile working in this area. Operatives have had to both attend training on the mobile devices and cope with some teething issues. Many of the initial technical issues have now been resolved and our software supplier is in the process of resolving the remaining technical issues with mobile working.



Incremental improvement of this target remains a priority for 2012/13.

HLS/10c Non-urgent repairs



A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

Whilst there has been a significant improvement in this category of repairs, the quarter 4 outturn is still affected by the backlog of repairs. The table below shows that day to day repairs are being completed well below the target of 35 days. Members should be aware that the target was reduced from 45 to 35 days this year which was bound to affect the backlog. Overall performance for the year (61.15 days) shows an improvement on the previous year.

Year to Date (1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012)			
	No of Jobs	Total Days	Average Days
Backlog of repairs	945	136807.65	144.77
Day to day repairs	1866	20451.36	10.96

Over recent years an in-house team have been deployed to carry out part of the capital works programme kitchen replacement scheme. The reason for this was to generate additional income for the trading account without over spending the client account budgets. This has been the case again this financial year and the dedicated team has now completed their allocation of the capital kitchen replacement scheme. This team will now be tasked to focus solely on the backlog of repairs. The team leader responsible for this team has been provided with reports on the backlog and will be required to provide a weekly update on progress. The team leaders in responsive repairs have now been tasked to focus on the other areas i.e. urgent, emergency and non-urgent to ensure that all new work is being completed within the target times. This will ensure that the targets are met for new works received and also ensure that the backlog, determined at a point in time, is not added to.



Improvement of this target remains a priority for 2012/13.

5.2 Service Plan Updates

Work continues on all areas of the service plan for this area. Below is commentary on areas of deviation from the timetable of delivery of the service plan.

1k Improve workforce productivity

Full implementation of mobile working was delayed due to a range of technical and IT problems. Implementation was achieved in April 2012.

1m Fleet Management

Reduction in the fleet has been extended due to negotiations with concerned parties and trade unions.

1n Business Performance Management

A new suite of financial and performance reports have been developed in readiness for the new financial year to support financial and performance reporting following the removal of the trading account. These new reports will provide improved monitoring for performance of the Housing Asset Management service. Alongside this the aim is to develop further performance and monitoring reports relating to specific teams within the service which will aid work planning, assign accountability and embed a culture of performance management within the service.

5.3 Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARCS)

CD12c Housing Repairs and Maintenance Services

Restructure of the service has been delayed due to job evaluation and the re-design of the structure to meet the organisational redesign principles.

5.4 Internal and External Regulatory Reports

No reports for this section.

6 Community Support Services

6.1 Performance Commentary

It is pleasing to see despite both the increased demand for accommodation and the decreased availability of suitable and affordable accommodation in the private rented sector that we are managing to maintain a Green RAG status on the majority of our indicators. Unfortunately the following indicators are a casualty of the current economic climate:



HHA/008

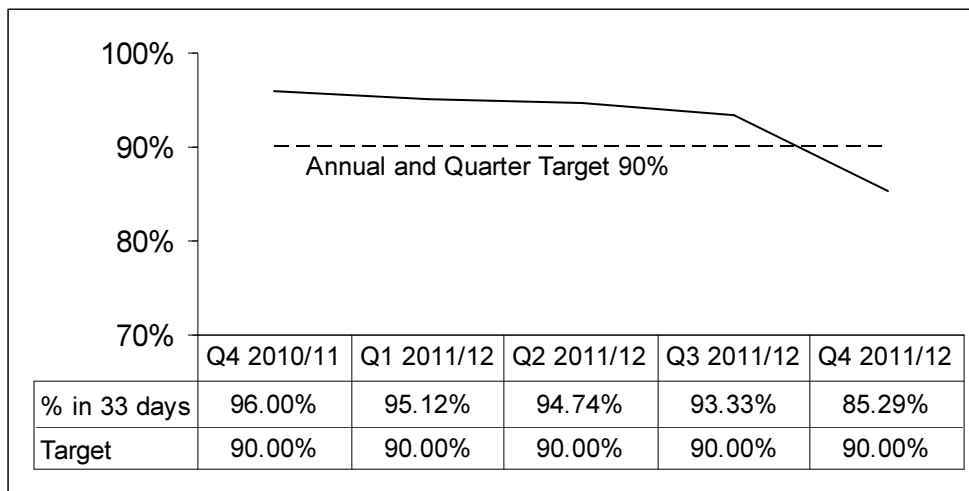
Homelessness Presentations decided within 33 days



HHA/013 (Annual)

Average number of days families with children spent in B&B

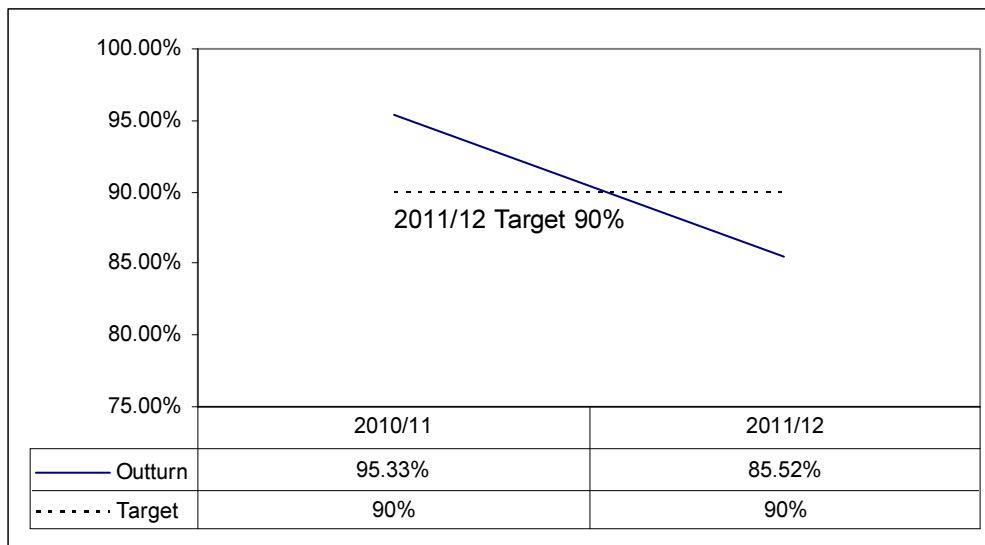
HHA/008 Homelessness Presentations decided within 33 days



An upward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

The outturn for Quarter 4 reflects the additional pressures being placed on the service as a result of changes to the Welfare Benefits System and the general economic climate. We have seen a 37% increase in the number of people accessing the Housing Options Service compared to last year. This also resulted in a small downturn on the performance achieved in previous year, although the annual outturn for 2011/12 exceeded the annual target of 90%.

HHA/013 The percentage of all potentially homelessness households for whom homelessness was prevented for at least 6 months



An upward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

The annual outturn of 85.52% is short of the target of 90%. Although disappointing this has to be put in the context of the 37% increase of households accessing the service and the more complex problems which have presented themselves following changes to local housing allowance etc. Also we are still seeing people accessing the service at the 11th hour which severely limits our ability to sustain their accommodation e.g. DHP (Discretionary Housing Payment) may provide a short term solution but households may ultimately still go on to lose their property.

6.2 Internal and External Regulatory Reports

No reports for this section.

7 Income Maximisation Unit

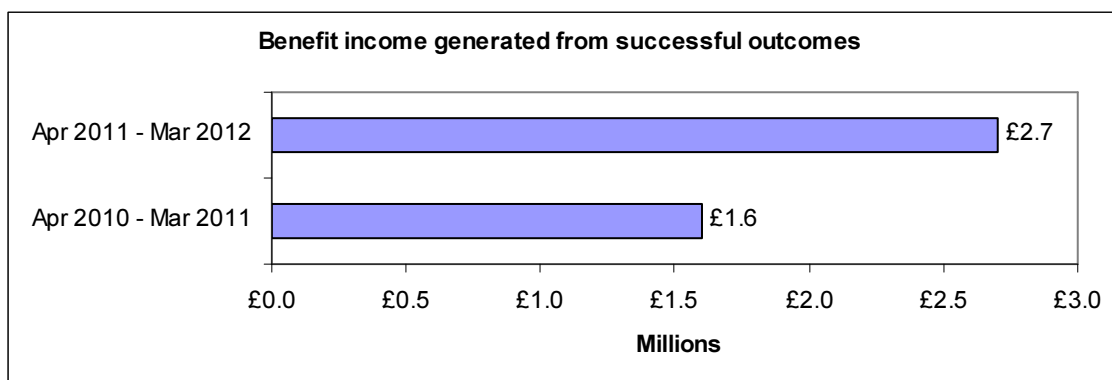
7.1 Welfare Rights Specialist Caseworker Service

The caseworker service helps residents to maximise their household income by ensuring they are in receipt of their correct entitlement to social security benefits and tax credits. The service supports residents throughout the entire benefit and tax credit claiming process. This ranges from identifying entitlement and completing initial claims to appearing for the resident before independent tribunal hearings where adverse decisions on entitlement are challenged.

During the period 01/01/12 - 31/03/2012:

- 401 Flintshire residents accessed the caseworker service and received advice and assistance from a welfare rights worker with their welfare benefit and/or tax credit problem. Of these residents, 89 were in need of specialist assistance and representation in connection with appealing an adverse decision on their sickness or disability benefit entitlement before a Social Security Tribunal.
- the residents supported by the caseworker service were helped to submit or challenge adverse decisions on a total of 469 social security benefits and tax credits applications. Of these applications, 214 have been successful, 87 unsuccessful and 168 are still awaiting a decision.
- the social security benefits and tax credits income generated for residents by successful outcomes to applications, totalled £577k. This figure is made up of £476,000 in on-going annual payments and £101k in one-off lump sum payments.

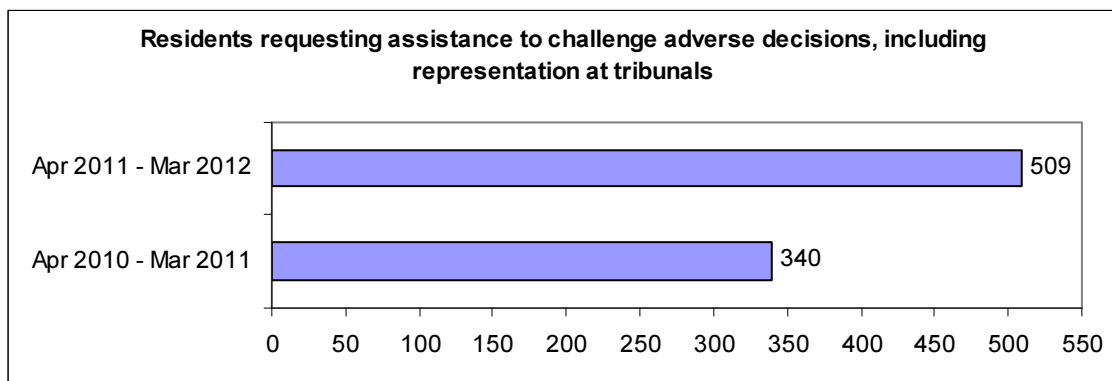
It is extremely pleasing to report that during the last financial year, through the commendable efforts of the welfare rights caseworker team, Flintshire residents have been supported to access over £2.7 million pounds in social security benefit and tax credit income.



The impact of increased social security benefit and tax credit take-up amongst lower income households has numerous and obvious positive benefits for the household concerned. The increased income also creates a positive economic effect for the wider community as the higher incomes, enjoyed by previously non-claiming recipients, is usually spent locally on the purchase of goods and services.

The amount of income gained for residents by the welfare rights caseworker service during the 2011/12 is £1.1 million higher than the income generated in 2010/11. However, as explained in previous Management Reports, not all this income represents 'new money' that has been introduced in to our local economy. Approximately £800,000 is income from a welfare benefit which has been re-awarded to a resident following a successful First-Tier Tribunal hearing that has overturned a previous decision made by Department of Work and Pension that had ceased the resident's entitlement to sickness and/or disability benefits.

As the reforms of the sickness and disability benefit system are progressed errors in decision-making on entitlement have become a regular occurrence as can be demonstrated by the number of residents accessing the welfare rights caseworker service for specialist assistance with challenging adverse decisions. (The welfare rights team are successful in 70% of Tribunal hearings against a Department of Works and Pension's decision to cease a resident's sickness related benefit.) During the next financial year there will continue to be an increasing number of residents, with a long-term health problem and/or a disability, who will require specialist advice on whether the decision on their welfare benefit entitlement is erroneous and, if it is, help with challenging the decision before an Independent Tribunal hearing.



Service Pressures – welfare reform

The Welfare Reform Act received Royal Assent in March 2012, and has introduced the legislation necessary for significant and far reaching changes to the social security benefit and tax credit systems to be implemented. The Government believe the reforms will make the welfare benefit system fairer and simpler and tackle the causes of poverty and worklessness by providing personalised support for people of working age to help them to overcome the barriers, which are preventing them from returning to employment.

On 24th January 2012, the Council's Executive approved a recommendation for a Welfare Reform Strategy, identifying all the risk/issues posed by the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act and the potential solutions that can be implemented to mitigate the risks to the authority, its partners and the local community, etc, be developed.

The Flintshire Welfare Reform Strategy will encompass a range of initiatives and complex strategic projects, including:

- Developing and implementing specific strategies, including the localised council tax replacement scheme and local welfare assistance scheme.
- Developing a robust homeless prevention strategy and ensuring that the private rented sector remains an affordable housing option for all residents.
- Increasing opportunities for residents to access support and training to overcome barriers to employment and improving access to social welfare advice and support services.

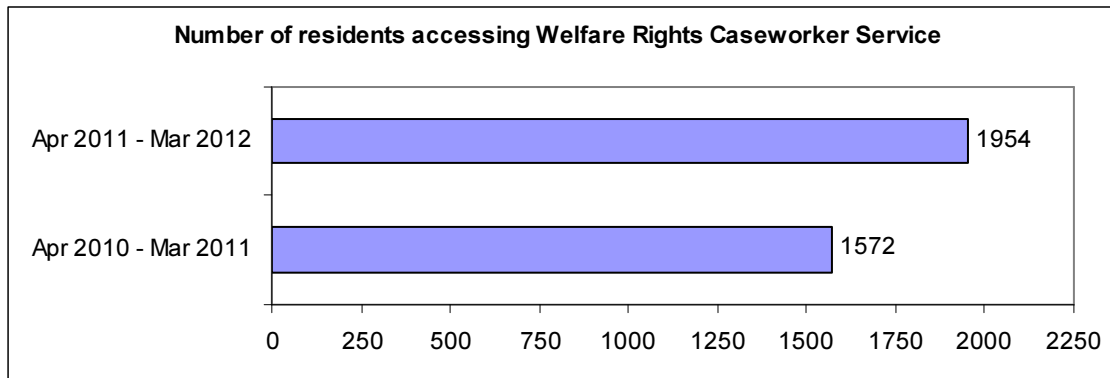
The design, implementation and long-term management of two high-scale projects within the Flintshire Welfare Reform Strategy, (i) Local Welfare Assistance Scheme and (ii) Welfare Reforms and Homelessness will lie with the Advice and Homelessness Service. The successful delivery of these two projects is a critical task, for example, they will provide the means through which measures can be implemented to ensure the Local Authority's statutory homelessness duties are fulfilled as cost effectively as possible.

As an acknowledgement that the significant risks that will emerge from introduction of the Welfare Reform Act are 'corporately owned' a comprehensive Community Leadership (welfare reform) SARC has been produced. The SARC has identified a total of nine significant risks. These range from loss of income to the Local Authority and to the local economy, through to a lack of available resources to deal with demands for access to advice and support services. However, the most significant risk is simply that all the reforms are being implemented within the same timeframe.

Not all the reforms of the welfare benefit system required primary legislation in order to be implemented. Two examples are the reduction in housing benefit paid to tenants renting in the private rented sector and the migration of claimants from incapacity benefit to employment and support allowance. These changes were both introduced in April 2011.

Consequently, there has already been a significant increase in the number of residents who are accessing the welfare rights caseworker service for advice and assistance on their welfare benefit entitlement. As demonstrated in the table below, during the last financial year, as compared to 2010/11, the demand for access to the caseworker service has increased by almost 25%. (The demand for access for specialist advice in connection with challenging decisions at First-Tier Tribunals has increased by almost 50%.)

The increase in demand for access to the welfare rights caseworker service will no doubt intensify during the next financial year (2012/13) as the wider impacts of the Welfare Reform Act is felt by our residents. This demand for access to the welfare rights caseworker service will need to be proactively managed within the project that will focus upon Welfare Reforms and Homelessness. For example, when the Advice and Homelessness Service was formed in April 2010 the authority placed within a single service the housing options and welfare rights specialist caseworker teams. Therefore, to manage the demand for access to the welfare rights caseworker service, access can be prioritised to residents who, because they have lost welfare benefit income, are at risk of losing their accommodation (and thus are being supported by Housing Options.)



7.2 Money Advisor Caseworker Service

The money advisor caseworker service is targeted at Flintshire residents who are at risk of homelessness. The advisor helps residents to resolve the financial difficulties that are resulting in them being unable to maintain their contractual rent or mortgage payments.

The advisor supports residents with all aspects of their interactions and negotiations with their creditors, including representing them at mortgage repossession and rent arrears hearings in the County Court.

The successful outcomes from the money advisor's casework not only alleviates a great deal of stress that has no doubt been placed upon the members of the households concerned but also saves the authority from having to meet the budgetary cost associated with fulfilling its statutory duties under Homelessness legislation, i.e. the provision of temporary accommodation.

During the period 01/01/2012 to the 31/03/2012, the Money Advisor:

- Provided on-going specialist money advice to 126 residents who were at risk of becoming homeless and to date has successfully resolved all the debt issues in 36 of these cases.
- Appeared for residents at four mortgage repossession hearings in the County Court. All these hearings resulted in the repossession order being refused and homelessness being prevented.

During the last financial year the Money Advisor provided specialist advice and support to 576 residents whose debt problems had placed them at risk of homelessness. To-date 181 of these residents had their debt problems successfully resolved and the threat of homelessness alleviated.

The successful outcomes from the money advisor's casework not only alleviates a great deal of stress that has no doubt been placed upon residents but also saves the authority from having to meet the budgetary cost associated with fulfilling its statutory duties under Homelessness legislation, i.e. the provision of temporary accommodation.

The work of this service also makes a positive contribution to the reduction of child poverty within Flintshire.

The Advice and Homeless Service (where the Income Maximisation Unit is based) adopts a proactive and customer focused approach in its work with all households that are at risk of losing their accommodation. Households can be provided with housing, money and benefit advice, as well as, accommodation support services and specialist support from Adult and Children Social Services.

This holistic approach has proven to be extremely effective in preventing households from becoming homeless and, very importantly, enabling households to sustain their accommodation and reduce the likelihood of the household again experiencing the threat of homelessness over the longer term.

7.3 Internal and External Regulatory Reports

No reports for this section.

8 Housing Renewal

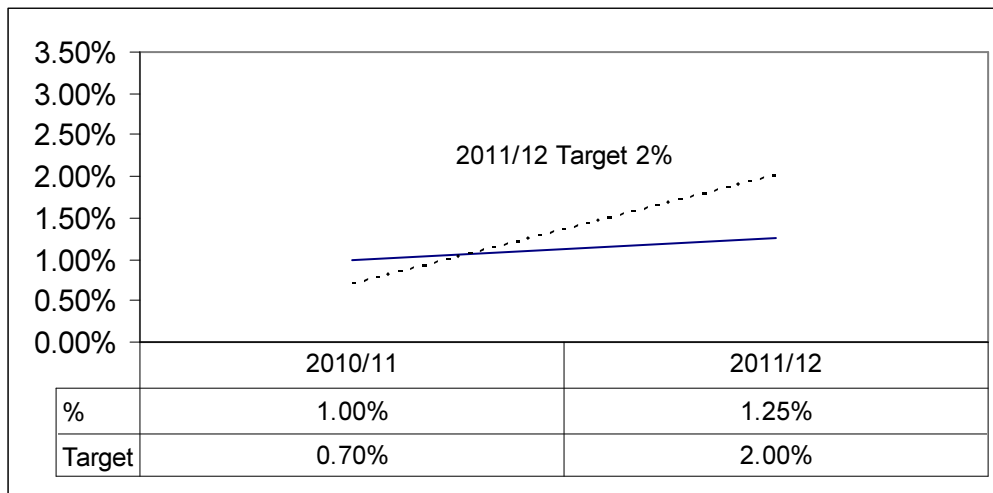
8.1 Performance Commentary



PSR/004
 Empty Properties

Supporting information for these indicators is provided below:

PSR/004 Empty Properties



An upward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

It is pleasing to see that although we have not met the increased target for this year the outturn both exceeds last year's outturn and target. This area is on a major path of improvement which has started this year with the development of a new database and a data cleansing exercise which has included the surveying of 571 properties which were suspected (based upon council tax) of being empty.

Out of these properties 309 were found to be either in use or demolished with 172 properties identified as being empty and are now subject to staged procedures. The outturn is calculated by dividing the number of properties according to Council Tax records are empty by the number of properties that have being brought back into use through direct action (there have been 13 properties returned to use this year.) Considering the way the indicator is calculated and the number of properties we have proved not to be empty, performance in this area is far greater than can be officially reported.



A further 903 properties will be surveyed before the end of May 2012 to ensure a more robust baseline is identified for reporting and to ensure that a clear picture of the number and situation of empty homes in the county to inform further work and policy development in this area.

8.2 Service Plan Updates

Improvement Area 3c - Developing the capacity to deliver the Renewal function

The need to finalise the Service redesign has progressed. A large number of Job Evaluation Questionnaires have been reviewed and refined during this Quarter.

It was the intention to submit the whole Service to the JEQ Team for evaluation during Quarter 4. Unfortunately this has not progressed as scheduled. Given the recently issued timeline for implementation of Single Status, these JEQ's must be submitted by the end of May 2012, to ensure they are included in this round of the agreement. Therefore, the whole Service will be submitted to the JE team during the next Quarter and it is anticipated that the new structure will be implemented during Quarter 3 of 2012/13. This timeframe will allow for job matching and identification of any posts which may need to be advertised outside the Service, as per the Council's current recruitment policy.

Improvement Area 3d - Develop an evidence based private sector housing renewal & improvement policy and private sector housing strategy.

Four member workshops had taken place to gain member input for a new Strategy for Private Sector Housing and a revised Private Sector Housing Renewal & Improvement Policy.

The intention was that both would be implemented during Quarter 1 of 2012/13. Unfortunately, given the need for wide consultation, including with the other authorities participating in the loans project, the policy will now be developed for implementation in Quarter 2.

Further meetings have also taken place in respect of the joint Flintshire and Wrexham Local Housing Strategy consultations, which will feed in to the Private Sector Housing Strategy. These will be finalised for approval in Quarter 1 2012/13.

Please see CD12a Housing Strategy on page 38.

Improvement Area 3f - Develop and implement an Empty Homes Strategy

Members will be aware from the Quarter 3 commentary that a large data cleansing exercise is ongoing of the empty property database. This has revealed that there are fewer long term vacant properties within the County than previously thought.

This work is ongoing and a further data cleansing exercise was due to take place during Quarter 4 of all properties declared long term vacant between 2008 and 2011. However, due to staffing issues this piece of work has slipped slightly and will now be completed early in Quarter 1 of 2012/13.

Robust data will allow for a proactive and staged approach to tackling long term vacant homes and will allow the Service to build on the progress it is now making in this area.

Improvement Area 3g - Procurement of a loans administrator

This is a collaborative project involving Flintshire, Denbighshire and Gwynedd. Discussions with two further North Wales Local Authorities are ongoing, as they have expressed an interest in being part of the project. The contract for the provision of this service has been awarded to Street UK Ltd.

Street UK Ltd is currently the largest organisation of its type, providing loan administration services to a number of Council's nationally. The Scheme to be known locally as Renew North Wales, will offer a number of interest bearing and equity loans to eligible persons. The Housing Renewal Task and Finish Group meetings, which include Member representation, have been a useful forum for the development of potential products, which will now be put to the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee in June. Subject to Member support and Executive approval, it is anticipated that the Scheme will go live on 1st July 2012.

8.3 Improvement Plan Areas

There has been some slippage in the improvement plan actions for this area all of which are covered in the service plan notes above.

8.4 SARC Updates

CD26 Disabled Facilities Grants

The OT team continues to experience higher referral levels, which challenge the capacity of the team. However, the effects of this are being mitigated through additional funding for commissioning external assessments, an additional fixed term resource from Housing for a part time OT and a pressure bid for more OT resource.

This will impact on the Performance Indicators over time. It is hoped that the outcome of the lean review will further eliminate process delays and minimise the impact of rising demand in conjunction with the above measures.

8.5 Internal and External Regulatory Reports

No reports for this section.

9 Housing Strategy

9.1 General Update

The Housing Strategy Team continues to work in its three key areas of developing the Council's strategic housing role, increasing the supply of affordable housing and supporting sustained performance improvement in the various service areas.

The joint review of the Local Housing Strategies being carried out in conjunction with Wrexham CBC is approaching completion with approval of the new strategy scheduled for May 2012. Extensive consultation has been carried out during this period to inform the content and direction of the new strategy

Glyndwr University were commissioned to conduct a joint Local Housing Market Assessment update with Wrexham CBC as part of the on-going LHS and Local Development Plan (LDP) projects. The assessment will form a key role in informing the emerging strategy and will also contribute to the LDP development thus reinforcing the aim of more closely aligning planning and housing strategic policies.

We have continued to expand the promotion of the Affordable Housing Register through a coordinated media campaign involving regular advertisements and features in local print media and a radio campaign through Heart FM. Our findings indicate that the advertising campaign has been successful in increasing the number of enquiries which lead to applications.

Affordable Housing

At present there are 164 registered applicants.

The number of affordable homes delivered/planned since April 2010 is shown in the table below:

Year	Units SHG	Units Non SHG	Total Units
2010/11 (delivered)	100	15	115
2011/12 (planned)	35	59	94
2012/13 (planned)	62	60	122

In December 2011 the Welsh Government announced there was further additional Social Housing Grant available £8.6 million. This was distributed by Welsh Government across the 22 Local Authorities. Flintshire County Council received £394k for a development by Wales and West Housing Association to provide 60 Dwellings at Glan y Don, Greenfield. This is in support of the Flint Regeneration Scheme.

9.2 Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARCS)

CL04 Affordable Housing

The housing strategy team has continued to work with the Planning service to encourage both the delivery and uptake of alternative forms of affordable housing. It is essential that a variety of alternatives are available to cater for the range of needs and demand presented. Since 2009, 209 new homes have been provided or planned through a range of options including:

- Shared equity (Equity shares held by the Authority)
- Purchase and/or development by Registered Social Landlords
- Properties gifted to the council by developers

A further 122 new homes are forecast for 2012-2013.

We are continuing to promote the affordable homes register in the local media through regular features and advertisements. In addition a radio promotion which starts January 2012.

With the adoption of the UDP further opportunities to provide additional affordable homes are being presented and the housing strategy team will continue to work closely with Planning to maximise sustainable and appropriate affordable housing.

Additional opportunities are being explored as part of on-going and planned renewal and regeneration schemes. Within the Deeside renewal area opportunities are being explored to provide additional housing through demolition and clearance, conversion of existing buildings and the bringing back into residential use of vacant properties.

The use of council land, which is surplus to requirements, will also form a part of the overarching strategy to provide additional affordable homes and the strategy team will be actively pursuing appropriate and viable opportunities.

In order to respond to the changing economic environment, supporting growth within the private rented sector remains a key objective. Activity aimed at supporting growth in the private rented sector continues to progress slower than hoped for as a consequence of the ongoing economic environment which continues to restrict the availability of mortgages continues to make unrealistic demands on the private rented sector.

The 'green predictive' date has been retained at September 2012. This situation will be monitored and will be updated to reflect any changes in the economic environment.

CD12a Housing Strategy

The development of the Local Housing Strategy is continuing in accordance with the revision of the programme to enable its link to the Welsh Government's national housing strategy.

One of the key outcomes for the local housing strategy is the successful coordination of separate, cross-sector strategies and plans to meet the housing needs of

vulnerable residents requiring housing-related support. The strategy has been structured to reflect the following three priority areas:

- More Housing, More Choice
- Improving Homes and Communities
- Improving housing-related services and support

Glyndwr University were commissioned to conduct a joint Local Housing Market Assessment update with Wrexham CBC as part of on-going LHS and Local Development Plan (LDP) projects. The initial findings of the assessment are currently being considered.

The 'green predictive' has been revised to May 2012 to reflect the updated timetable.

Improvement Plan

Ref 8.3 Increase the supply of affordable housing for first time buyers and people with special needs as a priority

Progress has been made in promoting the supply of affordable homes for first-time-buyers. However, the ongoing economic environment continues to restrict the availability of mortgages. In order to address this, alternative models are being developed for persons who are currently unable to access the necessary borrowing.

In addition to providing general needs accommodation we are continuing to focus on providing accommodation for Flintshire residents who currently reside out of county to facilitate their return to Flintshire. Many of these clients require specialist accommodation requiring detailed consultation and coordination with other agencies.

Ref 8.5 Develop a regional housing register and common allocations policy

This project is progressing and currently involves Flintshire, Wrexham, Denbighshire and Conwy councils in addition to the following RSLs: Tai Clwyd; Pennaf; Wales and West HA and North Wales HA. Proposals to carry out consultation on the project are currently being developed.

Service Plan Updates

Improvement Area 2d - Gypsies & Travellers

A new management agreement has been drafted for the council owned site at Riverside, Queensferry. Monitoring of the site is continuing and monitoring reports will follow on following the signing of the management agreement.

The development of a Gypsy Traveller Strategy for Flintshire has been delayed. The new strategy has been rescheduled for delivery in September 2012.

Improvement Area 2e - Strategy Development

See CD12a Housing Strategy on page 38 for information about progress and plans for this area.

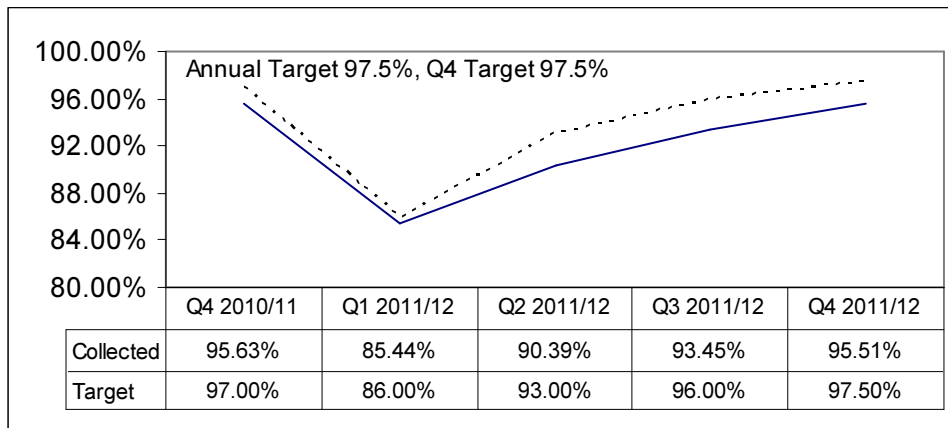
9.3 Internal and External Regulatory Reports

No reports for this section.

Appendix A – Performance Graphs

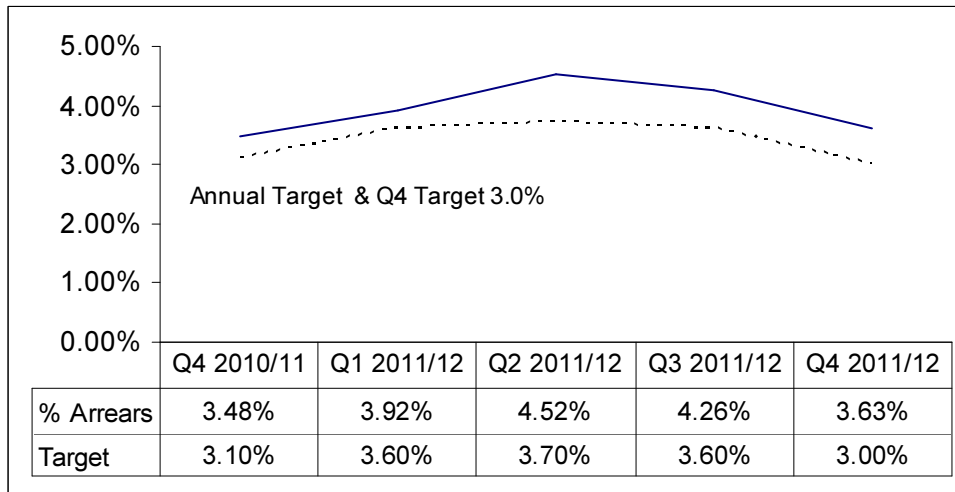
The graphs in this section show the quarterly performance achieved throughout 2011/12, except where the indicator is only measured annually. As a result some of the RAG status may appear different to those in Section 2, as they are generated by comparing the Q4 performance with the Q4 target as opposed to the annual performance with the annual target.

HLS/006a Rent Collection, Permanent Accommodation



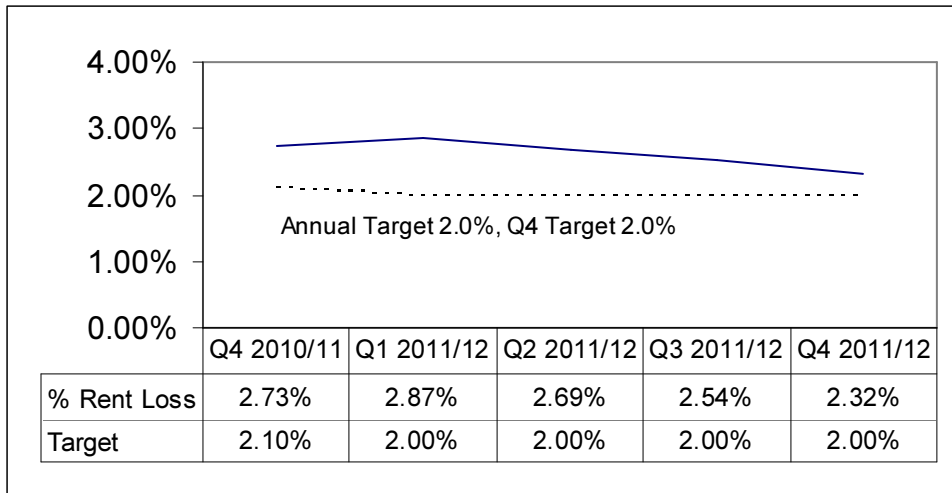
An upward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HLS/012a Current tenant rent arrears



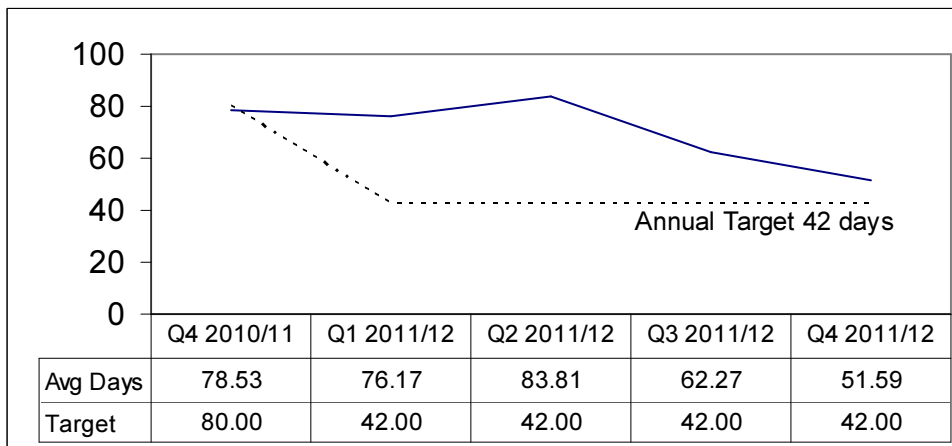
A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HLS/013 Percentage rent loss due to empty property



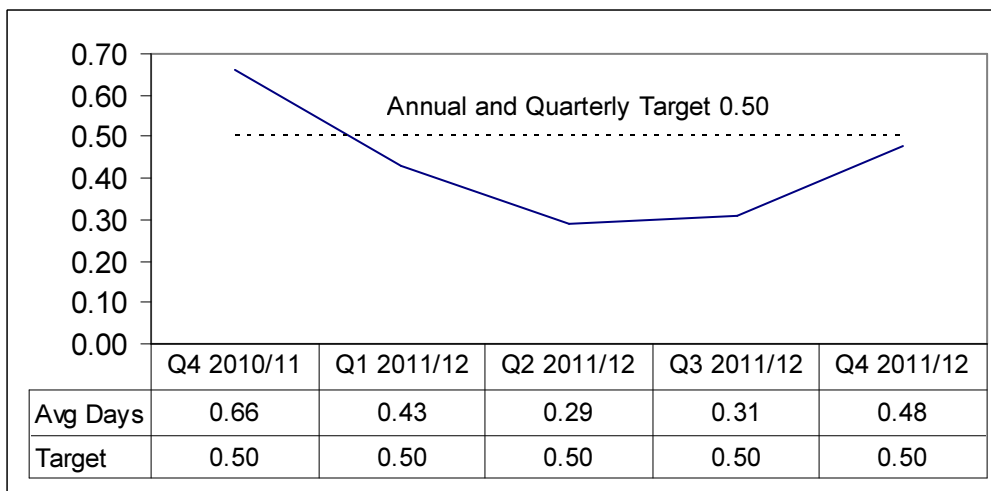
A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HLS/014 Letting Times



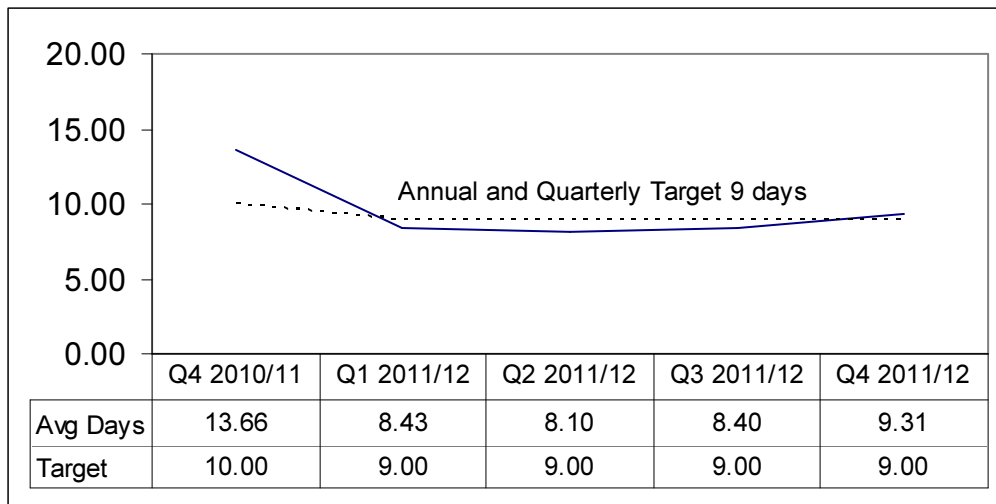
A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HLS/10a Emergency Repairs



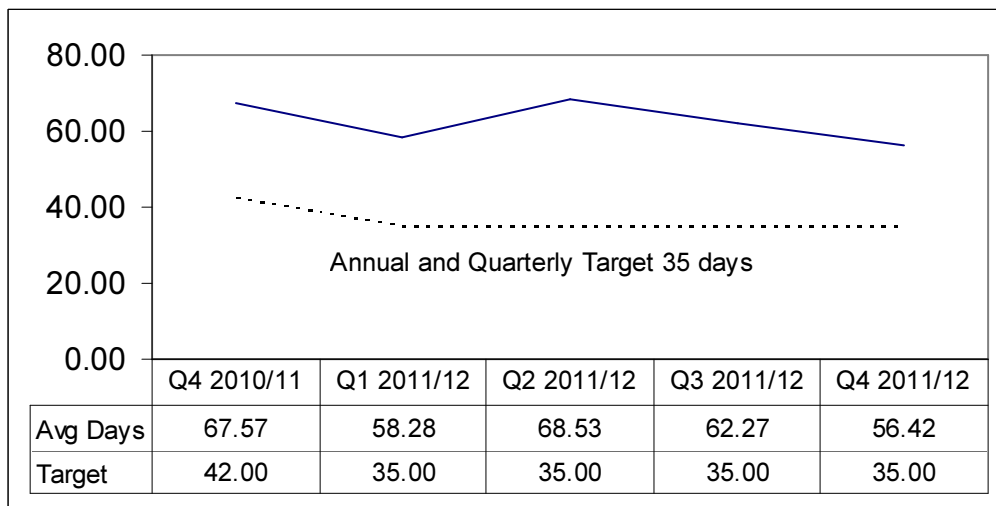
A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HLS/10b Urgent Repairs



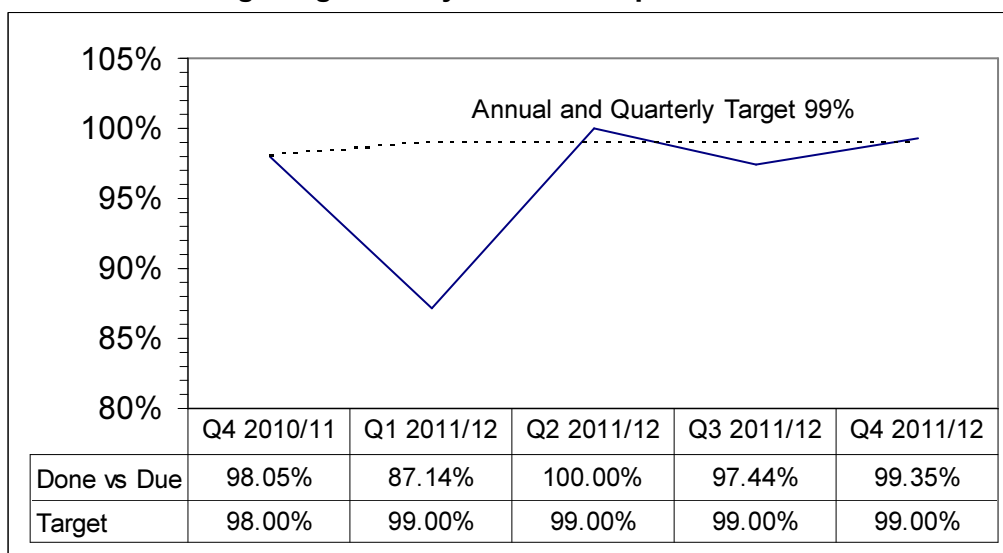
A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HLS/10c Non-urgent repairs



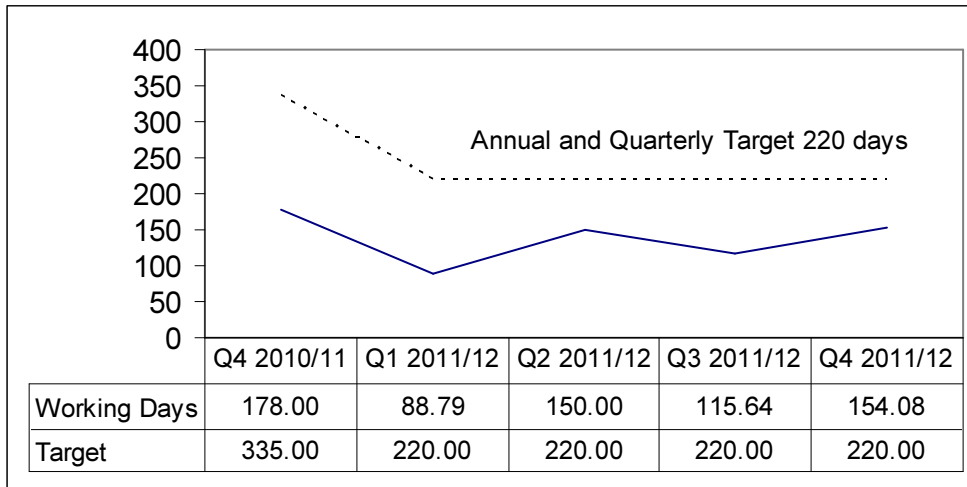
A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HPMM7 Percentage of gas safety checks completed



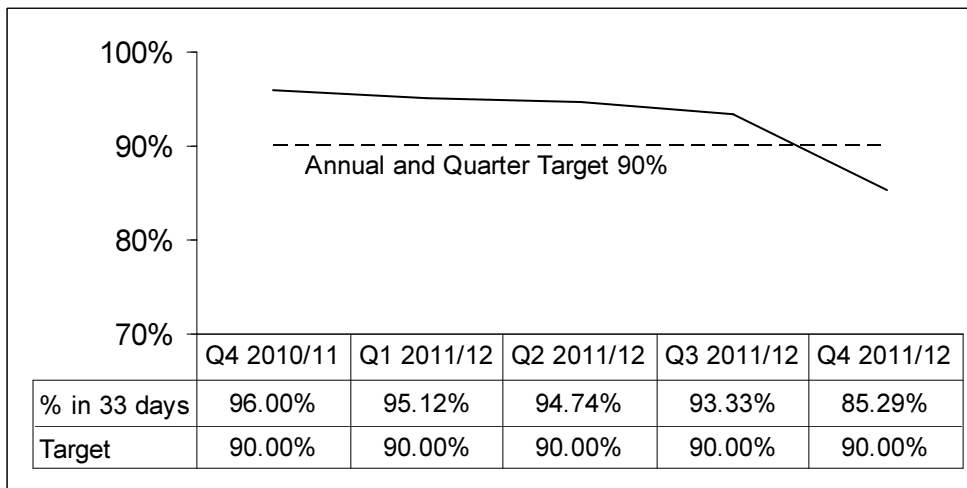
An upward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HHA/002 Timeliness of discharging full homelessness duty



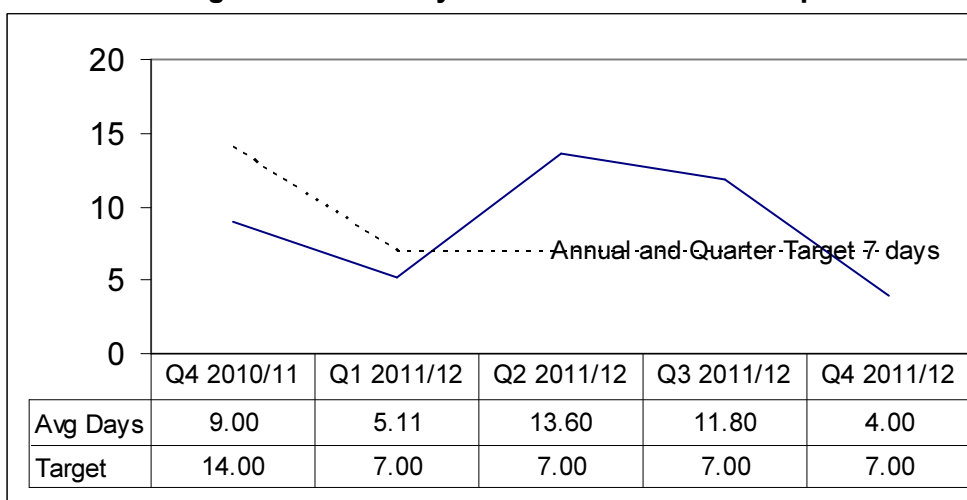
A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HHA/008 Homelessness presentations decided within target



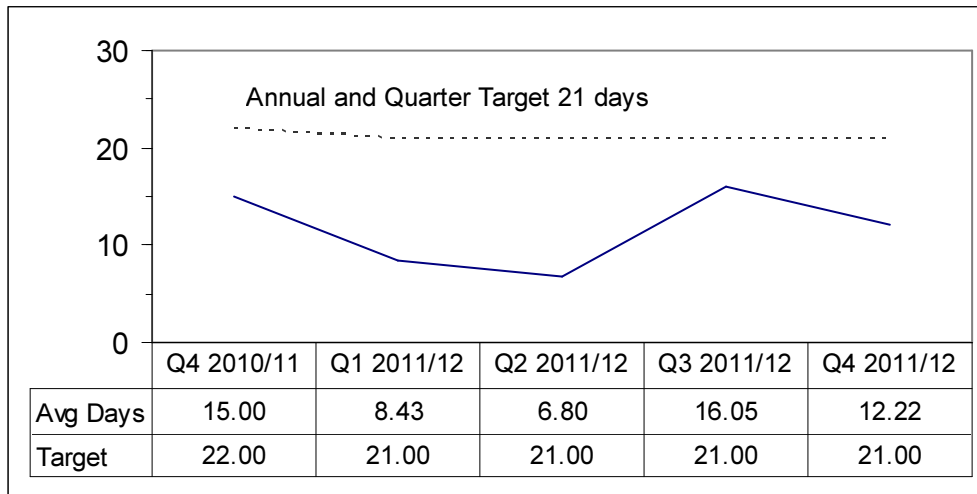
An upward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HHA/016 Average number of days families with children spent in B&B accommodation



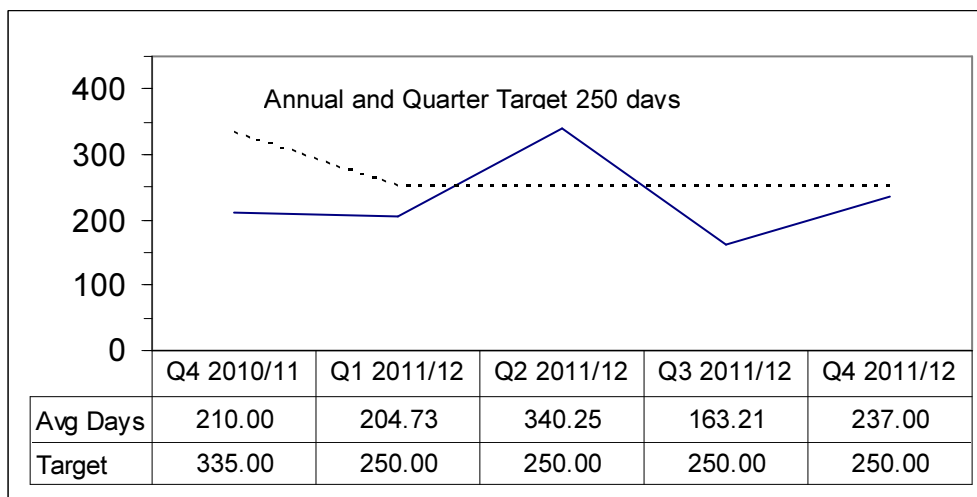
A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HHA/017a Average number of days all homeless households spent in B&B accommodation



A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

HHA017b Average days all homeless households spent in other temporary accommodation



A downward direction of travel in this graph represents an improvement.

Strategic Assessment of Risks & Challenges' RAG Summary (Refresh)

Risk Reference	Risk Title	2011-2012					Predictive Green/Amber
		Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
	Community Leadership	Mar 11	June 11	Sept 11	Dec 11	Mar 12	
CL04	Affordable Housing	A	A	A	A	A	SEP 2012
CL05	Social Care For Older People	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CL07	Relationship with Local Health Board & Public & Primary Health	A	A	A	A	A	APR 2013
CL08	Climate Change & Flood Risk Management	A	A		A	A	TBC
CL09	Economic Regeneration	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CL10	County Town Network Regeneration & Protection	G	G	G	G	G	FEB 2011
CL11	Integrated and Public Transport Infrastructure (External)	G	A	A	A	A	FEB 2011
CL12	Skills Needs of Employers	A	A	A	G	G	OCT 2011
CL14	North Wales Regional Waste Treatment Partnership	A	A		A	A	2016/17
CL15	Clwyd Theatr Cymru (CTC)	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
	Council Delivery	Mar 11	June 11	Sept 11	Dec 11	Mar 12	Predictive Green/Amber
CD02	Streetscene	A	A	A	A	A	JUN 2012
CD03	Transition from UDP to LDP	A	A	A	G	G	DEC 2011
CD04	Planning Protocol	A	G	G	G	A	SEP 2011
CD05	Highways Infrastructure	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CD06	Transport Arrangments For Service Users	A	A	A	A	A	DEC 2013
CD07	Depot Provision	A	A	A	A	A	DEC 2013
CD08	Connah's Quay, Shotton & Deeside Housing Renewal Area	A	A	A	A	A	MAR 2020
CD10a	Leisure - Revenue Funding			R	R	R	TBC
CD10b	Leisure - Capital Projects			A	A	A	SEP 2012
CD10c	Leisure - Play Strategy			A	A	A	DEC 2012
CD12a	Housing Strategy	A	A	A	A	A	APR 2012
CD12b	Housing Management	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CD12c	Housing Repairs and Maintenance Services	A	A	A	A	A	APR 2012
CD12d	Homelessness	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CD12e	Sheltered Housing	A	A	A	A	A	NOV 2013
CD14	Housing Ballot	A	A	A	A	G	TBC
CD19	Gypsies and Travellers	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CD20	School Buildings/School modernisation	R	R		R		2018
CD22	School Improvement - Regional Project			A	A	A	TBC
CD23	Procurement of Independent Sector placements for looked after children	R	A	A	A	A	TBC
CD26	Disabled Facilities Grants	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CD27a	Waste Management Targets/Food Waste Treatment Project	A	A	A	A	A	2016/17
CD27c	Waste Management Operations	A	A	A	A	A	2016/17
CD27d	Waste Management (AD Waste)	G	G	G		G	SEP 2010
CD34	Severe Winter Weather	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CD37	Food Waste Treatment Project					A	2016/2017
CD38	Welfare Reform					R	TBC
	Council Governance	Mar 11	June 11	Sept 11	Dec 11	Mar 12	Predictive Green/Amber
CG05a	Asset Management - Strategic	A	A	A	A	A	2015/16
CG05b	Asset Rationalisation			A	A	A	2015/16
CG06	Medium Term Financial Strategy	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CG07	Financial Management and Control	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CG08	ICT Strategy	A	A	A	G	G	DEC 2011
CG09	Information Governance	A	A	A	A	A	TBC
CG10	Human Resources and Management	A	A	A	A	A	NOV 2012
CG11	Single Status and Terms and Conditions of Employment	A	A	A	A	A	NOV 2012
CG13	Customer Focus	A	G	G	G	A	JUN 2011
CG16	Workforce and Succession Planning	A	A	A	A	A	NOV 2012
CG18	Procurement	A	A		A	A	TBC
CG19	Business Continuity (including Winter Disruption)	A	A	A	A	A	APR 2012
CG22	Flintshire Futures			A	A	A	TBC
CG23	Data Protection					R	

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FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 27 JUNE 2012

REPORT BY: ENVIRONMENT & HOUSING OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY FACILITATOR

SUBJECT: FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To consider the Forward Work Programme of the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 Experienced Overview & Scrutiny Members will be aware that items feed into a committee's Forward Work Programme from a number of sources. Individual Members can suggest topics for review by Overview & Scrutiny committees; members of the public can suggest topics; items can be referred by the Cabinet for consultation purposes; items can be referred by the County Council, or Directors can request that a committee gives a view on a particular topic. Other possible items are identified from the Cabinet Work Programme and the Strategic Assessment of Risks & Challenges.

2.02 In identifying topics for future consideration, it is useful for a 'test of significance' to be applied. This can be achieved by asking a range of questions as follows:

1. Will the review contribute to the Council's priorities and/or objectives?
2. Are there issues of weak or poor performance?
3. How, where and why were the issues identified?
4. Do local communities think the issues are important and is there any evidence of this? Is there evidence of public dissatisfaction?
5. Is there new Government guidance or legislation?
6. Have inspections been carried out?
7. Is this area already the subject of an ongoing review?

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 Overview & Scrutiny presents a unique opportunity for Members to determine the Forward Work Programmes of the committees of which they are Members.

3.02 At the last meeting of the committee on 30 May it was agreed that the meeting scheduled for 25 July would now be a workshop with an invitation to all members to consider the Common Housing Register. It was also agreed that a Forward Work Programme workshop would be arranged to allow the committee to consider and develop its forward work programme for the coming year. This has now been scheduled for Monday 2 July 2012.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 That the Committee considers its Forward Work Programme (attached as Appendix 1) and approve/amend as necessary.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

Not applicable.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Not applicable.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

Not applicable.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

Not applicable.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

Publication of this report constitutes consultation.

12.00 APPENDICES

Draft Forward Work Programme.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

CURRENT FWP

Date of meeting	Subject	Purpose of Report	Scrutiny Focus	Responsible / Contact Officer	Submission Deadline
25 July 2012	Workshop on Common Housing Register (Invite to all members)	To consider proposals for the introduction of a common housing register	Collaboration – Service Improvements	Head of Housing	16 July 2012
26 Sept 2012	Quarterly Performance Reporting	To consider Q1 performance outturns for improvement targets.			
31 Oct 2012	To be determined				
5 Dec 2012	Quarterly Performance Reporting	To consider Q2 performance outturns for improvement targets			
23 Jan 2013	To be determined				
21 Feb 2013	To be determined				
21 March 2013	Quarterly Performance Reporting	To consider Q3 performance outturns for improvement targets.			
24 April 2013	To be determined				
5 June 2013	Quarterly Performance Reporting	To consider Q4, year end outturns for improvement targets.			

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

10 July 2013	To be determined				
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HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

ITEMS TO BE SCHEDULED as agreed by Committee

Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
Resident Involvement	To consider proposals for improving resident involvement	Head of Housing
Energy Efficiency	To consider work undertaken within Housing Services	Head of Housing
Community Conference's (Boot-camp housing)	To consider proposals for the introduction of Community Conference (Boot-camp housing) within Flintshire, as a means to address tenant education and rent arrears.	Head of Housing
Tracker System	To consider the effectiveness of the vehicle tracker system, and any lessons learnt.	Head of Housing
Grass cutting (early Spring 2012)	To consider the cost implications of removing grass cuttings at sheltered schemes/elderly tenant properties, and to consider other options available.	Head of Housing
Galw Gofal	To consider progress following implementation of the new service.	Director of Community Services
Tenancy Agreements	To receive an update on the introduction of a more robust tenancy agreement following earlier proposals in April '11	Head of Housing

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
Local Housing Strategy	To consider proposals within the Draft Strategy	Head of Housing
Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)	To receive and consider the outcome of the Anti-social Behaviour workshop	Neighbourhood Housing Manager

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

REGULAR ITEMS

Month	Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
Quarterly / Annual	Performance Reporting	To consider performance outturns for improvement targets against directorate indicators.	Director of Community
Six monthly	Update on Repairs and Improvements	To enable Members to monitor the approach and effectiveness of repairs and improvements to the Council's housing stock, to include void management.	Head of Housing
Quarterly	Sheltered Housing Improvement Project	To receive progress with the review on sheltered accommodation.	
Quarterly	Housing Stock Ballot	To enable Members to monitor the progress leading up to balloting Flintshire's tenants on the future of the housing stock.	Chief Executive
Six monthly	Neighbourhood Renewal Area	To consider progress on the delivery of Flintshire's first Renewal Area	Head of Housing
Quarterly	Collaborative Working within Housing Services	To receive and consider current and future collaborative initiatives.	Head of Housing

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

APPENDIX B

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF RISKS AND CHALLENGES TOPICS ALLOCATED TO OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

SECTION 1 - COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Category	Risk Reference	Title	Committee
Strategic Partnerships	CL04	Affordable Housing	Housing

SECTION 2 - COUNCIL DELIVERY

Category	Risk Reference	Title	Committee
Environment	CD08	Shotton and Deeside Renewal Area	Housing
Housing	CD12a	Housing Strategy	C&H
	CD12b	Housing Management	C&H
	CD12c	Housing Repairs & Maintenance	C&H
	CD12d	Homelessness	C&H
	CD12e	Sheltered Housing	Housing
	CD14	Housing Ballot	C&H
	CD19	Gypsies and Travellers	C&H
Social Care	CD26	Disabled Facilities Grants	S&H and Housing (joint meetings)