

Matter which the Chair has decided is urgent in order that Cabinet can consider this prior to its submission to Welsh Government and with regard to its previous resolution on the matter on 27th April, 2023.

Agenda Item No. 14(i)

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 25TH MAY, 2023

REFERENCE FROM HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 17TH MAY, 2023

“33 VALE OF GLAMORGAN RAPID REHOUSING PLAN (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 27th April, 2023 was presented to the Committee by the Head of Housing and Building Services, in conjunction with the Operational Manager, Public Housing Services. The reference sought the Committee’s consideration and comment on the Council’s Rapid Rehousing Plan, following its agreement by Cabinet in principle.

It was a requirement for all Welsh Local Authorities to produce and submit this Plan for Welsh Government (WG) approval, it being added that the Plan would help to address the current crisis in housing being experienced in the Vale of Glamorgan and in other parts of Wales.

The Plan recognised that the current use of certain forms of temporary accommodation, such as hotels, bed and breakfast, hostels and shared housing was not the ideal provision or response to rehousing and homelessness, in that it did not provide a stable or sound foundation for families and those individuals impacted moving forward. Therefore, a multi-agency and multi-faceted approach was required involving the Council and its Housing Solutions Team in conjunction with other partners to help achieve this.

A key demographic housing need (but not the only one) which required to be addressed was single, younger people.

A key aim of the Plan was to ensure that homelessness became preventable or was short-lived for persons and families impacted by it. Therefore, the Plan outlined a number of potential actions and solutions to the housing crisis faced in the Vale (some of which were based on the Committee’s Task and Finish Group’s work and recommendations around housing and homelessness provision undertaken last year), including:

- New social housing developments
- Private landlords increasing their portfolios
- New Council owned temporary accommodation
- Prevention work
- Homeless Leasing

- Shared accommodation pilot
- Changes to the Homes4U Policy
- Changes to properties with age designation (reducing the minimum age from 55 to 30) and properties subject to local lettings policies.

Following this, the Committee and others made a number of comments and queries:

On Councillor Aviet's questions concerning the 'hidden homeless' and where single working people who were on very low incomes, could not afford private house renting and 'sofa surfed' fitted in to this Plan, it was explained that the 240 households living in temporary accommodation in the Vale included single working people (on low incomes). Also, any persons who were homeless but working could also approach the Housing Solutions Team in order to get housing advice, support and assess what the best housing solution would be for them in terms of their financial means, etc. with the opportunity to be put in the appropriate housing needs band and be able to make bids on properties. In terms of those persons 'sofa surfing', if they presented to the Council as homeless or in serious housing need, they would also be banded accordingly in terms of their circumstances, which would increase their ability to bid successfully for accommodation. It was stressed that the Rapid Rehousing Plan dealt with specific issues and priorities and that the Council's Local Housing Market Strategy dealt with the wider housing needs of Vale residents at various levels and not just homelessness, i.e. from social housing to low cost purchasing options.

Regarding Councillor Lloyd Selby's question on what discussions the Council had with those hotel and bed and breakfast providers in the Vale who offered temporary accommodation around greater flexibility for their residents to be able to self-cater (in their rooms as part of a wider improvement of their living conditions), it was explained that discussions had been undertaken with these establishments and they were now allowing fridges in residents' rooms to keep key foodstuffs and milk chilled, but they could not allow microwaves, toasters, air fryers, etc. in their rooms due to fire risks and their insurance liabilities. This remained a key challenge and inherent problem with using such premises, but the Council worked closely with these providers and through consultation with residents in order to mitigate this issue as much as possible. On the Councillor's other query concerning the approach to revising the age designation for Council housing (also raised by Councillor Hanks), and whether this would be a blanket approach or on a case-by-case basis (following consultation with existing residents and taking into account their needs), it was explained that this would be on the latter basis, with such an approach having been used previously with a successful conclusion. As part of this, older residents would be offered more bespoke accommodation (such as the development in Penarth) and support, in line with this demographic's increasing housing needs. An Older Persons Housing Strategy had also been developed.

Councillor Morgan wished to stress the need for the Council to 'balance' the key demands of both the younger and older populations in the Vale in terms of housing. He stated that by 2035 the population over the age of 75 in the Vale of Glamorgan would have increased by 70%.

On the Vice Chair's query concerning the proposed temporary suspension of the Homes4U policy, it was explained that the suspension would allow the Council, as with other Local Authorities in Wales, to address the current housing crisis, which had seen a rise in rough sleepers within the Vale. The minimum duration for this would likely need to be 12 months. The suspension of the policy would require Cabinet authority and Council approval, as well as, following Councillor Lloyd Selby's comments, the need to take into account the needs of those people who were currently on the waiting list. On the follow up question regarding the issue of 'furniture poverty' for tenants, it was explained that help could be provided by the Council via the Housing Support Grant and via other funding i.e. discretionary loans for tenants to obtain furniture and other fittings such as carpets. The Vice Chair also suggested regular updates on the progress of the Plan, as well as the Council needing to address how it shapes its housing strategy around young people and future generations and to give equal weight to the Older Persons Housing Strategy.

On Councillor Hanks' query on new council owned temporary accommodation, it was confirmed that the Eagleswell Road development would include the temporary housing of Ukrainian refugees in order to help alleviate resettlement pressures. In the longer term, the site would be used for permanent housing to meet the needs of the wider community. On the Councillor's follow up comments around additional WG funding for housing in the Vale, WG was providing substantial funding to assist the Vale and other Councils to provide accommodation such as through the Empty Homes Strategy, grants to tackle homelessness and the Housing Support Grant. These funding streams were usually on an annual basis.

On Councillor Perkes' query about the lessons learned from the establishment of 'mixed' communities following previous examples of lowering the age designation on Council accommodation, it was explained that this would be done on a site-by-site basis, looking at the suitability of accommodation within and with the provision of intensive management as well as support to help such communities flourish and be sustainable.

Both the Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing (both of whom currently shared the portfolio for Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement) emphasised the current crisis and demand in housing within the Vale and that 'doing nothing was not an option'. The Rapid Rehousing Plan would help to ensure the dignity of Vale residents impacted by the housing crisis and help them build more sustainable lives. The relaxing of age restrictions on Council accommodation, if done correctly, could lead to the subsequent establishment of successful intergenerational communities.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the Cabinet reference and report subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the following comments be reported back to Cabinet as part of their consideration of the report, prior to the final submission of the Rapid Rehousing Plan to Welsh Government:

- The report and Plan should provide a more explicit reassurance that any decision to remove or revise the age designation on selected Council owned accommodation and housing would be made on a case-by-case basis, as well as taking into account the needs of existing residents.
- The report and Plan should provide a greater recognition that if consideration was given to suspending the Homes4U policy, that this should take into account the needs of those who were currently on the waiting list.

(2) T H A T the Committee receives regular updates on the work being undertaken as part of the Rapid Rehousing Plan.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) In order that Cabinet be informed of the comments or recommendations made as part of their consideration of the Rapid Rehousing Plan prior to its submission to Welsh Government, as well as reflecting the reassurance given by Housing Services at the Committee meeting on these matters.

(2) In order that the Committee can consider and scrutinise the progress made and challenges faced by the Plan over the next 5 years on a regular basis.”

N.B. Cabinet, at its meeting on 27th April, 2023

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the Rapid Rehousing Plan for the Vale of Glamorgan be approved.

(2) T H A T the report be referred to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee for consideration and subject to any changes being received, it be agreed to submit the Rapid Rehousing Plan to Welsh Government. Reason for decisions

(1&2) To ensure that the Council minimised the use of temporary accommodation and complied with Welsh Government requirements, namely that all Welsh Councils would have in place their own Rapid Rehousing Plan

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