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Making Headway

Effective working between local authorities and housing associations to prevent, tackle and respond to homelessness

**Welsh Local Government Association and
Community Housing Cymru**

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This is a list of all the practical examples included in section 3. They are listed under the name of the organisation that appears first in the text, usually the lead partner. The full examples in section 3 include the names of all the partners involved.

Strategic approach to homelessness

Cardiff Council	Multi-agency homelessness strategy steering group
Cardiff Council	Matrix for evaluating housing association performance
Caerphilly CBC	Housing association liaison meetings
Conwy CBC	Housing association presentation to scrutiny committee

Prevention of homelessness

CT Clwyd & Hafod HA	Mortgage rescue scheme
Swansea HA	ADAPT scheme
Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC	Project Noddfa
CT Clwyd	Housing management support for Travellers
Conwy CBC	Youth homelessness outreach worker/Bus Stop Project
Merthyr Tydfil CBC	Consistent housing advice
Cardiff Council	Housing benefit verification
Dewi Sant HA	Welfare benefits advice
Bridgend CBC	YELLOW

Increasing the supply of affordable housing

Linc Cymru	Purchasing properties on the open market
Denbighshire CC	Affordable housing register
Powys CC	Rural housing enablers
Flintshire CC	Bringing empty homes back into use
City and County of Swansea	Housing association management role

Maximising access to social housing

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC	Common housing register
Cardiff Council	Cardiff Accessible Homes
Cardiff Council	Common approach to exclusions
Caerphilly CBC	Nominations and previous evictions
Carmarthenshire CC	Common allocations policy
Vale of Glamorgan	Multi-landlord choice-based lettings scheme
Pembrokeshire CC	Multi-landlord choice-based lettings scheme
Wales & West HA	Nominations
Charter Housing	Nominations
Cardiff Council	Nominations
Pembrokeshire HA	Furnished tenancies

Maximising access to the private rented sector

Flintshire CC	Bond schemes
Cadwyn HA	CalonAdref
Cadwyn HA	CalonLettings

Effective use of temporary accommodation

Charter Housing	Temporary Homeless Housing Scheme
Newydd HA & Hafod HA	Leasing scheme
Pembrokeshire HA	Two schemes of temporary accommodation
United Welsh	Flexible approach to temporary accommodation
Powys CC	Nominations and temporary accommodation
Cadwyn HA	Nightingale House
City and County of Swansea	Alternatives to Bed & Breakfast scheme
Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend	South West Wales Regional Women Domestic Violence, Substance Misuse and Mental Health Project
City and County of Swansea	Temporary accommodation for young single homeless people
Taff HA	Temporary accommodation for young single women and young women with babies
Flintshire CC	Move-on from hostels
City and County of Swansea	Move-on strategy
Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC	Move-on Panel
Wales & West HA	Hostel move-on

Work in progress

[Merthyr Tydfil CBC](#)

[Cardiff Council](#)

[Pembrokeshire CC](#)

[Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff Council](#)

1 Context

1.1 Background

This document has been produced in recognition of the need for social landlords to work in partnership to meet housing need, the most acute form of which is homelessness. It takes as a starting point the acknowledgement that working together at both strategic and operational levels, social landlords can be more effective and achieve more positive outcomes for those in need.

It has been produced by the Welsh Local Government Association and Community Housing Cymru (the Social Housing Partnership), and funded by the Welsh Assembly Government's Homelessness Good Practice Grant programme.

The view of both organisations is that we need more investment in housing in Wales, in particular affordable housing, and that changes to the housing benefit rules would also help to prevent and tackle homelessness. The current context is one of reducing numbers of lettings in social housing set alongside increasing interest rates, house prices and rents, with indications that these trends are likely to continue, putting further pressure on already limited resources. Waiting lists are increasing, and an Assembly exercise in early 2007 to identify how many households are on Welsh local authority waiting lists, including statutory homeless households and tenants wishing to transfer, concluded that the total was 82,840. However, both the Welsh Local Government Association and Community Housing Cymru also consider that action can be taken within the sector to make the best of what resources are available to us.

The aim of this document is to highlight effective practice in partnership working between Welsh local authorities and housing associations in relation to homelessness.

The intended audience for this document is local authority and housing association officers working in the areas of strategic housing, housing management, housing options, homelessness and housing advice. It may also be of interest to elected members and housing association board members.

Its development was overseen by a steering group¹ who commissioned Tamsin Stirling to undertake the following work on which the document is based:

- a review of relevant websites, publications and sources of effective practice from Wales and across the UK (see section 5 for further information)
- a questionnaire survey of all Welsh local authorities and housing associations about partnership working on homelessness to which 8 local authorities and 17 housing associations responded
- consultation with members of the steering group

The responses to the questionnaire survey clearly show a sense of movement in the extent and scope of partnership working on homelessness. Things have moved on significantly from former widespread mutual frustration between local authorities and housing associations to an increasing recognition that addressing housing need is a joint

¹ The steering group comprised Cheryl Emery of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Mike Friel of Cardiff Council, Paula Kennedy of United Welsh, Steve Jones of the Pennaf Group, Sue Finch from the Welsh Local Government Association and Amanda Oliver from Community Housing Cymru.

responsibility of both local authorities and housing associations and that homelessness is an acute form of housing need.

It was the strongly held view of the steering group that a good starting point for any landlord in relation to the homelessness agenda is to ensure the effective prevention of homelessness within its own housing stock. However, the focus of this document is on partnership working and so it does not go into a great deal of detail about this. However, section 4 includes a checklist for both local authorities and housing associations in relation to their landlord role.

The scope of this document, and the survey that has informed it, took a broad definition of preventing and tackling homelessness and included the following:

- improving the partnership between local authorities and housing associations on homelessness prevention
- increasing the supply of new affordable housing to rent and to buy
- joint work to maximise the effectiveness of empty homes strategies
- improving access to social housing including minimising exclusions and providing access for vulnerable households, as well as nominations and lettings
- improving access to the private sector including private sector leasing and management
- increasing the provision of temporary accommodation and 'move on'
- provision of accommodation and housing-related support for vulnerable groups
- improving housing management practice to minimise possessions
- partnership in delivery of housing benefit services

Where there were gaps in the information generated by the survey of Welsh local authorities and housing associations in relation to examples of effective practice from the above list, we have aimed to fill these by providing brief examples from outside of Wales. These are set out in section 5.1 with links to sources of further information.

1.2 Homelessness is a priority

Preventing and tackling homelessness is a priority for the Welsh Assembly Government. It recognises homelessness as a cross cutting issue that has significant impacts on other areas and the ability of the Assembly to meet its objectives in areas such as health and education. Assembly funding to both local authorities and voluntary sector organisations for homelessness projects and initiatives increased by over a third between 2003/04 and 2006/07, and subsidy for leasing schemes has doubled in the last four years. A significant proportion of Assembly funding has gone to support local authorities' commission external support to undertake a critical friend analysis of their homelessness service based on the Tarki Technology report published by the Assembly in June 2005. Based on work in four Welsh local authorities, this report sets out an MOT test to improve local authority homelessness services. It also included a range of recommendations for the Assembly that included one on working with Community Housing Cymru to develop meaningful information on registered social landlord nominations and lettings that could be used to more accurately judge housing association performance in this area. Funding has also been provided during 2007/08 for a Co-ordinator for the National Homelessness Network that comprises representatives of all 22 Welsh local authorities. The Co-ordinator's role is to develop the capacity of the Network and promote effective working practices in homelessness across Wales.

Secondary legislation has been passed by the Assembly to extend the groups considered as priority need and to support an increase in standards of temporary accommodation in which homeless households are placed. The National Homelessness Strategy has been revised and a new strategy put in place for the period 2006 to 2008. The 2006/07 policy agreement targets between the Assembly and local government include indicators on temporary accommodation and time taken to discharge duty for those households found to be statutorily homeless.

During 2006/07, Assembly Housing Directorate officials carried out visits to all 22 local authorities. General findings from these are that:

- most authorities have adapted their strategic approach to focus on prevention, and have also reconfigured their staff teams to reflect this
- resources for tackling homelessness have been increased, with some increase in political profile of the issue
- significant progress is being made on reducing the use of Bed and Breakfast for families, but this is proving more problematic for single people
- difficulties in accessing permanent accommodation were seen as the major obstacle to reducing the numbers of people in temporary accommodation
- partnership working is improving in most areas, although homelessness is not well reflected in high level strategic planning
- some authorities do not appear to be well prepared for completing the homelessness planning part of their local housing strategies

Homelessness is also a priority for both the Welsh Local Government Association and Community Housing Cymru and for partnership working between the two organisations. Both organisations have recently produced their own publications that have raised the profile of homelessness, and they have identified homelessness as an area for a joint piece of work. This document is part of a wider programme of partnership working between the two organisations at strategic and operational levels including joint meetings, signing of joint protocols between housing associations and local authorities across Wales, and joint conferences in late 2006 and 2007.

1.3 The policy context for homelessness

The Welsh Assembly Government issued its second **National Homelessness Strategy** in 2006. It includes a series of objectives, targets and an action plan to prevent and tackle homelessness. One of the objectives focuses on joint working:

'The support and other needs of homeless people are identified and provided for, and that agencies work together to aid sustainable resettlement'

The overall approach of the strategy is that homelessness is prevented wherever possible. In addition, key themes are user-focused services, strategic planning of homelessness services and partnership and joined-up working within the spirit of **Making the Connections**. The strategy notes that housing associations are key partners in tackling homelessness and sets out the following expectations for them:

- contribute fully to help local authorities meet their statutory responsibility in respect of homelessness

- assist local authorities in meeting their duties to provide temporary accommodation to homeless people and collaborate with them on rehousing homeless people through local lettings planning and nomination arrangements
- agree formal joint working arrangements to prevent and tackle homelessness within the area

A number of other points within the strategy action plan specifically address partnership working, eg in relation to:

- the delivery of housing benefit services
- multi-agency public protection arrangements for homeless people who may pose a significant risk to the public
- service users with particular needs such as offending behaviour, mental health issues etc

The strategy is clear that Supporting People Operational Plans should reflect corporate objectives to address homelessness. Supporting People is seen as a key part of the preventative agenda on homelessness.

A Wales Audit Office report published in early 2007 reviewed the effectiveness of the **National Homelessness Strategy** and concluded that:

- the downward trend in homelessness indicated by national statistics is positive, but not conclusive
- the strategy has encouraged a more joined-up approach to preventing homelessness, but further progress is needed to improve co-ordination and local delivery
- the evaluation of the strategy, policy and services needs strengthening

The report makes a number of recommendations on improving the collection and use of data, examining the relationship between the use of the social and private rented sector, the supply of affordable accommodation and homelessness, prevention of homelessness and improved evaluation. However, it does not specifically mention housing associations.

January 2007 also saw the publication of the report of the Assembly's Social Justice and Regeneration Committee policy review of youth homelessness. The Review considered the issues surrounding youth homelessness in Wales in particular:

- the provision of services for young homeless people by local authorities and the voluntary sector, including the identification of good practice
- the role of local authorities in applying relevant legislation to youth homelessness issues, including the identification of good practice

The report noted that many local authorities and voluntary sector organisations work in partnership with housing associations to provide supported tenancies for homeless young people. The report made 29 recommendations, 16 of which were endorsed by all members of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. These recommendations included exploring the issue of removing the test of intentionality for homeless people aged under 25. In the response to the report from the Minister on 21 March 2007, the majority of the recommendations of the review were accepted in whole, with the remainder being considered in the context of the current and future powers of the Assembly.

The Assembly has also appointed a national Health and Homelessness Facilitator to help to promote good practice across Wales and advise on how the Assembly can achieve its objectives for improving access to health services for homeless people.

1.4 The policy context for partnership working

Partnership working is integral to the Assembly's ***Making the Connections*** strategy for improving public service delivery in Wales. In July 2005, the Welsh Assembly Government established the Beecham review as part of the action plan for implementing ***Making the Connections***. The review concluded that the transformation of public services to deliver more effectively for citizens is dependent on four critical success factors - citizen engagement, delivery, partnership and challenge.

The Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Beecham Review – the ***Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries*** action plan is backed by a budget of £42 million. The key principles of the action plan are putting citizens first, working together to deliver, developing a world class public workforce, and achieving efficiency and major performance. The action plan provides further impetus to partnership working with the establishment of Local Services Boards on a local authority basis to bring the main services (both devolved and non-devolved) together to plan and deliver integrated services to citizens. Local Service Agreements will be put in place with the Boards, with more pooling of resources and budgets and stronger duties to co-operate.

The ***Making the Connections*** agenda also strongly supports regional collaboration between authorities, with significant investment made through the Improvement Fund to support practical ways for local authorities to work together. Individual housing associations are involved in two Improvement Fund funded projects looking at joint procurement, one in North Wales and one in Ceredigion². Local authority housing functions have come together in a number of regional networks such as the South East Wales Regional Housing Forum, and more specifically relevant to this document, three regional homelessness networks in the South East, South West and North of Wales.

The implementation of plan rationalisation in Wales means that the number of plans required to be submitted to the Assembly by local authorities will reduce to four – the community strategy, local development plan, health social care and well-being strategy and children and young people's plan. In the first instance, homelessness is expected to be incorporated into the local housing strategy and then as relevant into the four statutory plans. Although authorities can continue to produce local housing strategies and homelessness strategies if they wish, plan rationalisation will require the availability of robust information on homelessness and effective articulation of priorities for inclusion in the four statutory plans as appropriate.

In relation to housing, Welsh Assembly Government research on Community Housing Agreements found that their impact on the delivery of services to homeless people was minimal. However, regardless of whether there is a Community Housing Agreement in place, it was reported that, over the last five years local authorities and housing associations had increased co-operation in relation to the provision of accommodation to people who are homeless. In all six case study areas looked at during the research, housing associations were seen as having a greater understanding of the local authority's

² Information about round one Improvement Fund projects is available at new.wales.gov.uk.

statutory duties and the need to share the statutory burden with the local authority than in previous years.

Another relevant element of the context for partnership working on homelessness is the number of local authorities that are due to ballot their tenants on proposals to transfer their stock to registered social landlords as a means of achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. With one stock transfer registered social landlord already in existence, three ballot results for transfer in late 2006 and early 2007 and another four ballots planned during 2007/early 2008, the social housing landscape of Wales is likely to change significantly in the near future. Stock transfer brings with it the need for even closer partnership working in order to meet the needs of people in housing need, including homeless people. A guide specifically on this issue has been produced by Cymorth Cymru (see section 5.5 for more information)

1.5 The legal and regulatory context for partnership working on homelessness

Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to carry out periodic reviews of homelessness in their district, and to adopt and publish homelessness strategies that sets out how an authority will work with partners to prevent homelessness and to ensure that accommodation and support is available for people who are either homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless.

Section 170 of the Housing Act 1996 states:

'Where a local housing authority so request, a registered social landlord shall co-operate to such extent as is reasonable in the circumstances in offering accommodation to people with priority on the authority's housing register.'

Registered social landlords (RSLs) in Wales are required to work to the Assembly's **Regulatory Code**. This sets out key expectations for registered social landlords, the following of which are relevant to working in partnership with local authorities on homelessness:

- 1.1.1 RSLs should work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies to identify and provide for the housing-related needs of the area (including effective involvement in local homelessness strategies and reviews)
- 1.3.2 RSLs should work in partnership with relevant local authorities on the allocation of housing (including assisting local authorities to meet their obligations to house homeless people, vulnerable people and people who might be considered high risk)

These key expectations are further expanded in the Wales Audit Office's **Housing Key Lines of Enquiry** published in November 2005.

In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government issued two circulars in draft some time ago setting out regulatory guidance for housing associations:

- **Suspensions due to Unacceptable Behaviour** – this brings the regulatory framework for housing associations in line with the requirements placed on local authorities by the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002

- **Local Authority nominations to tenancies with registered Housing Associations**
– this sets out the detail for how nomination agreements and procedures should be framed

It is expected that the final versions of these circulars will be issued soon.

1.6 Performance context

The performance measurement framework developed by the Local Government Data Unit Wales, with the support of a series of practitioner reference groups, includes a range of indicators on housing advice and homelessness. The housing advice and homelessness indicator set for 2007/08 includes a new indicator on the prevention of homelessness. The scope of this indicator includes services provided by other organisations where a formal referral has been made by the local authority and the authority continues to monitor the case.

The framework also includes provision for the development of indicators for outcomes that are not the sole responsibility of local authorities. Work has yet to be completed on shared outcome indicators. The Welsh Assembly Government plans to test and develop possible shared outcome measures with relevant partners and use existing networks in advance of a formal consultation.

1.7 This document

It is clear from the above that the legal, regulatory, policy and performance framework all point to the need for local authorities and housing associations to work in partnership on homelessness.

This document seeks to:

- acknowledge the tensions that can be inherent between local authorities and housing associations in relation to homelessness
- build on the positive practice that exists
- disseminate a wide range of practical examples to ensure the best of partnership working between local authorities and housing associations to prevent and tackle homelessness can be extended to other areas

The following sections set out:

- principles for partnership working (section 2)
- a range of examples of partnership working within Wales (section 3)
- self-assessment checklists on partnership working on homelessness for local authorities and housing associations (section 4)
- further information – examples of effective practice from beyond Wales, websites, publications, key individual contacts and brief information about other toolkits funded by the Welsh Assembly Government's homelessness good practice grant programme (section 5)

2 Making partnerships work: principles

2.1 *Learning from experience*

A number of learning points emerge from the responses to the local authority and housing association responses to the questionnaire survey undertaken as part of developing the full ***Making Headway*** document. These indicate that the following are important factors in effective partnership working:

- trust
- good existing relationships leading to responsiveness
- flexibility
- creativeness in identifying and implementing solutions
- shared priorities (whether through the homelessness strategy, housing strategy or other means)
- shared commitment to excellent services
- commitment and belief in a different way of doing things
- drive and enthusiasm that can overcome difficulties that arise
- demonstrating success eg improved service, savings
- recognition and use of specialist skills of different organisations
- understanding the constraints within which each organisation works

Based on their close partnership working over the past few years, Cardiff Council and Cadwyn have identified the following six steps to effective partnership working:

- 1) Accept co-dependency
- 2) Establish dialogue
- 3) Develop priorities in partnership
- 4) Be creative and innovative
- 5) Sustainability
- 6) External focus

The principles set out below have been drawn from the above factors and range of publications and websites reviewed as part of putting the toolkit together. They set a framework for local authority and housing association joint working on homelessness.

2.2 *Principles underpinning strategic partnerships*

The local authority strategic housing role includes taking the lead on:

- reviewing homelessness in the area in conjunction with partner agencies
- developing an appropriate action plan to prevent and tackle homelessness (whether through the development of a homelessness strategy, or in the future, a homelessness action plan). The action plan is developed in partnership with a range of agencies including housing associations and is regularly monitored, refined and updated), and
- increasing the supply of affordable housing through a variety of mechanisms

The local authority corporately needs to ensure that:

- sufficient priority is given to preventing and tackling homelessness
- resources are allocated accordingly
- the prevention of homelessness is seen as a corporate priority supported by the work of different departments and teams, not just a housing issue
- structures for joint working on homelessness, such as homelessness fora, are appropriate and adequately resourced

For housing associations, prevention of homelessness also needs to be a strategic/corporate priority. This could fall within the scope of a broader strategic aim of helping local authorities to meet their strategic priorities. Actions to prevent and tackle homelessness, (developed either by an individual association or jointly with other associations in discussion with the relevant local authority), are incorporated into the organisation's operational plan. Housing associations need to actively participate in structures for joint working on homelessness such as homelessness fora.

A clear link is needed to a Community Housing Agreement, or other overarching agreement between local authorities and housing associations to ensure that action on homelessness is linked to strategic planning for housing services. Practical mechanisms are needed to ensure the necessary links between housing (including homelessness) and strategic planning for, eg Supporting People, young people, health well-being and social care and community strategies, particularly in the context of plan rationalisation.

Other principles for strategic partnerships between local authorities and housing associations on homelessness include:

- agreement of, and a commitment to, shared priorities
- sharing of the responsibility of meeting housing need in the area, including for homeless households
- a commitment to, and action to ensure, effective collection, collation, analysis and use of data to inform strategic decisions
- ensuring that information about need informs priorities for allocation of resources such as Social Housing Grant and revenue for support
- mutual awareness between local authorities and housing associations of their roles, responsibilities, skills, expertise and constraints
- effective communication
- sharing of risk and a willingness to try new things and develop new initiatives
- preparedness to learn from experience and taking the time to celebrate success

2.3 Principles underpinning operational partnerships

At an operational level, homelessness prevention needs to be seen as a core housing management function rather than as something separate. The following principles apply at an operational level:

- sustaining tenancies through excellent housing management and links to housing-related support where appropriate, as well as mechanisms such as debt advice and mediation
- eviction as a last resort
- minimising the exclusion of individuals from social housing
- making best use of the existing stock
- ensuring the awareness of those in need of the options available to them
- agreeing and working to locally appropriate levels of nominations
- a commitment to developing common approaches
- a commitment to share and implement effective practice
- sharing of information to support operational decisions

3 Making partnerships work in practice

The examples in this section of the report are predominantly drawn from the responses to the questionnaire sent to Welsh local authorities and housing associations. However, other sources of information have been used to supplement this information.

It is clear from the questionnaire responses that there is a great deal of joint working between Welsh local authorities and housing associations on homelessness. However, some of the respondents took a rather narrow view of projects that contributed to preventing and tackling homelessness, despite an introduction to the questionnaire that indicated the broad scope of projects/initiatives that could be included. It is hoped that the range of examples featured here will help to raise awareness of the nature and scope of activity that can contribute towards the prevention of homelessness and effective response when it does occur.

It is acknowledged that there are many other positive examples of joint working which are not included here. However, we hope that the range of examples presented will provide a useful stimulus to further discussions between local authorities and housing associations on joint working to prevent and tackle homelessness. Where further information is available online, a link to this is provided.

3.1 Strategic approach to homelessness

A strategic approach to homelessness provides the framework within which the efforts of partner organisations are directed at agreed priorities.

Multi-agency fora

'In terms of joint working with local authority partners, homelessness is high on the agenda for both officers and members. Importantly, action points from the strategies are being delivered.'

[Source: housing association survey respondent]

'We are consulted well on the implementation of the strategy action plan. With some local authorities, review workshops have been held. We feel that we had every opportunity to give feedback and suggestions for projects to be included'

[Source: housing association survey respondent]

'The Council value their partners' contribution and associations and support providers have a real opportunity to help shape the strategy'

[Source: housing association survey respondent]

Cardiff Council has a multi-agency homelessness strategy steering group in place which includes a range of voluntary sector organisations as well as housing associations. The aims of this group are to:

- improve partnership working around homelessness prevention
- assist in the effective management of available resources
- assist with the development of new initiatives

The steering group has developed a homelessness strategy which has the ownership of those involved in its production.

One partner housing association stated:

'We have been actively involved in shaping and implementing the homeless strategy, and encouraging others to be involved too. We are involved in a number of projects and promote our joint work locally and nationally.'

A range of sub groups are also in place including, an accommodation sub group, an advice and prevention group and a youth homeless task group, in which housing associations are also actively involved.

Linking homelessness to the strategic housing role

As part of its Community Housing Protocol, **Cardiff Council** has developed a matrix to evaluate performance of housing associations in the city. This formalises the procedure for determining the Council's preferred partner for the development of the affordable housing on Section 106 sites and for bids for Social Housing Grant. The matrix was developed by the Council in partnership with the Integrate and Syniad consortia.

Although comprising a relatively small part of the scope of the matrix, consideration is given to achieving successful nominations and contributions to addressing homelessness.

This has contributed to improved nominations outcomes and an improved contribution from housing associations to addressing homelessness/housing need.

Caerphilly CBC's housing association liaison meetings include rehousing homeless households as a standard agenda item. This approach:

- ensures that issues relating to the rehousing of homeless households are considered at every quarterly meeting
- provides an opportunity to consider new approaches, ideas and best practice in relation to homelessness
- ensures that housing associations work in partnership with the local authority to tackle homelessness

Raising the profile

Conwy CBC and the **Pennaf Group** have jointly taken on the role of educating the public and elected members about homelessness and the need for accommodation to meet specific needs. This has happened in the context of the proposed development of a new project for young single homeless people with significant support needs. An open public session and drop-in session in the local area were held by both organisations. Both organisations also played a role in increasing the understanding of the planners.

Building mutual understanding

'The cabinet member with responsibility for housing sits on our Board of Management. This has been useful generally but is very helpful when the board discusses homelessness initiatives.'

[Source: housing association survey respondent]

In November 2006. **Conwy CBC's** Community Well-being Scrutiny Committee received presentations from partner housing associations that included their role in preventing and responding to homelessness. The agenda of the meeting also included a presentation from the local authority's housing options support team.

Minutes of the meeting are available online at www.conwy.gov.uk.

3.2 Prevention of homelessness

The current homelessness policy emphasis is to prevent homelessness wherever this is possible and appropriate. Ways of preventing homelessness include sustaining people in their homes, the provision of good quality information and advice, benefits and debt advice and ensuring links to employment and training.

Sustaining people in their homes

CT Clwyd is working with **Denbighshire** and **Flintshire County Councils** on a mortgage rescue scheme. The aim of the scheme is to assist home owners to avoid repossession of their homes, either through the association buying the property and renting it to the occupiers, or they remain owners through the Homebuy scheme.

14 families have been assisted since 1995 through scheme and a further 3 families are being assisted during the 2006/07 financial year. The scheme enables families to remain in their homes, avoiding relocation to temporary accommodation and the stigma of repossession. Stability is ensured, removing the need for the family to change schools, GPs, work etc.

Hafod HA has carried out 30 mortgage rescues since 2005 on Bridgend, Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taff. The work with **Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC** has been formalised into a close partnership between the Housing Association and the Housing Advice team of the Local Authority.

Swansea HA is working with the **City and County of Swansea**, and **Gwalia** and **Family HAs** on the ADAPT scheme which aims to:

- significantly improve and streamline processes for applying to and accessing adapted and accessible social housing in Swansea
- significantly improve the allocation of accessible housing based on a 'Best Match' approach
- significantly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the use of existing adapted and accessible social housing in Swansea
- contribute to the more effective and efficient use of public monies in the form of Disabled Facilities Grants, Adaptations Grant and Social Housing Grant

The development of ADAPT has involved strong partnership working founded on inclusion at all levels of involved organisations. The development of the ADAPT model

was a bottom up process involving those doing the work - thus securing strong commitment throughout the organisations.

The scheme is already demonstrating significant successful outcomes in terms of making 'best matches' to physically disabled people in Swansea as well as contributing to the involved organisations learning in relation to successful partnership working.

ADAPT won the Pat Chown award for innovation in 2006 and it is planned to roll the approach out to other local authorities in which Swansea HA works.

A broad-based partnership in **Rhondda Cynon Taf** involving the council, all housing associations working in the area and organisations involved in community safety has developed Project Noddfa. This is a victim-centred initiative, which aims to make it possible for victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence to remain in their own homes and feel safe by the provision of additional safety measures. Its intended outcomes are to:

- offer a positive response to cases of domestic violence and other forms of violence on a multi agency basis
- reduce the levels of homelessness and repeat homelessness for victims of domestic violence, hate crime and other forms of violence.

Resources have been made available by the council under its spend to save approach.

CT Clwyd works in partnership with **Wrexham CBC**, other housing associations and the multi-agency Travellers Forum to provide additional housing management support to travelling families who have an occupancy agreement. The Supported Housing team works in a multi-disciplinary way, aiming to provide sensitive and non-intrusive level of support, which is based on an understanding of the holistic needs of the Travellers who decide to establish themselves in the housing community.

The association notes:

'It takes several years to gain the trust of the Travelling families to be able to work effectively in ensuring that their needs are met to a level that they are comfortable with. We feel that we have developed an expertise in this field.'

Many Welsh housing associations operate tenancy support schemes that enable people to live independently in their own homes. Some of these, such as the Rhondda HA Include scheme, provide support to people across all tenures, including council housing.

Information and advice

In **Conwy**, a Youth Homeless Outreach Worker post was created to promote the active participation of young people in the systems that affect their daily lives. The project was initially established in response to homelessness as the most extreme manifestation of exclusion. However, the work has not only established a pro-active strategic response to youth homelessness, but has also spawned projects that are bringing communities - and agencies – together, as well as encouraging young people to become actively involved in

working with others to improve the areas in which they live and through this attempt to prevent youth homelessness.

The project is a partnership between **Conwy CBC** and **CT Clwyd**. One of its outputs, A DVD made by young people about homelessness which is used in schools throughout the borough was short-listed in the UK Housing Awards and won the Val Feld Wales Communication in Housing - Landlord category award at the TPAS Cymru awards in 2006.

Conwy and CT Clwyd also work in partnership on the Bus Stop Project which is a service providing free and confidential advice, guidance and information to young people aged between 11-25 in the Conwy CBC area. The Bus Stop has created a service that reaches young people at times of the day and at venues that suit them and the number of service users is increasing dramatically year on year.

Merthyr Tydfil CBC has worked in partnership with housing associations and the voluntary sector to ensure people are provided with consistent and accurate information in relation to housing. This has involved the production of a housing advice manual, supported by information leaflets for service users and a service directory for organisations. It is intended that all housing organisations across the borough will use these resources to provide front-line information and advice to people in housing need. It is part of the council's move to a housing options and homelessness prevention approach.

Benefits and debt advice

Cardiff Council has worked with all its partner housing associations on a housing benefit verification project. This allows housing association tenants in Cardiff to have their Housing Benefit claim assessed and verified by their own landlord thus speeding up housing benefit processing times and reducing rent arrears.

Interestingly, one association notes that take up of this scheme from tenants has been limited as tenants appear to prefer to still go directly to the local authority.

Dewi Sant HA has arrangements with **Neath Port Talbot CBC** Welfare Rights Unit and Port Talbot Citizens Advice Bureau to provide access for all their tenants to Welfare Benefits Advice and with CAB debt advice in order to reduce arrears and prevent evictions.

Link to employment and training

Bridgend CBC works in partnership with **Hafod HA** and Llamau to provide the YELLOW (Youth Enterprise, Life-Long Learning and Opportunities to Work) scheme which has 8 bed spaces.

The aim of the scheme is to help 16-25 year olds to find and keep accommodation, by offering support and training, with links to training and employment opportunities.

3.3 Increasing the supply of affordable housing

There is an acute shortage of affordable housing in Wales. Local authorities and housing associations are working in partnership on a range of schemes to ensure that the resources that are available are used to best effect.

Providing new homes

Linc Cymru is investing £6million in purchasing properties on the open market in Cardiff and renting them on assured shorthold tenancies to households whom the Council have a legal duty to re-house. The aim is to make accommodation available in high demand areas, which will increase the options available to the local authority in discharging its homelessness duty.

Denbighshire CC has established a county-wide affordable housing register in partnership with **CT Clwyd, the Pennaf Group and Wales & West HA** to ensure that new affordable homes produced through the implementation of Section 106 agreements go to those in need of such housing. The register is hosted by [CT Clwyd](#) and matches up applicants with new affordable homes being developed across the County, involves the provision of advice to people in housing need and ensures that people comply with Section 106 criteria for each scheme.

Those on the register will also be considered for shared equity opportunities through housing associations in the County.

Rural housing enablers in **Powys, Gwynedd, Denbighshire, Conwy, Monmouthshire and Pembrokeshire** work in partnership with local authorities, housing associations, national parks and local communities to develop affordable rural housing solutions for rural communities. Recent research on rural housing enablers in Wales concluded that they help in developing collaborative partnerships with housing associations, planning authorities and the voluntary sector and to substantiate local development plan decisions on the allocation of sites for affordable housing.

A number of the rural housing enablers in Wales are at early stages of their work. However, the enabler for Monmouthshire and Powys has been working since 2004 and has supported the securing of planning permission for a number of rural developments for local people including 24 homes in Crickhowell.

The summary report on rural housing enablers in Wales is available online at www.chcymru.org.uk.

Bringing empty homes back into use

Flintshire CC has worked with the **Pennaf Group** to bring empty homes back into use. Landlords are offered a management package by the association and 100% nomination rights are offered for a 5-year period to provide suitable accommodation in order to discharge the authority's homelessness duty.

The City and County of Swansea is working with partner housing associations to develop their role in managing houses in multiple occupation and empty properties that have been taken into management by the Council under their statutory powers (empty dwelling management orders).

3.4 Maximising access to social housing

Given the reducing number of social housing lettings, it is important to ensure that transparent systems are in place for people in need, including homeless people, to access local authorities and housing associations. Common approaches between local authorities and housing associations can aid such transparency.

Common housing registers

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC has a common housing register with the three community based housing associations working in the area which provides one route into social housing using a shared database, application form and points scheme.

The partners meet quarterly as a strategy group to review working practices, including ensuring that homeless people are being placed on the register and are being re-housed by the partners.

The common register partners have agreed a common exclusions policy.

Cardiff Council works with all the housing associations in the area to provide an accessible housing register, Cardiff Accessible Homes. It comprises:

- a register of accessible properties held by Cardiff Community HA
- a register of disabled people who need accessible or adapted housing held by Cardiff County Council
- a service that matches people to available properties

Outcomes include:

- over 300 applicants housed since May 2003, with an average turnaround time of two weeks and a very low refusal rate
- significant savings to the Disabled Facilities Grant budget - the project has housed a high number of applicants who would otherwise have required a Disabled Facilities Grant making total savings of over £1 million
- savings to health budgets by enabling people to leave hospital more promptly than would otherwise be the case (up to August 2004, 6 patients who needed adapted housing were rehoused with an estimated saving of £8,400 per week)

Further development of Cardiff Accessible Homes planned for 2007 includes:

- work with private sector landlords to include appropriate vacancies within the scope of the register
- developing a common procedure for identifying properties that could be adapted and made accessible to increase the number of properties available

Common exclusions policies/minimising exclusions

All social landlords within **Cardiff** have a common approach to exclusions. Its aims are to:

- harmonise the approach to excluding high risk offenders and those with a repeated history of tenancy failure due to high levels of rent arrears
- minimise the number of exclusions which are made by managing the process more effectively and access tenant support and other means of reducing risk

The project has reduced the number of exclusions and has helped a better understanding of risk management which is now more inclusive.

Caerphilly CBC has agreed not to nominate back to an association any household who has previously been evicted by that association. However, associations may receive nominations of households that have been evicted by other associations and this is understood and accepted by all associations.

Common allocation policy

Carmarthenshire CC has a common allocation policy with its partner housing associations. A common housing register had been in existence since 2001. A common allocation policy was agreed to:

- ensure better access to social housing in the County
- provide landlords with a more accurate assessment of housing need, and
- improve information and communication between landlords

The approach includes targets set for lettings to homeless households.

Despite some problems with IT and an approach to partnership working from the Council which was not perceived as positive by the housing associations, the new policy is felt to be working well.

Multi-landlord choice-based lettings schemes

The **Vale of Glamorgan Council** and partner housing associations developed the first joint register under a choice based lettings scheme ([homes4u](#)) in Wales. The aim is to increase customer choice, make a simple and transparent system of letting in the Vale of Glamorgan and to provide (in effect) 100% nominations to the local authority.

The knock-on effects of introducing homes4u have included a quicker turnaround for homeless applicants as they have choice of a wider variety of properties. Newydd notes that the association now houses far more homeless applicants than under the previous system of nominations and points. The association also notes that homes4u is now a very tangible entity which regularly gets blamed as being the source for many problems.

The common approach between the **Vale of Glamorgan Council** and **Newydd HA** is seen as a positive aspect of the scheme – if one partner wants to change part of the

policy, both have to agree the change and it has to be approved by both the association's regional board and the local authority's elected members.

Pembrokeshire CC, in partnership with **Pembrokeshire, Dewi Sant and Cantref HAs**, has a joint choice-based lettings scheme '[ChoiceHomes@Pembrokeshire](#)' which went live in mid 2006. The scheme involves a single allocation scheme across all the landlords and aims to increase customer choice whilst affording access to social housing based on housing needs.

The set up and pilot scheme were assisted financially by an Assembly grant.

Nominations

Wales & West HA responded positively to a request from Flintshire Council to increase the level of nominations offered to the authority to 75% in order to help the authority with its 'homelessness crisis'.

Charter Housing has agreed with its partner local authorities Newport, Torfaen and Caerphilly 50% nomination rights to all vacant properties (excluding transfers) of which 100% are dedicated to homeless households. This is to help satisfy the demand for permanent housing from this priority group.

Cardiff Council has negotiated an increased level of nominations with its partner associations, with an increased proportion of these to go to homeless households. A target of 40% of association vacancies has recently been set for homeless households.

Furnished tenancies

Pembrokeshire HA responded to a need for furnished housing within the local authority's homelessness strategy. Its furnished homes scheme provides carpet, curtains, white goods and furniture paid for by a housing benefit eligible service charge. The scheme has assisted a number of families and had had a positive impact on them sustaining their tenancies and improving their quality of life.

3.5 Maximising access to the private rented sector

'... it should be recognised the demand for accommodation and market environment mean major financial investment and support resources are required to ensure that the private rented sector can undertake the significant role expected of it in resolving housing need in Wales.'

[Source: Shelter Cymru, 2006]

Bond schemes

Flintshire CC works with the **YMCA** to provide three types of bond schemes to enable homeless people to access good quality private rented sector accommodation:

- the bond scheme for non-priority homeless people who are reliant on benefits or who are on a low salary
- the family bond scheme provided through the authority's spend to save initiative – referrals are made directly through the housing options team to avoid placing families in bed & breakfast
- the landlord scheme which covers priority single people eg, young vulnerable people, ex offenders, people with mental health issues, people with substance misuse problems and people discharged from the forces

The schemes include the provision of information, advocacy and support to both landlord and tenant.

Leasing schemes

Cadwyn HA working with **Cardiff Council** has developed [CalonAdref](#), a leasing scheme designed to give homeless families more choice over where they live, providing permanent accommodation in the private sector.

Leasing from private landlords for a minimum of three years at below market levels with a fully managed service, Cadwyn procures properties in areas where there is no social housing, or where turnover is so low that homeless people would be unlikely to be offered a home. Ensuring that properties are brought up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, the rents (including management charge) fall within Housing Benefit limits and are therefore affordable to people on benefit. Cadwyn pays below market rates for the properties and the management charge is based on the association's management and maintenance costs with an additional amount to take account of the risk of dilapidations.

The scheme is attractive to owners, with rent guarantees not assuming any void periods, Cadwyn undertaking repairs and the use of a photo inventory when the property is let out to ensure that the property can be returned at the end of the lease in the same condition. Owners are paid in advance on the 28th day of every month.

More choice is available to larger families from BME groups as larger housing in central areas of the city where BME populations are concentrated and choose to live is procured through the scheme.

Between November 2005 and November 2006, 42 properties were secured and have been let through the scheme

Homeless people who have been offered the choice between a secure tenancy with the local authority or a property under the [CalonAdref](#) scheme have chosen [CalonAdref](#) because they prefer the property types and areas offered. As at February 2007, [CalonAdref](#) has housed 43 families with only 1 family refusing a property through the scheme.

Hafod HA has worked in partnership with Local Authorities on leasing schemes since 1990 when the first scheme was developed with **Cardiff CC**. More recently **Hafod HA** has developed a privately financed leasing scheme with **Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC**, this scheme includes using properties which the Local Authority wishes to dispose of on a selective basis.

Housing associations as lettings agents

[CalonLettings](#) involves **Cadwyn HA** acting as a lettings and management agency. The scheme:

- is specifically aimed at helping the residents of hostels in Cardiff gain access to good quality properties in the private rented sector
- includes 1 and 2 bed flats, studios and houses
- is available to single homeless people and families
- was informed by research undertaken in hostels in Cardiff which found that hostel bedspaces were becoming blocked due to a lack of move-on options
- is designed to bridge the gap between private landlords and homeless people. Landlords are encouraged to take part in the scheme by the involvement of Cadwyn Housing Association, an organisation with a proven housing management track record
- will provide information and advice to service users and workers on housing options in Cardiff, to enable them to make informed choices
- means that the single room rent does not apply to younger tenants as tenants are tenants of Cadwyn, not of the private sector landlord
- involves Cadwyn undertaking minor repairs up to the value of £200 per year

The scheme is jointly funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and **Cardiff Council** and rent and management fees are within Housing Benefit limits. Vacancies will be advertised online, with hostel support workers being able to access information and advise their clients accordingly. The scheme will also link to Cardiff Council's tenancy support service.

[CalonLettings](#) became operational in January 2007 with a target of acquiring 150 properties in a year.

3.6 Effective use of temporary accommodation

Reducing use of bed and breakfast

Charter Housing and **Solas** are working with **Newport City Council** to provide a Temporary Homeless Housing Scheme for families. The scheme involves the provision of good quality temporary housing for people to live in whilst permanent accommodation is sought and the provision of intensive management to assist families. The aims are to assist the local authority in their pursuit to reduce the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, reduce risk to clients and reduce cost, as well as to satisfy the objectives of the Homelessness Strategy.

The project now has 9 houses each of which has 3 bedrooms and has seen a number of families find temporary haven and ultimately establish permanent move on housing. Strong working relationships with the local authority have been established which has benefited the customer through effective service provision.

The organisations are also working together on bringing properties listed on Newport's empty properties register back into use for temporary accommodation. This scheme now has 7 houses ranging from 2 -3 bedrooms.

The main area that requires ongoing consideration in relation to both the schemes is in relation to keeping rent affordable as some clients are in low paid employment.

Newydd HA is working with **Torfaen CBC** on a leasing scheme which involves the association purchasing properties on the open market and leasing them to the local authority for use as temporary accommodation for homeless families. The main aims are to prevent the use of Bed & Breakfast and to reduce the costs of providing temporary accommodation.

The scheme has been successful in that Torfaen CBC has reduced their use of Bed & Breakfast for families to almost zero and has therefore saved a huge amount from the General Fund.

In negotiations with other local authorities to set up similar schemes, Newydd has found that they are cautious in approving a scheme which does not require any grant or capital outlay from the authority.

Pembrokeshire HA is providing two schemes of temporary accommodation for homeless households for **Pembrokeshire CC**:

- eight 2-bed flats as partially furnished accommodation with 100% nomination rights to the local authority and rents above benchmark to reflect increased costs
- buying and partially furnishing 20 houses to lease to the authority for 5 years for use as temporary accommodation for homeless households

Both schemes are successful and popular with homeless households. However, the lack of permanent move-on accommodation means that people have stayed longer than anticipated.

United Welsh work with **Cardiff Council** to provide individual properties identified for asylum seekers or homeless households. Several properties were identified as temporary accommodation (initially) and offered on a licence to homeless individuals or asylum seekers. Where appropriate and in order to avoid a second move, the licences have the possibility of being changed to assured tenancies, allowing the individual/family to remain in the property. This works well and prevents unnecessary upheaval for individuals and families and reduces void costs.

United Welsh has worked with **Neath Port Talbot CBC** to change the use of an ex-supported housing scheme as homelessness accommodation under a 3-year lease in order to reduce the use of Bed & Breakfast. This project demonstrated that both organisations were prepared to be flexible and creative in developing a solution that worked for both sides.

In addition to the regular nomination process between **Powys County Council** and **Wales & West HA**, the two organisations have negotiated that the authority may request one property per month in order to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households, up to a maximum of 12 at any one time. Depending on the individual case, the household may be eligible to be offered that accommodation on a permanent basis.

Cadwyn HA worked with **Cardiff Council** to develop [Nightingale House](#), high quality temporary accommodation for homeless families in Cardiff. The aim is to help tackle homelessness in Cardiff by providing a safe and supportive environment to families, for a period of up to six months.

A former nursing home, the building has been transformed to include modern standards of privacy and independence. The 26 family rooms all have en-suite bathrooms, most have their own mini-kitchen and everyone has access to a multi-functional communal area where residents can relax and socialise, or take part in training courses and other activities. One unit is fully wheelchair accessible and there is a kitchen with halal facilities.

A key success factor was how quickly Cadwyn were able to respond to the opportunity, when the building was identified, and their on-going commitment to provide quality housing services to people in housing need.

The **City and County of Swansea** works with **Swansea HA**, **Tai Cymdogaeth** and the **Wallich Clifford** on the Alternatives to Bed & Breakfast scheme (ABBA). The aims of the scheme are to:

- utilise good quality social housing stock as temporary accommodation for households accepted as homeless and in priority need as an alternative to bed and breakfast
- provide support to households including help to secure permanent accommodation
- provide resettlement support to household once rehoused

The scheme requires social landlords in the area to lease properties to Wallich Clifford whose role is to manage the properties and provide support. Relationships established with associations as part of the development of the Homelessness Strategy meant that the process of gaining permission to lease properties to the scheme was speedy.

Temporary accommodation for groups with particular needs

Many housing associations across Wales provide good quality accommodation for supported housing projects such as women's aid refuges. In addition, many local authorities have prioritised preventing homelessness by providing supported housing for people with particular needs within their Supporting People Operational Plans. Projects noted by respondents to the questionnaire survey included:

- Bridgend – a substance misuse project (in partnership with United Welsh and Wallich Clifford) and two projects for young single homeless people (in partnership with Llamau and Hafod HA)
- Denbighshire – a young single homeless scheme for 16 to 25 year olds (in partnership with CT Clwyd, social services and voluntary sector organisations)

- Flintshire - a hostel for single people with challenging behaviour (in partnership with the Pennaf Group and the local authority's Children's Services Team)
- Torfaen – young single people and care leavers (in partnership with Eastern Valley HA, social services and Trothwy)
- Vale of Glamorgan – a project for young people (in partnership with Newydd HA, Llamau and social services) and a range of projects for ex-offenders (in partnership with Trothwy and a number of other organisations)

City and County of Swansea, Neath Port Talbot CBC and Bridgend CBC are working with **Swansea HA, United Welsh** and **Wallich Clifford** to develop a South West Wales Regional Women, Domestic Violence, Substance Use and Mental Health Project. The project aims to harness the resources of three local authorities, two housing associations and a specialist support provider to provide a regional, geographical spread of safe and secure supported accommodation for women with challenging needs who are not able to access refuge provision.

The project will provide a range of accommodation types, spread across three local authorities that will provide twenty-four hour staffed supported housing for women fleeing domestic violence/abuse and who have additional challenging needs. Its development has involved three local authority Supporting People Teams working together to commission supported housing services. It is the first Housing association development consortium undertaking joint working in the delivery of supported housing services.

The **City and County of Swansea** works with **Swansea HA** and **Swansea Young Single Homeless Project** to provide Drws Agored, temporary accommodation for young single homeless people as an alternative to Bed & Breakfast. In addition, it prepares young people for independent living and so has a role in preventing homelessness, including repeat homelessness.

The authority notes that gaining planning consent for such projects can be problematic.

Taff HA works with **Cardiff Council** to provide accommodation for young single women and young women with babies:

- Ty Seren - provides housing for 29 young single women who have become homeless and who need some extra support to maintain their accommodation and prepare for a permanent tenancy
- Ty Haul - provides 4 units of move-on accommodation in preparation for permanent accommodation
- Ty Enfys - provides 21 units of supported accommodation for young women with babies who have become homeless and who need some extra support to maintain their accommodation and prepare for a permanent tenancy.

The Council block book spaces in the projects and a service level agreement is in place between the two organisations. Increasing rates of planned move-on and fewer evictions show the value of the projects in readying young women for future tenancies.

Securing move-on accommodation

Flintshire CC and the **Pennaf Group** have worked together to provide move-on from hostels for both homeless families and single people. The family project will provide 76 households with suitable temporary accommodation. The project for single homeless persons enables them to move on into semi-independent living with minimum support. Referrals are made from the single person hostel, enabling a process of moving from high support to minimum support and then into independent living.

A partnership between the **City and County of Swansea's** Housing Service, local housing associations and various statutory and voluntary agencies in the city aims to assist single homeless people who are ready to move-on to their own accommodation from temporary and supported accommodation.

The Swansea Move-On Strategy believes that everyone has the right to appropriate housing and support services. The strategy exists to provide access to permanent accommodation for people moving on from temporary and supported accommodation in the Swansea area. The strategy is firmly founded on and relies heavily on a cross cutting approach to partnership working. The strategy membership works together for the sole benefit of service users with relationships based on trust, honesty and a commitment to identifying the most appropriate solutions to individuals housing and support needs.

Annual targets are established from all accommodation providers.

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC has developed in partnership with housing associations and voluntary sector agencies a move-on system which includes a Move-on Panel to which referrals are made using a form which asks for a range of information which includes any request for a sensitive allocation, information to support the assessment of risk and future support needs.

Referring agencies take responsibility for referring clients when they consider they are ready to move on, the Panel meets monthly to consider the referrals and can award points when the applicant is deemed ready or required to move on. The level of points awarded by the allocation policy used by the council and the three community-based associations means that these applicants get reasonable priority on the common housing register.

Wales & West HA have agreed the provision of four units of move-on accommodation from Garth Villas direct access hostel in Merthyr. Move-on accommodation will be provided to residents of Garth Villas who are capable of managing a tenancy.

Initial feedback from Garth Villas is very positive and the agreement will be reviewed annually.

3.7 Work in progress

A number of the questionnaire responses noted that partnership schemes or projects were at an early stage of development. A few examples are:

- Merthyr Tydfil CBC:
 - intends to roll out its choice-based lettings scheme Tai Dewis to include housing associations working in the borough
 - is developing a night shelter to provide emergency accommodation for people over 18 years of age with substance misuse problems
 - is developing a common approach to access to adapted and supported housing

- Cardiff Council is developing:
 - a common waiting list with its partner associations
 - a resettlement strategy with its partner associations, whereby they agree to 5% of their vacancies being made available for move-on from hostels to enable better use of temporary accommodation. This 5% of vacancies is over and above the agreed nominations percentages

- Pembrokeshire CC is developing accommodation with support to persons who are recovering from a substance misuse problem and who have undertaken a course of treatment and/or rehabilitation in partnership with Pembrokeshire HA and other statutory and voluntary agencies

- The Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff Councils are developing a drug intervention programme for ex offenders who misuse substances in partnership with Newydd and Cadwyn HAs and the Wallich Clifford

There are also a whole range of other partnership activities which support work on homelessness. These are well exemplified by the following quote from one of the housing associations:

'The real benefits we have had from closer collaboration do not fit neatly into well defined projects. They are less tangible, but equally important. They range from better information sharing on serious arrears cases, clearer understanding about the need to balance lettings between both parties, to better awareness of the services of specialist support and move on projects'.

[Source: housing association survey respondent]

4 Self-assessment checklists to support partnership working

'If you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always got.'
Helen Armstrong, Cadwyn Housing Association

The following checklists, (the first two and last two for both local authorities and housing associations), offer suggestions and ideas that local authorities and housing associations may wish to consider when thinking about joint working on preventing and tackling homelessness. They drawn on all the publications and information reviewed as part of putting this document together.

4.1 *Raising the profile of homelessness*

- Have we taken steps to raise the profile of homelessness within our organisation at both strategic and operational levels?
- Have we used existing liaison mechanisms with our partner local authorities/housing associations to raise the profile of homelessness?
- Have we worked jointly with our partner local authority/housing association to raise the profile of homelessness within local communities and with community leaders?

4.2 *Building greater mutual understanding*

- Can we take practical steps to build greater mutual understanding of partner local authorities/housing associations? For example, exploring the potential for:
 - joint staff training
 - joint events/conferences
 - secondments
 - joint elected member/board member study visits
 - joint visits to new schemes

4.3 *Local authorities*

Strategic

- Do we have an effective homelessness forum (and appropriate sub-groups) in place which involves housing associations that work in our area?
- Have we effectively involved housing associations in reviews of homelessness and the development of our homelessness strategy/action plan?
- Do we ensure that housing associations can maximise their contribution to implementing the homelessness strategy/action plan? Eg, are all partner associations clear about the main reasons for homelessness in the area and how they can contribute to reducing/preventing homelessness due to these reasons?

- Have we involved housing associations in discussions about the national targets we are expected to meet on homelessness (on prevention, use of temporary accommodation, repeat homelessness and rough sleeping) and how they might help us achieve them?
- Have we considered extending partnership working on allocations/lettings, eg through a common housing register, joint choice-based lettings scheme, common exclusions/allocations policy, move-on strategy?
- Do we have a lettings plan/agreed targets for rehousing whereby the housing associations rehouse the same proportion of homeless households as the local authority?
- Have we reviewed Supporting People funded services provided by housing associations to ensure that they contribute to the prevention of homelessness?
- Do we include homelessness as a regular agenda item of liaison meetings with housing associations?
- Have we asked housing associations to present information to the relevant scrutiny committee about their role in preventing and tackling homelessness?
- Have we explored all possible options with housing associations for supporting the development of new affordable housing for homeless households, eg Section 106 agreements, community land trusts, transfer of land at below market value, involvement in empty homes strategies, housing associations as recipients of improvement grants etc?
- Are we ensuring that new affordable housing developed by housing associations is going to those in most need of it?
- Have we discussed the balance of meeting need and sustainability on large sites with partner housing associations to ensure an agreed approach to lettings on such sites is taken by all associations, and not by individual associations in isolation?
- Have we considered linking the performance of associations on helping to meet the needs of homeless households to the distribution of resources for new affordable housing?

Operational

- Do we have in place appropriate nominations agreements with our partner housing associations that specify the proportion of nominations to go to homeless households? Have we agreed with housing associations the type of detail of information that needs to be provided with a nomination? Are the targets reached? Do we have adequate data by which to monitor the nominations agreement?
- Have we got a joint approach with partner housing associations to exclusions from social housing which seeks to minimise the number of exclusions made and enhance risk assessment processes?

- Have we got a joint under-occupation incentive scheme in place with partner housing associations which includes agreements about who will have access to the resulting voids?
- Do we have an agreed mechanism with housing associations for move-on from temporary and supported housing?
- Do we have an agreed method for housing associations to refer a tenant to our Homeless Persons or Housing Options Team?
- Have we developed material/mechanisms to support the provision of consistent advice across agencies including associations?
- Have we discussed/agreed with partner associations their roles in relation to:
 - prevention of homelessness?
 - the provision of information and advice?
 - using their stock as temporary accommodation?
 - developing leasing schemes and other alternatives to Bed & Breakfast?
 - working with private rented sector landlords to maximise the contribution of the private rented sector to tackling homelessness?
 - empty homes strategies and Empty Dwelling Management Orders?
 - move-on from temporary and supported housing?
 - access to affordable housing for groups with particular needs such as disabled people, offenders, care leavers etc?
 - the provision of temporary/supported housing for vulnerable people with particular needs?
- Have we agreed what information is needed from housing associations for monitoring purposes and how often?

4.4 Housing associations/registered social landlords

Strategic

- Is the prevention of homelessness a corporate/strategic priority for our association?
- Does our association actively contribute to local homelessness forum/fora?
- Does our association actively contribute to reviews of homelessness and the development of homelessness strategies/action plans?
- Does our association fully contribute to implementation of the homelessness strategy/action plan? Eg are we clear about the main reasons for homelessness in each local authority area and how we might contribute to reducing/preventing homelessness due to these reasons?
- Is our association aware of the targets that partner authorities are expected to meet and how we can help them achieve such targets?

- Does our association participate in joint approaches on lettings eg common register, common allocation policy etc?
- Have we reviewed any Supporting People funded services to ensure that they contribute to the prevention of homelessness?
- Have we taken opportunities to raise our profile with partner local authorities by, eg making a presentation to the relevant scrutiny committee?
- Have we discussed with partner local authorities how to maximise our delivery of new affordable housing through all possible mechanisms?
- Have we discussed the balance of meeting need and sustainability on large sites with partner local authorities to agree a way forward for lettings on such sites that is used by all associations in the area?
- Have we considered roles for our association in relation to meeting specific needs that will contribute to the prevention of homelessness, eg schemes to meet the needs of those being discharged from institutional care settings, offenders and young people leaving the care of the local authority?
- Do we work with other associations as well as local authorities to maximise the potential of collaborative approaches to prevent homelessness?

Operational

- Do we have a homelessness action plan or are actions on preventing and tackling homelessness incorporated in our operational plan?

Have we:

- got in place an appropriate nominations agreement with our partner local authorities which specifies the proportion of nominations to go to homeless households and do we reach the targets?
- involved local authorities in the development of any local lettings policies?
- got a joint approach with the local authority to exclusions from social housing which seeks to minimise the number of exclusions made and enhance risk assessment processes?
- got a joint under-occupation incentive scheme in place with partner local authorities which includes agreements about who will have access to the resulting voids?
- got an agreed method for referring a tenant to the local authority Homeless Persons or Housing Options Team?
- worked with partner local authorities to ensure that we provide consistent and accurate housing advice about housing options in the area?

- reviewed our links with local authorities and voluntary sector agencies in relation to mediation for tenants experiencing problems in sustaining their tenancy?
- discussed with partner local authorities access for tenants with multiple debts to the welfare benefits service?
- reviewed our links with partner local authorities on housing benefit? Have our staff been trained in housing benefit verification?
- discussed/agreed with partner local authorities roles for us in relation to:
 - prevention of homelessness?
 - the provision of information and advice?
 - using our stock as temporary accommodation?
 - developing leasing schemes and other alternatives to Bed & Breakfast?
 - working with private rented sector landlords to maximise the contribution of the private rented sector to tackling homelessness?
 - empty homes strategies and Empty Dwelling Management Orders?
 - move-on from temporary and supported housing?
 - access to affordable housing for groups with particular needs such as disabled people, offenders, care leavers etc?
 - the provision of temporary/supported housing for vulnerable people with particular needs?
- agreed what information is needed for monitoring purposes and what will be shared with the local authority / authorities?

4.5 *Monitoring and evaluating partnerships*

- Are members of our partnerships clear about what they are contributing and practical actions that they are to take?
- Do we have in place agreed ways to identify whether our partnerships are effective and successful?
- When things are not working as intended, do we act to put things right quickly?
- Do we learn from our partners and the way that our partnerships operate, eg do we work to share and implement the best of practice across the local authority area?

4.6 *Local authority and housing association landlord role*

- Have we reviewed the following housing management policies, procedures and practices to ensure that they work to prevent, not create homelessness:
 - lettings and re-let standards?
 - exclusions and suspensions?
 - rent collection and rent arrears, including access to debt advice?
 - anti-social behaviour, including services for the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour?

- tenant incentive schemes?
 - demotion, possession and eviction?
- Have we developed an eviction/homelessness prevention protocol which identifies all actions to be taken at the beginning of a tenancy, during the tenancy and pre-eviction, where applicable, to prevent homelessness/eviction?
- Do we facilitate access to the following services for our tenants if and when they need them:
 - mediation?
 - debt advice?
 - tenancy/floating support?
 - general advice/signposting to specialist advice?
 - education and life skills training?
- Do we undertake adequate monitoring of lettings and housing management outcomes and respond to information that indicates poorer outcomes for people with particular needs?

5 Further information

5.1 Effective practice examples from outside of Wales

Brief description	More information available
Prevention of homelessness	
<u>Cunningham Housing Association</u> – always informs the relevant social work department about pending evictions where the household included children	www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk (page 30)
Joint training initiative, <u>Edinburgh Housing Advice Network</u> (which includes a range of housing associations) has developed/delivered a series of training courses for all agencies to support the implementation of the Housing Advice Strategy	www.edinburgh.gov.uk
<u>Money Information Network Tameside</u> - an alliance of a number of organisations within the Tameside area, including housing associations and the council. All the partners share a vision of giving people the right tools and skills so that they can manage their personal finances and avoid the debt trap	www.mintameside.org.uk
<u>Swale Housing Association</u> – has service level agreements with local authorities for private sector leasing schemes which include any surpluses generated being channelled directly back into further prevention services. In one area, such surpluses have enabled the funding of a resettlement officer	www.cih.org (page 15)
<u>Trafford Housing Trust</u> – work with partners such as the Youth Offending Team to prevent homelessness amongst young people. Have produced a youth housing handbook	www.traffordhousingtrust.co.uk
<u>West Country Housing Association</u> - have an agreed protocol with one local authority to visit jointly with an officer from the housing options team (where the association's own intervention on rent arrears using in-house resources or a referral to local agencies has not addressed an arrears problem). The joint visit will involve looking at other ways of tackling the problem as well as reinforcing the real risk that the tenancy may be lost due to rent arrears	www.cih.org (page 15)

Brief description	More information available
Prevention of homelessness (cont)	
<p>A homelessness prevention protocol and procedures between <u>Your Homes Newcastle</u> (an ALMO) and <u>Newcastle City Council</u> identifies action to be taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • before a tenancy starts - identify vulnerable tenants, develop support plan and undertake new tenant visit • during the tenancy - multi-agency case meeting • to prevent eviction – alert other agencies and hold eviction prevention case meeting <p>It is intended that this approach will be extended to include other social housing providers working in the area.</p>	<p>www.housemark.co.uk (search on Your Homes Newcastle – access for subscribers only)</p>
Maximising access to social housing	
<p><u>Telford and Wrekin</u> – the local authority and a number of housing association partners share the burden of debt to enable access to housing. The housing association agrees to write-off a third of the debt, the authority covers one third and the final third is met by the homeless person via a credit union loan</p>	<p>www.cih.org (page 10)</p>
<p><u>Thames Valley Housing</u> – under-occupation scheme that enables them to make best use of their housing stock and provide larger accommodation for nominations from local authorities. Financial incentives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a one-off grant payment of £2,500 • the full costs of removals • arranging and paying to disconnect and reconnect appliances, gas and electricity supply, and telephone • lifting and relaying carpets, or providing new carpets up to the value of £9.00 per metre if carpets cannot be re-laid • refitting curtains or providing new curtains if they cannot be refitted • payment of the cost of redirection of mail • payment of other reasonable costs, subject to proof of the expenses <p>Tenants in arrears are eligible for the scheme, with the arrears offset from the grant payment, enabling the new tenancy to start with a clear rent account.</p>	<p>www.tvha.co.uk</p>

Effective use of temporary accommodation	
<p>Midland Heart, won a Housing Corporation Gold Award in 2006 for its work on homelessness. The organisation's online tackling homelessness toolkit includes a range of practical information including a section on partnership working</p>	<p>www.midlandheartgold.org.uk</p>

5.2 Websites

Business Action on Homelessness	www.bitc.org.uk	Partnership between business, homeless agencies and the Government which aims to help homeless people to find employment and achieve independent living
CIH Cymru	www.cih.org	Policy information
Community Housing Cymru	www.chcymru.org.uk	Membership body for housing associations in Wales
Co-ordinated action against domestic abuse	www.caada.org.uk	Working to improve the safety for all survivors of domestic violence, including children
Communities and Local Government	www.communities.gov.uk	Information on homelessness
Crisis	www.crisis.org.uk	Useful resource on homelessness policy issues
Cymorth Cymru	www.cymorthcymru.org.uk	Incorporates Homeless Link Cymru
Homeless Link	www.homeless.org.uk	National membership organisation for frontline homeless agencies in England
Homeless pages	www.homelesspages.org.uk	Information on publications and training on homelessness
Homeless UK	www.homelessuk.org	Online information about over 8,000 services that can help homeless people and those at risk of homelessness across the UK
HouseMark	www.housemark.co.uk	Subscription good practice and benchmarking service
Housemate	www.housemate.org.uk	Part of Housemate project aiming to prevent homelessness amongst young people
IDeA	www.idea.gov.uk	Includes information on the Beacon Scheme
It's your move	www.itsyourmove.org.uk	Practical resources to support effective resettlement with young people

leavinghome.info	www.leavinghome.info	On-line guide to leaving home and housing for young people in Scotland
Local Government Data Unit - Wales	www.lgdu-wales.gov.uk	Information about performance indicators including on housing advice and homelessness
Roof	www.roofmag.co.uk	Shelter's housing magazine
Shelter Cymru	www.sheltercymru.org.uk	Working for the prevention of homelessness
UK Coalition on Older Homelessness	www.olderhomelessness.org.uk	Lobby group of housing and homelessness agencies concerned with raising the profile of older homeless people in the UK
Wales Audit Office	www.wao.gov.uk	Has produced a report on the National Homelessness Strategy
Welsh Assembly Government	new.wales.gov.uk	Policy information on homelessness
Welsh council websites	www.outwood.com	Portal site to all Welsh local council websites
Welsh housing association websites	www.chcymru.org.uk	Links from Community Housing Cymru website to all Welsh housing association websites
Welsh Housing Quarterly	www.whq.org.uk	Quarterly housing and regeneration magazine – includes regular information and examples on homelessness
Welsh Local Government Association	www.wlga.gov.uk	Homelessness content on WLGA website

5.3 Publications

Title	Published by	Available from
An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Community Housing Agreements	Welsh Assembly Government 2006	new.wales.gov.uk
Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness	Welsh Assembly Government 2003	new.wales.gov.uk
Effective co-operation in tackling homelessness – nomination agreements and exclusions	ODPM 2004	www.communities.gov.uk
Homelessness prevention and housing associations – contributing to efficiency	Housing Corporation and CIH, 2006	www.cih.org
Housing associations, nominations and homelessness – Sector Study 24	Housing Corporation 2003	www.housingcorp.gov.uk
Housing Key Lines of Enquiry	Wales Audit Office November 2005	www.wao.gov.uk
National Homelessness Strategy 2006-2008	Welsh Assembly Government 2006	new.wales.gov.uk
Policy Review of Youth Homelessness	Welsh Assembly Government Social Justice and Regeneration Committee 2007	www.assemblywales.org
Preventing Homelessness: the role of housing management	Communities Scotland, 2001	www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk
Providing the Solution - Improving the Private Rented Sector as an option for resolving housing need in Wales	Shelter Cymru, 2006	new.wales.gov.uk
Regulatory Code for Housing Associations registered in Wales	Welsh Assembly Government March 2006	new.wales.gov.uk

Tackling Homelessness in Wales: A Review of the Effectiveness of the National Homelessness Strategy	Wales Audit Office 2007	www.wao.gov.uk
Tackling homelessness: the Housing Corporation strategy	Housing Corporation 2006	www.housingcorp.gov.uk
The Social Housing Cycle: lettings and homelessness in Wales, 1980-2005	Welsh Assembly Government 2006	new.wales.gov.uk

5.4 People

Name	Role	Contact details
Carl Chapple	Homelessness Campaigns and Policy Officer Cymorth Cymru	carlchapple@cymorthcymru.org.uk
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Geoff Marlow	Team Leader, Homelessness Policy Team, Welsh Assembly Government	geoff.marlow@wales.gsi.gov.uk 01685 729200
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Chris Price	National Homelessness Network Co-ordinator	chris.price@swansea.gov.uk 01792 533126
Amanda Ryan	Health and Homelessness Facilitator, Welsh Assembly Government	amanda.ryan@wales.gsi.gov.uk 029 2082 5988

5.5 Other homelessness toolkits funded by the Assembly

The Welsh Assembly Government's homelessness good practice grant programme has funded a range of toolkits on various aspects of homelessness. A summary of each is provided here along with a contact point.

Organisations(s)	Toolkit title	Summary	Contact
Carmarthenshire County Council	Homelessness Best Practice Toolkit	The focus of the toolkit under discussion (May 2007)	Jonathan Morgan
Cymorth Cymru in conjunction with Cardiff multi-agency homelessness strategy and advisory planning group	A toolkit to meet the new standards in temporary accommodation for homeless households	To develop a toolkit for organisations that house statutory homeless households to in order to assess what they need to do to meet the higher standards for 2011	Carl Chapple
Cymorth Cymru	Homelessness and stock transfer	<p>A practical guide for local authorities, housing associations and the voluntary sector on ensuring stock transfer does not negatively impact on homeless needs</p> <p>The guide <i>Homelessness and stock transfer: a guide to the issues and best practice</i> was published in February 2007 and is available online at www.whq.org.uk</p>	Carl Chapple
Cymorth Cymru	Good practice toolkit – drugs policies	A toolkit that addresses approaches to drug users which are legal, inclusive, and supportive for supported housing providers	Carl Chapple

Organisations(s)	Toolkit title	Summary	Contact
Monmouthshire County Council	Working with the private rented sector	Good practice toolkit for private landlords to include advice and information on relevant legislation, sample tenancy agreement, information about Housing Benefits and the advantages of working in partnership with the local authority	Victoria Hiscocks
North Wales Partnership Bid	Homelessness manual	Information for local authority staff on dealing with homelessness enquiries	Ros Tyrrell
Shelter Cymru and the Vale of Glamorgan Council	Homelessness decision making	A toolkit to enable those responsible for processing homelessness applications within local authorities to avoid making common mistakes when taking, investigating and deciding upon homelessness applications and in carrying out their homelessness statutory duties. Will include an assessment tool to benchmark current performance, and a 'how to' guide to avoiding common mistakes	Steve Povey
Shelter Cymru and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	Effective preventative advice toolkit	A toolkit which will help local authorities maximise homelessness prevention through provision of effective housing advice. Will include an assessment tool enabling housing departments to benchmark current performance of housing advice services, a practical guide to providing basic housing advice and identifying the 'trigger points' at which specialist advice services may assist in preventing homelessness	Steve Povey

Organisations(s)	Toolkit title	Summary	Contact
Welsh Local Government Association	Making the most of the resources to tackle homelessness	Based on learning exchange held in 2006, a toolkit to identify effective practice in relation to leasing schemes, use of housing benefit to prevent homelessness, maximising use of the private sector and homelessness prevention funds	Sue Finch
Welsh Local Government Association	Homelessness handbook for Members	A handbook for members to help develop their knowledge and understanding about the National Homelessness Strategy and the local authority role in implementing effective practice on homelessness	Sue Finch

In addition, the Welsh Local Government Association is joint funding the development of four linked service improvement toolkits, one of which is on housing advice and homelessness. Each was piloted within a Welsh authority during the winter 2006/spring 2007. The final toolkits and guidance will be launched later in 2007. For further information, contact [Sue Finch](#).

The themes for the Welsh Assembly Government homelessness good practice grant programme for 2007/08 are:

- opening up the private rented sector
- monitoring and evaluation of the prevention of homelessness
- the prevention of homelessness in the cases of domestic abuse
- the prevention of homelessness in ex-offenders
- the prevention of homelessness in young people, especially care leavers