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Welsh Government

STATISTICS

# Social housing vacancies, lettings and arrears: April 2021 to March 2022

Information on the number of housing units that were empty, rented to tenants and tenancies in rent arrears for April 2021 to March 2022.

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# Introduction

The information is used to assess: the effectiveness of social landlords in managing their stock; gauge turnover rates for social housing; and monitor the number of social housing tenants in debt across Wales.

Social housing refers to housing units (including bedsits and bed spaces) owned by and rented from social landlords (local authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)). The data used in this release is provided by the social landlords.

## Main points

- At the 31 March 2022, there were 4,846 vacant social housing units (2% of total social housing stock). This was an 8% decrease on 2020-21 but the second highest total since 2008-09.
- 1,784 units (37% of all vacancies) had been vacant for more than 6 months. 327 of these units were available for letting.
- There were 18,950 new lettings during 2021-22. This is an increase of 7% on 2020-21. Of these, 51% were housed from waiting lists, 24% through priority lettings to the homeless and 25% via transfers or exchanges.
- At 31 March 2022, 96,309 (41%) of social housing tenancies were in rent arrears. This was an increase of 6% on 2020-21. Around 3% of all tenancies had been in rent arrears for 13 weeks or more.

## Social housing units in Wales

At 31 March 2022 there were a total of 237,395 social housing units in Wales. Of

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these, 95% (225,432) were self-contained general need or sheltered housing units which were rented from Welsh social landlords at social rents (as regulated by the Welsh Government Rent and Service Charge Standard). The remaining 5% (11,963) were social housing units not covered by the Welsh Government Social Rent Policy but still classed as social housing (e.g. 'extra care ' or supported housing units).

RSLs owned 63% (149,468 units) of all social housing units at 31 March 2022 and the 11 stock retaining authorities owned the remaining 37% (87,927 units).

Detailed data sets for social housing stock can be found on [StatsWales](#).

## Social housing vacancies as at 31 March 2022

There may be a number of reasons why the housing units are vacant, and why some of these are not available for letting, such as awaiting sale, demolition or undergoing improvements and repair.

The 4,846 vacant units at 31 March 2022 were a decrease of 8% on 31 March 2021, and represents 2% of all social housing stock (Table 1).

### Table 1: Social landlord vacancies by type of social landlord, as at 31 March [Note 1] [Note 2] [Note 3] [Note 4]

Type of social landlord	Total social housing stock	Total vacancies	Percentage (%) of stock vacant [1]
Local authorities			

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Type of social landlord	Total social housing stock	Total vacancies	Percentage (%) of stock vacant [1]
2017-18	87,374	1,601	1.8
2018-19	87,404	1,876	2.1
2019-20 [3]	87,324	.	.
2020-21 [4]	87,559	2,390	2.7
2021-22	87,927	2,183	2.5
<b>RSLs</b>			
2017-18	142,643	2,568	1.8
2018-19 [2]	144,004	2,467	1.7
2019-20 [3]	.	.	.
2020-21 [4]	147,840	2,856	1.9
2021-22	149,468	2,663	1.8
<b>All social landlords</b>			
2017-18	230,017	4,169	1.8

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Type of social landlord	Total social housing stock	Total vacancies	Percentage (%) of stock vacant [1]
2018-19 [2]	231,408	4,343	1.9
2019-20 [3]	.	.	.
2020-21 [4]	235,399	5,246	2.2
2021-22	237,395	4,846	2.0

Description of Table 1: A table showing that the number of social landlord vacancies increased each year to 2020-21 but has decreased for 2021-22.

Source: Annual social landlord stock and vacancies returns, Housing Revenue Account Subsidy (HRAS)

[Note 1] As a percentage of total social housing stock.

[Note 2] For 2018-19 one RSL (Baneswell Housing Association) was unable to submit data on vacancies. Therefore, information provided by Baneswell HA for 2017-18 has been used to calculate a Wales total.

[Note 3] Data not collected for 2019-20 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Note 4] For 2020-21 one local authority (Flintshire) was unable to submit data on vacancies. Therefore, information provided by Flintshire for 2018-19 has been used to calculate a Wales total.

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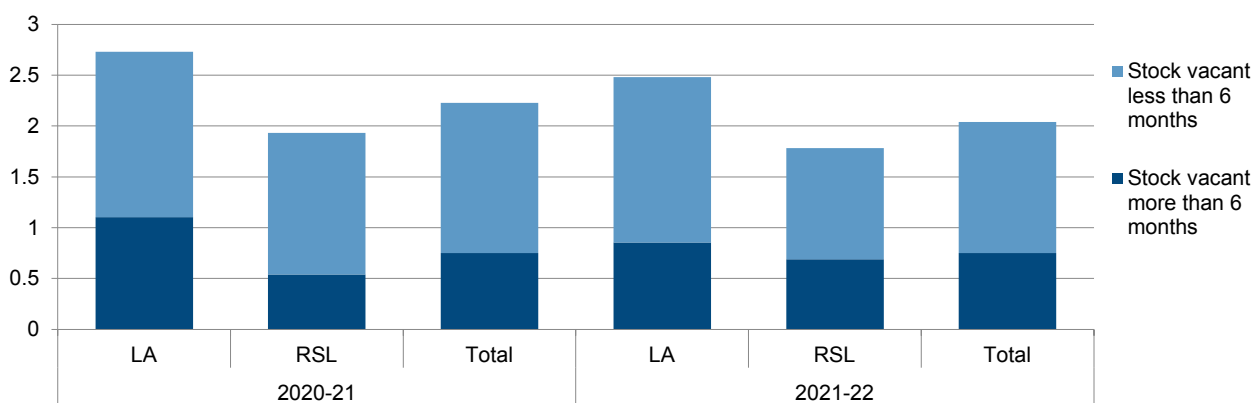
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Between 31 March 2021 and 31 March 2022, the number of units empty for more than 6 months increased by 1% to 1,784. These units accounted for 1% of all social housing stock as at 31 March 2022, the same as the previous year (Figure 1).

At 31 March 2022 the proportion of vacant units was higher for local authorities (3%) than RSLs (2%). Local authorities and RSLs both had around 1% of their stock vacant for more than 6 months.

**Figure 1: Percentage of social housing stock vacant by length of vacancy at 31 March 2021 and 2022 [Note 1] [Note 2]**



Description of Figure 1: A stacked bar graph showing that the percentage of vacant stock in both LA and RSL properties in Wales has decreased between 2020-21 and 2021-22.

Source: Annual social landlord stock and vacancies returns, Housing Revenue Account Subsidy (HRAS)

[Note 1] As a percentage of total social housing stock.

[Note 2] For 2020-21 one local authority (Flintshire) was unable to submit data on vacancies. Therefore, information provided by Flintshire for 2018-19 has been used to calculate a Wales total.

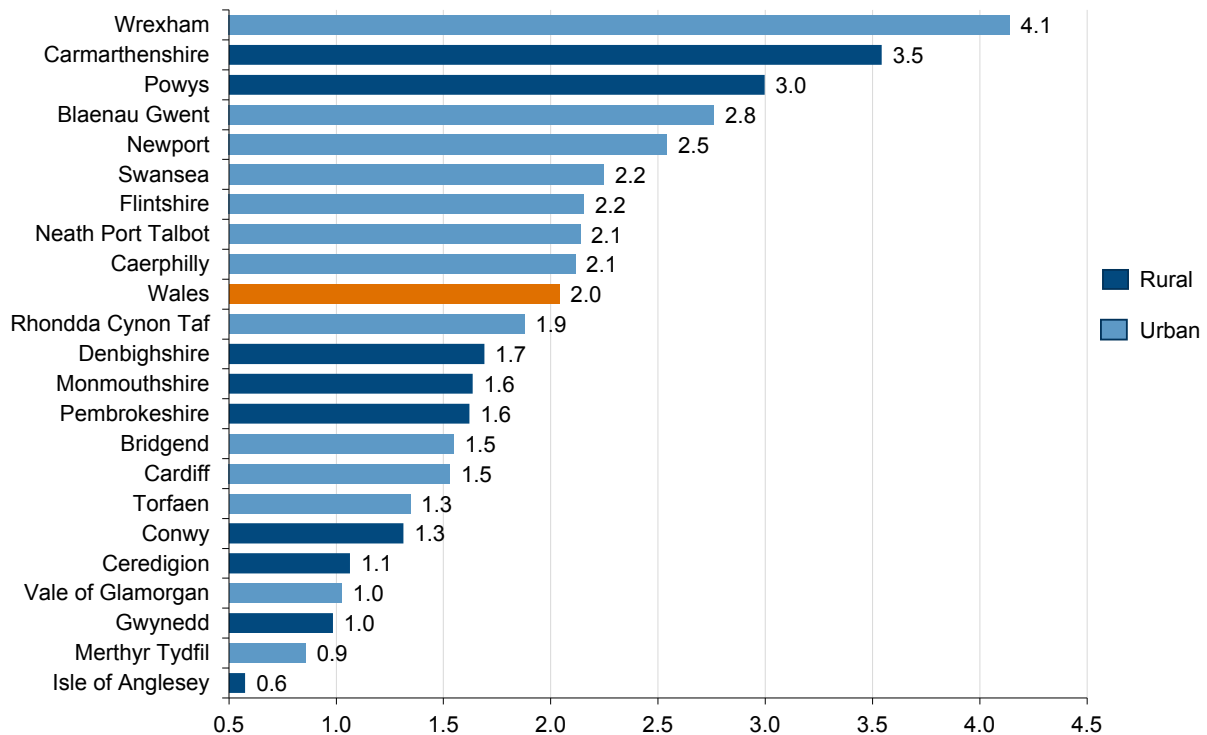
The percentage of vacant social housing units as at 31 March 2022 varied across Wales, ranging from 4% in Wrexham to 1% in the Isle of Anglesey. As Figure 2 below shows, there was no particular pattern associated with rural or urban authorities.

Of the 11 local authorities who transferred their stock to registered social landlords, 4 transfer authorities had vacancy levels above the Wales average (Figure 2).

Further details, including a list of the large-scale voluntary transfers of local authority stock and dates of transfer to registered social landlords, are found in the [quality report](#).



**Figure 2: Percentage of social housing stock vacant at 31 March 2022, by local authority**



Description of Figure 2: A bar graph showing that the percentage of social housing stock vacant by local authority varies from 1% to 4% in Wales.

Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

## Vacant social housing available for letting

Not all stock that is vacant at 31 March 2022 will be available for letting.

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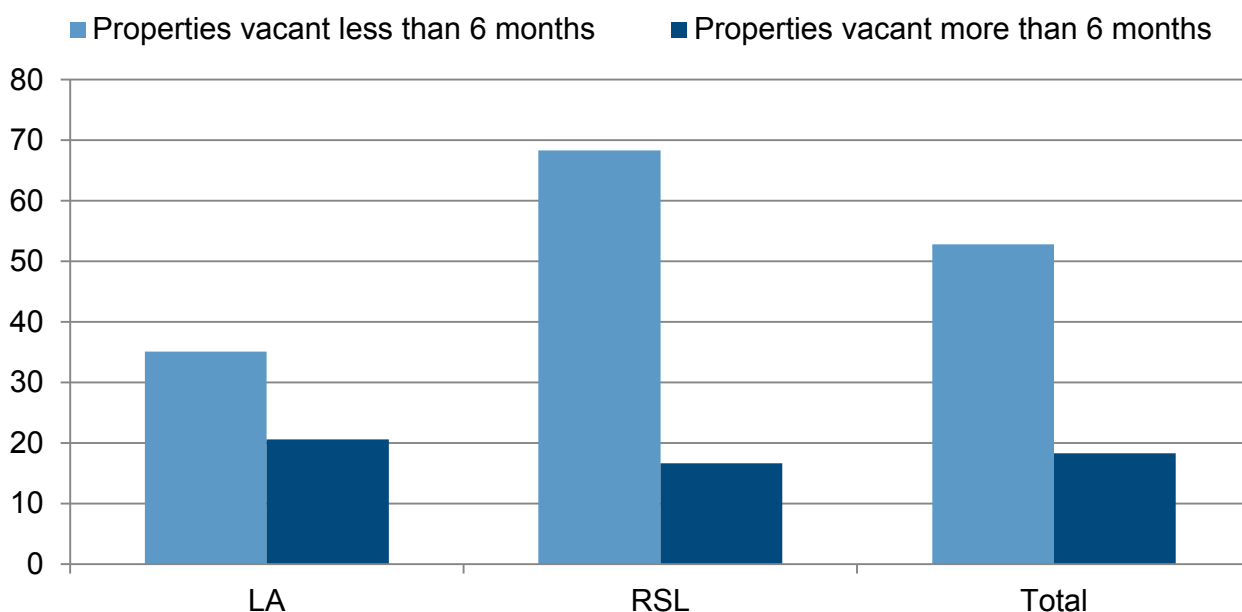
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Reasons why social housing stock may not be available for letting include the housing units undergoing or awaiting improvements, or awaiting sale or demolition.

The percentage of vacant social housing stock which is available for letting has been decreasing annually since 2012-13 when it accounted for 59%. At 31 March 2022, 40% of all vacant social housing was available for letting though across Wales this varied between 92% in Torfaen to 14% in Wrexham. 2021-22 was the first increase in the percentage of vacant stock available for letting (up from 39% in 2020-21) since 2012-13.

### Figure 3: Percentage of vacant social housing stock available for letting at 31 March 2022



Description of Figure 3: A bar graph showing that over half of all social housing properties vacant for less than 6 months in Wales are available for letting, whereas just under a fifth of properties vacant for more than 6 months are

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available for letting.

Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

At 31 March 2022, 53% of all social housing units that had been vacant for less than 6 months were available for letting. 68% of RSL units that had been vacant for less than 6 months were available for letting compared with 35% of local authority units.

At 31 March 2022, 18% of social housing vacant for more than 6 months was available for letting (327 units). The percentage available for letting was higher for local authority properties at 21% than for RSL properties at 17%.

At a local authority level, the number of social housing units vacant for more than 6 months can be relatively small so the percentage available for letting can vary considerably depending on local circumstances.

A detailed data set for vacant social housing available for letting by local authority can be found on [StatsWales](#).

## Housing stock at social rents: let and lettings

### Social housing stock let

A total of 232,549 social housing units were let at 31 March 2022 which is 98% of all social housing stock. The number of RSL social housing units let increased by 1% since 2020-21 to 146,805 units, the same percentage as local authority lets (85,744 units). The percentage of stock let for RSLs was less than 1 percentage point higher compared to local authorities. .

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**Table 2: Social housing stock let, by type of social landlord as at 31 March 2017 to 31 March 2022 [Note 1] [Note 2]**

Type of social landlord	Total number of social housing stock	Total number of social housing stock let	Percentage (%) of social housing stock let
<b>Local authorities</b>			
2017-18	87,374	85,773	98.2
2018-19	87,404	85,528	97.9
2019-20 [2]	87,324	.	.
2020-21	87,559	85,169	97.3
2021-22	87,927	85,744	97.5
<b>RSLs</b>			
2017-18	142,643	140,075	98.2
2018-19 [1]	144,004	141,537	98.3
2019-20 [2]	.	.	.

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Type of social landlord	Total number of social housing stock	Total number of social housing stock let	Percentage (%) of social housing stock let
<b>2020-21</b>	147,840	144,984	98.1
<b>2021-22</b>	149,468	146,805	98.2
<b>All social landlords</b>			
<b>2017-18</b>	230,017	225,848	98.2
<b>2018-19 [1]</b>	231,408	227,065	98.1
<b>2019-20 [2]</b>	.	.	.
<b>2020-21</b>	235,399	230,153	97.8
<b>2021-22</b>	237,395	232,549	98.0

Description of Table 2: A table showing that the total number of social housing stock let has increased every year for the last 5 years, however the percentage of stock let has remained around 98%.

Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

[Note 1] For 2018-19 one RSL (Baneswell Housing Association) was unable to submit data on lettings. Therefore, information provided by Baneswell HA for 2017-18 has been used to calculate a Wales total.

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[Note 2] Data not collected for 2019-20 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

. No data

## Social housing lettings

New lettings <sup>[footnote 1]</sup> of social housing stock increased by 7% during 2021-22, to 18,950 lettings. As in previous years, just over a half of these were via housing waiting lists<sup>[footnote 2]</sup>, though the number of lets via the housing waiting list were down 1% from 2020-21 to 9,746 (Figure 4).

In 2021-22, there were 4,567 lettings for households re-housed on a priority basis due to homelessness (up by 7% on 2020-21). (Figure 4).

The proportion of these lettings was similar for 2021-22 and 2020-21 at just under a quarter, increasing yearly since the low of 13% in 2013-14 and a noticeable jump from 18% in 2018-19.

At the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020, the Welsh Government put in place an emergency homelessness response which involved additional funding, together with both statutory and non-statutory guidance, to ensure that no-one was left without accommodation or support to stay safe during the pandemic.

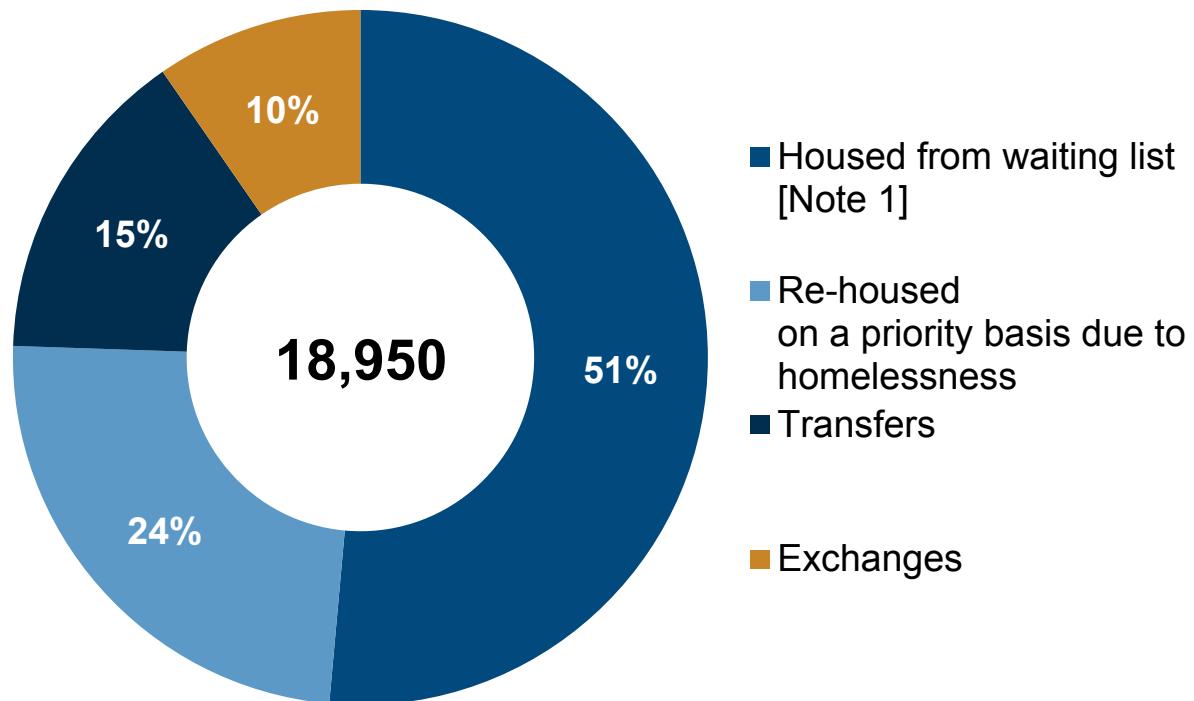
During 2021-22, there were a total of 4,637 transfers and exchanges, where existing tenants transfer within a social landlord's stock (transfer) or moves from another social landlord's stock (exchange), accounting for a quarter of all lettings. Both the number of transfers and the number of exchanges increased, by 9% and 65% respectively, compared to 2020-21.

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**Figure 4: Social housing lettings during the financial year 2021-22 [Note 1]**



Description of Figure 4: A donut chart showing that the majority of social housing lettings in 2021-22 were housed from waiting list.

Source: Annual social landlord stock and lettings returns

[Note 1] Housed from the waiting list includes: Lettings from a landlord's or another waiting list; non-priority homeless; lettings resulting from a nomination from another landlord; and lettings resulting from resettlement/move-on strategies or disabled registers.

For 12 of the 22 local authorities, the majority of lettings during 2021-22 were made to those housed from waiting lists with the highest proportion being 72% in Blaenau Gwent. The lowest proportion of these lettings was 20% in Bridgend.

During 2021-22, Bridgend had the highest proportion of priority lettings due to homelessness at 45% followed by Conwy at 42%, Swansea at 39% and Pembrokeshire at 34%. Bridgend and Conwy both reported rates of households assessed as homeless above the Wales average of 84.9 cases per 10,000 households during 2021-22. However, it is possible that households accepted as homeless or threatened with homelessness may not be re-housed on a priority basis in the same year, due to the timing of processes or households initially being placed in temporary accommodation. The lowest proportion of priority lettings due to homelessness was in Isle of Anglesey (8%).

The highest proportion of lettings through transfers and exchanges was 37% in Pembrokeshire followed by 35% in Bridgend and Cardiff then 33% in Merthyr Tydfil and Newport, whilst the lowest proportion of lettings through transfers and exchanges was in Powys at 11% and closely followed at 12% in Blaenau Gwent.

Bridgend, Cardiff, Newport and the Vale of Glamorgan, reported higher proportions of lettings through exchanges than transfers compared to other social landlords within their own stock. Bridgend had the highest percentage of exchanges across all 22 authorities accounting for 22% of all its lettings during the year. Wrexham had the highest percentage of transfers accounting for 24% of all lettings during the year.

Looking at the number of lettings per 100 units of stock at social rent gives an indication of the turnover rate for social rented stock (general needs and sheltered housing)<sup>[footnote 3]</sup>. The letting rate for Wales was 8.4 per 100 units of stock at social rents during 2021-22, an increase from a rate of 7.9 in 2020-21.

At the local authority level, Cardiff had the highest number of lettings (1,864) in 2021-22, but the highest number of lettings per 100 units of stock at social rent was in Wrexham at 11.4.

Ceredigion had the lowest number of lettings during 2021-22 (363), whilst Conwy had the lowest number of lettings per 100 units of all stock at social rents



at 6.5. In 12 of the 22 local authorities, the number of lettings per 100 units of stock at social rent (general needs and sheltered) was above the Wales average and there was no clear distinction between the urban and rural authorities.

A full data set for social housing lettings by local authority is available on [StatsWales](#).

## Social housing rent arrears

A tenancy is in rent arrears when they have failed to pay the rent due at the appropriate time. As this relates to tenancy agreement it is not a count of social housing tenants living in poverty. At the end of March 2022, there were 96,309 tenancies in arrears, accounting for 41% of all social housing tenancies. This was an increase of 5,769 tenancies (6%) on the 90,540 tenancies in arrears at the end of March 2021. A number of social landlords cited recent welfare reforms and in particular the roll out of Universal Credit as having an impact on the level of rent arrears. It is likely that the onset of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as the cost-of-living crisis seen nationally, also had a contributory affect.

**Table 3: Number of social housing tenancies in rent arrears at 31 March 2018-19 to 2021-22 [Note 1]**

Tenancies	2018-19 [Note 2]	2019-20 [Note 3]	2020-21 (r)	2021-22
<b>Local authority</b>				
<b>Number of tenancies</b>	85,528	.	85,169	85,744

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Tenancies	2018-19 [Note 2]	2019-20 [Note 3]	2020-21 (r)	2021-22
<b>Tenancies in rent arrears</b>	29,620	.	31,301	33,526
<b>Percentage of tenancies in rent arrears</b>	34.6	.	36.8	39.1
<b>RSLs</b>				
<b>Number of tenancies</b>	141,537	.	144,984	146,805
<b>Tenancies in rent arrears</b>	47,712	.	59,239	62,783
<b>Percentage of tenancies in rent arrears</b>	33.7	.	40.9	42.8
<b>All social housing</b>				
<b>Number of tenancies</b>	227,065	.	230,153	232,549
<b>Tenancies in rent arrears</b>	77,332	.	90,540	96,309
<b>Percentage of tenancies in rent arrears</b>	34.1	.	39.3	41.4

Description of Table 3: A table showing the number and percentage of social housing tenancies in rent arrears broken down by local authority tenancies, RSL tenancies and all social housing.

Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

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[Note 1] The total number of tenancies is calculated as total social housing stock minus vacant units at 31 March.

[Note 2] For 2018-19 one RSL (Baneswell Housing Association) was unable to submit data on lettings and arrears. Therefore, information provided by Baneswell HA for 2017-18 has been used to calculate a Wales total.

[Note 3] Data not collected for 2019-20 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The proportion of tenancies in rent arrears was higher for RSL tenants (43%) than for local authority tenants (39%).

At 31 March 2022, the number of RSL tenants in rent arrears increased by 6% compared to 2020-21 to 62,783. The number of local authority tenants in rent arrears at 31 March 2022 was also up by 7% on the previous year to 33,526 (Table 3).

Across Wales, the highest percentage of social housing tenancies in arrears was seen in Merthyr Tydfil (61%) and the lowest in Gwynedd (27%). There was considerable variation in the percentage of tenancies in arrears amongst both the rural and urban authorities with 9 authorities recording arrears above the Wales average of 41%.

## Length of time of rent arrears

At 31 March 2022, 38% of all social housing tenancies had been in arrears for less than 13 weeks and 3% had been in arrears for 13 weeks or more.

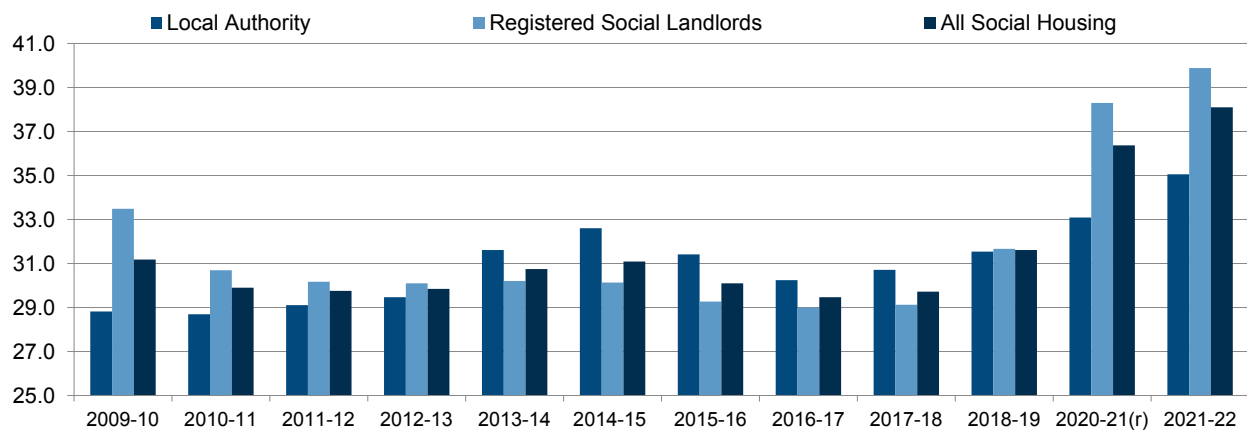
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In 2021-22, as in 2020-21, there was a higher percentage of RSL tenancies in short term rent arrears (of less than 13 weeks) than local authority tenancies (35% compared to 40%) (Figure 5a). In 2021-22 the number of local authority tenancies in rent arrears of less than 13 weeks was 30,055 (7% higher than in 2020-21) and for RSLs it was 58,558 (6% higher than in 2020-21).

**Figure 5a: Percentage of all tenancies in rent arrears for less than 13 weeks at 31 March 2009-10 to 2021-22 [Note 1] [Note 2] [Note 3] [Note 4]**



Description of Figure 5a: Bar graph showing that the number of tenancies in rent arrears for less than 13 weeks increased drastically during 2020-21 and has again increased in 2021-22 for both local authority and registered social landlord tenancies.

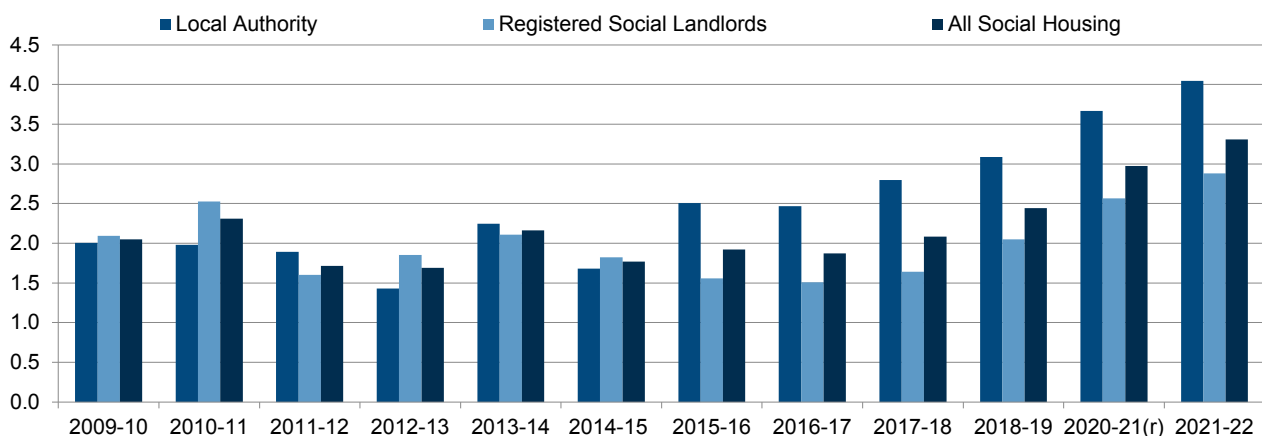
Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

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Since 2015-16, the percentages of tenancies in longer term rent arrears (of 13 weeks or more) has been consistently lower for RSL tenancies than for local authority tenancies. At 31 March 2022, 4% of local authority tenancies had been

in rent arrears for 13 weeks or more compared with 3% of RSL tenancies. This represents a slight increase for local authority tenancies and the same as the previous year for RSL tenancies (Figure 5b).

**Figure 5b: Percentage of all tenancies in rent arrears for 13 weeks or more at 31 March 2009-10 to 2021-22 [Note 1] [Note 2] [Note 3] [Note 4]**



Description of Figure 5b: Bar graph showing that the number of tenancies in rent arrears for 13 weeks or more has increased steadily between 2016-17 and 2021-22 for both local authority and registered social landlord tenancies.

Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

[Note 1] As at 31 March each year.

[Note 2] Arrears are shown for tenancies in self-contained and non self-contained units only. Arrears data is not collected for intermediate tenures and tenures not at social rents.

[Note 3] The total number of tenancies is calculated as total stock minus vacant dwellings. Total stock includes all self-contained and non self-contained units but

excludes intermediate tenures and tenures not at social rents.

[Note 4] Data not collected for 2019-20 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

(r) Revised

Table 4 below covers the number of social housing tenancies (both local authority and RSL) in rent arrears at 31 March 2022 for each local authority area.

Of the 96,309 social tenancies in Wales in rent arrears at 31 March 2022, the vast majority (92%) had been in arrears for less than 13 weeks, with 7,696 (8%) tenancies in arrears for 13 weeks or more.

As was the case in 2020-21, Cardiff recorded the highest number of social housing tenancies in rent arrears at 12,087 tenancies followed by Swansea at 10,742 tenancies. The lowest number of social housing tenancies in rent arrears was recorded in Ceredigion at 1,106 tenancies. Of these 5% (60 tenancies) had been in arrears for 13 weeks or more (Table 4).

Flintshire recorded the highest proportion of tenancies in long term arrears (13 weeks or more) at 18% (678 tenancies) whilst Monmouthshire had the lowest at 3% (85 tenancies).

**Table 4: Rent arrears at 31 March 2022, by length of time and local authority [Note 1] [Note 2]**

Local authority	Total number of tenancies [Note 3]	Less than 13 weeks	13 weeks or more	Total
Isle of Anglesey	5,006	1,524	146	1,670
Gwynedd	9,053	2,226	173	2,399
Conwy	6,390	1,977	252	2,229
Denbighshire	5,817	1,622	253	1,875
Flintshire	10,216	3,122	678	3,800
Wrexham	12,849	3,509	200	3,709
Powys	8,481	2,368	137	2,505
Ceredigion	3,531	1,046	60	1,106
Pembrokeshire	8,499	3,482	485	3,967
Carmarthenshire	12,225	3,718	310	4,028
Swansea	21,479	9,746	996	10,742

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<b>Local authority</b>	<b>Total number of tenancies [Note 3]</b>	<b>Less than 13 weeks</b>	<b>13 weeks or more</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Neath Port Talbot</b>	12,408	4,953	347	5,300
<b>Bridgend</b>	9,096	2,536	211	2,747
<b>The Vale of Glamorgan</b>	7,622	2,863	201	3,064
<b>Cardiff</b>	26,573	10,985	1,102	12,087
<b>Rhondda Cynon Taf</b>	15,783	7,924	349	8,273
<b>Merthyr Tydfil</b>	5,781	3,335	160	3,495
<b>Caerphilly</b>	14,768	5,988	669	6,657
<b>Blaenau Gwent</b>	7,711	3,519	171	3,690
<b>Torfaen</b>	10,195	4,574	249	4,823
<b>Monmouthshire</b>	5,650	2,520	85	2,605
<b>Newport</b>	13,416	5,076	462	5,538
<b>Wales</b>	232,549	88,613	7,696	96,309

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Description of Table 4: A table showing the number of total tenancies in each local authority in Wales, as well as the number of those which are in rent arrears for less than 13 weeks, or 13 weeks or more. The table shows Cardiff has the highest number of tenancies in rent arrears.

Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

[Note 1] Arrears are shown for tenancies in self-contained and non self-contained units only. Arrears data is not collected for intermediate tenures and tenures not at social rents

[Note 2] The total number of tenancies is calculated as total stock minus vacant units at 31 March 2022. Total stock includes all self-contained and non self-contained units but excludes intermediate tenures and tenures not at social rents.

## Glossary

### Exchanges

Lettings through exchanges involve units let to tenants of other social landlords through mutual exchanges during the financial year; and existing tenants enabled to move within the local authority's stock through mutual exchange agreements during the financial year.

### Housed from the waiting list

This includes lettings from waiting lists, lettings to non-priority homeless, lettings resulting from a nomination from another landlord and lettings resulting from resettlement/move-on strategies or disabled registers.

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## **New-let**

A new-let is the letting of a dwelling that comes under registered social landlord or local authority management for the first time and will include newly built dwellings.

## **Re-let**

A re-let is the lettings of an existing registered social landlord or local authority managed dwelling but does not include the renewal of a tenancy.

## **Tenancies**

Tenancies refer to the tenancy agreements between an individual (or individuals in the case of joint tenancies) and the social landlord. The number of tenancies only includes the tenancy agreement for each individual social housing unit and not all social housing tenants living in that property.

The total number of tenancies shown in this release is calculated as total stock minus vacant dwellings at 31 March. Total stock includes all self-contained and non self-contained units but excludes intermediate tenures and tenures not at social rents.

## **Transfers**

Lettings through transfers involve tenants transferring within the organisation's stock, i.e. where an existing tenant is transferred to another tenancy under the organisation's policy for transfers.

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# Quality and methodology information

Detailed information on data quality and methodology can be found in the [quality report](#).

## Footnotes

[1] New lettings include lettings to new tenants, re-lets, transfers and exchanges.

[2] Includes lettings from a landlord's or another waiting list; non-priority homeless; lettings resulting from a nomination from another landlord; and lettings resulting from resettlement/move-on strategies or disabled registers.

[3] Lettings information includes only general needs and sheltered housing units let by social landlords at social rent under the under the [Welsh Government Social Rents Policy framework](#). The rate of lettings per 100 units of stock is based on general needs and sheltered stock only.

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