Gareth Owens LL.B Barrister/Bargyfreithiwr
Chief Officer (Governance)
Prif Swyddog (Llywodraethu)

Contact Officer:
Ceri Shotton 01352 702305
ceri.shotton@flintshire.gov.uk

To: Cllr Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: Helen Brown, Geoff Collett, David Cox, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Mared Eastwood, Veronica Gay, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Brian Lloyd and Kevin Rush

4 November 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

NOTICE OF REMOTE MEETING
COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, 10 NOVEMBER, 2021 at 2.00 PM

Yours faithfully

Robert Robins
Democratic Services Manager

Please note: This will be a remote meeting and 'attendance' will be restricted to Committee Members and those Members of Council who have asked the Head of Democratic Services for an invitation. Such attendees may only speak at the Chair's discretion.

The meeting will be live streamed onto the Council's website. A recording of the meeting will also be available, shortly after the meeting at https://flintshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home

If you have any queries regarding this, please contact a member of the Democratic Services Team on 01352 702345.

A G E N D A

1   **APOLOGIES**

Purpose: To receive any apologies.

2   **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

Purpose: To receive any Declarations and advise Members accordingly.

3   **MINUTES** (Pages 5 - 10)

Purpose: To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2021.

4   **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING** (Pages 11 - 20)

Report of Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator

Purpose: To consider the Forward Work Programme of the Community Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee and to inform the Committee of progress against actions from previous meetings.

5   **HOUSING STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN** (Pages 21 - 60)

Report of Chief Executive - Cabinet Member for Housing

Purpose: To review progress made on the Housing Strategy Action Plan and provide feedback and comments.

6   **VOID PROPERTIES WITHIN THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT** (Pages 61 - 72)

Report of Chief Executive - Cabinet Member for Housing

Purpose: To note the update report in relation to voids managed by the Housing Service and provide any comments or observations.

Please note that there may be a 10 minute adjournment of this meeting if it lasts longer than two hours

Procedural Note on the conduct of meetings

The Chair will open the meeting and introduce themselves.

The meeting will be attended by a number of Councillors. Officers will also be in attendance to present reports, with Democratic Services officers acting as hosts of the meeting.

All attendees are asked to ensure their mobile phones are switched off and that any background noise is kept to a minimum.

All microphones are to be kept muted during the meeting and should only be un-muted when invited to speak by the Chair. When invitees have finished speaking they should go back on mute.

To indicate to speak, Councillors will use the chat facility or use the electronic raise hand function. The chat function may also be used for questions, relevant comments and officer advice and updates.

The Chair will call the speakers, with elected Members addressed as 'Councillor' and officers addressed by their job title e.g. Chief Executive' or name. From time to time, the officer advising the Chair will explain procedural points or suggest alternative wording for proposals, to assist the Committee.

If and when a vote is taken, the Chair will explain that only those who oppose the proposal(s), or who wish to abstain will need to indicate, using the chat function. The officer advising the Chair will indicate whether the proposals are carried.

If a more formal vote is needed, this will be by roll call – where each Councillor will be asked in turn (alphabetically) how s/he wishes to vote

At County Council and Planning Committee meetings speaker's times are limited. A bell will be sounded to alert that the speaker has one minute remaining

The meeting will be live streamed onto the Council's website. A recording of the meeting will also be available, shortly after the meeting at https://flintshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home

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<u>**COMMUNITY HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**</u>
<u>**13 OCTOBER 2021**</u>

Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Wednesday, 13 October 2021

<u>**PRESENT:**</u> **Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)**
Councillors: Geoff Collett, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Mared Eastwood, Veronica Gay, Dennis Hutchinson Kevin Rush, Brian Lloyd and Ray Hughes,

<u>**SUBSTITUTE:**</u> Councillor David Wisinger (for David Cox)

<u>**ALSO PRESENT:**</u> Councillors: Patrick Heesom, Haydn Bateman, Paul Johnson, Christine Jones and Brian Lloyd attended as an observer

<u>**CONTRIBUTORS:**</u> Chief Executive, Councillor Dave Hughes, Cabinet Member for Housing; Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management; Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), Housing & Assets Senior Manager, Benefits Manager, Housing Programme Services Manager, Housing & Prevention Senior Manager, Corporate Finance Manager, Business Performance Team Manager, Benefits Officer, Principal Accountant, Community and Business Protection Manager & Senior Surveyor.

<u>**IN ATTENDANCE:**</u> Community & Education Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Electoral Services Officer

12. <u>**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**</u>

      None.

13. <u>**MINUTES**</u>

      The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2021, were moved as a correct record by Councillor Geoff Collet and seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

<u>**RESOLVED:**</u>

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

14. <u>**FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING**</u>

      The Facilitator introduced the current Forward Work Programme and action tracking report and reported that both actions arising from the previous meeting had been completed.

      The Facilitator reported that at a recent meeting of the Recovery Committee, it has been recommended that the portfolio risks identified be reported that the appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The risks identified for this Committee were around Rent Arrears, Homelessness and Raw Materials. She reported that the Committee would receive an update report on Housing Rent and Welfare Reform at the

December meeting, with a verbal update from the Chief Officer on raw materials being considered at today's meeting. She would liaise with the appropriate Officers to ensure a report on Homelessness was added to the forward work programme following the meeting.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Ron Davies and seconded by Councillor Mared Eastwood.

RESOLVED:

(a)   That the Forward Work Programme be noted;

(b)   That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises; and

(c)   That the progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

15.   **BUDGET 2022/23 – STAGE 2**

The Chief Executive, Corporate Finance Manager and Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) introduced the second budget stage report which detailed the forecast and the cost pressures which would make-up the total budget requirement.

A report to Cabinet and the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee in July provided an updated position on the budget for 2022/23. The cost pressures identified were referred to the respective Overview & Scrutiny Committees with a request that they all undergo a rigorous review. The details of the cost pressures for Education and Youth were included in the report.

The Chief Executive, Corporate Finance Manager and Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) provided a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Purpose and Background
- Summary Totals of Cost Pressures
- Housing & Assets Portfolio Cost Pressures 2022/23
  - ➢ Housing & Assets Pressures
- Strategic Solutions
- Update on Efficiencies
- Budget Timelines

The Benefits Manager reported on Council Tax Reduction and commented that they had seen a significant increase in expenditure. She added that a great deal of significant support was about to come to an end (furlough scheme and tax credits) which would have an impact. The Benefits Manager gave an overview to the Committee on the exposure level and commented that there would be a significant impact for Universal Credit and that the service for the scheme had been scaled up to provide comprehensive measures to help with advice and support to the public and household income.

The Benefits Manager also commented on the 'Help You' scheme for Council tenants and fuel support due to the increase in fuel pricing and the grant for tenancy hardship.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Ron Davies and seconded by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson.

RESOLVED:

(a)   That the Committee supports the Housing and Assets Portfolio cost pressures; and

(b)   That no further cost efficiency areas be proposed by the Committee to be explored further

16.   FLINTSHIRE HOUSING NEED PROSPECTUS

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) and Housing Programme Services Manager jointly introduced the Housing Need Prospectus which would inform the Social Housing Grant Programme.

The Welsh Government (WG) had requested that each Local Authority develop a Housing Need Prospectus. The aim of the prospectus was to inform affordable housing delivery, shape of Social Housing Grant programme by setting out what the Local Authority priorities were and provide a guide about what type of housing was needed in what locations.

The Chief Officer reported that the WG allocated the Social Housing Grant based on pro-rata amount of the all Wales allocation. He advised that the allocation for Flintshire County Council had substantially increased for 2021/22.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson and seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the Flintshire Housing Need Prospectus be noted.

17.   DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG) POLICY

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) and Benefits Manager introduced the revised policy and new discretionary grant. As part of the Internal Audit review of the Disabled Facilities Grant service in June 2018, it was identified that the current policy required a review in order to make the process and detail clearer and easier to understand.

The Benefits Manager outlined changes to the new policy and explained that the process has been greatly simplified for applying for a £36,000 grant based on a 5 year period of recommendations from specialists such as Occupational Health. She added that there was no means test for children, and no means test for any works to be

carried out under £10,000. They had also removed the equity requirement for a top up grant, and relocation grants were still available of up to £20,000.

The Benefits Manager informed the Committee that Welsh Government (WG) timescales for adaptation had been adopted and where previously the work carried out had been recorded in the number of days, it would now be brought in line with WG and the wording changed to months/weeks.

The Chair commented that he was pleased that the grant was remaining at £36,000.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Geoff Collet and seconded by Councillor Mared Eastwood.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the revised policy and new discretionary grant.

18. **PROGRESS OF EMPTY HOMES SCHEME IN FLINTSHIRE**

The Community and Business Protection Manager introduced a report to provide an overview of the work undertaken by the Empty Homes Services. She gave a joint presentation with the Development Officer which covered the following:

- context
- achievements since 2019
- case studies

The Chairman commented that the number of empty homes seemed high but added that the standard of the refurbishments was excellent. The Senior Surveyor added that the figures for the number of empty properties was obtained from Council Tax. He also commented that they had the use of an excellent private investigator to identify home owners, and that private landlords were often part of the solution.

In response to a question from Councillor David Wisinger around an empty property in the Deeside area, the Senior Surveyor that work was progressing on identifying a solution to bring the property back into use.

In response to a question from Councillor Adele Davies-Cooke, the Senior Surveyor advised that all properties were sold at auction to ensure the best possible price at a given time.

Councillor Ron Davies asked if empty buildings were addressed alongside empty homes. The Senior Surveyor advised that only empty residential properties were targeted with their being not enough resources in the team to address commercial properties.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Veronica Gay and seconded by Councillor Mared Eastwood.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

19.   **RAW MATERIALS SUPPLIES**

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), relayed the impact that Covid and Brexit has had on suppliers, and that it had created and continues to create a number of pressures for activities & works including the impact on the speed of a build and the costs of construction. For example, the costs of timber and windows had increased 30-40% in the current market, and the waiting time for lift components had increased from 12 to up to 30 weeks wait. Haulage had also been hugely impacted with the shortage of lorry drivers and how quickly goods could come into the Country.

He commented that the situation was likely to settle down within the next 12/18 months and added that Officers were currently reviewing all projects to identify which would continue and which would have to be put on hold.

Councillor Ron Davies moved that the Committee felt assured that the risk around raw material supplies was being managed. This was seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee feel assured that the risk around raw material supplies was being managed.

20.   **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.20 a.m.)

………………………
Chairman

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COMMUNITY HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 10th November 2021
Report Subject	Forward Work Programme and Action Tracking
Report Author	Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview & Scrutiny presents a unique opportunity for Members to determine the Forward Work programme of the Committee of which they are Members. By reviewing and prioritising the Forward Work Programme Members are able to ensure it is Member-led and includes the right issues. A copy of the Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration which has been updated following the last meeting.

The Committee is asked to consider, and amend where necessary, the Forward Work Programme for the Community Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The report also shows actions arising from previous meetings of the Community Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the progress made in completing them. Any outstanding actions will be continued to be reported to the Committee as shown in Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDATION	
1	That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme and approve/amend as necessary.
2	That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.
3	That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING
1.01	Items feed into a Committee's Forward Work Programme from a number of sources. 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, or by County Council or Chief Officers. Other possible items are identified from the Cabinet Work Programme and the Improvement Plan.
1.02	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. Is it an area of major change or risk? 3. Are there issues of concern in performance? 4. Is there new Government guidance of legislation? 5. Is it prompted by the work carried out by Regulators/Internal Audit? 6. Is the issue of public or Member concern?
1.03	In previous meetings, requests for information, reports or actions have been made. These have been summarised as action points. Following a meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee in July 2018, it was recognised that there was a need to formalise such reporting back to Overview & Scrutiny Committees, as 'Matters Arising' was not an item which can feature on an agenda.
1.04	It was suggested that the 'Action tracking' approach be trialled for the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Following a successful trial, it was agreed to extend the approach to all Overview & Scrutiny Committees.
1.05	The Action Tracking details including an update on progress is attached at Appendix 2.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None as a result of this report.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	In some cases, action owners have been contacted to provide an update on their actions.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None as a result of this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Draft Forward Work Programme

Appendix 2 – Action Tracking for the Community Housing & Assets OSC. |

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Minutes of previous meetings of the Committee as identified in Appendix 2.

Contact Officer: Ceri Shotton
Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator
Telephone: 01352 702305
E-mail: ceri.shotton@flintshire.gov.uk |

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	**Improvement Plan:** the document which sets out the annual priorities of the Council. It is a requirement of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to set Improvement Objectives and publish an Improvement Plan.

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COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME
CURRENT FWP

Date of meeting	Subject	Purpose of Report	Scrutiny Focus	Report Author	Submission Deadline
Wednesday 8th December, 2021	**Housing Rent Income – Mid-year outturn and latest position for 2022/23**	To provide the Mid-year outturn for 2021/22 and an operational update on rent collection and current arrear levels for 2022/23.	Monitoring Assurance	Revenues Manager	
	Welfare Reform Update	To provide an update on the impact of Welfare Reform on Flintshire Residents.	Monitoring Assurance	Benefits Manager	
	Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016	To provide an update on the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 following it becoming fully enacted.	Information Sharing	Chief Officer (Housing & Assets)	
	Mid-year Performance Indicators for Recovery, Portfolio and Public Accountability Measures	To review the levels of progress in the achievement of activities, performance levels and current risk levels as identified in the Council Plan.	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Housing & Assets)	
Wednesday 12th January, 2022	**Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**	To consider the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2022/23 and the HRA Business Plan.	Consultation	Chief Officer (Housing & Assets)	

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

	Council Plan 22/23	To consult on Part 1 of the Council Plan 2022/23	Consultation	Chief Executive	
	NEW Homes Business Plan	To consider the NEW Homes Business Plan	Consultation	Chief Officer (Housing & Assets)	
Wednesday 9th February, 2022					
Wednesday 9 March 2022	**Meeting Cancelled**				
Tuesday 7 June 2022 at 2pm	**Housing Rent Income - Year end outturn and latest position for 2022/23**	To provide the Year end outturn for 2021/22 and an operational update on rent collection and current arrear levels for 2022/23.	Monitoring Assurance	Revenues Manager	
	Welfare Reform Update	To provide an update on the impact of Welfare Reform on Flintshire Residents.	Monitoring Assurance	Benefits Manager	
	Communal Heating Charges 2022/23	To consider the proposed heating charges in council properties with communal heating systems for 2022/23 prior to Cabinet approval.	Consultation	Corporate Finance - Accountant	

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Wednesday 6 July 2022	**Year-end Performance Indicators for Recovery, Portfolio and Public Accountability Measures**	To review the levels of progress in the achievement of activities, performance levels and current risk levels as identified in the Council Plan.	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Housing & Assets)	

Items to be scheduled

- **Sheltered Housing Review –** Reports to be submitted to Committee meetings as appropriate as agreed at the Committee meeting held on 4th November, 2020.
- **Dynamic Resource Scheduler (DRS) System Update –** Update reports to be submitted annually to the Committee starting September 2022 following implementation on the new system, as agreed at the Committee meeting held on 23rd February, 2021
- **De-carbonisation Strategy –** Briefing session to be arranged for Members to enable a better understanding of the De-Carbonisation Strategy, when appropriate.

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS 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.	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)
Six monthly	**Welfare Reform Update – including Universal Credit**	To update Members on the impact of Welfare Reform and the cost to the Council.	Benefits Manager
Six monthly	**Update on North East Wales Homes & Property Management**	To update Members on the work of the North East Wales Homes & Property Management	Housing Strategy Manager
Annually – September	**WHQS Capital Programme – Delivery review update**	To provide an update on progress of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS), that the Council is delivering through its Capital Investment Programme. Report to include information around the use of local labour and number of apprentices and school leavers.	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)
Six monthly	**Update on Housing Rent Income**	To provide an update on rent collection and current arrear levels	Revenues Manager

ACTION TRACKING FOR THE COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting Date	Agenda item	Action Required	Action Officer(s)	Action taken	Timescale
13.10.2021	8. Progress of Empty Homes Scheme in Flintshire	That a copy of the presentation be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.	Ceri Shotton	A copy of the presentation was e-mailed to all Committee Members on 28.10.21	Completed

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CYNGOR
Sir y Fflint
Flintshire
COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 10 November 2021
Report Subject	Housing Strategy and Action Plan
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing
Report Author	Chief Executive
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide Community, Housing and Assets Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CHAOSC) with the annual update on progress towards meeting the priorities set out in the Local Housing Strategy 2019-24.

The Housing Strategy has an action plan that sets out 3 priorities with key areas for action within in each priority:

Priority 1: Increase supply to provide the right type of homes in the right location
Priority 2: Provide support to ensure people live and remain in the right type of home
Priority 3: Improve the quality and sustainability of homes

RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	That Community, Housing and Assets Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the Progress Action Plan October 2021 and provide feedback and comments.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	**EXPLAINING THE HOUSING STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN**
1.01	Flintshire's Housing Strategy and Action Plan sets out the vision for how the Council with its partners, will deliver affordable housing, provide the relevant support to its residents and ensure it creates sustainable homes.
1.02	**The Housing Strategy and Action Plan**
1.03	The Housing Strategy identifies 3 priorities with key areas for action within in each priority: • Priority 1: Increase supply to provide the right type of homes in the right location • Priority 2: Provide support to ensure people live and remain in the right type of home • Priority 3: Improve the quality and sustainability of our homes
1.04	**Priority 1**
1.05	Priority 1 aims to address the lack of supply of affordable housing to meet demand, which is evident on the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) for social housing and on the Affordable Housing Register - Tai Teg.
1.06	The action plan sets out how we ensure that the right type of homes to meet people's needs are provided in the right locations.
1.07	**Priority 2**
1.08	Priority 2 aims to ensure we have the right type of housing related support in place to prevent issues that can cause vulnerable people to become homeless.
1.09	The principle of housing related support is to support a person to access, maintain and manage their accommodation by assessing and developing or maintaining the necessary skills and confidence to live as independent a life as possible. The priority will focus on prevention and intervention, and complements the priorities set out in the Regional Homelessness Strategy and local action plan.
1.10	It is, however, wider than homelessness and the action plan identifies interventions for different vulnerable groups including people with specialist needs and older people.
1.11	**Priority 3**
1.12	Priority 3 aims to improve the quality of existing housing stock and develop innovative, energy efficient new stock to contribute towards target of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases by 3% per year as set out in

	the Climate Change Strategy for Wales Delivery Plan for Emission Reduction. Decarbonisation is an evolving agenda and Welsh Government has recently revised the Welsh Development Quality Requirements (WDQR 2021) that relates to all new affordable housing and that sets out space standards and aims to progress towards homes being carbon zero.
1.13	**Progress Action plan October 2021**
1.14	A progress report was last completed October 2020 and presented to COT and Informal Cabinet.
1.15	The Action Plan (appendix 1) has been updated and responsible Officers have provided commentary to explain how the actions are being developed and work is evolving.
1.16	During 2020/21 and into 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic remains to cause significant challenges in delivering Council services. There has been an impact on resources and for some services a shift in priorities as immediate challenges had to be dealt with e.g. providing temporary accommodation to homeless people, providing support and assistance to those shielding. The pandemic has been ongoing for an extensive amount of time, causing uncertainty and the Council has had to react to a rapidly changing environment. This unsettled period has resulted in delays and significant adjustment in all areas of housing and further delays may occur with levels of uncertainty continuing throughout the rest of 2021.
1.17	Despite this, the Action Plan demonstrates there has been progress and the Council has successfully adapted to new ways of working and achieved continuation of services for Flintshire residents during an unprecedented time of change.
1.18	The Action Plan will be presented annually to COT and Cabinet and Housing Association partners via the RSL Strategic Housing Group.

2.00	**RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**
2.01	Revenue: the Housing Strategy Action Plan is a strategic document, there are no implications for the approved revenue budget for either the current financial year or for future financial years.

Capital: the Housing Strategy Action Plan is a strategic document, there are no implications for the approved capital programme relating to the Strategy or Action Plan.

Human Resources: there are some actions within the Action Plan that refer to the potential for new posts to be recruited that will help to deliver additional services. The feasibility for this is being explored as part of the Housing Services Review and restructure and will be reported on via a separate report to COT. |

3.00	**IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT**
3.01	**Impact Assessment**
3.02	The Housing Strategy Action Plan is a progress report rather than a new policy, therefore an impact assessment is not deemed as necessary.
3.03	**Risk Management**
3.04	The impact of Covid-19 continues to pose a risk to delivering the Local Housing Strategy actions and this is likely to continue for the remainder of 2021/22. It is difficult to mitigate this risk due to the level of uncertainty.
3.05	Many of the actions will require funding to progress and therefore should funding be unavailable this will impact deliverability.
3.06	The Housing Strategy action plan will be monitored annually by the Housing Programmes Team and shared with internal and external stakeholders for feedback and review.
3.07	**Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles Impact** *(see table below)*

Long-term	Positive - more affordable homes will be provided in the right location
Prevention	Preventing - preventing people becoming homeless through ensuring there is relevant services and accommodation
Integration	Positive – the delivery of a range of affordable homes will contribute to integration within communities
Collaboration	Positive – the strategy's premise is on delivering in partnership with relevant stakeholders.
Involvement	Positive - individual decision making will involve all partners with strategic oversight by the Strategic Housing Partnership.

Well-being Goals Impact

Prosperous Wales	Positive - Providing good quality affordable homes, aiming for low / zero carbon. Also ensuring the homes are in the place that people need them and will meet their housing needs. Maximising local

		employment and training opportunities for local people.
	Resilient Wales	Positive - Developing low / zero carbon homes though adopting modern methods of construction and other relevant technologies.
	Healthier Wales	Positive - Ensuring our homes are fit for purpose and will enable people to stay in their home for longer, and ensuring we have homes that meet the needs of all people in our society including those who are most vulnerable supporting their well-being.
	More equal Wales	Positive - Providing good quality and decent homes for the most vulnerable people in society including temporary, single household, adapted etc.
	Cohesive Wales	Positive - Contributing to attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities through promoting good design and collaborative delivery.
	Vibrant Wales	Positive - Ensuring our communities are diverse through good communication of housing opportunities and support.
	Globally responsible Wales	Positive - The outcomes of the strategy will contribute to improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	Responsible officers who deliver services within the Action Plan have been consulted and asked to provide their feedback against the actions which have formed the basis of the responses in appendix 1.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 - Housing Strategy Action Plan Progress Report October 2021

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Flintshire Housing Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2024

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	**Contact Officer:** Sarah Faire, Housing Strategy Manager **Telephone:** 07788389661 **E-mail:** : sarah.faire@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	**Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) Policy –** the regional common policy for all major social landlords allocating social housing properties across Flintshire.
8.02	**Social Housing Grant** – Welsh Government funding that may be available to housing associations and developing Local Authorities. It is to help fund new affordable housing e.g. for social rent. To qualify for grant homes must comply with Welsh Government Development Quality Requirements (WDQR).

Local Housing Strategy Action Plan
Progress Report October 2021

Priority 1: Increase supply to provide the right type of homes in the right location

Output	Timescale	Lead organisation/s	Progress
To meet the annual shortfall of 228 affordable housing as identified in the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) 2019 by delivering the following tenures: (i) To increase the number of new social rent properties (RSL or Council) by 86 per annum (ii) To increase the number of intermediate rent properties (NEW Homes or RSLs) by 57 per annum (iii) To increase the number of intermediate ownership properties (through s106 provision or RSLs) by 95 per annum	Annual	Flintshire County Council and RSL Partners	<u>Completed 2020/21</u> Number of newbuild social rented homes FCC – 37 RSL – 124 Number of newbuild intermediate rent homes FCC – 47 RSL – 20 Number of newbuild intermediate ownership homes marketed by Tai Teg Shared Equity Sales – 17 Rent to Own - 8 During 2020 and into 2021, there have been challenges for the construction sector. The combined impact of Brexit and the Covid 19 pandemic has resulted in delays due to lock down restrictions, shortage of materials

			and caused a substantial uplift in costs. It is expected that completion of new homes for 2021/22 will be lower. However, the number of completions should increase in 2022/23 and 23/24 and will include the delayed FCC schemes at Nant y Gro, Gronant and Ffordd Hiraethog and Ffordd Pandarus, Mostyn which will deliver a further 71 social rent units and 6 units at Park Lane/ Duke Street Holywell. Development teams at FCC and RSL partners continue to work on pipeline schemes that are at varying stages to bring forward for social rent/ intermediate rent units.
Deliver 5% (10) new build properties per annum to meet demand specialist provision	Annual	Flintshire County Council and RSL Partners	Number of new build units to meet specialist provision 20/21 FCC – 3 RSL – 6
Deliver 20 major adaptations on existing properties per annum (all tenures)	Annual	Flintshire County Council and RSL Partners	10 large adaptations were completed in 20/21 by FCC some of these adaptations were

			outstanding prior to 20/21. Long delays were incurred due to the Covid lockdown and restrictions in 2020 and again in 2021, with customers self-isolating this meant only priority works were completed for the majority of the year. Since the latest Covid restrictions were lifted works have restarted where possible and 2 large adaptations have been completed to date during 2021/22. There have been challenges with some supply shortages since Covid. RSLs have completed 2 large adaptations (Clwyd Alyn).
Increase the percentage of one bedroom social rented properties by 20% (16) per year of all new build social rented properties	Annual	Flintshire County Council and RSL Partners	Number of one bedroom social rent properties complete 20/21 FCC – 9 RSL – 60 (43 units were extra care)
Reduce the number of empty properties by 10% (50) over the lifetime of the strategy	March 2025	Flintshire County Council	With the help of Houses into Home loans, working with existing owners and using enforcement

			measure 38 empty properties have been brought back into use. This is broken down as: 2019/20 – 19 properties 2020/21 – 10 properties 2021/22 – 9 properties to date

Priority 1.1 To increase the supply of all types and tenures of affordable housing through new build developments		
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
The RSL Welsh Government Social Housing Grant programme	• Increasing development capacity in Flintshire through zoning additional Housing Associations. • Ensuring maximum number of properties delivered using the available funding. • Ensuring a robust reserve list of schemes. • Ensuring the type and tenure meets local housing needs, primarily social rent properties, informed by the Council's Housing Strategy Team.	The FCC social housing grant allocation for 2020/ 21 was £5.2 million. The amount allocated for 2021/22 is £10.2 million, this has been was fully allocated to schemes in the Programme Delivery Plan (PDP) which has been approved by WG. The PDP should deliver approx. 191 units during the PDP 3 year period (subject to financial appraisals/ planning approvals). FCC and partner RSLs are seeking to maximise opportunities for WG funding and delivering a range of property types and tenures including social rent and intermediate rent. The WG have requested all Local Authorities produce a Prospectus that sets out housing need and priorities for the area. This will help to inform future social housing grant allocation. The draft Flintshire Prospectus has been produced subject to formal Council approval. For 2021, WG have opened up zoning so all RSLs that operate across the North Wales region can work in every Local Authority area and request

		support for social housing grant. Therefore, there are now 6 RSL's who can access grant in Flintshire.
The Council's new build programme: SHARP/ HRA	- Meeting the HRA Business Plan's ambition to deliver 50 new social rent homes per annum up to 2030 in order to meet the demand of the social housing register. - Ensuring the delivery of new builds adds value through addressing the pressures for certain housing types by basing development plans on intelligence. - Utilising Welsh Government's Affordable Housing Grant to support delivery. - Securing a lift in the borrowing cap to enable additional financial resources to meet the Council's delivery ambitions. - Developing a forward delivery plan for the SHARP once 500 new homes target achieved.	From 2020/21, the WG have an ambitious target to deliver 20,000 new social homes and have opened up the social housing grant programme to developing Local Authorities. FCC is reviewing its Housing Programmes Team to secure additional Officers who will work to deliver newbuild housing schemes. It is anticipated the new team will be established by March 22. FCC and NEW Homes continue to work proactively to increase the number of social and affordable rent properties available to meet identified housing demand across Flintshire. In accordance with WG strategic housing policy, the Council will work with an increased focus upon working collaboratively with partner housing associations to jointly deliver new housing schemes. New development schemes will be procured via the North Wales Construction Framework.
NEW Homes investment	Supporting the delivery of affordable rented properties through SHARP for NEW Homes.	NEW Homes currently owns and manages 173 units.

	• Ensuring NEW Homes maximises its ability to invest in the delivery of affordable rented properties through using their existing assets.	NEW Homes are in discussion with WG to see if they are eligible for social housing grant support.
Maximising the provision of affordable housing on market led sites through S106 requirements	• Ensuring the new LDP affordable housing planning policy requirements maximises appropriate on-site provision. • Supporting and encourage our delivery partners to utilise private finance and Rent to Own grant to acquire units from developers for affordable rent and rent to own / shared ownership, in addition to the planning requirement. • Working with developers to ensure delivery of affordable ownership models, such as shared equity, where there is demand.	Housing Strategy is a consultee for new planning applications and negotiations occur with developers and RSL partners based on housing need and Local Authority priorities. This will be reinforced via the Housing Need prospectus. Welsh Government Rent to Own grant funding is not available for 2021/22.
Exploring innovation and social value across the sector	• Working with partners to use off site manufacturing / Modern Methods of Manufacturing. • Explore opportunities through the regional growth deal partnership • Considering investing in designs for multi-generational / flexible homes • Increasing the use of social value in service planning and procurement in order to maximise opportunities and support vulnerable residents.	All new FCC schemes will incorporate MMC to achieve enhanced sustainability and in line with the Welsh Development Quality Requirements 2021 (WDQR 2021) "Creating Beautiful Homes and Places", this sets out the minimum functional quality standards for new and rehabilitated general needs affordable homes. FCC is taking part in an all Wales pilot project which aims to develop a good practice framework by sharing knowledge about zero carbon housing

		among Local Authorities and RSLs.
		The launch of the North Wales Construction Framework in April 2020 provides a delivery route for procurement of schemes and ensures that social value is embedded within procurement.

Priority 1.2 To increase the supply through better use of existing social housing stock		
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
The Council's housing stock	• Undertaking a review of the stock and tenancies to determine where there is under occupation or where there is capacity to realign the use of the stock • Reviewing the existing use of stock to assess best use • Developing an incentive scheme to encourage movement in the stock where it can be proven to meet a need from the housing register and address under occupation / overcrowding.	There is an established working group to review all sheltered housing schemes to assess suitability as older persons housing in the future. Flintshire has a sizeable amount of older persons stock and therefore this review has taken longer than anticipated. The review has widened in scope to consider what the Flintshire 'offer' of sheltered housing should be. A matrix is being developed and will be used to assess sheltered schemes that require substantial investment or that have housing management challenges. A pilot project is being explored that will focus on a specific scheme. FCC is working with the North Wales housing providers in a 'rightsizing' project looking at whether people are in a property that is suitably sized for their needs. This will include under

		occupancy/ overcrowding and incentives and aim to achieve a consistent approach across the North Wales region.
Partner Housing Association stock	• Review existing use of stock to assess best use in line with strategic priorities.	FCC continues to work with partner housing associations through the strategic and operational SARTH groups to identify challenges and develop ways of maximising allocations within existing stock. All of the RSLs are involved in the rightsizing project as outlined above.
Accessible Housing	• Develop an Accessible Housing Register for all social housing stock to enable better use of adapted stock • Assess the register to identify where there are homes with adaptations that could be utilised. • Engage with Housing Occupational Health and Social Services as early as possible on all developments to ensure all accessible needs are met.	The specialist housing register is considered when looking at housing need for new build affordable housing schemes and planning applications. NEW Homes and FCC new build housing schemes include consultation at inception stage (with Housing occupational health and social services) to ensure housing requirements for people with accessible needs can be met. FCC and NEW Homes developments with ground floor flats/ bungalows will be developed using wheelchair space standards where the site is deemed as suitable. The housing need prospectus emphasises specialist and supported housing provision being included within grant funded

		developments.
Priority 1.3 To increase the supply by bringing empty homes back into use		There is an ongoing review of specialist housing.
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
Developing relevant policies to maximise legal powers	• Develop a policy for Flintshire to maximise legal powers including the potential to compulsory purchase or take ownership on a temporary basis. • Explore potential resources with Welsh Government for compulsory purchase orders • Developing an initiative, in partnership with our Housing Associations, to bring back empty properties into use to meet specific needs such as for larger families.	FCC aims to recruit two additional Occupational Therapists within the Adaptations team who will work to improve opportunities for applicants on the Specialist Housing register and build links with internal departments. New procedures have been implemented by the Empty Homes Officer to initiate Enforced Sale of long term vacant properties and the first property was sold at auction in September 2020, second in July 2021. The WG initiative aimed at assisting Local Authorities with empty properties and remediating them back into homes was undertaken in June 2021 via a training session. It is anticipated that an enforcement panel will be established to focus on using enforcement powers to bring homes back into use.
Reducing empty properties	• Working closely with partner Housing Associations and the Council Tax Team to identify those properties which are long term empty and are causing issues to the local community.	Working closely with Council tax and utilising land registry information the empty homes team are targeting long term empty properties by locating owners and offering support and financial assistance. To raise awareness the houses into home loan scheme will publicised via a leaflet sent with the council tax bills 2022/ 23, this will be sent to every property in the authority.

		There have been two enforced sales carried out. One in September 2020 and the second in July 2021.
The provision of financial support to bring empty properties back into use	• Promoting 'Houses to Homes' loans, which aims to bring empty properties back into use through providing affordable loans up to £25k in the private sector. *Amounts have been increased from £25,000 to £35,000 for each property and up to £250,000 per application.*	<u>Financial Support</u> The Houses to Homes loan scheme has facilitated the following: 19/20 – 8 properties creating 18 units of accommodation 20/21 – 7 properties creating 9 units of accommodation 21/22 – 3 properties creating 3 units of accommodation. Two applications have been approved which will create a further 3 units of accommodation. In total, 18 properties have been brought back into use creating 30 units of accommodation from the Houses into Home scheme

Priority 1.4 To increase the supply through the private rented sector (PRS)		
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
A dedicated PRS team / Officer in the Council	• Realign existing staffing resources and expertise to develop an improved PRS offer across Flintshire.	FCC are exploring the option of joining the WG Private Sector Leasing Pathfinder scheme (by March 22) which leases private sector properties and makes them available for homeless households.

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		FCC aims to use Housing Support Grant funding to recruit a Landlord Liaison Officer and Private Sector Access Officer. These new posts would develop the private rented sector offer and build relationships with private landlords. HAWS letting agency continue to manage private sector landlord properties for Flintshire.
Develop a PRS action plan ensuring an effective service	• Undertaking a review of the affordability of the sector and explore ways to address them through incentives or interventions if required. • Working with Environmental Health team to improve standards within the sector.	When officers are in post, part of their role will be consult and engage with landlords and develop an action plan.
The delivery of a bespoke landlord offer	• Consulting with private sector landlords through the Landlord Forum to establish a better understanding of the barriers and what the critical success factors would be to provide a successful offer. • Providing a range of offers for Landlords to incentivise their engagement and commitment to the Council including the BOND. • Ensuring the offer is flexible as well as robust and cost effective.	The BOND scheme continues to be funded. A Landlord Forum will be established when private sector officers are recruited. And incentives explored after landlord engagement.

Priority 1.5 To provide the right type of homes to meet the increased demand for single person accommodation and larger properties for families		
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
The RSL's and Council's new	• Requiring higher numbers of single person accommodation and larger properties as part of all new build developments.	The Housing Need Prospectus prioritises the need for single person

build programmes	• Continuous assessment of priorities and regular updates	accommodation and the highlights the growing need for larger properties. Evidence of housing need, demonstrated by the housing registers, is sought for all new development opportunities and informs the property mix that is to be built. Quarterly meetings are held with RSL development partners to keep them advised about strategic priorities.
Developing innovative approaches	• Reviewing best practice elsewhere and identifying a range of options that could meet our emerging demands for single person and larger units in a cost effective way. • Identifying innovative delivery models which can provide smaller units which are flexible and can be altered to meet changes in demand in the future. • Considering the appropriateness of different delivery methods such as self build/custom build and co-operative approaches to meet the need.	New approaches to house building are considered where the site is suitable and to comply with WDQR 2021 which promotes enhanced environmental sustainability. FCC is working with the Active Building Centre to develop a scheme that strives towards carbon zero. Quick build developments using MMC and flexible modular construction is being explored on sites that are suitable and viable.
Strategic acquisitions	• Providing a strategic acquisition fund for properties which would meet a very specific need and for small numbers of properties. • Requesting partner Housing Associations to utilise social housing grant to acquire individual properties where there is a specific need which is either urgent or cannot be met through current stock.	2021/22 social housing grant funding has been allocated to fund two property acquisitions in partnership with First Choice Housing Association. The properties will help people who need specialist adapted accommodation and who cannot be easily housed within the existing housing stock.

Priority 1.6 To provide the right type of homes to improve the offer and scope of specialist housing provision

Action	Task	Progress
An overarching / strategic framework for determining the most cost effective delivery	- Reviewing the options for delivery i.e. adaptations; acquisition or new build and develop a universal assessment mechanism to determine the most cost effective delivery option within an equality framework. - Reviewing and mapping resources available to meet the increasing demand for adaptations. - Exploring a partnership approach to funding and delivery including Council Housing / DFG teams, HAs Housing teams, Supporting People, Social Services, Occupational Health, Health and ICF partnership. - Lobbying Welsh Government to simplify funding for adaptations across all delivery partners.	The recruitment of two additional Occupational Therapists within the Adaptations team will build capacity and free up resources. A review of the options for delivery can then take place to aim to provide a better coordinated approach across the different service area's in Flintshire that provide adaptations and support for people with disabilities.
Meeting the housing needs of people with disabilities	- Continuing to deliver as a partnership to meet the needs of people on the specialist housing register. - Maximising the use of adaptations to help sustain tenancies and reduce increased pressure on the housing register. - Considering potential strategic acquisitions to meet the needs of particular complex cases. - Ensuring adapted properties are included on all Housing Association new build developments to meet the needs of the specialist register. - Exploring the delivery of adapted properties on market led schemes.	The homeless team review has identified the need for a Specialist Housing Support Officer to work with people whose needs cannot be easily met within the existing social housing supply. The housing need prospectus prioritises the need for specialist housing provision on social housing grant funded schemes. <u>Specialist Housing Register</u> 14 applicants were rehoused from the SHR during 2020/21.
Meeting the needs of people	Developing a proactive relationship with the Health sector to improve communication with Housing Strategy around housing	Glan Y Morfa scheme is completed.

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with complex health needs	needs of those in their care. • Delivering affordable transitional accommodation to reduce delayed transfer of care – Glan y Morfa – through securing funding and undertaking the necessary works. • Working with the Homeless Prevention team to inform provision and identify best practice	The Accommodation and Support Group meets regularly to identify opportunities to address priority groups. The Housing need prospectus prioritises the need for accommodation for specific client groups.
Providing the right type of housing to meet the needs older people	• Understanding the housing needs of the older people. • Exploring alternative and innovative housing models for older people such as intergenerational properties or co-operative models, which help to keep older people active and healthier for longer. • Providing specialist provision such as extra care and supported housing for those older people with care needs including dementia. • Reviewing existing specific older persons social housing stock to ensure they can sustain tenancies. • Exploring potential to include age-friendly properties as part of new build market developments.	This will be considered as part of the Sheltered Housing Review (priority 1.2). There are four extra care schemes in Flintshire providing 239 homes. A potential further scheme is being explored in Buckley.

Priority 1.7 To provide the right type of accommodation for the Gypsy and Traveller community		
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
Meet the need for residential pitches	• Increasing the number of pitches in line with Flintshire's Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) through market led schemes and the refurbishment of the Council owned site.	Market led schemes have increased capacity by two pitches and two planning applications have been submitted that could provide an additional seven pitches (pending Local Development Plan Planning Inspector review).
Provision of a	• Identifying and assessing potential sites to deliver a transit site in	Preferred location for a transit site has

transit site within the County	• Applying for planning permission for transit site and secure Welsh Government grant to deliver provision.	been submitted via Local Development Plan. Planning Inspector decision expected by end December 21.
Management of the Council owned site	• Review different management models for the Council owned site. • Redesigning and delivering the refurbishment of the site to provide modern pitches. • Developing an allocation policy for the site.	Preferred services provider at Council owned site has been ratified and working through detail around what will be provided including general maintenance, litter collection and liaison with FCC and North Wales Police. Redesign of existing site has been concluded using WG site capital grant funding and allocation policy is in place.

Priority 2: Provide support to ensure people live and remain in the right type of home

Output	Timescale	Lead organisation/s	Progress

Deliver the actions identified in the Flintshire Homelessness Local Action Plan	March 2024	Flintshire County Council	Whilst progress has been made on the delivery of the Local Homelessness Plan the landscape for homelessness has shifted significantly due to Covid and 100% of the services attention has been on managing the emergency public health response to the Covid pandemic. A new Housing Support Programme Strategy is required and will merge the Housing Support Grant Delivery Plan and local Homelessness Strategy (homeless strategy brought forward a year by Welsh Government) to create an overarching 4 year strategy for housing support and homelessness agendas for April 2022 onward.
Develop a Youth Homeless 'hub'	March 2024	Flintshire County Council	Youth homeless hub is featured as a priority within the housing need prospectus. Identifying a potential location and partner agencies for delivery of this activity will be key to having a shared vision and appropriate setting for this accommodation and service delivery model. Project Manager to be brought in to pull agencies together and help kick start the project which will feed into internal social care and housing accommodation needs mapping exercises. Potential for

			social housing grant to be utilized for delivery of the accommodation.
Reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation by 50% (33) over the period of the plan	March 2024	Flintshire County Council and RSL Partners	This has not been possible due to the Covid crisis whereby as part of the public health response, all people who are at risk of rough sleeping and or experience homelessness during the pandemic must be accommodated. As a result numbers in temporary accommodation have increased by approx. 600% across Wales. Covid Hardship Funding has enabled this rapid response to safeguard people who would otherwise be at increased risk of harm as a result of homelessness and the coronavirus.
Deliver a transit site for the Gypsy and Traveller Community	March 2022	Flintshire County Council	Preferred location for a transit site has been submitted via Local Development Plan. Planning Inspector decision expected by end December 21.
Deliver one Extra Care during the period of the Strategy	March 2024	Flintshire County Council and RSL Partners	Plas yr Ywen, Holywell care scheme was completed in 2021.

Priority 2.1 To reduce homelessness through prevention			
Action	**Task**		**Progress**

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Work across the region with partners to prevent homelessness	• Working across the region to develop a cross Local Authority Regional Homelessness Strategy, pulling together resources to deliver shared interventions where appropriate and cost effective. • Developing a better understanding of the causes of homelessness to inform the development of the right interventions through collective, regional intelligence gathering.	The Covid pandemic has seen a significant shift in homelessness policy across Wales. Whilst regional work has continued the approach has often been very operational and responsive due to the crisis management phase of managing homelessness during the pandemic still being very much the norm. Discussions with regional partners continue regarding Housing Support Grant, Homelessness Priorities and Covid response, and a needs analysis for housing and homelessness is currently underway to inform the development of Flintshire's Housing Support Programme Strategy. There will be opportunities for regional collaboration within North Wales but the decision has been taken to develop localised strategies for the next 4 year period.
Work with partners in Flintshire to prevent homelessness	• Develop a Local Action Plan for homelessness to ensure local issues are addressed. • Develop preventative measures by providing tenancy support and crisis management to enable the people to sustain their tenancies.	Local action plan will be developed on the back of the robust needs assessment as part of the Housing Support Programme Strategy development. The housing market and peoples support needs are changing significantly

| | | due to the pandemic and resources will be targeted at the most urgent and necessary intervention at the local level

Homeless services have been working through their "Phase 2" Plans as required during the pandemic and additional funding has been made available through Phase 2 Grant and additional Housing Support Grant to develop more prevention activities, whilst also managing the high caseloads and numbers of people who have been art risk of homelessness, and in homeless accommodation throughout the course of the pandemic. |
|---|---|---|

Priority 2.2 To reduce the demand for temporary accommodation

Action	Task	Progress
Provide suitable accommodation to meet the needs of homeless	• Develop different models of delivery such as Housing First. • Develop a 'hub' to provide a range of services for the homeless including emergency beds and support services. • Working closely with Housing Strategy and development partners to inform the delivery of flexible and suitable accommodation.	As outlined elsewhere, demand for temporary accommodation has risen significantly due to the public health response to the Covid pandemic and temporary accommodation numbers have increased by 600% across Wales.

Utilising alternative models of temporary accommodation has been helpful through the remodelling of the Glanrafon Night Shelter into a 24-7 Homeless Hub and taking on other properties for |

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Priority 2.3 To provide the right type of support for the most vulnerable people

Action	Task	Progress
Strategic commissioning of support services	• Develop the Local Commissioning Plan incorporating the Regional Homelessness Strategy priorities to ensure a joined up approach. • Support the work of the Regional Collaborative Committee. • Commission support for priority groups: Youth homeless; Prison Leavers; Rough Sleepers; and Complex Needs.	additional temporary housing. Reliance on B&B and hotels is also necessary and funding has been provided by Welsh Government to assist with this. As referenced above, a new Housing Support Programme Strategy is required and will merge the Housing Support Grant Delivery Plan and local Homelessness Strategy (homeless strategy brought forward a year by Welsh Government) to create an
Increase availability of move on accommodation	• Undertake a review of the existing stock and explore options for increasing supply of move on accommodation. • Ensure commissioning priorities incorporate the necessary support required to sustain tenancies.	Welsh Government have developed a high-level action plan designed to end homelessness. A key pillar within the plan is for Wales to move to a rapid rehousing approach. This internationally recognised model also delivered in Scotland will require significant shift and change within homelessness and housing services. Local Authorities have been tasked with developing Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans by the end of 2022 and the issue of move on accommodation and commissioning priorities will be addressed through this plan and the Housing Support Programme Strategy

| | | overarching 4 year strategy for housing support and homelessness agendas for April 2022 onward.

Opportunities for regional working and collaboration will be identified and referenced within localised plans with delivery of shared activities for North Wales delivered through the Housing Support Regional Delivery Group (the new RCC). |
|---|---|---|
| Working with partners and other teams in the Council to ensure available support. | • Working with key stakeholders e.g. health to provide support packages at an early stage through joint protocols.
• Working with Social Services and health colleagues to ensure supported living.
• Working with strategic delivery partners to ensure capacity and scale of support is available to avoid unacceptable delays in provision for the individual. | As referenced above, the responsive nature of the Covid pandemic homeless response has been significant.

Excellent joint working with partners internally, through commissioned services and across public services has developed in pockets and the opportunity to co-ordinate and capture this and build on such momentum will be channelled through the Housing Support Programme Strategy. |

Priority 2.4 To provide a range of financial and social support		
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
Ensuring a range of financial products to support people to	• Promote and develop affordable ownership products including Shared Equity; Homebuy and Rent to Own. • Promote private rent support through the BOND. • Develop access to affordable starter furnishing packages.	Affordable ownership products are provided via s.106 planning contributions and in partnership with RSLs on suitable developments. Rent to

| access and remain in their home | • Provide financial management advice and access to financial products with the aim of reducing the risk of rent arrears / eviction. | Own funding is not currently available 2021/22. Affordable ownership properties are marketed via Tai Teg when available for application.

As referenced above a range of prevention activities have been developed and will continue to be explore to help people to avoid homelessness and when homelessness does occur support is available to help secure new homes within the private sector in particular.

Funding is available and enhanced pots identified for Bonds, Rent In Advance, Deposits through the Homeless Service, in addition to services such as Discretionary Housing Payments.

The new Wales Tenant Hardship Grant has also been launched as a Covid specific intervention for debt in the private rented sector. This grant targets finances for rent arrears to those people who have fallen into arrears due to the pandemic, but would not have an entitlement to "qualifying benefits" e.g. people who are not on benefits but suffered significant financial hardship and in arrears due to Covid.

Welsh Government Covid Hardship |

		Funding has enabled the Homeless Service to issue Homestarter packs and monies through core budgets and grant have been identified to sustain such interventions.
Develop a range of innovative support to address key barriers	• Explore a range of initiatives, based on best practice, which will provide cost benefits in the medium term to the public finances. For example a furniture rental social enterprise.	Further work required through the development of the local action plan for the Housing Support Programme Strategy. During the pandemic excellent joint working has been achieved with Flintshire Furniture Recycle Project to enable the provision of fully furnished temporary accommodation units when capacity within homeless accommodation has grown significantly. Opportunity to build on this work.

Priority 2.5 To provide support for older people to either remain in their own home or move to more suitable accommodation		
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
Review the SARTH to understand the housing needs of older people in	• Develop a plan with our Housing Association partners to address the needs of older people on SARTH. • Develop an understanding of demand for adaptations to enable future planning of resources.	Further work required with partners to develop localised plans and strategies to meet the needs of older people within social housing across Flintshire.

social housing	• Links with Social Services; Residential Care homes; Extra Care and supported housing to scope out move on options.	FCC's sheltered housing review will be a significant piece of work in regards to this. The Housing Need Prospectus identifies the need for one additional Extra Care scheme which is likely to be supported with social housing grant funding.
Develop an understanding of the wider housing requirements for older people	• Consult with interest groups to identify key issues, barriers and potential opportunities for an action plan. • Review tenancy support and the potential of incentives to encourage downsizing where appropriate.	Further work required with partners. Unable to progress significantly due to the pandemic. FCC is working with the North Wales housing providers in a 'rightsizing' project looking at whether people are in a property that is suitably sized for their needs. This will include under occupancy and downsizing incentives and aim to achieve a consistent approach across the North Wales region.

Priority 3: Improve the quality and sustainability of homes

Output	Timescale	Lead organisation/s	Progress
Reduce the number of households in the private sector in Flintshire who are in fuel poverty from 10.1% to 8% during the period of the strategy	March 2024	Flintshire County Council	Improvements are being made to fuel poor homes, including tariff switching advice, the installation of fuel efficient heating systems, extension of the existing gas grid and improvements to Household EPC ratings. Alternative renewable energy, such as the use of hydrogen boilers, are being explored with the aim of offering a greater range of solutions to traditional fossil fuel based heating. A stock condition survey will need to be done to determine the County's fuel poverty ratio.
Complete the Welsh Housing Quality Standard programme by 100%	March 2021	Flintshire County Council and RSL Partners	The Capital Works Team are on target to meet the extended WHQS deadline by December 2021

Priority 3.1 Maximising energy efficiency standards and delivery methods		
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
Private sector renewal energy loans	• Maximise the use of the loan products aimed at owner occupiers to bring properties up to a good standard by making them energy efficient and removing hazards.	A process has been established whereby owner occupiers can access support to fund new central heating and property improvements. This process is supported by using a

		combination of the available funds such as Warm Homes funding, Crisis funding, the renewable heat incentive as well as a Welsh Government loan fund which is available at a zero percent interest rate. This product has only recently been available and to date 16 new heating systems have been installed using an energy loan.
Gas infill programme for social housing properties that are off-gas	• Working with Wales and West Utilities to extend the gas network to bring more convenient and cost effective heating to residents across all tenures.	The Domestic Energy Efficiency Project Team have worked alongside Wales and West Utilities and developed a programme of gas mains connections to be delivered in the coming year. The extensions to the gas mains will target previously surveyed properties identified as having inefficient heating systems. Between April 2016 and June 2021 the gas mains has been extended to 734 properties and the Domestic Energy team have ensured that gas meters and new central heating systems have been installed to all of the 734 addresses.
Retro fit of energy efficiency measures for vulnerable residents in all tenures	• Identify the strategic sites within communities that need redevelopment.	Delivery under the Warm Homes Fund, utilisation of a Flintshire Council crisis fund, work carried out alongside local social housing providers and partnership work with utility companies has allowed households to benefit from the installation of new, efficient heating

		systems, insulation and the use of renewable energy. This has contributed towards a reduction in fuel poverty and the carbon footprint across the county.
Deliver the Warm Homes Fund	• The Council has secured £3m to tackle fuel poverty in Flintshire by improving efficiency through for example: fitting new heating systems or accessing the gas network.	A programme of renewable energy schemes is in the process of being delivered in conjunction with the Warm Homes Fund. This programme is expected to be extended as cost savings have resulted in the potential to target more properties than originally considered. Additional sites have been identified and are part of an application made to Warm Homes Fund for further approval. To date there have been 214 new gas central heating installations, replacing older less efficient heating such as coal fires and oil fired boilers. Also 160 Air source heating systems have been fitted, installed in rural areas where it is not possible to extend the gas mains to the individual properties
Arbed for wales programme	• A spatially targeted WG programme focusing on windows and doors and external wall insulation, to address fuel poverty in the private sector.	This programme is coming to a completion with Buckley being the last new area to be targeted. A final completion/ mop-up exercise is being carried out at Ffynnongroew. The Domestic Energy Efficiency Project Team will continue with post installation assessments to determine

		the effectiveness of the new measures after the Arbed programme is complete, providing advice and support where required. Between April 2016 and June 2021 the Arbed programme has supported 558 properties for new gas mains installations, new gas meters and new central heating installations. A further 40 are expected to be completed before the programme comes to an end.

Priority 3.2 Improving the quality and standard of accommodation in the private sector

Action	Task	Progress
Healthy Homes and Healthy People – 2025 project bringing together a voluntary group of concerned people and organisations working with a shared purpose of ending avoidable health inequality in North Wales	• Encourage different teams to think more broadly when undertaking their daily roles to improve the homes of people in the private sector.	Consultations have been carried out by the Domestic Energy Efficiency Project team, to ensure continuous delivery of Healthy Homes Healthy People. Providing support with access to services such as food parcels, food delivery, prescription collection, etc. in addition to support for savings on tariff advice and switching, debt support, energy efficiency measures, smoke detectors, carbon dioxide detectors and adaptions. This process has highlighted differing areas of vulnerability and allows for the appropriate amount of support needed to ensure that a specific individuals needs can provided for. 3771

		households have had some form of support since January 2018 and 593 households have been given assistance on reducing their energy bills.
Rent Smart Wales	• Work with Landlords to promote Rent Smart Wales and improve the standards of the private rented stock.	When a private rented sector team is established as outlined in 1.4, further work will be done to promote Rent Smart Wales.

Priority 3.3 Completing the WHQS programme by 2020 across all social housing stock		
Action	**Task**	**Progress**
The Council stock	• Complete environmental improvements by 2020 and identify funding to undertake the external works.	External Stock Condition Surveys are ongoing and all surveys to external areas will be completed by December 2021. The Capital Works Team are prioritising any immediate works following the surveys accordingly. Future funding requirements are also being identified and these will be captured through our Business Planning arrangements.
Housing Association partners' stock	• Complete environmental improvements by 2020.	Clwyd Alyn achieved WHQS compliance in March 2017. However, following the addition of the Polish Housing Society stock which was not WHQS compliant Clwyd Alyn advised Welsh Government that those properties would be logged as

acceptable fails. Clwyd Alyn has taken with the decision alongside Welsh Government and Gwynedd Council to re develop the Polish Housing Society scheme so the homes will comply with WDQR.

Wales and West Housing (WWH) has maintained compliance with the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS), with a very low level of acceptable fails. Since 2019, there has been £17.5m invested in properties. WWH has delivered almost 586 new kitchens, 287 bathrooms, over 74 roofing projects, nearly 761 windows, doors and roofline projects and around 384 groundwork and external projects. WWH has completed more than 746 adaptations, allowing residents to stay in their existing homes as their circumstances change.

Grwp Cynefin (GC) state 100% of homes have passed the WHQS, subject to acceptable fails (latest annual report 2019/20). GC have an investment programme which aims to reduce its number of acceptable fails to ensure tenants live in good quality affordable homes (Corporate Plan 2019/24).

Priority 3.4 Adopt a collaborative approach to preparing for the increase in demand for adaptations in properties to allow residents to remain in their home.

Action	Task	Progress
Set appropriate strategic objectives for adaptations that focus on wellbeing and independence	• Establish a partnership which incorporates all partners with funding for adaptations including: (i) The Council's HRA budget (ii) Private sector Disabilities Funding Grant; (iii) Care and Repair, ENABLE for minor and major adaptations for those in the private sector; (iv) Housing Associations can access Physical Adaptation Grants for existing tenants.	This work will be progressed as part of the adaptations and specialist housing review work, outlined in 1.6.
Improve the intelligence on the demand for adaptations	• Pull together a range of data from all partners to establish a better understanding of future demand.	
Link the systems for managing and delivering adaptations	• Collaboratively develop adapted housing policies for all partners as part of the Specialist Housing Group. • Review service standards for adaptations in line with Welsh Government. • Consider how the EHRC toolkit can be utilised in Flintshire.	

Priority 3.5 Improve the standard of new build properties built by the Council and Housing Associations

Action	Task	Progress
Utilising the Flintshire House Standards	• Continually review and evaluate the standards to ensure they are relevant and contribute to the wider energy efficiency agenda. • Consider introducing further requirements such as solar panels / PVs, electric car charging points.	Flintshire Housing Standards have been superseded by the Welsh Development Quality Requirements 2021 (WDQR). All future affordable housing schemes have to meet this standard. The standards have set

		space requirements and include higher energy efficiency measures moving towards carbon zero.
Welsh Government's Design Quality Requirements (DQR)	• Ensure a consistent standard of quality of internal layout is achieved across a range of standard house types that are as flexible as possible to cater for most residents needs.	See above
Deliver different construction methods	• Deliver new builds using sustainable materials including timber frame / SIPs, and improve SAP ratings as part of SHARP. • Develop procurement opportunities through collaboration with Housing Association partners to deliver new construction methods. • Develop using off site manufacturing to reduce waste and quicker construction methods.	Modern methods of construction is a priority and featured within WDQR 2021. Therefore all new affordable housing schemes will be built using MMC and utilising construction methods that minimise environmental impact. Homelessness Phase 2 capital funding will deliver units for homeless households, these will be built using MMC (Park Lane x 4 units and Duke Street x 2 units). Anticipated completion Spring 2022.

CYNGOR Sir y Fflint Flintshire COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 10th November 2021
Report Subject	Void Properties within the Housing Revenue Account
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing
Report Author	Chief Executive
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Letting voids as efficiently and effectively as possible is essential in order to ensure that customers receive much needed accommodation and rent loss is minimized. The voids process combines the role of the Housing Assets Service to make the empty property ready to let and undertake essential safety checks and the housing management service whom allocate the property and sign up the new tenant.

On average each year the service will receive between 500 and 600 void properties. The Covid 19 pandemic affected many areas of business and the voids service was significantly impacted as a result on restrictions with movement limiting sign ups and health and safety requirements which prevented no more than two people working in any one property having a substantial and sustained impact upon the number of voids being managed by the service and the time taken to re-let them.

Both the housing management and housing asset service have undertaken a number of initiatives and made a number of changes in order to re-let more properties more quickly. Some of these initiatives will take some time to become embedded, however, the foundations are now in place and the benefits of the changes made should start to be realised in the third quarter of the current financial year.

Improving performance in relation to voids is a top priority for the service and the measures outlined within the report should support the service objective of letting properties as efficiently and cost effectively as possible.

	RECOMMENDATIONS
1	That Scrutiny note the update in relation to voids managed by the Housing and Assets Service and provide any comments or observations.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	**EXPLAINING THE VOID PROPERTIES WITHIN THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT**
1.01	Letting voids as efficiently and effectively is possible are essential in order to ensure that customers receive much needed accommodation and rent loss is minimised. The voids process combines the role of the Housing Assets Service to make the empty property ready to let and undertake essential safety checks and the housing management service whom allocate the property and sign up the new tenant.
1.02	On average each year the service will receive between 500 and 600 void properties. A breakdown of voids since 2015 is outlined in table one below: **Table One** {TABLE}
1.03	When considering the reasons for voids becoming available analysis has identified that the biggest single factor for voids is due to the previous tenant becoming deceased. Given that over one third of the housing stock is classified as sheltered housing containing a higher cohort of more elderly and vulnerable tenants then this statistic should not be surprising. Another major reason for void properties occurring is due to tenants transferring into extra care/ residential care. Once again given the high volume of sheltered housing stock this is to be expected.
1.04	Members will note that officers are currently undertaking a review of sheltered housing in order to ensure all schemes are sustainable and where they are not then officers shall provide Members with recommendations for consideration. It is expected that further update reports regarding the sheltered housing review shall be shared with members in the coming months.
1.05	The other major reason for tenancy terminations is due to internal transfers. There are a wide range of reasons why transfers are required

Table within 1.02:

Financial Year	Number of Voids
2015	575
2016	591
2017	531
2018	567
2019	485
2020	511
2021*	319
*Figures for the year to date	

	including over/under occupation, medical need and support requirements to name but a few. The service shall always seek to place tenants in homes which are suitable for their need but as needs and circumstances change the service must respond in a positive and compliant way.
1.06	Transfers to another FCC/RSL property last year accounted for 29% of overall terminations. Whilst this may be viewed as a reward for some tenants, there are many reasons why transfers are essential and contributes to tenants being housed in properties that are safe and secure, affordable and meet their housing needs.
1.07	Some of the main reasons for a tenant requiring a transfer are: • Under-occupying their home and subject to the bedroom tax • Living in overcrowded conditions and need for space • Have developed mobility or health problems and need to move to more suitable accommodation or ground floor • Need to be closer to relatives to provide support • An older person wanting to downsize to sheltered bungalow • Are experiencing harassment or anti-social behaviour
1.08	Transfers are managed through the Common Housing register and tenants are required to demonstrate a need for the move. There will be occasions where more urgent moves are required and this will be facilitated through a Management Move.
1.09	Whilst it is recognised that enabling tenants to transfer will encourage mobility, help create sustainable communities and makes best use of our housing stock it is also important to recognise that our existing tenants also have a duty to take reasonable care of their property and vacate a property that is in good and lettable condition in order to minimise the financial impact on the Housing service. There are occasions where this is not the case which results in the void taking longer than it should to be made ready to let.
1.10	Mutual exchange is another means for a secure tenant to move by swapping homes with another social housing resident. A tenant does require permission in order to exchange their tenancy, however, there are only certain circumstances when this can be refused.
1.11	**Reasons for Tenancy Terminations** (see table below)

Tenancy End Reason	Reasons for Termination of Tenancies April 2020 – March 2021	Reasons for Termination of Tenancies April 2021 – July 2021
Abandoned	1	3
Buying Another Property	10	6
Decant Tenancy End Period	4	1
Deceased	134	60
Move to More Cost Effective Accommodation	9	5
Move On	5	1

Move to LCHO/Owner Occupation/ Private Rented	44	11	
Mutual Exchange	11	5	
New Let	1	2	
Other	54	23	
Residential Care	52	34	
Tenant Moved to another LA/ RSL Tenancy	28	18	
Transfer to FCC Property	111	35	

1.12	Whilst most stock is attractive and sustainable there are a relatively small number of properties which are deemed to be more difficult to let and which require a more bespoke and targeted approach to let the stock.
1.13	In order to meet this challenge the housing management service are developing a number of tools and techniques to attract interest in empty properties and develop a healthy waiting list for all stock in all areas.
1.14	Both the Housing Asset and Housing Management teams are committed to letting more properties more quickly and a range of initiatives have been undertaken in order to attain this objective which are outlined below for information.
1.15	**Housing Asset Service** The service presently undertake all routine void works in house and perform well with a track record of meeting void key performance indicators for routine voids. Major voids, which may require asbestos works or major components replacements (electrical rewire, new kitchen, bathroom etc.) are mainly undertaken by an external contractor. Over time the number of contractors available to the service through the voids framework has reduced and the service has been reliant upon one local contractor who most recently has not had the capacity to manage the number of major voids that require being made ready to let.
1.16	In response to this challenge the service has utilised two further approved contractors to undertake void works and are in the process of procuring a new voids framework agreement which will provide the service with a wider range of contractors with the capacity and capability to complete void works more efficiently and effectively.
1.17	The service is exploring the potential to provide a number of routine voids to the responsive repairs service to make ready to let.
1.18	Work has been undertaken to review the Void definition for Major Voids and Routine Voids in order to ensure that the right balance is struck between voids which can be undertaken in-house and voids which require completion by an external contractor.
1.19	The void service recently moved from paper tickets to receiving and completing works via Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). This should help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service and make it easier to track progress of work and appraise performance.

1.20	The service has identified the need to add some capacity to the inspection service and has appointed an agency inspector to bring the number of void inspectors up to three full time staff. This will help provide cover for inspectors who are absent due to leave, sickness or training and ensure that delays due to inspections are minimised.
1.21	As a result of the pandemic, the need to socially distance and being mindful of Health and Safety Executive interventions where too many contractors or trades persons were working in a property at any one time, the Covid 19 risk assessment for the Housing Asset service was updated to state that no more than two persons should work in any one void property at the same time. This was done in order to protect staff in line with the Councils duty of care to its employees. Whilst this was the correct thing to do it did have a direct impact on how quickly void properties were made ready to let.
1.22	In September 2021 following the progress made with the vaccination roll out programme and in keeping with the removal of the most onerous restrictions as part of the opening up plans developed by Welsh Government the risk assessment was reviewed and the restrictions relating to only two persons working in a void property at any one time have now been relaxed. The risk assessment is a dynamic document and shall be kept under review in order to ensure that the service responds to any potential issues in a proactive and measured way.
1.23	On average the service has been receiving 9.5 voids each week since April 2021 whilst the service has been letting on average 6 voids per week. Through the above initiatives the service has been challenged to return at least twelve voids each week to housing management for letting (although this target may be difficult to attain consistently until the new voids procurement framework has been established).
1.24	**Housing Management Service** The Housing Management Service have undertaken a number of initiatives to let properties more efficiently and effectively. In response to the pandemic and the restriction on movement which prevented applicants from physically visiting properties to view them. The service developed a video link so that applicants could view vacant properties via a virtual tour of the property. This enabled applicants to view properties safely and also speeded up decision making on offers. This facility was particularly helpful for applicants unable to view the property if they lived outside the local area.
1.25	In addition, there has been some changes within the team with the introduction of new working arrangements. As of September 2021, Housing Officers now have smaller patch areas to manage and the role has been changed to that of a generic Housing Officer. This means that they will be responsible for all areas of Housing Management, from lettings to managing all aspects of neighbourhood issues. This will ensure that they will have a greater understanding of the neighbourhoods that they manage and will be more proactive and able to deal with issues at a much earlier stage.

1.26	The Housing Management team are working closely with Homelessness colleagues to secure rapid rehousing for urgent homeless cases and have developed effective working initiatives with the Connects Team and Common Housing Register team in order to triage cases more effectively and to better manage the expectations of applicants regarding the realistic length of time they will have to wait for an offer if they opt not to be more flexible in their choice of area/ accommodation. Further work has also been undertaken in order to gain a better understanding of applicant's preferences by drilling down into area preferences to ensure that applicant's preferences are clearly understood so that they do not receive offers in any sub areas or schemes that they do not want.
1.27	The work on developing the priority system for prioritising void works allied to the better understanding of applicant preferences shall enable allocations, lettings and tenancy commencement to happen more efficiently and effectively.
1.28	**Housing Waiting List** Whilst it is recognised that the number of voids is significant this turnover of housing provides an opportunity to meet the housing needs of applicants accepted onto the Common Housing Register (at the time of reporting there are over 2000 live applications for social housing in Flintshire). There is however some disparity between the local housing needs and the supply of void properties for re-let by the Housing Service.

1.29	The following are all reasons why this disparity between supply (void properties) and demand (the properties routinely available and in the voids process) exists and creates not only operational challenges for the voids process, but also exacerbates unmet housing need in Flintshire:
	
	• Changing needs and aspirations of applicants within our older population
	    o Preference for bungalows over flats
	    o Mobility issues meaning greater demand and need for ground floor and accessible accommodation
	    o Anxieties linked to high rise living (specific to Flint area)
	
	• Expectations and needs of families shows a significant preferences for houses over flats, particularly within the two bed range, meaning two bed flats can be less desirable and harder to let. Factors that drive this include:
	    o Access to gardens is a significant factor in accepting or declining offers
	    o Families navigating stairs for access to homes
	    o Suitability of flats for families with mobility issues
	
	• Available housing doesn't always lend itself to adaptation for households with physical needs linked to mobility and disability. This is not always exclusively due to the property itself but also on occasion due to topography of estates and access to essential facilities such as parking or proximity to shops.

| | • High demand for properties that have limited availability e.g. general needs one bed properties

• Properties available within areas of lower demand for issues such as but not limited to:
    o Community stigma
    o Community safety issues
    o Lack of public services
    o Rural locations |

| 1.30 | **Performance**

Outlined below at table 2 is the performance of the Housing Assets team for the last 5 years.

Table 2 |

Year	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22*
Number of days	13061	11717	17089	14364	3128
Number of Voids	445	419	485	397	71
Days in Maintenance	29	28	35	36	44
Target * Quarter 1 Performance	32	32	32	32	32

| 1.31 | The average void target is set at 32 days for all voids. The key performance indicator comprises the amalgamation of two distinct targets. The target set for routine voids being 20 days and the target for major voids being set at 45 days. The reason for the increase in void turnaround times reflect a combination of factors including the number of voids requiring making ready to let, the condition of the property returned to the Council, the over reliance upon one approved contractor and the social distancing restrictions which have reduced the number of operatives working in voids which has had a particularly pronounced impact upon major voids. |

| 1.32 | Void performance in the current financial year has been affected by a significant number of major voids and the time taken to complete them. During quarter 1 the service managed 71 voids of which 51 were major voids and 20 voids were routine. The major voids took on average 54 days to make ready to let against a target of 45 days. It is worth noting however that average figures are distorted when long terms voids are relet. |

| 1.33 | The major voids have been directly impacted by some of the supply shortages experienced across the country for example shortages of plaster, plasterboard, timber products and UPVC doors and fire doors. The lack of kitchens units caused significant delays as associated works for example rewires and plastering and tiling cannot be fully completed until the kitchen has been fitted. In response to this challenge the voids service |

	maximised the use of materials from the in-house stores and utilised spare kitchens retained by the capital works team. Whilst the supply shortages are not as acute as during the height of the pandemic it is clear that the pandemic has cast a long lasting shadow and the risk of the virus wreaking further havoc upon supply chains, staffing levels and further restrictions of movement should not be underestimated.
1.34	The service has learnt a lot during the past 12 months and is now better placed to manage these risks going forward. Furthermore, having a new void contractor framework in place will provide the service with a wider range of contractors and supply chains to choose from which should reduce the risk associated with supply shortages.
1.35	Whilst the performance on major voids has been significantly impacted by the issues mentioned above by contrast 20 routine voids were let in an average of 18 days against a target of 20 days. As can be seen from the above analysis the major problem rests presently with major voids. The voids contractor framework will help to improve the time taken to relet empty properties by having a range of good quality contractors to rely upon to make properties ready to let and inspectors have been instructed not to commission major works in voids if they are not immediately required.
1.36	The service has traditionally sought to undertake major works to empty properties to save inconvenience to an incoming tenant. Whilst this is a very customer focused approach and provides for a very good standard of accommodation conversely it does have the disadvantage of incurring additional rent loss. It is important that the service strikes the right balance here and there will be trade-offs between letting properties more quickly and the timing of improvement works as where it is reasonable and safe to do so works shall be undertaken when the tenant is in situ. Where works cannot be effectively undertaken when the property has been relet for example major plastering works or replacement of flooring or urgent works to replace heating systems for example then the works shall be undertaken whilst the property is void.
1.37	The number of voids being managed by the service in the current financial year have increased from 154 to 230 as at 4th October 2021. The reasons for the increase are attributable to the factors outlined above. The pandemic has had a significant and sustained impact upon how many voids were worked on and how quickly they were made ready to let.
1.38	It is unlikely that the number of voids have reached their peak. The service is confident, however, that due to the measures outlined above the number of voids are likely to start to reduce over time. However, as can be seen above the service is now having to manage an additional 100 voids compared to the number of voids in the system prior to the pandemic.
1.39	This shall have a substantial and sustained impact upon the service in making these properties ready to let and it is not unreasonable to assume that it may take another 9 to 12 months for voids to reach their pre-pandemic levels of around 130 empty properties.

1.40	**Sector wide benchmarking data**
	It is important to note that the most recent survey data from Housemark UK (Monthly Pulse Report) indicated that in September 2021 there was a 13% increase in the number of properties sitting vacant across the social housing sector. The report went on to state that anecdotally, 55% of landlords who experienced an increase in vacancies told Housemark that this was due to higher terminations, decreased resource, an increase in major voids and properties not being available to let, as well as materials and labour availability due to the 'Pingdemic'.
1.41	All of the factors stated above have to a greater or lesser degree been observed within Flintshire and it would appear that the service is being impacted by a number of wider strategic issues associated with the pandemic. It is evident that the pandemic allied to some of the supply shortages as a result of Brexit have had a substantial and sustained impact upon the voids and lettings service within Flintshire and upon the social housing sector more broadly.
1.42	It is worth noting that whilst the worst effects of the pandemic would appear to be behind us the situation is still very fluid and could quickly change and escalate to cause similar problems and disruptions to services that were experienced in the first and second wave of the pandemic. It is therefore important that the service remains vigilant and the timeframe for recovery to a pre-pandemic level of voids has been developed with caution given the potential for further significant disruption over the winter period.

2.00	**RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**
2.01	Rent Loss associated with void properties is factored into the business plan as the service will never be in a position to have every property let due to the need to make voids ready to let and to complete all necessary safety and compliance works.
2.02	Due to the growth in voids this is having a direct impact upon rent loss as the target for voids is currently being exceeded with the void loss for 2021/22 financial year currently running at 2.59% compared to a business plan allowance of 2% void loss.
2.03	As mentioned above a number of measures have been taken to address the high number of voids which the service is currently experiencing and the number of voids is expected to slowly decrease and return to a more normal rate and level over the next 9 to 12 months. The re-designation of more routine voids and the appointment of a framework agreement for voids contractors shall be pivotally important in realising this objective.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	The rent loss incurred as a result of voids is presently exceeding target as set within the business plan. The continuation of high levels of voids will reduce the income available to the service to invest in stock and to pay salaries. The current void percentage of 2.59% equates to rent loss £1,038,890 compared to a base business plan assumption of 2% which equates to £746,828 for voids. It is expected that the number of voids and level of rent loss shall reduce by year end but it is worth noting that escalation in voids and associated rent loss have taken a number of months to build up and it is estimated that it will take at least a further 9 – 12 months before the service is in a position to return void levels to a similar scale to where they were prior to the pandemic.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	The report has been developed by officers and has not involved any wider consultation at this stage.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1985/68 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278607/Promoting_mobility_through_mutual_exchange_-_learning_lessons.pdf

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	**Contact Officer:** Peter McHugh Service Manager Housing Assets **Telephone:** 01352 701658 **E-mail:** peter.mchugh@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	**Void** – an empty property

8.02	**Major Void** – a major void is defined as a property that requires major works for example a new kitchen/ bathroom/ electrical rewire or extensive asbestos removal or plastering works which require redecoration.
8.03	**Minor Void/routine void** – relates to an empty property where the focus is placed upon repairing rather than replacing components and where the extent of works are considered to be small for example patch plastering rather than the re- plastering of whole walls/ ceilings
8.04	**TPAS** – Tenant Participation Advisory Service
8.05	**Rapid rehousing** - The Rapid Re-Housing program is a Housing First intervention providing a primary solution for ending homelessness. It has been demonstrated to be effective in getting people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing and keeping them there.
8.06	**Transfer** – The rehousing of an existing tenant to an alternative Council tenancy.
8.07	**Mutual Exchange** – This is the process whereby two tenants swop homes. The mutual exchange can be between 2 Council tenants within the same authority or between a Flintshire Council Tenant and the tenant of another Local Authority or Registered Social Landlord.

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