



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

BACKGROUND, DOCUMENT

# Social housing vacancies, lettings and rent arrears: quality report

This report covers the general principles and processes leading up to the production of our statistics.

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# What are these statistics?

Social housing vacancies, lettings and arrears statistics provide summary information on the number of housing units that were empty, the number of housing units rented to tenants and the number of social housing tenants who were in rent arrears.

## 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 effect of welfare reform and recent changes to housing benefit.

## Users and uses

More generally the information is used for:

- monitoring housing trends
- policy development
- advice to Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers
- informing debate in the Senedd Cymru and beyond
- geographic profiling, comparisons and benchmarking

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There are also a variety of further users of these statistics including national and local government, researchers, academics and students.

## Strengths and limitations of the data

### Strengths

- The information is processed and published frequently and in an ordered manner to enable users to see the statistics when they are current and of greatest interest.
- Data is obtained directly from housing providers and undergoes rigorous quality assurance.
- **Detailed statistics are provided via our StatsWales website at local authority level as well as by provider.**

### Limitations

- Different local authorities prioritise different needs when it comes to allocating lettings. Because of this it is difficult to understand patterns in letting occurrences and make policy decisions accordingly.
- There is an absence of what type of properties are vacant. This makes it difficult to correlate with housing need and availability.
- There is no cause given for every incidence of a property being in arrears. This makes it difficult to make sweeping policy changes to reduce this number.

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# 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.

In April 2022, following a pause in the managed migration programme due to the Covid pandemic, the Department for work and Pensions (DWP) announced plans to resume their programme to move all legacy benefit claimants over to Universal Credit by 2024. However, in October 2022 the Chancellor announced that the DWP would not move claimants receiving income-related employment and support allowance over to Universal Credit until 2028. Claimants moving over from legacy benefits have their entitlement to Universal Credit assessed against their current claims, with transitional protection (top up payments) available for eligible claimants ensuring they receive the same amount of income as they are entitled to from their legacy benefit.

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Provisional statistics published by the DWP show in February 2024, there were 91,714 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, there are [Alternative Payment Arrangements \(Department for Work & Pensions\)](#) available to help claimants identified as needing additional support

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 Welsh Government commissioned Policy in Practice to undertake [research into the impact of Universal Credit on rent arrears in Wales](#) and a final report was published on the Welsh Government's website in July 2020.

## Data source and coverage

Information was collected 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.

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Data for 2022-23 were collected from all of the local authorities who retained stock at 31 March 2023 and most Welsh Registered Social Landlords at 31 March 2023, including Abbeyfield societies, Almshouse Charities and Co-ownership societies. Bron Afon was not able to provide data. Therefore, information provided by Bron Afon for 2021-22 has been used to calculate a Wales total for 2022-23.

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.

## Table 1: Large scale voluntary transfer of local authority stock, by date of transfer

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

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<b>Local authority</b>	<b>Date of transfer</b>	<b>Registered social landlord</b>
<b>Ceredigion</b>	30 November 2009	Tai Ceredigion
<b>Gwynedd</b>	12 April 2010	Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd
<b>Blaenau Gwent</b>	26 July 2010	Tai Calon Community Housing
<b>Neath Port Talbot</b>	05 March 2011	NPT Homes

Description of Table 1: A table showing that the large scale voluntary transfer of local authority stock took place between September 2003 and March 2011.

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 are 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)

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- 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.

## Standards

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

Accredited official 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 accredited official 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 accredited official statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. Accredited official statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

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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 (e.g. added definition of social housing)

enhanced trustworthiness by reviewing and reducing the number of officials with pre-release access.

## **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

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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.

## 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

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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.

## Accuracy

The closeness between an estimated result and the (unknown) true value.

On receipt of the data collection forms, the data collection team carry out secondary validation and work 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.

For 2022-23 one RSL (Bron Afon) was unable to submit data on vacancies, lettings and rent arrears. Therefore, information provided by Bron Afon for 2021-22 has been used to calculate a Wales total.

In 2020-21. Flintshire County Council were unable to submit vacancies data and, therefore, their 2018-19 data return was used to calculate totals for Wales.

In 2018-19, the RSL Baneswell Housing Association were unable to submit lettings and arrears data. Their 2017-18 data return was used instead to calculate totals for Wales. Baneswell HA are no longer trading with all undertakings transferred to Linc-Cymru Housing Association from 1 April 2019.

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

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improvements in the recording of the information rather than an actual increase in the level of rent arrears for this landlord.

## Revisions

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 and clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format(s) in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

Social housing vacancies, lettings and rent arrears statistics for Wales are published in an accessible, orderly, pre-announced manner on the Welsh Government website at 9:30am on the day of publication.

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We aim to inform known key users of the publication of the statistics when they are published. An e-mail is circulated to the [Housing Information Group](#).

We aim to use Plain English in our outputs and all outputs adhere to the Welsh Government accessibility policy. Furthermore, all our headlines are published in Welsh and English.

Further information regarding the statistics can be obtained by contacting the relevant staff detailed on the release or via [stats.housing@gov.wales](mailto:stats.housing@gov.wales).

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

Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but which refer to the same phenomenon, are similar.

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](#).

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# Geographic areas

## The local authority groupings used in the charts

### Rural authorities

- Isle of Anglesey
- Gwynedd
- Conwy
- Denbighshire
- Powys
- Ceredigion
- Pembrokeshire
- Carmarthenshire
- Monmouthshire

### Urban authorities

- Rhondda Cynon Taff
- Merthyr Tydfil
- Caerphilly
- Blaenau Gwent
- Torfaen
- Flintshire
- Wrexham
- Swansea
- Neath Port Talbot
- Bridgend
- The Vale of Glamorgan

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- Cardiff
- Newport

## 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 \(LHS\)](#).

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 2022-23 \(Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities\)](#).

#### Scotland

The Scottish Government collect information on local authority housing stock, including information on lettings and vacancies via its [Housing Statistics Annual Return \(Scottish Government\)](#).

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

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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

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[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 2022-23](#)' includes information on average weekly rents and levels of rent arrears.

## Evaluation

We always welcome feedback on any of our statistics. Please contact us via email: [stats.housing@gov.wales](mailto:stats.housing@gov.wales)

Produced by Knowledge and Analytical Services, Welsh Government

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