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Local Authorities 'Common Housing Registers' and 'Accessible Housing Registers': A Report

1. Introduction

The aim of this short piece of research is to understand more about the current situation regarding the use of Common Housing Registers and Accessible Housing Registers in Local Authorities. This report provides the findings of the survey undertaken as part of this research.

A Common Housing Register is a waiting list shared between the Local Authority and Housing Associations in the same area. It enables people seeking social housing to make just one application instead of many for one area.

An Accessible Housing Register is a system and waiting list for matching available adapted social housing to people with disabilities on the housing waiting list.

2. Methodology

An online survey was developed by analysts within the Welsh Government using Questback (an online survey tool). An email sent by the Welsh Local Government Association to all 22 Local Authorities contained a link to the survey and once completed the responses were recorded by Questback and analysis was undertaken by Welsh Government. The survey was open for the month of June 2016 (the initial deadline was extended to encourage a fuller response rate). Responses were received from 21 of 22 Local Authorities.

The survey posed both open and closed questions. For the open questions, a thematic analysis was undertaken to identify the key themes and issues.

3. Findings

Common Housing Registers.

The majority (76% n=16) of Local Authorities have a Common Housing Register, whilst only 24% (n=5) do not. The five Local Authorities who reported not having a Common Housing Register were asked whether they had plans to develop one. Four Local Authorities had plans to develop one, while only one did not.

Common Housing Register: Partners

The Local Authorities who currently have Common Housing Registers were also asked who the Housing Association partners involved in their Common Housing Register were. All 16 of the Local Authorities who reported holding a Common Housing Register responded to this question. It is important to note that when

these Local Authorities responded they often gave more than one partner involved. The research found the most common partner was Wales and West Housing Association mentioned by eight Local Authorities. Hafod Housing Association was the next most common partner with six local authorities, closely behind this was Linc Cymru and Melin Homes mentioned by five Local Authorities.

The survey also asked the 16 Local Authorities who have a Common Housing Register what aspects of partnership working worked well.

Nine of the 16 Local Authorities who responded, commented on how well the partnerships themselves work. The benefits of collaborating with a variety of partners generated a similar benefit to all Local Authorities:

“As a partnership we meet on a regular basis and have found it is a good opportunity to develop other projects where joint working is appropriate.”

“Multi-agency approach, all partners engage well with the process from Housing Leaders through to Directors and Operational Management.”

“We have had a very recent review and revision of all policies and the process was aided by good communication and a willingness to work in partnership for the common good.”

Six of the Local Authorities also noted the benefit of regular meetings:

“Quarterly steering group meetings”

“As a partnership we meet on a regular basis and have found it is a good opportunity to develop other projects where joint working is appropriate.”

“Monthly meetings with all 4 Registered Social Landlords to discuss operational matters”

The Register itself was also mentioned as a means of saving time and resources:

“It saves administration by having one list and all partners are housing the applicants who are most in need.”

“..use one IT system access and scan all documents relevant”

These 16 Local Authorities were then asked to whether they experienced any difficulties with their Common Housing Register. One of the common issues raised (by seven Local Authorities) was the issue of consistency of applications and the possible problems of different partners approaching allocations differently.

“One significant challenge stems from the fact that all of the housing partners used to allocate completely differently”

“Ensuring consistency of policy application for shortlisting across the partners can be complex and difficult at times”.

Another difficulty two Local Authorities mentioned concerned issues with the IT system in place. One Local Authority reported for example, that as another partner hosted the system, this left them unable to undertake reporting activities. There were some minor indications of imbalance in the systems, with not all partners having equal access:

“This means they have to e-mail us a spreadsheet after each allocation so our officers can then update the system. This results in duplication of work and delays in inputting data so the list is not completely up to date.”

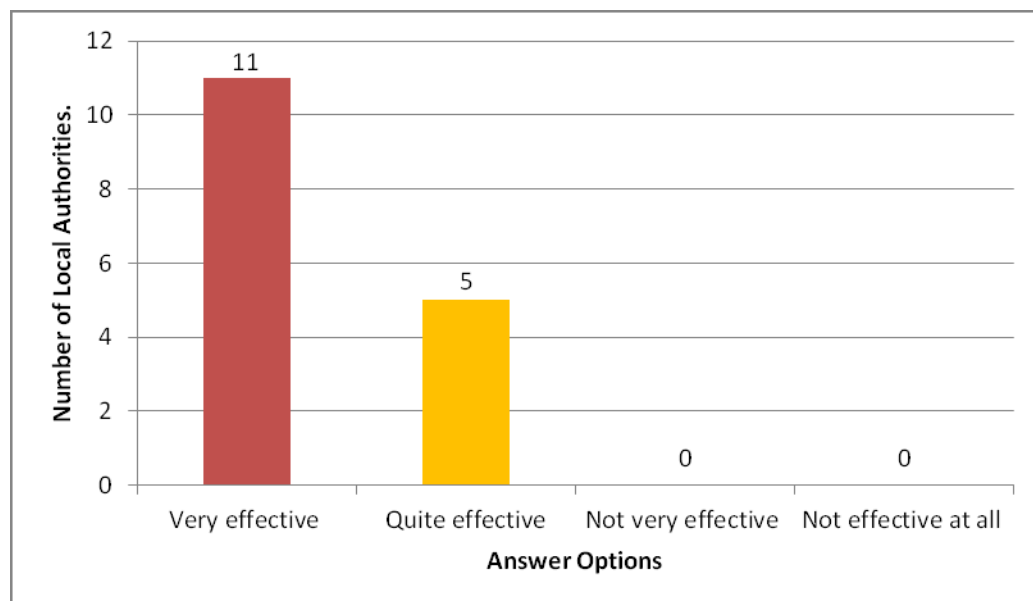
The management of Local Authorities’ Common Housing Registers:

The 16 Local Authorities who have Common Housing Registers were asked about the day to day management of their register. The majority (13) are run by the Local Authority themselves. One Local Authority administers the register and the choice-based letting advert process, but their Housing Association make allocations against the common policy framework. Another Local Authority takes on the main functions of managing the Common Housing Register but each organisation manages their own clients; while yet another Local Authority reported using a Housing Association to manage the Common Housing Register on behalf of the council and Housing Association partners.

The effectiveness of Local Authorities’ Common Housing Registers:

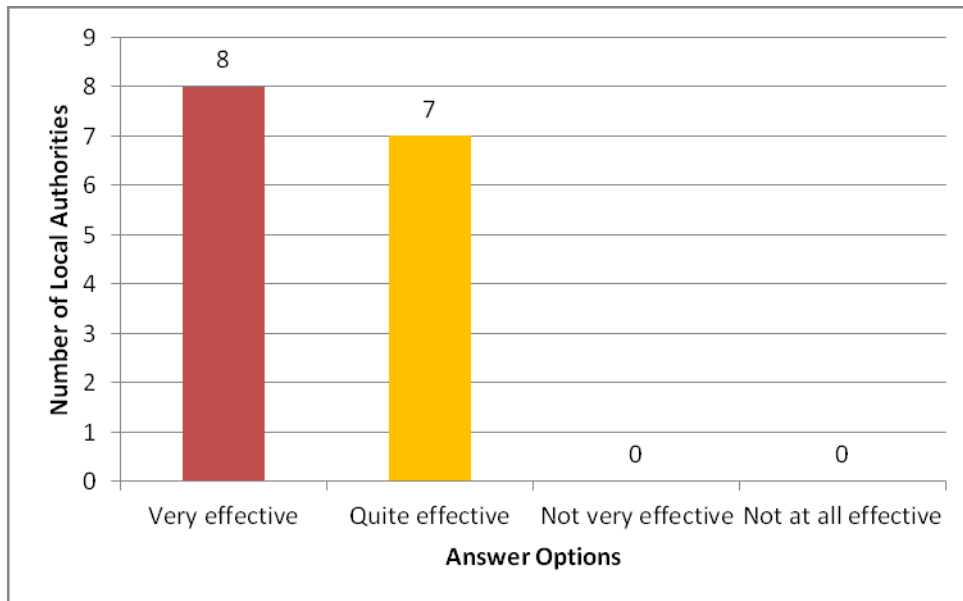
The 16 Local Authorities were asked how effective the Common Housing Register is in helping them to provide a housing service and meet housing needs in a co-ordinated way. The majority of Local Authorities (69% n=11) reported that their Common Housing Register was very effective, with the remaining 31% (n=five) Local Authorities reporting theirs was quite effective. This is shown in Figure 1 below. This indicates that all the Local Authorities who have a Common Housing Register find them effective.

Figure 1: From your perspective, how effective is the Common Housing Register in helping you to provide a housing service and meet housing need in a co-ordinated way?



Common Housing Registers are also perceived by the majority of respondents to be effective in enabling Local Authorities to implement part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Half of the Local Authorities (n=eight) reported that their Common Housing Register is very effective in this regard, while 44% (n=seven) reported it was quite effective. Only one Local Authority (6%) reported it was not very effective. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: How effectively does your Common Housing Scheme enable you to implement Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014? (Homelessness prevention).



Local Authorities were then asked to explain why they felt Common Housing Registers were effective. The eight Local Authorities who felt their Common Housing Register was very effective in enabling them to implement Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, reported that those with the greatest housing need are now rehoused as soon as possible. Four of these Local Authorities mentioned this was due to the revised emphasis on those who are most at risk of homelessness and threatened by homelessness.

Comments provided by some of the seven Local Authorities who rated their Common Housing Register as quite effective pointed out that the Register, in this case as part of a choice-based letting system allowed them to show clients which properties are available and clients are able to make one application that can access 15, 000 properties. Another Local Authority suggested that housing partners are mostly supportive with their homelessness duties but the low supply of one bedroom accommodation can make it difficult to discharge the duty.

Accessible Housing Registers

The majority of the 21 local authorities responding to the survey reported having an Accessible Housing Register (81% n=17) whilst only 19% (n=four) reported not having one, Subsequent survey responses, however, made it clear that in fact all Local Authorities do have a system in place for matching available adapted housing with people with disabilities on the housing waiting list.

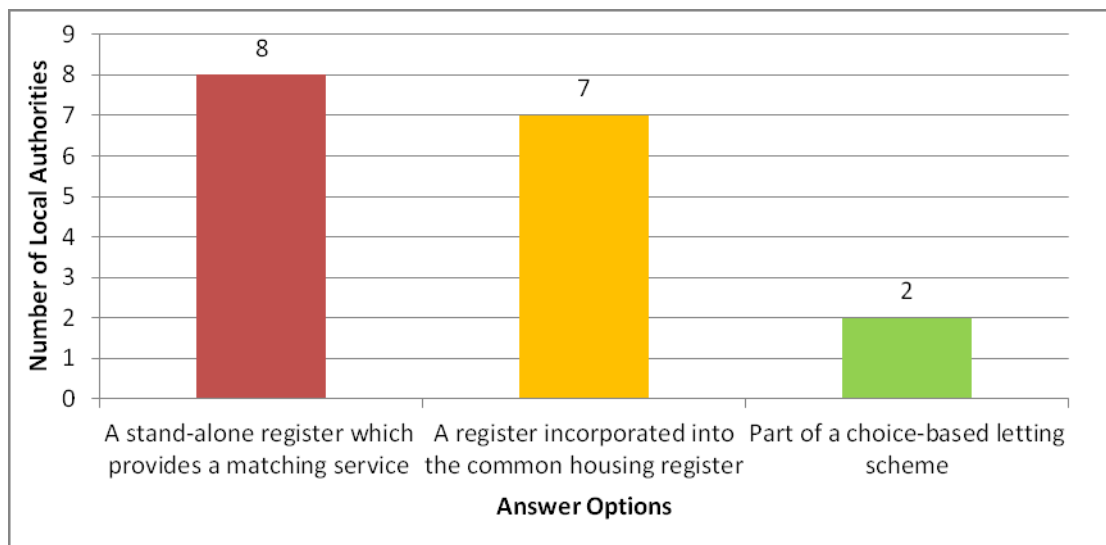
Of the four Local Authorities who reported not having an Accessible Housing Register, two have plans to develop one, whilst the other two Local Authorities did not. However, it is apparent that all 21 Local Authorities have matching systems in place, even if this is not locally defined as an Accessible Housing Register.

The four Local Authorities who reported that they didn't have an Accessible Housing Register, reported using other vehicles, such as the Common Housing Register, a manual list or Choice Based Lettings to perform the **same** function. Adapted properties are identified and then matched to those who have indicated a need for adapted properties on the Common Housing Register or manual list. Similarly, in the case of choice-based lettings, those who have registered a need for adapted properties are invited to bid on such properties when they become available.

The 17 Local Authorities who have an Accessible Housing Register were asked how they would describe it using the categories provided in Figure 3 below. The most frequently given answers were:

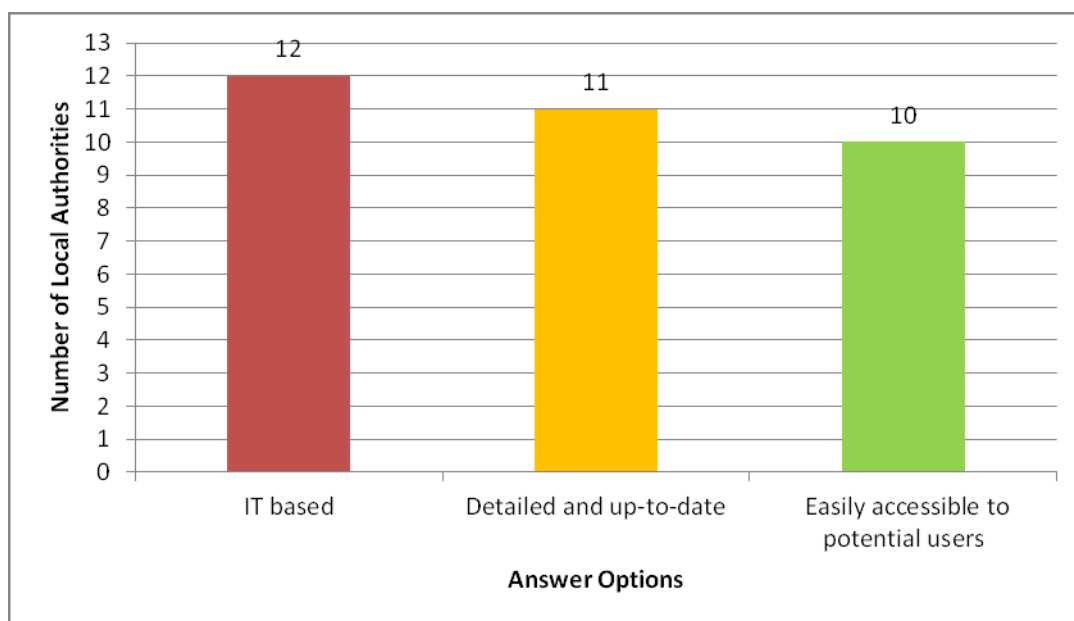
- 'A stand alone register which provides a matching service' (47% n=eight)
- 'A register incorporated into the common housing register' (41% n=seven)
- 'Part of a choice-based letting scheme' (12% n=two Local Authorities)

Figure 3: How would you describe your Accessible Housing Register?



The 17 Local Authorities were then asked to tick all the options that applied to their Accessible housing Register. The most frequently chosen answers are illustrated in Figure 4 below. While six Local Authorities selected a combination of two options that applied to their Accessible Housing Register, six also selected just one of the available options (although the options chose differed). Five Local Authorities selected all three of options.

Figure 4: Is your Accessible Housing Register:

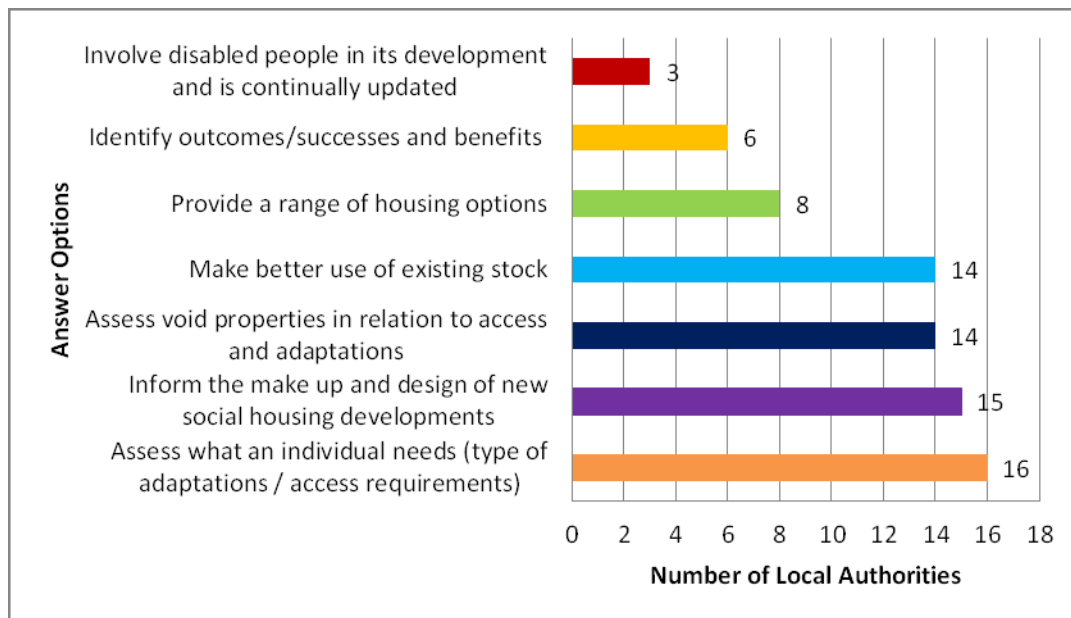


The 17 Local Authorities with an Accessible Housing Register were then asked what this enabled them to do, Figure 5 below clearly shows the variety of functions that the Accessible Housing Register has across Local Authorities. (It is important to note that Local Authorities could tick all the categories that applied to them. The majority of Local Authorities selected a mix of four options.)

The most frequently chosen answers (as set out in Figure 5) reveals that Accessible Housing Registers are important in enabling Local Authorities to assess the needs of an individual (types of adaptations/ access requirements etc) and also in enabling Local Authorities to understand the potential requirements for the design of new social housing developments. It was also reported to enable Local Authorities to manage their stock appropriately.

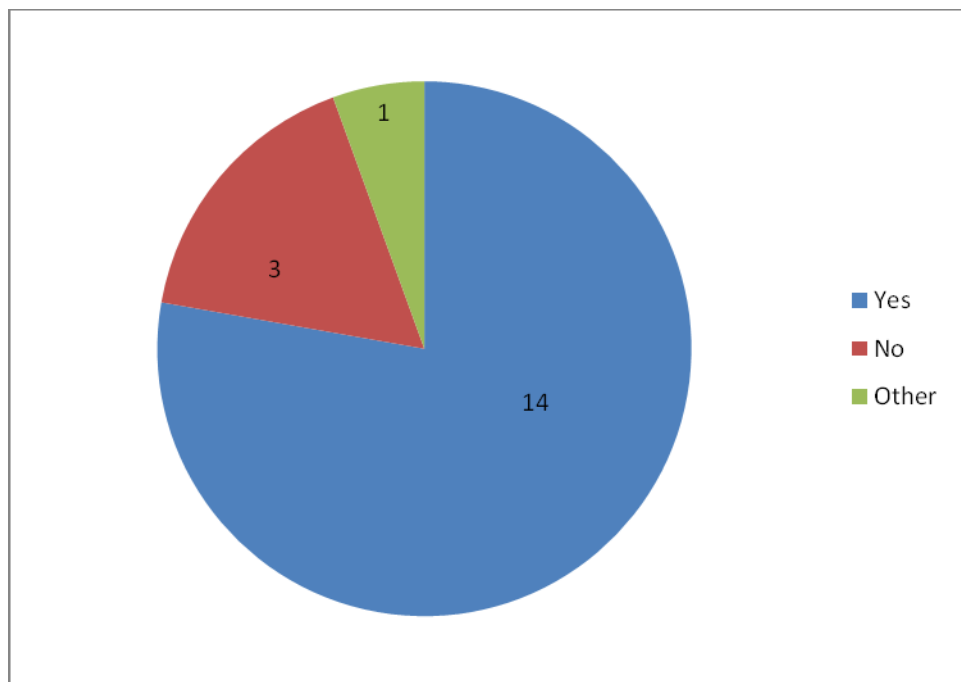
Figure 5: Action facilitated by Accessible Housing Registers

N.B. Respondents could chose more than one option



There were 14 Local Authorities with an Accessible Housing Register who reported that people with disabilities could apply for general needs housing which is then adapted if there are no suitable adapted properties on the register. There were significantly fewer Local Authorities (three) who did not allow people with disabilities to apply for the general needs housing, this is illustrated in Figure 6 below.

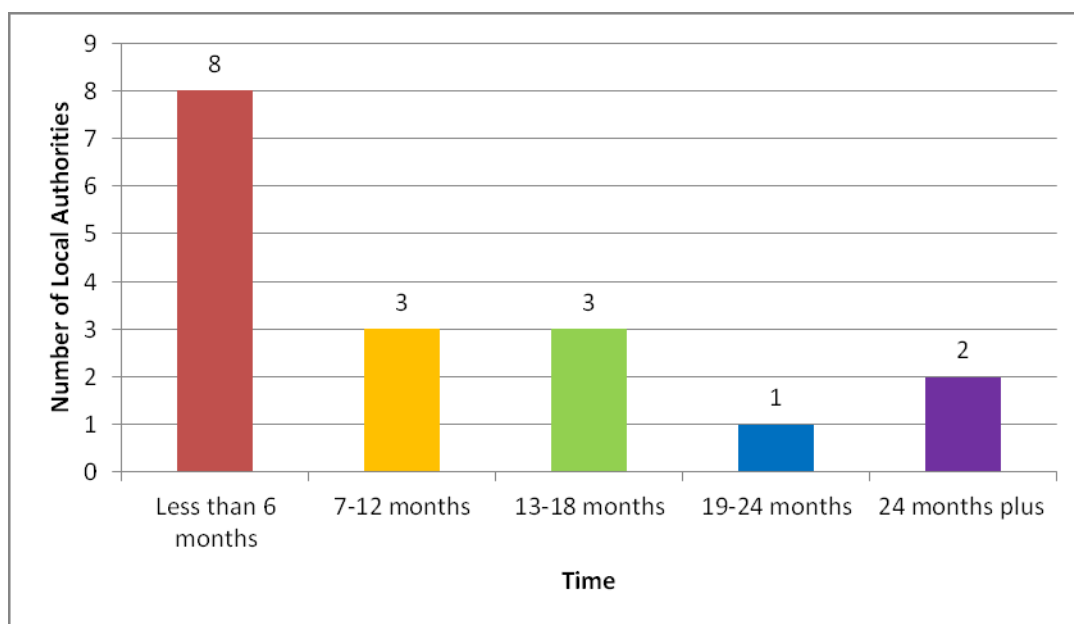
Figure 6: Can people with disabilities apply for general needs housing which is then adapted if there are no suitable adapted properties on the Register?



Local Authorities were then asked to provide the average waiting times for adapted homes for those who have been assessed by an occupational therapist and are judged to be in a priority need category on the housing waiting list.

There were 17 Local Authorities who responded to this question, with around half (eight) reporting waiting times of less than six months. However, three Local Authorities reported longer waits of between 19 – 24 months and 24 months plus. This is shown below in Figure 7. However, Local Authorities also pointed out the difficulty in establishing a waiting time as there are such a variety of influential factors that affect individuals' applications. Other Local Authorities mentioned struggling with budget cuts which have meant they have less time and capacity to deal effectively with applications.

Figure 7: How long on average are people who have been assessed by an occupational therapist and are judged to be in a priority need category on the housing waiting list for adapted homes in your Local Authority area?

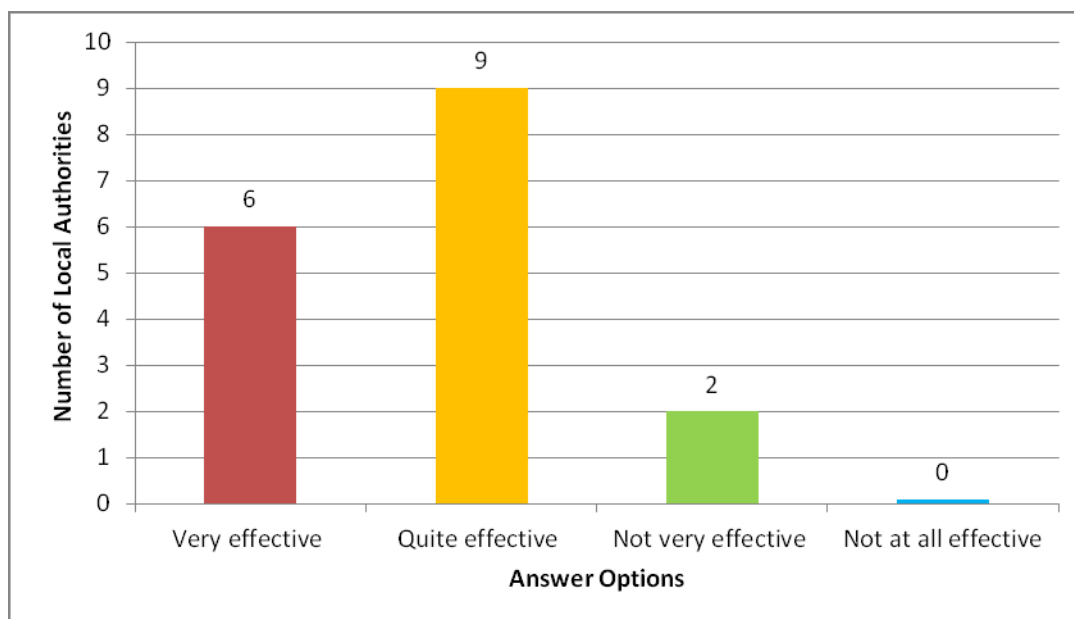


Effectiveness of Accessible Housing Registers:

The 17 Local Authorities responded to the question asking how effective their Accessible Housing Register is in helping them meet the housing need of people with disabilities. Figure 8 below indicates the majority of Local Authorities (nine) felt their Accessible Housing Register was quite effective, this was followed by (six) Local Authorities who found theirs very effective. They were then asked a follow-up question to explain why they felt Accessible Housing Registers were effective/not effective. The six Local Authorities who felt their Accessible Housing Register was very effective in meeting the housing needs of people with disabilities felt this was due to the success of matching available adapted homes to those that need them the most enabling Local Authorities to ensure they are making best use of resources and saving money.

Those Local Authorities who answered quite effective were generally positive but raised issues around limited scope to influence new developments to cater for individuals with specific needs, a lack of knowledge over complete stock of adapted housing within an area and some have suggested limitations on how well the register can match as every circumstance is individual and needs to be assessed for each property. The two Local Authorities who selected not very effective had different reasons for this rating. One felt that those who are most in need of properties may not get it due to 'conflicting priorities'. Whilst the other felt that there were simply not enough appropriate properties available in their area to meet the demand for specialist designed properties to meet long term needs, or more specifically level access properties with a level access shower.

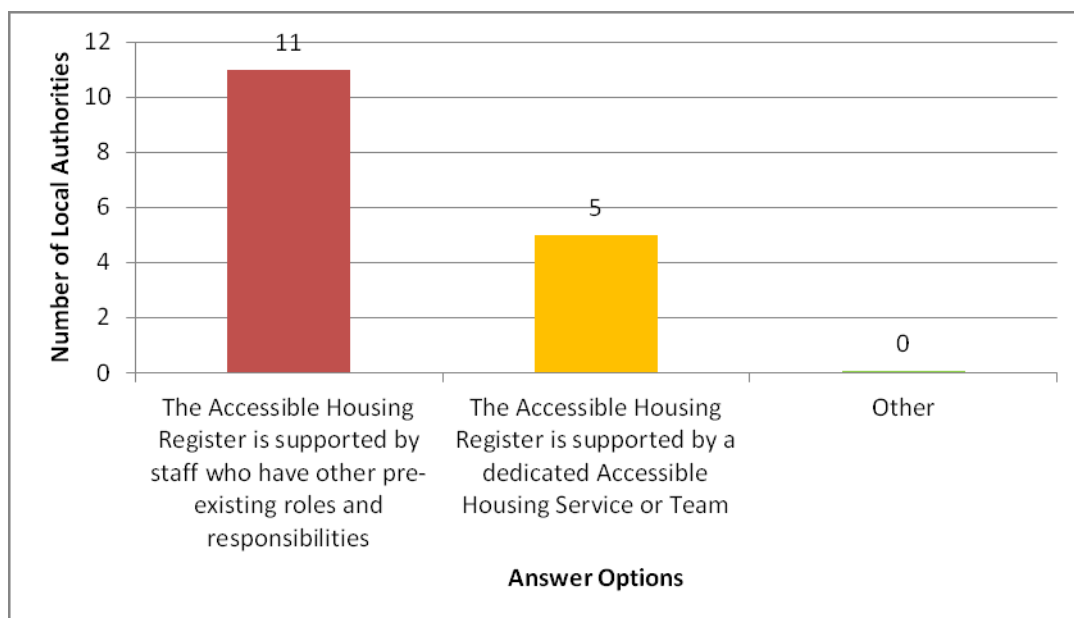
Figure 8: From your perspective how effective is the Accessible Housing Register in helping you meet the housing need of people with disabilities?



Staffing Accessible Housing Registers:

The majority of Local Authorities (11) reported that their Accessible Housing Register is supported by staff who have other pre-existing roles and responsibilities. Just five Local Authorities reported that their Accessible Housing Register is supported by a dedicated Accessible Housing Service or Team. While another Local Authority indicated that their Accessible Housing Register is maintained within the Choice Based Letting Scheme so the same staff manage both systems. This is shown below in Figure 9.

Figure 9: How is the Accessible Housing Register supported by staff?



The 17 Local Authorities who identified having an Accessible Housing Register were asked what specialists training their staff receive in relation to matching people with disabilities to an accessible home. The majority (11) of Local Authorities mention there being an Occupational Therapist to make assessments.

“No property is offered to any tenant without a viewing and assessment by an Occupational Therapist”

“The staff member is a qualified Occupational Therapist”

Other mentions were made of general policy and procedural training, although one mention was made of staff receiving some training on health conditions.

Four Local Authorities didn't report undergoing training, although two of these but reported that their teams were suitable and experienced to undertake the roles they perform.

Monitoring

Local Authorities were also asked whether they had systems in place to monitor the number of people with disabilities being re-housed. The majority (14) of Local Authorities have a system in place, whilst only three do not. Similarly the survey asked whether a system was in place to monitor the outcomes in terms of money being saved to other budgets such as Disabled Facilities Grants and Physical Adaptation Grant. Again the majority, (17) Local Authorities reported having a system in place, with only two reporting no system.

4. Conclusions

Common Housing Registers

All 21 Local Authorities either have or are planning to have a Common Housing Register, partnering with a variety of Housing Associations. The survey found that Common Housing Registers were seen to save resources and foster good partnership working. However issues were raised regarding the variation in allocation processes between partners.

All respondents found Common Housing Registers to be effective to some extent and most found them useful in helping to implement Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act.

Accessible Housing Registers

All 21 Local Authorities either have an Accessible Housing Register in place or utilise another waiting list/register, such as the Common Housing Register or choice based lettings, to undertake the task of matching newly available adapted properties to those who are waiting for them.

Local Authorities also report that Accessible Housing Registers enable them to assess individual adaptation needs, to inform the development of new social housing as well as helping Local Authorities to manage voids and existing stock. The majority of Local Authorities found Accessible Housing Registers effective because of the success in matching and the ability they provide to manage stock appropriately.

Report Authors: Griffiths, L & Harris, L (2016) *Local Authority Survey of Accessible Housing Registers*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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