**Updates Section:**

**Housing Services Forum**

**Changing Demographics in Social Housing Tenants**

This session focussed predominantly on the issues being presented by an ageing population amongst tenants of social housing in Wales.

Key areas covered included:

* Understanding a range of approaches being taken to support those with dementia, with a session from Luke Reeves of Wales and West focussing on their particular approach.
* A session delivered by Rhodri Walters of Hafan Cymru on The Men’s Sheds project - a practical solution to the problem of finding meaningful occupation for retired men
* Understanding the aspirations of older tenants; it was actually agreed that it’s not older people we should be looking to for these now – it’s the older people of the future. Both the Directors Network and the Forum reported similar issues of high standard, low demand housing for older people. Understanding aspirations would mean this was less of a problem. There was good discussion about this, with some examples of good practice, e.g. Merthyr Valleys Homes who commissioned CIH to review their older people’s accommodation – recommendation was to move to floating support to engage with tenants and wider community. Former wardens = house keepers doing low level support. High satisfaction living in the schemes, but they wanted that presence in-house. One ‘housekeeper’ per two schemes, plus floating support. So changing the way the warden role works was considered very beneficial.
* Some discussion was had as to the best way of understanding demand: United Welsh commissioning market research as to what older people want from a tenancy – it was suggested that we as a sector should improve our relationships with universities who are doing research in this area.
* We have to accept that flexibility is really important to demand in this area – 1 or 2 services won’t fit everyone’s needs – we have to provide a broad menu of services, based on need and marketed well.
* Marketing was much discussed, as was giving sheltered accommodation a better identity. One point was that if we could work better with social care and encourage nominations into sheltered accommodation, it could be that we improve that identity and better use the stock.
* Changing staff roles to reflect the change in demographics: at MHA all neighbourhood officers and support teams are doing a coaching course with a psychologist (strengths based approach) to halt the creation of dependencies and to help people to help themselves.

**Incommunities – Value Based Lettings**

**Presentation from Adrienne Reid - Assistant Chief Executive for Neighbourhood Services - at NHF Housing Management Conference**

* Major landlord serving Bradford
* Undertook a deconstruction of their allocations system, based on high number of complaints about the system: 76% of approaches made by prospective tenants were complaints that the system was not working. Found that they were putting as much resource into failed allocations as successful ones.
* Then they took a systems-thinking approach to their CBL system – see graph; extraordinarily complex system from the point of view of a prospective tenant.
* Relies on prospective tenants being digitally included
* They found Choice Based Lettings was not achieving the results they wanted; a low percentage of lettings were made to those in priority need, for example. They also found that many of the matches made were not compatible with the needs of their clients, leading to reduced sustainability of tenure.
* The old system placed a responsibility on applicants to bid regularly and often the most vulnerable people found it difficult to use and to compete with those who bid regularly.
* Decided to make a case to the LA for the move from a bidding based system to a matching system and said they were fortunate that their local authority were sufficiently forward thinking to be prepared to take a plunge on the new system of Value Based Lettings, having seen the level of difficulties that the old system was causing
* The new system is a simpler process. Applicants just need to provide their details and housing preferences to the Council’s Housing Options service or Incommunities in person or over the telephone. All applicants are interviewed and prioritised according to their housing needs and are then only contacted when a property match is found based on their preference information i.e. people are only asked to identify the areas they would live in and what they would be willing to accept, therefore ruling out unsuitable properties in unsuitable locations.
* Applicants can also look on the Property Shop – [www.openmoves.co.uk](http://www.openmoves.co.uk) - for properties which will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Only properties which cannot be matched to applicants on the social housing waiting list will be advertised on this website. Hard to let properties are transparently advertised and people from beyond the traditional tenant group are accessed as the property details are shared via Rightmove.
* Properties are allocated based on the priority bandings and waiting time within the bands. The bands follow the priority sequence as set out in the Housing Allocations Policy. Where more than one applicant is matched for a property, it will be matched to applicants by band in the following order:
* •Statutory need band
* •Urgent need band
* •Reasonable preference band
* •General need band
* where there is more than one applicant within the same band matched to a single property, the applicant with the longest waiting time will be offered the property
* where the system is unable match a property to a suitable applicant, then the property will be referred to the Property Shop and will be allocated on a ‘first come, first served’ basis
* The benefits are numerous, for LA, tenants and landlord alike
	+ Sustainability of tenancies is up: over the 1 year that they provided data for, 3.9% of tenancies were terminated, compared to 6% under the previous system. This is in part due to the move away from a self-service system to one in which the applicant is supported through the process. The focus is on creating sustainable tenancies, not just filling voids.
	+ Data is a big issue from the landlord POV:
		- Because this is not a self-service system, they can collect far more data about individuals and build up an overall picture of housing demand in Bradford.
		- This means, in the example given, that they could compare the different ethnic groups they are working with, focussing in on what size stock the different groups want and where they want them, then react to that demand in a focussed and effective manner. Provides better VFM for the landlord, as well as a better service for the tenant.