4 March 2020
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Social Housing Vacancies, Lettings and Rent Arrears, 2018-19

Social housing refers to housing units (including bedsits and bed spaces) owned by and rented from Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), who are otherwise known as social landlords.

Social Housing

Vacant Stock:

At the 31st March 2019, 4,343 social housing units (1.9 % of stock) were vacant. 31% (1,329 units) had been vacant for more than 6 months. 279 of these vacant units were available for letting.

4,343 vacant social housing units

Up 4% on 2017-18

Lettings:

There were 21,135 new lettings of social housing stock during 2018-19. Of these, 61% were from waiting lists, 22% via transfers or exchanges and 18% through priority lettings to the homeless.

21,135 new social housing lettings

Up 4% on 2017-18

Rent arrears:

At 31 March 2019, 77,332 (34%) of social housing tenancies were in rent arrears. 2% of tenancies had been in rent arrears for 13 weeks or more.

77,332 social housing tenancies in rent arrears

Up 8% on 2017-18

About this release

This release presents information about the number of social housing units that were empty (vacancies), the number of housing units rented to tenants (lettings) and the number of social housing tenants who were in rent arrears during 2018-19. The information is used to assess the effectiveness of social landlords in managing their stock and to gauge turnover rates for social housing. The information on rent arrears is used to monitor the number of social housing tenants in debt across Wales.

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1. Background

The information shown in this release, on the number of social housing units owned by and rented from social landlords in Wales, is based on data provided by local authorities and RSLs.

This release analyses data on social landlord housing stock as outlined below.

Social Housing Units, which includes:

Housing at social rents - this includes self-contained general needs (included self-contained bedsits) and self-contained sheltered housing let by social landlords at social rent under the Welsh Government social rents policy framework. This is an agreed rental system which sets a target rent band for each landlord.

Other social housing - this includes Self-contained 'other supported' housing, self-contained extra care housing and non self-contained bed sits and hostel bed spaces. These are not subject to the Welsh Government social rents policy framework.

More information on the Welsh Government Rent Policy is available in the 'Key quality information' section of this release.

Some social landlords may also own, partly own or manage other non-social housing such as housing units let at intermediate rent levels (where the rents are above those of social rented housing but below market housing rents), shared ownership, flexible tenure for the elderly, housing units let at market rents, Home buy and other investment housing. These are not included in the analysis presented here.

At 31 March 2019 there were a total of 231,408 (r) social housing units in Wales. Of these, 98% (227,083) 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 Social Rents Policy framework). The remaining 2% (4,325) were social housing units not covered by the Welsh Government Social Rent Policy but still classed as social housing (e.g. 'extra care ' housing units).

RSLs owned 62% (144,004 units (r)) of all social housing units at 31 March 2019 and the 11 stock retaining authorities owned the remaining 38% (87,404 units).

Detailed data sets for social housing stock can be found on StatsWales.

2. Social housing vacancies

This section of the release looks at the amount and proportion of all social housing (housing at social rents and other social housing) which was empty at 31st March 2019 and how long those dwellings had been empty for. This will include vacant general needs, sheltered, other supported and extra care housing units.

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 4,343 vacant social housing units at 31 March 2019 was an increase of 4% on the previous year and represents 1.9% of all social housing stock (Table 1).

Table 1 - Social landlord vacancies by type of social landlord, as at 31 March

Type of social landlord	Total social housing stock	Total vacancies	Percentage (%) of stock vacant (a)	Stock vacant for more than 6 months	Percentage (%) of stock vacant for more than 6 months (a)
Local Authorities:					
2012-13	88,333	1,586	1.8	311	0.4
2013-14	88,159	1,592	1.8	340	0.4
2014-15 (b)	87,891	1,611	1.8	319	0.4
2015-16	87,407	1,692	1.9	264	0.3
2016-17	87,321	1,431	1.6	305	0.3
2017-18	87,374	1,601	1.8	387	0.4
2018-19	87,404	1,876	2.1	500	0.6
RSLs:					
2012-13	137,406	2,707	2.0	1,111	0.8
2013-14	138,110	2,720	2.0	940	0.7
2014-15	139,082	2,888	2.1	1,072	0.8
2015-16	140,034	2,648	1.9	950	0.7
2016-17	141,484	2,626	1.9	1,007	0.7
2017-18	142,643 (r)	2,568 (r)	1.8	977 (r)	0.7
2018-19 (c)	144,004	2,467	1.7	829	0.6
All social landlords:					
2012-13	225,739	4,293	1.9	1,422	0.6
2013-14	226,269	4,312	1.9	1,280	0.6
2014-15 (b)	226,973	4,499	2.0	1,391	0.6
2015-16	227,441	4,340	1.9	1,214	0.5
2016-17	228,805	4,057	1.8	1,312	0.6
2017-18	230,017 (r)	4,169 (r)	1.8	1,364 (r)	0.6
2018-19 (c)	231,408	4,343	1.9	1,329	0.6

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

(a) As a percentage of total social housing stock.
(b) For 2014-15 one local authority (Flintshire) was unable to submit data on vacancies. Therefore information provided by Flintshire for 2013-14 has been used to calculate a Wales total.

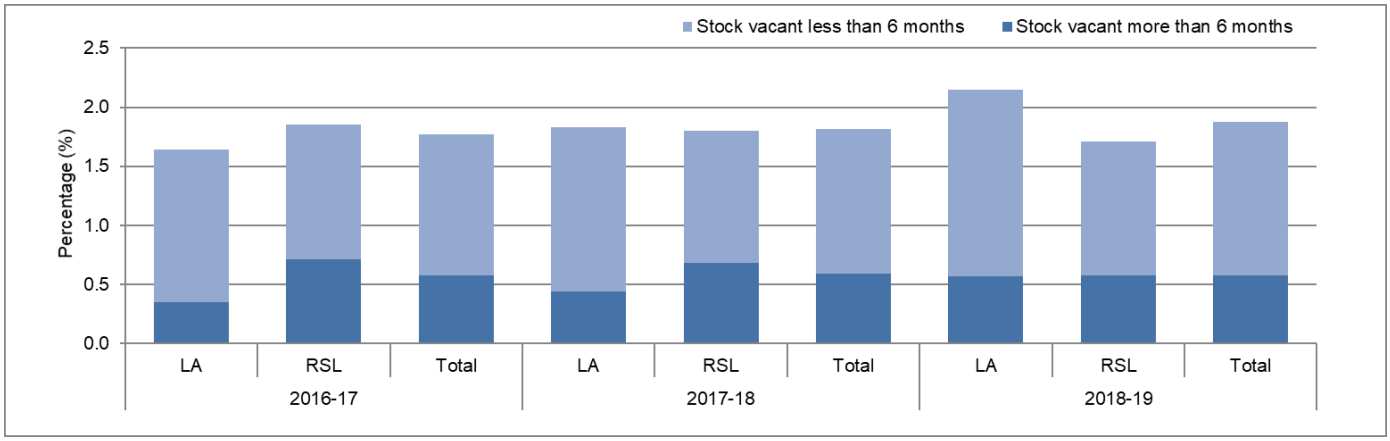
(c) For 2018-19 one RSL (Baneswell Housing Association) was unable to submit data on vacancies. Therefore information provided by Baneswell HA for 2017-18 has been used to calculate a Wales total.

(r) The 2017-18 stock data has been revised since previously published. Also, Wales & West Housing have revised their data on vacancies following an internal audit.

At 31 March 2019, the number of units that had been empty for more than 6 months decreased by 3% to 1,329. However, they continued to account for 0.6 per of all social housing stock (Table 1).

At 31 March 2019 the proportion of vacant properties was higher for local authorities (2.1%) than RSLs (1.7%) with both having 0.6% of their stock vacant for more than 6 months (Chart 1).

Chart 1. Percentage of social housing stock vacant by length of vacancy at 31 March (a)



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

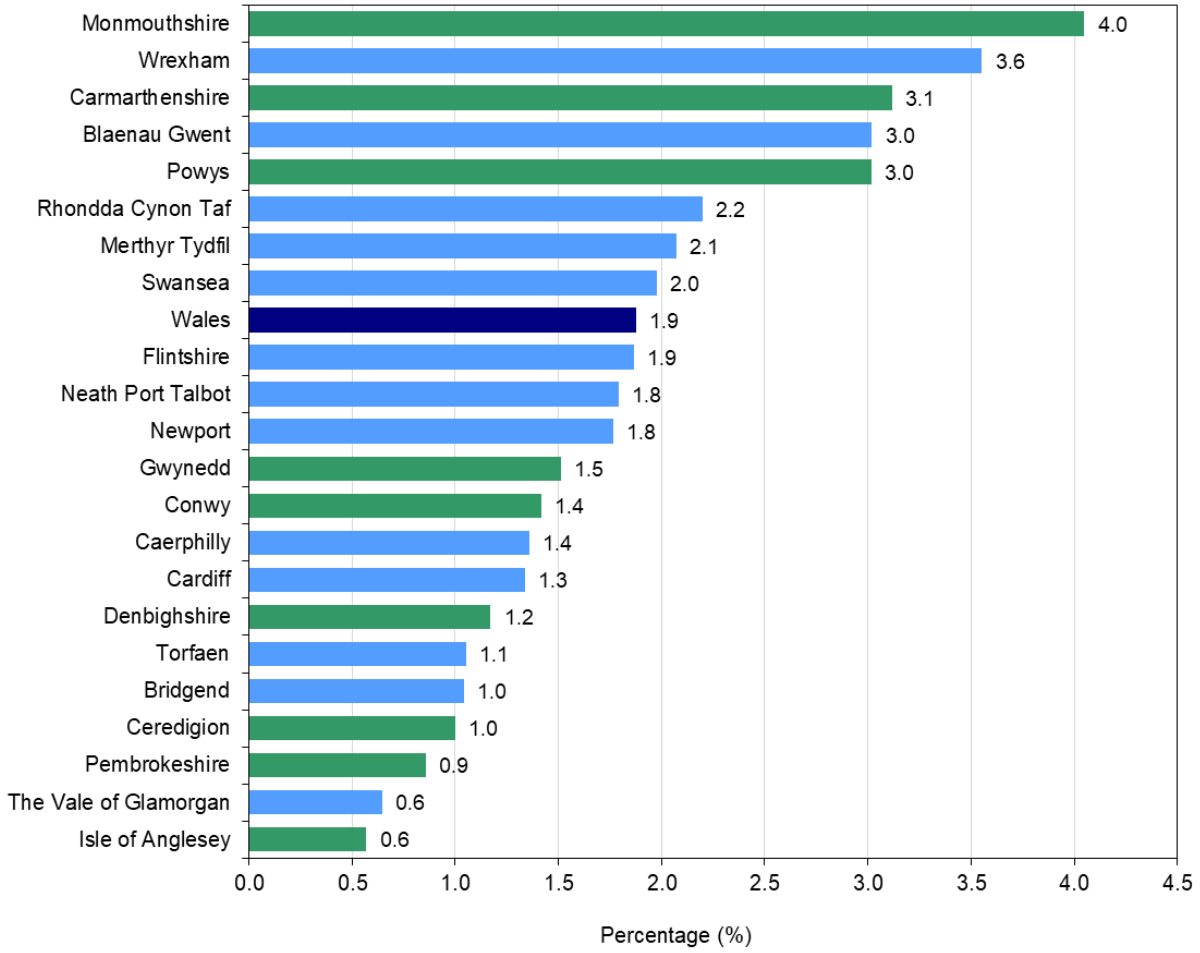
(a) As a percentage of total social housing stock.
(b) For 2018-19 one RSL (Baneswell Housing Association) was unable to submit data on vacancies. Therefore information provided by Baneswell HA for 2017-18 has been used to calculate a Wales total.

The percentage of social housing that was vacant at 31st March 2019 varied across Wales, ranging from 4% in Monmouthshire to 0.6% in the Isle of Anglesey and The Vale of Glamorgan. As Chart 2 below shows, there is no particular pattern associated with rural or urban authorities.

Of those 11 local authorities who have transferred their stock to registered social landlords, 4 transfer authorities had vacancy levels above the Wales average and 7 below (Chart 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 shown in the Key quality information section of the release.

Chart 2 - Percentage of social housing stock vacant at 31st March 2019, by local authority



Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

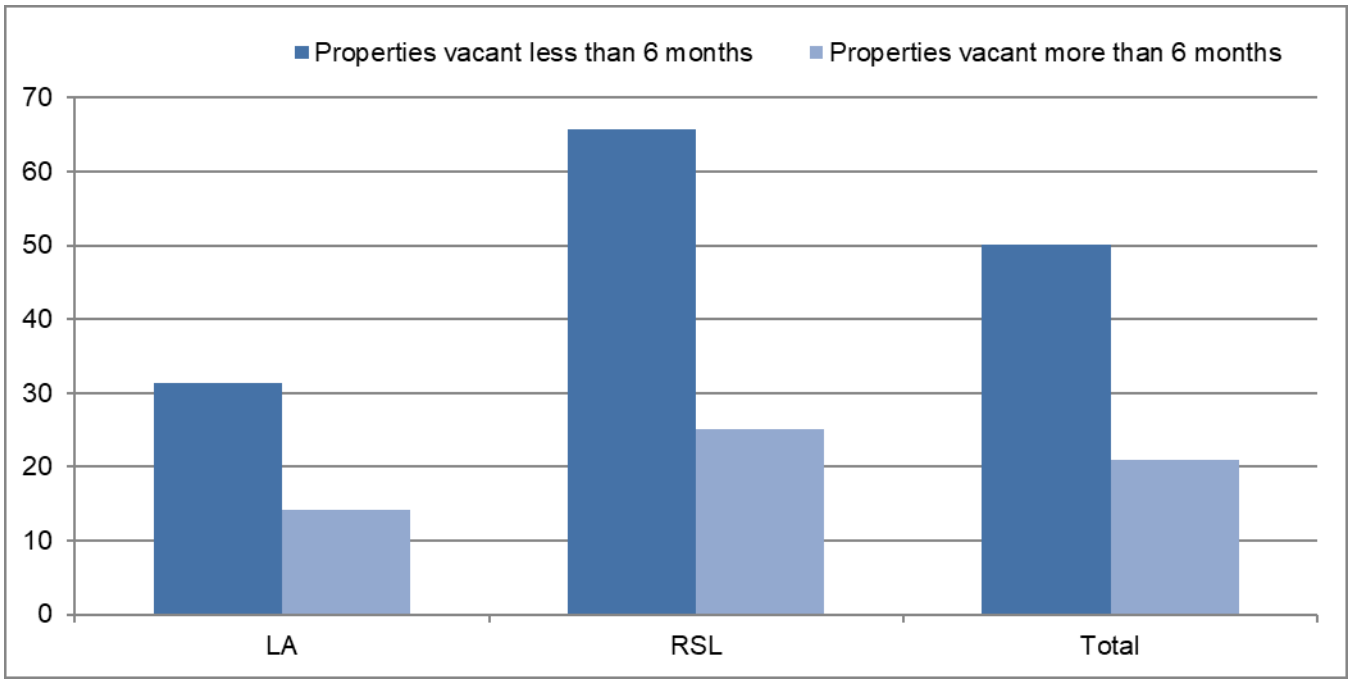
Note: Rural authorities are in green and urban authorities are in blue. Details of which authorities are in which group, can be found in the 'Key quality information' section at the end of this release.

2.1 Vacant social housing available for letting

Not all stock that is vacant at 31st March 2019 will be available for letting. 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 2019, 41% of all vacant social housing was available for letting though across Wales this varied between 100% in Ceredigion to 10% in Wrexham.

Chart 3 - Percentage of vacant social housing stock available for letting at 31st March 2019 (a)



Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

(a) 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.

At 31 March 2019, 50% of all social housing units that had been vacant for less than 6 months were available for letting. 66% of RSL properties that had been vacant for less than 6 months were available for letting compared with 31% of local authority properties.

When looking at stock which has been vacant for more than 6 months, the percentage available for letting has been falling steadily since 2012-13. At 31st March 2019, as was the case for 2017-18, just over a fifth (21%) of all social housing vacant for more than 6 months was available for letting (279 units). Again the percentage available for letting was higher for RSL properties at 25% than for local authority properties at 14%.

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.

3. Housing stock at social rents - let and lettings

3.1 Social housing stock let

A total of 227,065 social housing units were let at 31st March 2019 which is 98% of all social housing stock. The number of RSL social housing units let increased by 1% during the year and the number of lets of local authority social housing units was down by 0.3%. However, the percentage of stock let remains at around 98% for both local authorities and RSLs.

Table 2 - Social housing stock let, by type of social landlord as at 31 March

Type of Social landlord	Total number of social housing stock	Total number of social housing stock let	Percentage (%) of social housing stock let
Local Authorities:			
2012-13	88,333	86,747	98.2
2013-14	88,159	86,567	98.2
2014-15	87,891	86,280	98.2
2015-16	87,407	85,715	98.1
2016-17	87,321	85,890	98.4
2017-18	87,374	85,773	98.2
2018-19	87,404	85,528	97.9
RSLs:			
2012-13	137,406	134,699	98.0
2013-14	138,110	135,390	98.0
2014-15	139,082	136,194	97.9
2015-16	140,034	137,386	98.1
2016-17	141,484	138,858	98.1
2017-18	142,643 (r)	140,075 (r)	98.2
2018-19 (a)	144,004	141,537	98.3
All social landlords:			
2012-13	225,739	221,446	98.1
2013-14	226,269	221,957	98.1
2014-15	226,973	222,474	98.0
2015-16	227,441	223,101	98.1
2016-17	228,805	224,748	98.2
2017-18	230,017 (r)	225,848 (r)	98.2
2018-19 (a)	231,408	227,065	98.1

Source: Annual social housing stock and vacancies returns

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

(r) The 2017-18 stock data has been revised since previously published. Also, Newport City Homes have revised their data on lettings.

3.2. Social housing lettings

This section of the release covers the number of lettings made to tenants of housing at social rents during the year. The lettings information covers all lettings made to new tenants of local authorities and RSL's social housing during the financial year as well as re-lets, transfers and exchanges within their existing social rented housing stock.

The lettings information includes all self-contained general needs (including self-contained bedsits) and self-contained sheltered housing units let by social landlords at social rent under the under the Welsh Government Social Rents Policy framework. It does not include information on lettings made to tenants of other social housing including 'other supported' housing units and self-contained 'extra care' housing units or to non-social housing.

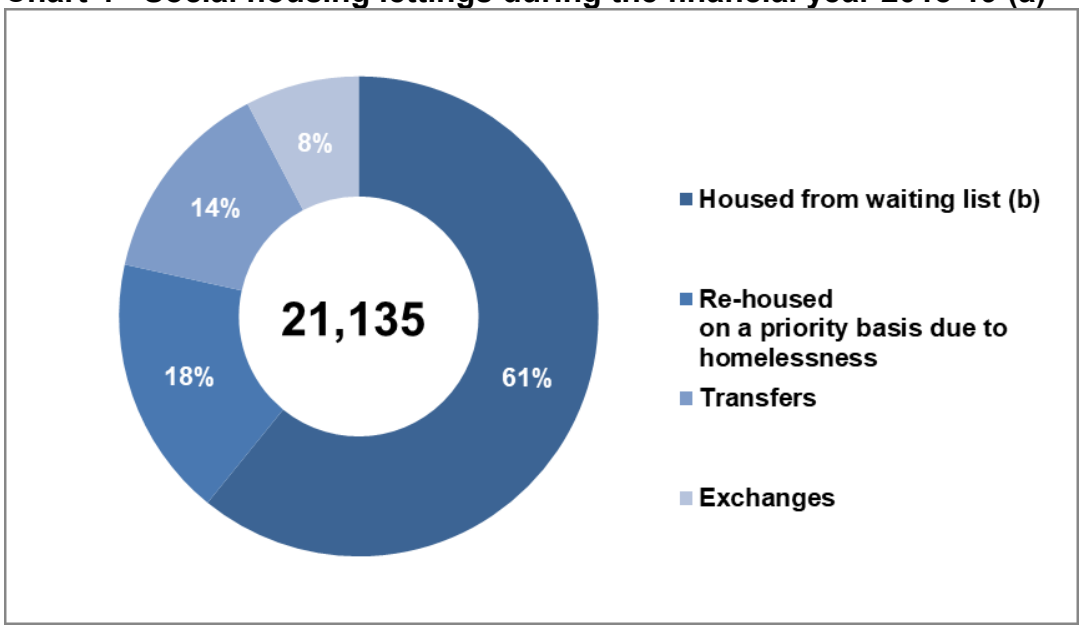
New lettings[1] of social housing stock increased by 4% during 2018-19, to 21,135 lettings. As in previous years, the majority of these (61%) were via housing waiting lists[2] which were up 2% on the previous year to 12,863 (Chart 4).

The proportion of lettings for households re-housed on a priority basis due to being homeless has been increasing each year since the low of 13% in 2013-14.

The overall number of these type of letting were up by 15% on the previous year to 3,722 lettings, they accounted for 18% of all lettings compared to 16% in 2017-18 and to 15% in 2016-17 (Chart 4).

During 2018-19, there were a total of 4,550 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 22% of all lettings. The number of transfers increased (2%) and the number of exchanges decreased (4%) compared to 2017-18.

Chart 4 - Social housing lettings during the financial year 2018-19 (a)



Source: Annual social landlord stock and lettings returns

(a) Due to rounding total may not equal 100%
(b) 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.

[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.

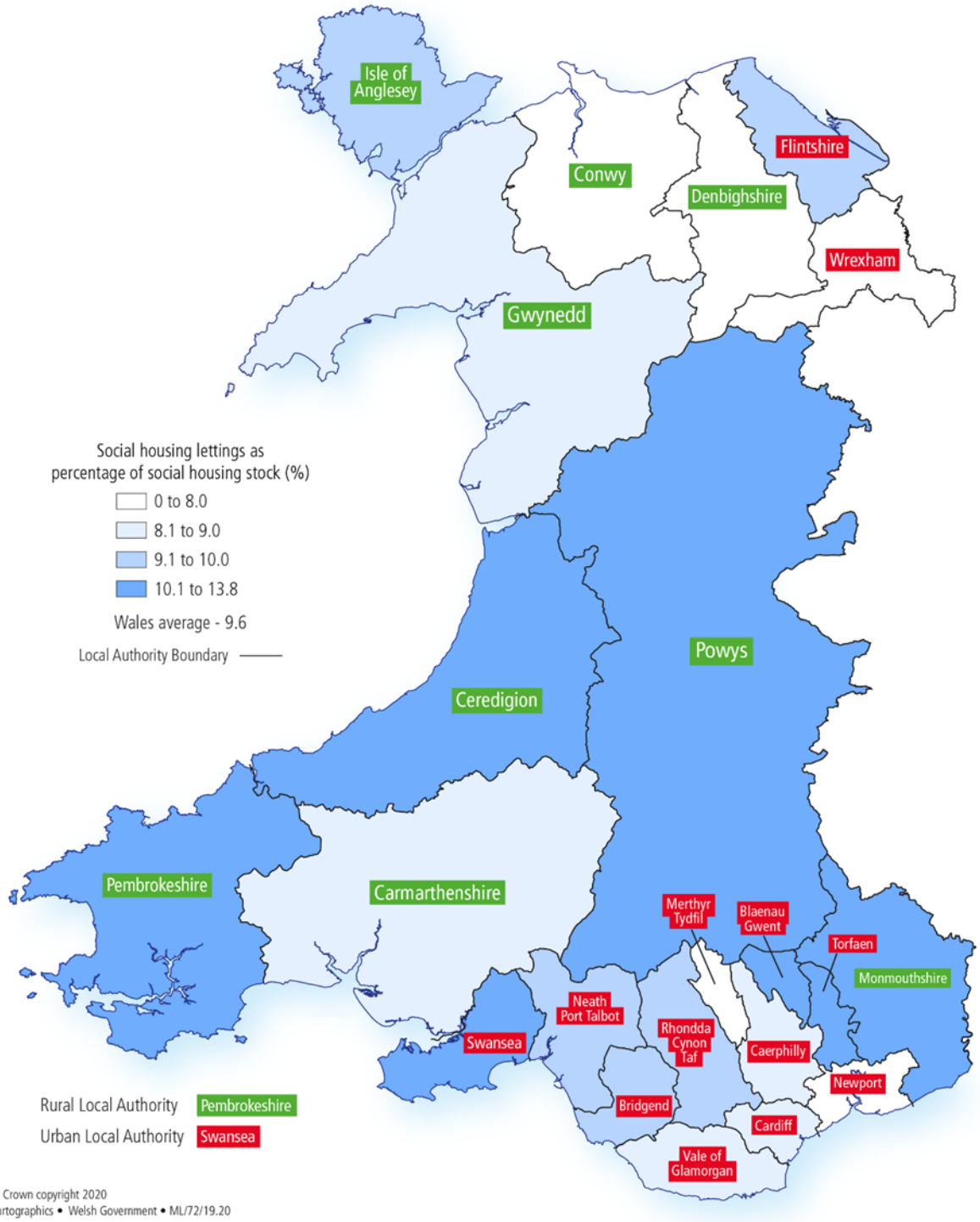
The majority of lettings during the year were made to those on housing waiting lists in most of the 22 local authorities and varied from 84% in Powys to 43% in Cardiff.

During 2018-19, Carmarthenshire had the highest proportion of priority lettings to the homeless at 33% followed by Swansea and Conwy at 28% and Cardiff at 27%. Carmarthenshire, Conwy and Cardiff all had reported rates of households assessed as homeless above the Wales average of 87 per 10,000 households during 2018-19. 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.

Whilst the highest number of lettings through transfers and exchanges during 2018-19 was in Cardiff (619 lettings), the highest percentage was in Pembrokeshire, where a third of all lettings were through transfers and exchanges. The lowest number of lettings through transfers and exchanges (62 lettings) was in Ceredigion whilst the lowest percentage is Powys at 12%.

3 authorities, Cardiff, Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan, reported higher proportions of exchanges from other social landlords than transfers within their own stock. Cardiff had the highest percentage of exchanges across all 22 authorities accounting for 19% all its lettings during the year. Pembrokeshire had the highest percentage of transfers accounting for 25% of all lettings during the year.

Map 1 - Social housing lettings as percentage of social housing stock, 2018-19



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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)[3]. The letting rate for Wales was 9.6 per 100 units of stock at social rents during 2018-19.

At the local authority level, Swansea continued to have the highest number of lettings (2,459) in 2018-19, but the highest number of lettings per 100 units of stock at social rent was in Torfaen at 13.8.

Ceredigion had the lowest number of lettings during 2018-19 (336), whilst Denbighshire had the lowest number of lettings per 100 units of all stock at social rents at 7.3. In 9 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 (Map 1).

A full data set for social housing lettings by local authority is available on StatsWales.

[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

4. Social housing rent arrears

This section provides information on the number of social housing tenancies where there was a failure to pay the rent due at the appropriate time and therefore the tenancy would be in rent arrears at 31st March 2019. Tenancies refer to the tenancy agreements between an individual (or individuals, in the case of joint tenancies) and the social landlord. A tenancy, as referred to in this release, relates to the tenancy agreement for an individual social housing unit. It is not a count of the number of social housing tenants living in a property.

At the end of March 2019, there were 77,332 tenancies in arrears, accounting for 34% of all social housing tenancies. This was an increase of 5,493 tenancies (8%) on the 71,839 tenancies in arrears at the end of March 2018. 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.

Table 3 - Number of social housing tenancies in rent arrears at 31st March (a)

Tenancies	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19 (b)
Local Authority:							
Number of tenancies	86,747	86,567	86,280	85,715	85,890	85,773	85,528
Tenancies in rent arrears	26,800	29,308	29,584	29,071	28,099	28,740	29,620
Percentage of tenancies in rent arrears	30.9	33.9	34.3	33.9	32.7	33.5	34.6
RSLs:							
Number of tenancies	134,699	135,390	136,194	137,386	138,858	140,075 (r)	141,537
Tenancies in rent arrears	43,050	43,751	43,517	42,362	42,353	43,099	47,712
Percentage of tenancies in rent arrears	32.0	32.3	32.0	30.8	30.5	30.8	33.7
All Social Housing:							
Number of tenancies	221,446	221,957	222,474	223,101	224,748	225,848 (r)	227,065
Tenancies in rent arrears	69,850	73,059	73,101	71,433	70,452	71,839	77,332
Percentage of tenancies in rent arrears	31.5	32.9	32.9	32.0	31.3	31.8	34.1

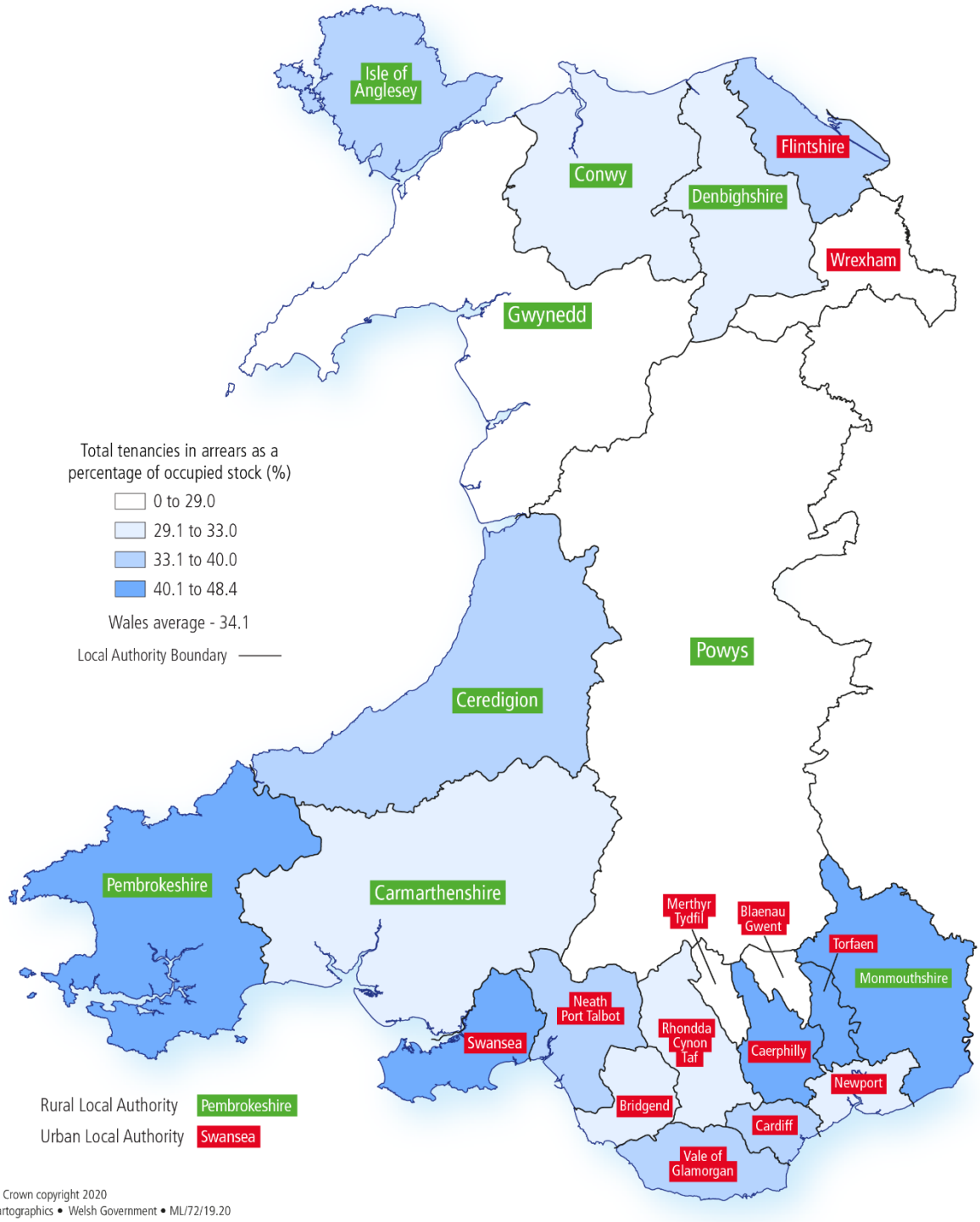
(a) The total number of tenancies is calculated as total social housing stock minus vacant dwellings at 31 March.
(b) For 2018-19 one RSL (Baneswell Housing Association) was unable to submit data on lettings and arrears. Therefore information provided by Baneswell HA for 2017-18 has been used to calculate a Wales total.
(r) Newport City Homes have revised their data on lettings for 2017-18.

The proportion of tenancies in rent arrears remained slightly higher for local authority tenants (35%) than for RSL tenants (34%).

At 31 March 2019, the number of RSL tenants in rent arrears increased by 11% compared with the previous year to 47,712. The number of local authority tenants in rent arrears at 31 March 2019 was also up by 3% on the previous year to 29,620 (Table 3).

Across Wales, the highest percentage of social housing tenancies in arrears was seen in Monmouthshire (48%) and the lowest in Powys (21%). There was considerable variation in the percentage of tenancies in arrears amongst both the rural and urban authorities with 8 authorities recording arrears above the Wales average of 34% (Map 2).

Map 2 - Percentage of social housing tenancies in arrears at 31 March 2019



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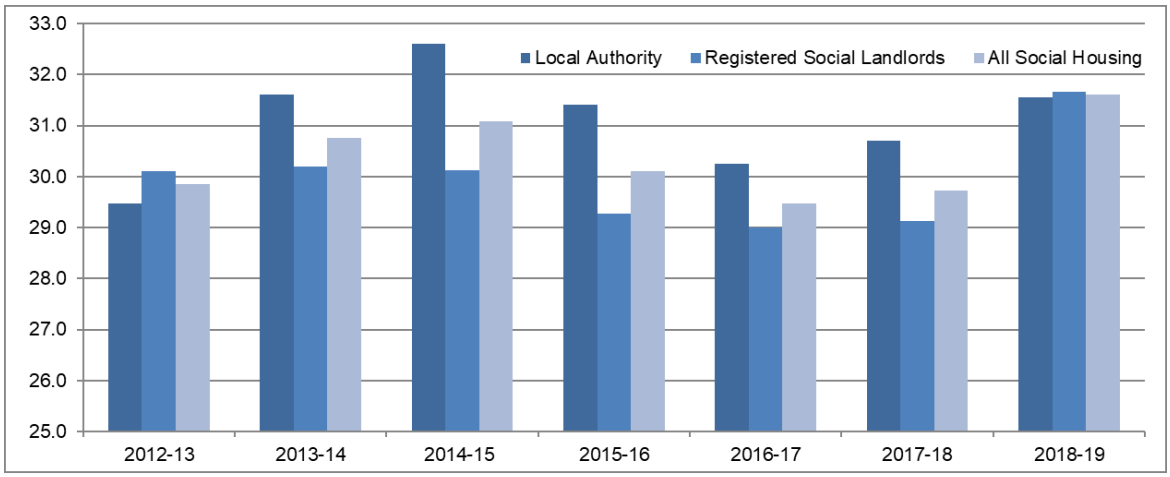
4.1 Length of time of rent arrears

At 31 March 2019, 31.6% of all social housing tenancies had been in arrears for less than 13 weeks and 2.4% had been in arrears for 13 weeks or more.

This is the first time since 2012-13 that there is a slightly higher proportion of RSL tenancies in in short term rent arrears (of less than 13 weeks) than local authority tenancies (31.7% compared to 31.5%) (Chart 5a).

Chart 5a – Percentage of all tenancies in rent arrears for less than 13 weeks at 31st March (a)

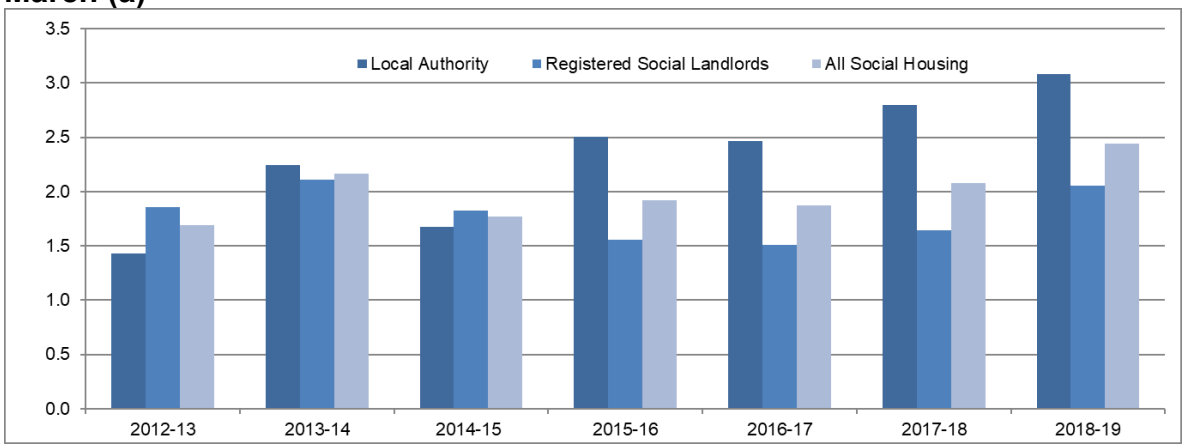


Source: Annual rent arrears returns from local authorities and registered social landlords

(a) Arrears are shown for tenancies in self-contained and non self-contained units of social housing. The total number of tenancies is calculated as total stock minus vacant dwellings. Total excludes intermediate tenures and any other non social housing units owned or managed by social landlords.

Over the last four years the proportion of tenancies in longer term rent arrears (of 13 weeks or more) has been lower for RSL tenancies than for local authority tenancies. At 31 March 2019, 3.1% of local authority tenancies had been in rent arrears for 13 weeks or more compared with 2.1% of RSL tenancies. This represents a slight increase for both RSL and for local authority tenancies (Chart 5b).

Chart 5b – Percentage of all tenancies in rent arrears for 13 weeks or more at 31st March (a)



Source: Annual rent arrears returns from local authorities and registered social landlords

(a) Arrears are shown for tenancies in self-contained and non self-contained units of social housing. The total number of tenancies is calculated as total stock minus vacant dwellings. Total excludes intermediate tenures and any other non social housing units owned or managed by social landlords

Table 4 below covers the number of all social housing tenancies (both local authority and RSL) that were in rent arrears at 31 March 2019 for each local authority area.

Of the 77,332 social tenancies in Wales in arrears at 31 March 2019, 7.2% (5,541 tenancies) had been in arrears for 13 weeks or more.

As was the case last year, Cardiff recorded the highest number of social housing tenancies in rent arrears at 9,640 tenancies followed by Swansea at 8,485 tenancies. Cardiff also recorded the highest proportion of social housing tenancies in long term arrears (13 weeks or more) at 15.3% (1,474 tenancies) whilst Monmouthshire had the lowest at 1.5% (40 tenancies).

The lowest number of social housing tenancies in rent arrears was recorded in Ceredigion at 1,128 tenancies. Of these 6% (68 tenancies) had been in arrears for 13 weeks or more (Table 4).

Table 4 - Rent arrears at 31st March 2019, by length of time and local authority (a)

			Number of current tenancies in arrears at end of period			
Local Authority	Total number of tenancies (b)	Percentage (%) of all tenancies in arrears for 13 weeks or more	Less than 13 weeks	13 weeks or more	Total	Of those in arrears, percentage (%) of tenancies in arrears for 13 weeks or more
Isle of Anglesey	4,892	1.5	1,573	73	1,646	4.4
Gwynedd	8,659	2.4	2,048	205	2,253	9.1
Conwy	6,255	2.2	1,754	135	1,889	7.1
Denbighshire	5,741	3.0	1,675	170	1,845	9.2
Flintshire	9,995	4.5	3,318	454	3,772	12.0
Wrexham	12,951	1.6	3,368	212	3,580	5.9
Powys	8,355	1.7	1,650	142	1,792	7.9
Ceredigion	3,367	2.0	1,060	68	1,128	6.0
Pembrokeshire	8,223	2.0	3,189	164	3,353	4.9
Carmarthenshire	12,062	1.7	3,480	202	3,682	5.5
Swansea	21,043	2.0	8,063	422	8,485	5.0
Neath Port Talbot	12,339	1.6	4,456	201	4,657	4.3
Bridgend	8,850	1.6	2,510	144	2,654	5.4
The Vale of Glamorgan	7,064	1.7	2,266	123	2,389	5.1
Cardiff	25,682	5.7	8,166	1,474	9,640	15.3
Rhondda Cynon Taf	15,307	1.4	4,244	209	4,453	4.7
Merthyr Tydfil	5,716	2.0	1,541	117	1,658	7.1
Caerphilly	14,607	2.6	5,489	375	5,864	6.4
Blaenau Gwent	7,581	1.2	1,594	91	1,685	5.4
Torfaen	9,981	1.9	3,934	190	4,124	4.6
Monmouthshire	5,331	0.8	2,541	40	2,581	1.5
Newport	13,064	2.5	3,872	330	4,202	7.9
Wales	**227,065**	**2.4**	**71,791**	**5,541**	**77,332**	**7.2**

(a) 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.

(b) The total number of tenancies is calculated as total stock minus vacant dwellings at 31 March 2019. Total stock includes all self-contained and non self-contained units but excludes intermediate tenures and tenures not at social rents.

(c) 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.

Key quality information

In addition to the information below, further information can be found in the Housing Statistics Quality Report which is available on our website.

National Statistics status

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

These statistics last underwent a full assessment against the Code of Practice in 2011. Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- Added contextual information to the release.
- Added definitions/explanations of what housing is included within each section (eg added definition of social housing).
- Enhanced trustworthiness by reviewing and reducing the number of officials with pre-release access.

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators ("national indicators") that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Well-being goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before the National Assembly. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being goals and associated technical information is available in the Well-being of Wales report.

Further information on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

Users and uses

Generally the information is used for:

- monitoring housing trends;
- policy development;
- advice to Ministers;
- informing debate in the National Assembly for Wales and beyond; and
- geographic profiling, comparisons and benchmarking.

There are a variety of users of these statistics including national and local government, researchers, academics and students. For further information on the users and uses please refer to the the Housing Statistics Quality Report.

Policy and operational context

The information on vacant dwellings and lettings is used to assess the effectiveness of social landlords in managing their stock and to gauge turnover rates for social housing. The information on rent arrears is used to monitor the number of social housing tenants in debt across Wales and to assess their requirement for advice and financial assistance. The information is used by the Welsh Government to monitor the effectiveness of policy and for future policy development. The information may also be used to monitor the affect of welfare reform and recent changes to housing benefit.

Housing Benefit and the housing element of Universal Credit

Since April 2011, a number of UK Government policy changes have been introduced which affect those residents of social housing in Wales who are in receipt of Housing Benefit. For example, in April 2013, size criteria for new and existing working-age Housing Benefit claimants were introduced in the social rented sector, which means that working-age social housing tenants that are claiming Housing Benefit will see a reduction in their entitlement if they are deemed to be living in accommodation that is too large for their needs. Some other examples of welfare changes (in place by the end of March 2019) include most working-age benefits being frozen in cash terms between April 2016 and March 2020, and a reduction in the household benefit cap from £26,000 to £20,000 (or £18,200 to £13,400 for single adults without children) in Wales.

A further significant policy change is the introduction of Universal Credit, which is replacing Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. Universal

Credit is a payment to help with living costs for those on a low income or out of work. It was introduced in April 2013 in certain pathfinder areas of North West England. The pathfinder areas were broadened to include Shotton in Wales in April 2014. During the pathfinder stage, eligibility was initially restricted to new claims from a limited group of single jobseekers without children. It is now available to all types of new claimants (or those on legacy benefits who have had a change in their circumstances) across Wales.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has recently announced they now currently expect Universal Credit to be fully rolled out by September 2024 (which will include the managed migration of all remaining existing legacy claimants on to Universal Credit) rather than the previous completion date of December 2023. Provisional statistics published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) show in November 2019, there were 38,800 households in Wales on Universal Credit who were in receipt of payment and receiving the housing element in the social rented sector (Source: StatXplore).

Universal Credit is assessed and paid in arrears and if paid on time claimants wait five weeks for their first payment for new claims (following the removal of the 7 day waiting period from the 14 February 2018). Claimants receive a single monthly household payment, paid into a bank account in the same way as a monthly salary; support with housing costs will usually go direct to the claimant as part of their monthly payment. However, the following Alternative Payment Arrangements are available to help claimants who are identified as needing additional support: paying the housing element of Universal Credit as a Managed Payment direct to the landlord; more frequent than monthly payments; and, a Split Payment of an award between partners.

There have been some implementation issues with Universal Credit such as some claimants experiencing delays in receiving their full Universal Credit payment on time, particularly in the case of new claims. This along with direct payment to the household (rather than the landlord), issues with monthly budgeting, and also the five week wait could have had an impact on rent arrears. The UK Government has announced various changes to Universal Credit (such as those included in Budget 2018) in response to these implementation issues.

The Welsh Government has commissioned Policy in Practice to undertake research into the impact of Universal Credit on rent arrears in Wales. The interim report was published on the Welsh Government's website in January 2020, with the final report currently expected to be published in spring 2020.

Data source and coverage

Information is collected annually via Excel spreadsheets downloaded from the Afon file transfer website, which provides a secure method for users to submit data. Copies of the vacancies, lettings and rent arrears data collection forms are available.

Further information on the data processing cycle can also be found in the Housing Statistics Quality Report which is available on our website.

Data for 2018-19 were collected from all of the Local Authorities who retained stock at 31 March 2019 and all Welsh Registered Social Landlords at 31 March 2019, including Abbeyfield societies, Almshouse Charities and Co-ownership societies.

The proportion of social housing stock managed by registered social landlords will have been influenced by the large scale voluntary transfers of local authority stock. All transfers covered 100% of the local authority housing stock. A list of the large scale voluntary transfers of local authority stock and dates of transfer to registered social landlords are shown below.

Local authority	Date of transfer	Registered social landlord
Bridgend	12 September 2003	Valleys to Coast
Rhondda Cynon Taf	10 December 2007	RCT Homes
Monmouthshire	17 January 2008	Monmouthshire Housing
Torfaen	01 April 2008	Bron Afon Community Housing
Conwy	29 September 2008	Cartrefi Conwy
Newport	09 March 2009	Newport City Homes
Merthyr Tydfil	20 March 2009	Merthyr Valleys Homes
Ceredigion	30 November 2009	Tai Ceredigion
Gwynedd	12 April 2010	Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd
Blaenau Gwent	26 July 2010	Tai Calon Community Housing
Neath Port Talbot	05 March 2011	NPT Homes

The information shown in the release excludes vacant dwellings where an offer of tenancy has been accepted, even if no rent is being paid at the end of the financial year.

Stock let covers all housing stock let at the end of the financial year. This is calculated by subtracting the number of vacancies from the social housing stock.

Lettings cover all new lettings during the financial year and include new lets, re-lets, transfers and exchanges.

Current tenants arrears is the gross indebtedness of the then current tenants, in respect of rent and excluding other landlord charges, included in the gross debit at the end of the financial year, not deducting payment received in advance, but deducting the following amounts:

- Amounts received but not applied to tenants' accounts, for example in respect of housing benefit or rebate.
- Amounts receivable other than from tenants, for example from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).
- Other adjustments, for example amounts debited to tenants' accounts but not yet contractually payable by tenants.

The arrears amount for each account at the end of the year is divided by the weekly gross rent for that account to give the number of weeks in arrears.

Rent arrears data excludes arrears on garages and arrears for court costs or rechargeable repairs.

The local authority groupings used in the charts are as follows:

Rural authorities
Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Monmouthshire.

Urban authorities
Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Flintshire, Wrexham, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend, The Vale of Glamorgan, Cardiff and Newport.

Quality

Welsh housing statistics adhere to the Welsh Government's Statistical Quality Management Strategy, and this is in line with the European Statistical System's six dimensions of quality, as listed in Principle 4 of the Code of Practice for Statistics. Further detail on how these are adhered to can be found in the Housing Statistics Quality Report which covers the general principles and processes leading up to the production of our housing statistics. The report covers various topics including definitions, coverage, timeliness, relevance and comparability.

More detailed quality information relating specifically to social housing vacancies, lettings and rent arrears, which is not included in the quality report, is given below.

Administrative data quality assurance

This release has been scored against the UK Statistics Authority Administrative Data Quality Assurance matrix. The matrix is the UK Statistics Authority regulatory standard for the quality assurance of administrative data. The Standard recognises the increasing role that administrative data are playing in the production of official statistics and clarifies what producers of official statistics should do to assure themselves of the quality of these data. The toolkit that supports it provides helpful guidance to statistical producers about the practices they can adopt to assure the quality of the data they receive, and sets out the standards for assessing statistics against the Code of Practice for Statistics.

The matrix assesses the release against the following criteria:

- Operational context and administrative data collection
- Communication with data supply partners
- Quality assurance principles, standards and checks applied by data suppliers
- Producer's quality assurance investigations and documentation.

Data are collected from local authorities and Registered Social Landlords via Excel spreadsheets. These are downloaded from the Afon file transfer website which provides a secure method for users to submit data.

The spreadsheets allow respondents to validate some data before sending to the Welsh Government. Respondents are also given an opportunity to include contextual information where large changes have occurred (e.g. data items changing by more than 10% compared to the previous year). This enables some data cleansing at source and minimises follow up queries.

Local authorities and Registered Social Landlords are notified of the data collection exercise timetable in advance. This allows adequate time for local authorities to collate their information, and to raise any issues they may have. There is guidance in the spreadsheet, which assists users on completing the form.

Examples of validation checks within the forms include year-on-year changes, cross checks with other relevant data tables and checks to ensure data is logically consistent. We pre-populate the forms with stock figures as an additional quality assurance check, and therefore if they include vacancies where they have not reported stock, an error is flagged.

Accuracy

On receipt of the data collection forms, the data collection team carry out secondary validation and worked closely with the different types of data providers to ensure information provided was accurate and on a consistent basis. Copies of the data collection forms for vacant social housing, social housing lettings and social housing rent arrears can be found on the website.

In 2017-18, one social landlord, Cartrefi Cymundol Gwynedd, improved the methodology used for calculating rent arrears. However, it was not feasible for them to revise the data provided for previous years by applying the same methodology. Therefore the increase in 2017-18 can be partially attributed to improvements in the recording of the information rather than an actual increase in the level of rent arrears for this landlord.

As the RSL Baneswell Housing Association were unable to submit 2018-19 data their 2017-18 data was used instead to calculate a Wales total. Baneswell HA are no longer trading with all undertakings transferred to Linc-Cymru Housing Association from April 1st 2019.

Revisions

Vacancy numbers for 2017-18 have been revised due to the RSL Wales and West Housing Association conducting an internal audit in which they identified some needed amendments.

Lettings data for 2017-18 has also been revised. This is due to Newport City Homes incorrectly double counting the number of homeless in priority need, which has now been rectified.

Revisions can arise from events such as late returns from a local authority or RSL or when a data supplier notifies the Welsh Government that they have submitted incorrect information and resubmits this. Occasionally, revisions can occur due to errors in our statistical processes. In all of these cases, a judgement is made as to whether the change is significant enough to publish a revised statistical release.

Where changes are not deemed to be significant, i.e. minor changes, these will be updated in the following year's statistical release. However, minor amendments to the figures may be reflected in the StatsWales tables prior to that next release.

Revised data is marked with an (r) in the statistical release

We follow the Welsh Government's statistical revisions policy.

Accessibility

A full set of social housing vacancies, lettings and rent arrears data, including information by individual local authority, individual RSL and property type and size, back to 2003-04 is available to download from our StatsWales interactive website.

Coherence with other statistics

Prior to April 2016, the National Strategic Indicator PSR/004 collected annual information from the 22 local authorities across Wales covering the total number of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April each year. It also collected information on the number and on the percentage of those vacant private sector dwellings that were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the local authority. The data is available on our StatsWales website.

Similar information is now collected and published annually by the Local Government Data Unit Wales as part of the Local Authority Performance Bulletins.

Related statistics for other UK countries

Vacancies and lettings

England

England collect information on local authority owned stock and stock management via the Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS) return. The latest information is published in an annual release and associated tables

The LAHS is the source for information on local authority stock, whilst for stock owned by housing associations in England, Homes England (formerly Homes and Communities Agency) is the preferred data source.

The latest published information on social housing lettings for 2018-19.

Scotland

The Scottish Government collect information on local authority housing stock, including information on lettings and vacancies via its Housing Statistics Annual Return.

The Scottish Housing Regulator each year produces Performance tables based on information collected in the Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR), and Financial tables based on information input by RSLs from their audited accounts.

Information on social housing statistics, specifically:

- Stock – General needs; Special Needs; Low demand and vacant stock
- Social lets and rents

Can be accessed for both local authorities and RSLs via the Scottish Government's Housing Statistics for Scotland webpage.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Social Development produces an annual publication which brings together housing statistics collected by the Department including statistics on social housing.

In Northern Ireland, council owned vacant figures are published at a national level in the Northern Ireland Housing Statistics publication. These figures are provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) but published alongside other tenures – including Housing Associations and the public sector. Lettings or allocations of Local Authority / council stock are also published at a local authority area level by Northern Ireland based on collections from NIHE for Northern Ireland. The local authority figures are an annual snapshot at 31 March.

Rent arrears

England

The latest published data available for England can be accessed via the Gov.UK website.

Scotland

The latest published data available for Scotland can be accessed here:

- LA data from the Housing Revenue Account returns by local authorities to the Scottish Government.
- RSL data from the Scottish Housing Regulator Registered Social Landlord Annual Performance and Statistical Return.

Northern Ireland

The Department for Communities in Northern Ireland publishes an annual compendium on housing statistics. The latest version 'Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2017-18' includes information on average weekly rents and levels of rent arrears.

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.

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 31st 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.

Further details

The document is available at:
https://gov.wales/social-housing-vacancies-lettings-and-arrears

Next update

Annual release March 2021

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to stats.housing@gov.wales

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