



**RTPI Cymru**

mediation of space · making of place  
cyd drefnu gofod · creu cynefin

# The Process for Developing Robust Housing Evidence for Local Development Plans

## Executive Summary

---

*Neil Harris  
Bob Smith  
Brian Webb*

*Cardiff University School of Planning and  
Geography*

**RTPI Cymru Research  
RTPI Report no.13  
DATE: January 2016**

# The Process for Developing Robust Housing Evidence for Local Development Plans

## Note

Since completion of this research in December 2015, the Welsh Government have issued Edition 8 of Planning Policy Wales which includes clarification on the assessment of household projections, in particular the weight to be given to projections and the range of issues to be considered as part of the evidence base for the housing requirement figures in Local Development Plans. RTPI Cymru welcomes the clarifications and further guidance on assessing household projections in principle.

We stress the urgent need for the development of skills to ensure LPAs have the technical knowledge and statistical ability to undertake the work outlined in PPW para 9.2.2, which includes modelling to provide alternative scenarios to the Welsh Government's projections. Resources for such training is a major concern for RTPI Cymru, given continued budget constraints for LPAs and we believe that the RTPI, Welsh Government and other stakeholders should work together to deliver further training and skills development opportunities on interpreting, adapting and refining household projections data for land use planning purposes as set out in the recommendations of this research.

## Executive summary

This is a summary of research commissioned by Royal Town Planning Institute Cymru to explore the use and interpretation of household projections in preparing Local Development Plans. The research was carried out in response to some local planning authorities' uncertainty and concerns about how much flexibility they have to interpret household projections. The research – carried out by Cardiff University School of Planning and Geography - is based on interviews with a wide range of stakeholders and a series of case studies. The full report of the research can be found at <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/the-rtpi-near-you/rtpi-cymru/policy-in-wales/wales-planning-research-agenda/process-for-developing-housing-evidence-for-ldps/>

### *Local Development Plans and housing*

Each local planning authority in Wales is required to prepare a Local Development Plan. Local Development Plans are important, statutory documents and play a significant role in planning for housing. Local planning authorities have to assess housing requirements for their area and include policies and allocations in their Local Development Plans to support the delivery of housing.

### *Household projections*

Welsh Government planning policies state that Welsh Government local authority level household projections should form the starting point when local planning authorities assess their housing requirements. Local planning authorities also take into account a range of other data and evidence in preparing their Local Development Plan.

Welsh Government local authority household projections are trend-based projections and estimate the future number of new households by local authority area over a 25 year period. They are released every two to three years and the latest household projections were released in 2014. These household projections are used for a wide range of activities including land-use planning.

## *Key findings*

- **Household projections.** The Welsh Government local authority level household projections are a valuable mechanism for assessing housing requirements in Local Development Plans. Stakeholders understand the nature of household projections and some of the limitations in using them for the purpose of land-use planning. There is less use of variant household projections issued alongside the principal household projections. The variant household projections vary some of the assumptions about population and household change and can be useful for land-use planning. The research identifies that local planning authorities can deviate from the Welsh Government household projections where they can provide robust evidence that this is appropriate.
- **The Welsh Government and its planning policies.** The Welsh Government has provided valuable support for local planning authorities with the task of preparing Local Development Plans. The content of Planning Policy Wales is generally fit for purpose and there is no need for an extension of national planning policy on household projections and their use in Local Development Plans. Some minor refinement of the content of Planning Policy Wales would be useful. The Welsh Government clarified its planning policies on the use of household projections in a Policy Clarification Letter in 2014. This has resulted in some local planning authorities stating that there has been a change in emphasis on how household projections should now be used when preparing Local Development Plans.
- **Local data and refinement of the household projections.** There is a wide range of easily accessible data available to local planning authorities and other stakeholders to interrogate and refine the Welsh Government household projections at local level. The development of a shared methodology for refining household projections and developing variant projections using different assumptions has been very useful. Some of the data, particularly data for migration and household size, can vary considerably over time. These variations can lead to widely differing household numbers when short-term trends are projected forward over longer timescales.
- **Skills, expertise and training.** The research identifies that the skills and expertise to interpret and adapt household projections data varies considerably between local planning authorities. The availability of these skills within local planning authorities has declined over time. The limited skills and expertise in some local planning authorities means that household projections are not always applied to local circumstances in an appropriate way. The limited skills and expertise also mean that local planning authorities cannot always defend a plan's dwelling requirement that is above or below that initially implied by the Welsh Government household projections. Practical solutions to this skills deficit include sharing expertise and resources between local planning authorities and using planning or other consultants.
- **Examination of Local Development Plans.** The Welsh Government household projections are given considerable weight in examination of Local Development Plans. A very wide range of different housing requirements are presented during examination depending on the assumptions made by participants in the plan-making process. Examination processes are

robust and allow an evidence-based approach to assessing housing requirements. Examination processes are effective in identifying inconsistencies in the arguments and evidence presented at examination. The examination process also encourages the refinement of data and evidence as the process progresses. The challenge is for local planning authorities to keep their evidence up-to-date, although the examination process can deal with revised Welsh Government household projections data even at later stages of the process.

### **Recommendations**

The project makes several recommendations focusing on:

- Delivering further training and skills development opportunities so that local planning authorities and other stakeholders can interpret, refine and adapt household projections data;
- Making minor amendments and clarifications to Planning Policy Wales;
- Preparing a good practice guide on the use of household projections in preparing Local Development Plans; and
- Exploring the development of Welsh Government local authority level household projections using longer-term trend data to better reflect the character and purposes of the planning system.