

Meeting of:	Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday, 18 September 2019
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Homes and Safe Communities
Report Title:	Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018 - 2022 - Monitoring Report
Purpose of Report:	To update Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee on progress implementing the Homelessness Prevention Strategy since its adoption by Cabinet on 17th June 2019.
Report Owner:	Cabinet Member for Housing and Building Services
Responsible Officer:	Miles Punter - Director of Environment and Housing
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Councillor Margaret Wilkinson, Cabinet Member for Housing & Building Services Carys Lord, Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer Committee Reports; Legal Services Mike Ingram, Head of Housing & Building Services Pam Toms, Operational Manager, Public Housing Services
Policy Framework:	This report is consistent with the Policy Framework and Budget.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <p>The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 Act placed a statutory requirement on local authorities to undertake a Homelessness Review and to produce a Homelessness Strategy setting out how each Council, in partnership with other stakeholders would identify and develop the services required to help and support those in housing need.</p> <p>Following extensive consultation, a Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan were developed in the Vale of Glamorgan and adopted by Cabinet on 17th June 2019. These documents set out how the Council, with assistance from its partners will deliver the required strategic outcomes for clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.</p> <p>The Vale of Glamorgan Homelessness Prevention Action Plan covers the period 2018 to 2022 and is a working document which will be kept under constant review and updated as and when required.</p> <p>This report provides the first quarterly update to Members of the Homes and Safe Community Scrutiny Committee on the progress made to date in implementing the Strategy and Action Plan.</p>	

Recommendation

1. That the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee note the progress to date implementing the Homelessness Prevention Action Plan.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To ensure that the actions in the Homelessness Action Plan are progressing and are driving improvements in the quality of the homelessness service.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 took effect on 27th April 2015 and placed a number of new duties on local authorities in respect of homelessness, which included the following;

- To provide assistance to anyone threatened with homelessness.
- To provide appropriate help and support to any homeless person to help secure a suitable home.
- To provide new powers to local authorities to discharge their homelessness duty into the private rented sector.

- 1.2 The Housing Wales Act 2014 is the biggest change in tackling homelessness in Wales since the first Homeless Person's Act commenced in 1977. Its aim was to transform homelessness by creating a modern safety net where no one is turned away without help.

- 1.3 Section 50 of the Act also required local authorities to undertake a Homelessness Review and to produce a Homelessness Strategy which sets out how the Council in partnership with other stakeholders would address:

- the prevention of homelessness;
- the availability of suitable accommodation for people who are homeless or may become homeless;
- the availability of appropriate support and assistance for people who are homeless or may become homeless.

- 1.4 The newly adopted Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan set out the activities to be undertaken by the Council and its partners to deliver the required outcomes for clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness including:

- people leaving prison or youth detention accommodation,
- young people leaving care,
- people leaving the regular armed forces of the Crown,
- people leaving hospital after medical treatment for mental disorder as an in-patient, and

- people receiving mental health services in the community.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan has 4 themes and progress will be measured over the four years of the Strategy 2018-22 and reported quarterly to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.2** The actions have been deemed low, medium and high to ensure that priority is given to the most important requirements of the service.
- 2.3** The overall aim of the Strategy is to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity and to help mitigate the pressures and challenges on service users and also on the support services across the Vale of Glamorgan. It is also important to ensure the services are monitored and are able to adapt to the changing needs of those that use them so that the required outcomes are achieved.
- 2.4** There is a focus on training to ensure that the Councils front line Housing staff, as well as those in partner agencies have the tools and knowledge to provide the required support and advice to prevent homelessness. A bespoke staff induction and training package is being developed with Shelter Cymru which can be updated regularly to take into account any changes in National Policy and Legislation.
- 2.5** The Housing Solutions Service is also developing staff shadowing opportunities with staff from its key partners, including the Probation Service, Department of Works and Pensions and Prison Support Staff in order to gain a better understanding of Services and further improve communication.
- 2.6** The Housing Solutions Service has made significant and continued improvements in service delivery since the introduction of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 in respect of successful prevention cases. The Annual Statistics collated by Stats Wales for Welsh Government placed the Vale of Glamorgan Council as the top performing local authority in Wales for homelessness prevention in 2018/19 achieving a 82% success rate.
- 2.7** In order to build on this prevention success there is now a wide range of ways households who may be at risk of becoming homeless can access the support, information and advice to help them to resolve their situation. There is information available on the Council's website as well as a comprehensive information package provided directly to clients who present to the Service and regular housing & support 'drop in' surgeries across the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 2.8** A significant amount of work has taken place to develop the housing opportunities available in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) through increased engagement with landlords. The Housing Solutions Team hold a quarterly Landlord Forum which attracted over 55 landlords to the last meeting.
- 2.9** Feedback from landlords led to a recently developed support service funded by the Supporting People Programme for landlords in this sector to improve the sustainability of tenancies and to give private sector tenants improved security of tenure.
- 2.10** Youth homelessness is also very high on the agenda in the Vale of Glamorgan and Welsh Government (WG) and following a successful funding bid to WG the

Council has introduced the Emphasis Project in partnership with Llamau. This Service has developed links with all secondary schools across the Vale of Glamorgan and provides structured homelessness and support awareness sessions directly to pupils and teachers within the school environment. This ensures that pupils understand the reality of homelessness and how they can prevent it and teachers recognise the early signs of potential homelessness and know where to seek advice and support.

- 2.11** A Support Service gateway is now in place which provides a single point of access for vulnerable people to ensure they are able to access the most appropriate support service for their needs to gain the life skills to maintain a home, live independently and integrate into the community.
- 2.12** The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan updated with progress to date is attached at Appendix 1.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** Looking to the long term - the Vale of Glamorgan Homelessness Prevention Strategy will support vulnerable people to attain the life skills required to maintain their home, integrate into the community and to live independently in the long term.
- 3.2** Taking an integrated approach - the Homelessness Prevention Strategy will be continually reviewed, working closely alongside the Supporting People Local Planning Group and endorsed by the Regional Collaborative Committee. These are made up of Members and senior officers from both the statutory and voluntary sectors, including Housing, Social Services, Health and the Probation Service to ensure homelessness support services remain strategically relevant and there is a mechanism in place to develop new services where required with our partners to support any emerging themes.
- 3.3** Involving the population in decisions - the needs of service users are monitored to ensure that the correct services are delivered to meet their individual needs. In addition, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has been designed to help encourage households in need to take responsibility for their housing circumstances and to help manage the options and solutions available to them. Support and assistance is provided by the services involved to enable them to solve problems themselves in the future. The key message delivered by the Homelessness Service and the Supporting People Programme is "doing with" rather than "doing for" the service user in order to reduce dependency on services and to enable the service user to live independently in the future.
- 3.4** Working in a collaborative way - the Council's Homelessness Prevention Strategy places collaboration and co-production at its core through the consultation process undertaken to develop it and the ongoing integration with the Supporting People Programme where these principles are monitored on a local, regional and national level through regular reviews.
- 3.5** Understanding the root causes of issues and preventing them - the Council's Housing Solutions Service is responsible for delivering the Homelessness Prevention Action Plan and along with the Supporting People Team is required to

collect needs data on clients quarterly and annually in order to inform service delivery and commissioning.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** There are no direct resource implications associated with this report. The Strategy is being delivered within existing departmental resources which includes the Housing Support Grant (HSG) received from Welsh Government.

Employment

- 4.2** There is a statutory requirement on the Vale of Glamorgan Council to ensure appropriately experienced staff are in place to carry out the statutory duties within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** The development and adoption of a reviewable four year Homelessness Prevention Strategy is a statutory requirement of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

5. Background Papers

- (i) Housing (Wales) Act 2014 & Code of Guidance.

Operational Delivery Plan (Appendix 1)

- To provide a robust and targeted homelessness prevention service

Action	Target date	Progress	Status
Undertake a feasibility study to determine costs of a Bespoke IT system	Ongoing	Documents for a full tender process currently being completed which will be submitted via Sell2Wales	
Ensure the Council continues to meet its statutory Homelessness obligations as stipulated within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014	Ongoing	Homelessness Statists for Qtr. 1 completed and submitted to Welsh Government - on-going action Welsh Governments National Statistics Department's annual homelessness report published August 2019 which is a league table on homelessness prevention performance across Wales confirms that the Vale of Glamorgan Housing Solutions Service is the top performer for 18/19 with 82% of households prevented from becoming homeless.	
Develop Youth Homelessness & Early Homelessness Prevention/Intervention services	Completed	Completed. Funding bid successful to develop the Emphasis project that delivers homelessness prevention advise within the secondary schools across the Vale of Glamorgan	
Develop a standard service 'promise' to demonstrate commitment to the client	Completed	Completed. The 'Promise' is a two way agreement signed by both the case worker and client which sets out the appropriate standards of behaviour and respect expected by each party.	
Develop a robust hospital discharge process for homelessness clients who do not meet the criteria for the Discharge Solutions Service	On track	Commenced. An initial meeting has taken place with practitioners working in the Mental Health Wards in Llandough Hospital to determine the required communication prior to a patient being discharged when homeless.	
Explore the feasibility of developing Housing First Model	On track	Initial discussions held to explore if this initiative could work within the Vale of Glamorgan Council and if it would reduce homelessness.	
Formulate a demand led training and induction programme for front line staff.	On track	Training programme and literature currently under development in close liaison with Shelter Cymru.	
Maintain close working relationships with all relevant agencies	Ongoing	Shadowing opportunities have been made available to partners, with a more formal plan in development.	
Continue to strengthen relationships with RSL's	Ongoing	Homes4U Steering Group now meets quarterly. Quarterly meetings also arranged for front line Homes4U officers.	
Analyse the current equality monitoring data being captured	Ongoing	Annual data collated and submitted to Equalities Team	

Housing Support Grant (HSG) to continue to fund Homeless Prevention Services	On track	HSG consultation meetings are ongoing with Welsh Government to develop new grant monitoring and reporting framework	
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- **To continue to develop and extend the availability of early housing advice and assistance.**

Action	Target date	Progress	Status
Ensure service delivery and customer engagement complies with Welsh Language standards	Ongoing	All staff are encouraged to learn Welsh and allowed time to attend courses. All public documents/forms have been translated and are available in Welsh on request.	
Develop Rolling Homes4u advert	On track	Discussions have been held to develop this, an Equality Impact Assessment to be completed and the requirement will be included in the tender specification for a new IT system.	
Explore the possibility of developing Pilot Tenancy Ready Training opportunities within HMP Cardiff	On track	Further meetings held with the support team within HMP Cardiff to discuss initiative.	
Promote and provide opportunities for staff to access Welsh language courses.	Ongoing	All staff are encouraged to learn Welsh and allowed time to attend courses.	
Develop close working relationships with DWP and Vale wide Job Centre's	Ongoing	Close working relationships have now been forged with DWP and quarterly update meetings held.	
Review & Improve the quality and range of information provided by the Housing Solutions team e.g. web site links, contact details of external organisations.	Completed	Completed. New documents developed to assist clients on line. Information also provided on the Council's website on services available from partner agencies and 'drop in' support services across the Vale. This information will continue to be reviewed and kept up to date.	
Improve the quality and range of information provided by the Housing Solutions Service on the Council's website.	On track	Information updated and approval currently awaited from the Communications Team before going live.	
Residents are aware of the drop in support services that are available throughout the Vale	On track	Leaflets produced and disseminated at events and available at key public venues across the Vale of Glamorgan. Information also available via Council's web pages and the Council's Supporting People inbox on auto reply.	
Maximise the use of social media	On track	Meeting arranged with Council's Communication Team in September.	

- To ensure the most vulnerable are provided with support to maintain a home and to integrate into the community

Action	Target date	Progress	Status
To adhere to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (VAWDASV)	Ongoing	Continuing. Regular Multi-agency meetings continue which include the statutory and third sector organisations to review progress on delivering the regional Strategy.	
Review of supported accommodation services	Ongoing	Consultation event held in June. Reviews of individual projects underway and ongoing in accordance with the Supporting People Programme Grant Guidance.	
Develop strategy for non- engagement within Supporting People Projects.	On track	Initial meetings have taken place with supporting people providers including Pobl and Llamau and a draft policy to be drafted in the Autumn for consultation.	
Analyse the support needs of clients in Temporary Accommodation	On track	Initial discussions held between Supporting People Coordinator & Housing Solutions Manager to consider introduction of a new support initiative where residents within shared temporary accommodation receive support from the same provider to improve consistency and communication	
Explore the need for a 24hr supported accommodation service for clients with mental health issues.	On track	Initial revenue costings received from current support provider in order to commence assessment of viability.	
Explore the feasibility of dedicated Support workers for all temporary accommodation households	On track	This work will now form part of the action above.	
Develop and implement a Supporting People Gateway to create a single point of access to all housing related support services	Completed	Gateway now exists for all support services funded by the Supporting People Programme with a clear referral and monitoring framework in place.	
Request that the Regional Collaborative Committee (RCC) for Supporting People co-opt a representative from each of the homelessness services in the Vale of Cardiff onto the Committee	Completed	Request refused by RCC as Local Authority representatives from Housing already on RCC and able to update homelessness staff.	
Continue our work with partners to provide appropriate accommodation and support services for particular vulnerable groups	Ongoing	This work continues in accordance with Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Supporting People Programme Guidance (for support services) in line with resources and demands.	

- To improve the support offered to private landlords to improve tenancy sustainability.

Action	Target date	Progress	Status
Further develop working relationships and initiatives to expand the opportunities within the Private Rented Sector (PRS)	Ongoing	Quarterly Landlord Forum meetings arranged for the next 12 months. Most recent Forum was attended by over 55 landlords. New forum structure developed in discussions with landlords and will now involve additional time for networking.	
Develop a dedicated Support service for the private rented sector	Completed	Two new dedicated officers commissioned through the Supporting People Programme introduced specifically to increase the support available to private rented sector (PRS) landlords in addition to the support available for PRS tenants	