

| | |
|--|--|
| Meeting of: | Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | Wednesday, 05 February 2025 |
| Relevant Scrutiny Committee: | Homes and Safe Communities |
| Report Title: | Homelessness – Rapid Rehousing Plan Update |
| Purpose of Report: | To highlight current homelessness pressures and progress implementing the Rapid Rehousing Plan. |
| Report Owner: | Miles Punter - Director of Environment and Housing |
| Responsible Officer: | Nick Jones – Operational Manager, Public Sector Housing |
| Elected Member and Officer Consultation: | This report will affect all Vale residents and therefore no individual ward member consultation has been undertaken Committee Reports Legal |
| Policy Framework: | This report is within the Policy Framework and Budget. |
| Executive Summary: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report highlights the significant pressures relating to homelessness in the Vale of Glamorgan and updates Members regarding actions being taken to address the situation via the Council’s Rapid Rehousing Plan. The report also flags up additional actions, currently being considered, to assist, high numbers of households affected by homelessness and reduce the current use of bed and breakfast type accommodation. |

Recommendations

1. That Committee considers the current service pressures arising from homelessness and progress made, implementing the Rapid Rehousing Plan.
2. That Committee note the steps being taken to reduce the use of temporary accommodation.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure that Elected Members have knowledge and understanding of current service pressures regarding homelessness.
2. To minimise homelessness and reduce the use of bed and breakfast type provision to accommodate homeless households.

1. Background

- 1.1 Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council's Housing Solutions team managed an active case load of around two hundred households who were either homeless or threatened with being homeless. Single people and couples who were not deemed vulnerable were provided with advice, support, and assistance to resolve their housing situation. Families with children and vulnerable households, deemed to be in 'priority need' (in line with the definition set out in the Housing Wales Act 2016) were offered the same help but also accessed temporary accommodation where this was required.
- 1.2 At that time, around 115 units of temporary accommodation were used, including the Council managed hostel in Treharne, properties within the Council's own housing stock which were designated for use as temporary accommodation, properties leased from private owners under a leasing agreement, rooms in shared houses of multiple occupation accessed via partnerships with private landlords and a number of supported housing projects including a domestic abuse refuge, specified accommodation for 16/17 year olds, accommodation for people recovering from substance misuse etc.
- 1.3 Changes introduced during the Covid pandemic required all homeless people to be provided with temporary accommodation (to mitigate the impact of the virus). Later, the directive to Local Authorities was underpinned by changes to Housing Law, namely the Priority Need Order, which required all homeless individuals to be offered temporary accommodation.
- 1.4 The effect of this has been significant, in terms of the need to secure large additional amounts of temporary accommodation, in particular accommodation for single people. Given the short lead in times, the extra temporary accommodation was met by securing hotel rooms, an approach which was replicated by most Local Authorities across Wales. Whilst the Welsh Government initially provided financial assistance to pay for hotel bookings, as part of the No One Left Out (NOLO) Approach, the grant funding has reduced significantly and

left Councils having to meet the continued financial burden from existing budgets.

- 1.5 The Council developed its Rapid Rehousing Plan in 2022 (Cabinet minute C297 refers) which highlighted a range of priority actions and interventions to minimise the use of temporary accommodation in future and reduce the reliance on bed and breakfast type provision.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

Trends and pressures relating to homeless presentations.

- 2.1 The number of households seeking help from the Council's Housing Solutions service remains high, and this continues to stretch staff resources within the team, who are now dealing with a case load which has quadrupled since 2018. It also places pressures on temporary accommodation.
- 2.2 Currently, 186 units of temporary accommodation are occupied across the Vale, including 45 hotel rooms.
- 2.3 Households in temporary accommodation are made up of 30 families with children and 156 single people. Over the last twelve months, on average, families have remained living in temporary accommodation for between 3 and 6 months, whereas single people can remain there for 24 months or more. The timescales depend on the availability of alternative housing.
- 2.4 Local hotels have been used and mainly accommodate single people. Hotel room occupancy have typically run at over 95% and there have been periods of time when no rooms were available. The cost of hotels is high and place significant cost pressures on the Council. The requirement to reduce use of hotels has been a priority.
- 2.5 Significant progress has been made moving households on from temporary accommodation. This has been possible due to the number of new social rented homes completed during the last twelve months. Of particular note are:
 - 53 New Council homes built at Hayeswood Road in Barry providing a mixture of family homes and flats for couples and single people.
 - Twenty-eight family homes purchased by an RSL partner, from a Private Developer, using Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme Grant (TACP).
 - Ninety units of temporary accommodation built on the former Eagleswell School site in Llantwit Major, providing emergency accommodation for Ukrainian households and homeless families from the Council's Housing waiting list.
 - Twenty empty homes purchased from the Ministry of Defence, at St Athan and used to provide longer term accommodation for homeless families.
 - Nomination rights secured to twenty extra rooms for single people via private rented landlord partners.

- One hundred and fifty households at risk of homelessness were prevented following intervention and support from the Council's Housing Solutions team.
- A new complex needs hostel has opened, providing intensive levels of support on a 24-7 basis to vulnerable single people who are not able to live independently.

The Council's response to homelessness pressures

- 2.6 The Council's Rapid Rehousing Plan focussed on several key areas. Updates on progress against each action in the plan, is summarised in Appendix A.

Interim position regarding use of hotels

- 2.7 As a result of the progress made with homeless prevention, building new homes, securing access to private rental properties and prioritising homeless households, it has been possible to move 141 people on from hotel accommodation during the last 12 months. There are currently no homeless families placed in hotels, and this has been the case for two months. In addition, there has been a reduction in the number of rooms occupied at the Holiday Inn Express at Cardiff Airport. Around thirty rooms are currently used, which is a reduction from eighty and the aim is to rehouse or relocate all existing placements before the end of the financial year, when the current block booking expires.
- 2.8 Whilst there has been significant progress assisting homeless families, there remain pressures related to single people. A number of initiatives are therefore underway to provide extra accommodation for singles. These include conversions of existing Council homes into shared accommodation, the purchase of existing Houses in Multiple Occupation on the open market and the development of specialist temporary accommodation, like the former Olive Lodge, Bed and Breakfast, Barry. It has also been possible to accommodate a greater number of single people at the Council's own hostel.
- 2.9 Over the next three months a number of new flats are scheduled to be completed, including twelve self-contained flats on the former Colcot Clinic, twenty self-contained flats at Coldbrook Road and twelve flats at Holm View Phase 2. Homeless people living in temporary accommodation will be prioritised for these new homes.

Future actions and priorities

- 2.10 There is a need to buy back more existing homes to provide extra social housing in the short and medium term. The Council is in the process of updating its own Property Acquisition policy, to extend the financial viability period used, to enable extra purchases on the open market. There may also be a need to recruit additional capacity into the Council's Housing Development team to identify properties, liaise with vendors and package up works. Partner RSLs have also been asked to purchase existing properties to use as social housing and to consider other opportunities where temporary accommodation can be developed with a short lead in time.

- 2.11 The purchase of land for housing development remains a priority, including larger sites.
- 2.12 Conversion of existing Council homes and non-residential buildings is a way to increase the number of one bedroom accommodation in the short term. If the pilot scheme is effective, there is scope to expand this at pace.
- 2.13 There is a need to make contingency plans for dealing with increased numbers of single homeless people, including asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status. This is currently putting huge pressures on accommodation in Cardiff, and it is refugees will present as homeless to the Vale. There is a need to explore the learning from other Local Authorities who have stood up shared accommodation in larger buildings.
- 2.14 There is a need to protect the relationships with private landlords and retain access to existing accommodation, in particular shared houses. The creation of 'supply contracts' with private landlord partners may assist them to secure longer term funding and secure the Council's exclusive nomination rights to the accommodation.

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

Long term

- 3.1 The measures within the Rapid Rehousing Plan are intended to minimise the harmful impacts of homelessness and ensure everyone has access to accommodation.

Prevention

- 3.2 The Rapid Rehousing Plan has a strong emphasis on the prevention of homelessness through multi agency work and a significant amount of resource is being invested in prevention measures.

Integration

- 3.3 The Housing Solutions team work closely with other Council teams and external partners to deliver a seamless service to citizens.

Collaboration

- 3.4 The reasons for homelessness are varied and complex and it should not be considered solely as a Housing issue. The Council's Housing Solutions team works closely with internal and external partners to prevent and minimise the adverse impacts of homelessness. The delivery of the Rapid Rehousing Plan is also overseen by a multi-agency steering group.

Involvement

- 3.5 There is a strong focus on working with people to deliver a tailored package of assistance and support which address threats of homelessness, but also provides accommodation solutions where homelessness cannot be prevented.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

4.1 The report has no direct climate change or nature implications.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1 There are significant financial implications to the Council arising from its statutory responsibilities in respect of homelessness. This includes the need to fund booking of large numbers of hotel rooms for use as temporary accommodation. A 'spend to save' approach is therefore adopted to expand the scale of alternative, lower cost temporary accommodation options.
- 5.2 The proposals outlined to expand the development of new temporary and permanent social housing needs to remain affordable within the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. The Council works with RSL partners to further increase the supply of new homes, using grant funding routes but also via the planning system and the section 106 obligations.

Employment

- 5.3 Some of the proposals in the report may give rise to additional staffing requirements for the Council e.g. to expand the supply of new housing and to manage a larger number of temporary accommodation units. The case for additional posts would be put forward for consideration in line with the Council's existing processes / procedures.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.4 Homelessness decisions and are made in accordance with the duties set out in the Housing Wales Act. Welsh Government is currently consulting on future changes to the legislation to end homelessness in the longer term and minimise the impact of homelessness, including on groups of people who are more likely to experience homelessness.

6. Background Papers

None.

Appendix A – Update of actions within Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan

Objective 1: Expand the supply of affordable housing.

| Priority | Action | Update January 2025 |
|--|---|---|
| Provide strong evidence base to highlight need | Update Local Housing Market Assessment | LHMA refresh completed and provides robust evidence base regarding housing need. |
| | Undertake local needs assessments of rural areas | Discussions with community councils have taken place regarding housing pressures and local needs. Local assessments of housing need due to start shortly in some rural communities. |
| | Review and update prospectus | Review complete and prospectus updated. Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee fed into process. |
| | Collate and analyse data in respect of homelessness to identify trends and themes | Trends and patterns in respect of homelessness continue to be reviewed. |
| | Track resettlement trends and emerging needs for move on | Resettlement pressures are mainly addressed through move on into private rented sector, however Council owned and leased accommodation continues to provide temporary accommodation for some cohorts. |
| Increase supply of temporary and permanent housing | Manage Programme Delivery Plan and maximise additional monies via slippage | Additional slippage of over £7m was secured in 2024 and a further grant award of £4m was awarded to the Vale to get |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | | some reserve developments brought forward. |
| | Provide assurances to RSLs to forward fund schemes to enable opportunities for extra Social Housing Grant via slippage to be maximised | Individual scheme submissions are considered and prioritised in accordance with the Housing Prospectus. RSL partners continue to progress schemes provided there is support and their proposal is added to main or reserve programme. |
| | Maximise delivery of affordable housing via section 106 planning agreements | Review of Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance complete and affordable housing requirements are reinforced to maximise delivery of new homes on site. |
| | Expand Council new build programme at scale and pace | A number of council house building schemes are on site and scheduled to be completed over the next few months. Other reserve schemes are being brought forward and there is provision within the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan to make significant further investment in building new council homes over the next 30 years. |
| | Explore opportunities for alternative grant funding e.g. Town Centre Regeneration Board, Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme etc | Engaged with relevant departments via Empty Homes Group to identify potential options for funding opportunities via WG projects e.g. Energy Efficiency Grants to partner landlords. |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>Purchase and convert properties on open market</p> | <p>A number of property acquisitions have been completed, including two, six bed houses in multiple occupation. Works are currently underway to create additional homes for single persons.</p> <p>In addition, works are continuing at Olive Lodge to convert a former bed and breakfast property into self-contained accommodation for single persons. It is anticipated the ten units will be ready for occupation in June 2025.</p> <p>Further opportunities to acquire existing buildings for conversion, continue to be explored and the priority is larger properties which can accommodate single persons.</p> |
| | <p>Explore scope to convert existing social housing into smaller units or shared</p> | <p>A number of current council homes are being converted into shared accommodation.</p> |
| | <p>Explore scope for in house private sector leasing scheme</p> | <p>The in-house leasing scheme has expanded and provides more than 20 units of accommodation, mainly for single people.</p> |
| | <p>Explore scope to use existing Council office accommodation for residential purposes</p> | <p>A vacant Council office block is in the process of being appropriated into the Housing Revenue Account, so it can be</p> |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | | converted into council owned residential accommodation. |
| | Review Council owned land for potential housing e.g. garage site, green space | <p>Council owned surplus land is considered for potential housing development. Limited land already within Housing team ownership, restricts opportunities, however larger parcels of land, owned by other Departments is actively considered.</p> <p>The former Eagleswell school site in Llantwit is a good example as is the development of new council homes adjacent to Holm View Leisure Centre.</p> |
| Maximise benefit of existing housing stock | Review Homes4U allocation Policy to increase the number of offers made to homeless households | Review of Homes4U Policy on hold pending new Legislation covering Homelessness and Allocations. |
| | Minimise empty properties in social rented and private sector | Corporate Empty Homes Strategy Group meets regularly to drive reductions in the number of long-term empty homes across the Vale. |
| | Consider de designating age restricted properties | Draft protocol developed for adjustment of age restrictions on a carefully considered, case by case basis. |
| | Explore scope to relax local lettings criteria to increase the number of homes available to households in the greatest housing need | Proposal being developed for Scrutiny and Cabinet to consider approach to applying local lettings policies and achieving the balance between meeting local needs of people with connections to specific areas, |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | against the requirement to rehouse households in greatest need i.e. homeless households. |
| | Flip existing Temporary Accommodation into permanent accommodation | Accommodation used as temporary accommodation has been flipped into permanent accommodation. Other temporary accommodation units are being remodelled into shared accommodation. |
| | Consider the options for converting larger Council homes into shared tenancies | A pilot exercise is underway, and conversion work is underway to increase the supply of accommodation for single persons. |
| Expedite move on from Temporary Accommodation | Intensive rapid rehousing support provided to all tenants in temporary accommodation | Challenging given large caseloads, however Housing Solutions Officers, Temporary Accommodation Officers and Support Workers work closely with households in temporary accommodation. The amount of time families spend in temporary accommodation has reduced recently however there are still pressures, and longer stays for single people. This reflects the limited, one bed, move on options. |
| | Regular reviews of Personalised Housing Plans for homeless households | Completed in line with regulation. |
| | Property bids placed for households in temporary accommodation with the earliest Homes4U registration dates | This practise continues to minimise stays in temporary accommodation. Some |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | applicants challenge suitability of offers made and these are considered on a case-by-case basis. In most instances, offers of accommodation are found to be suitable following review. |
| Maximise opportunities to prevent homelessness | Review effectiveness of current prevention measures | Continuation of staff training program to highlight best practice procedures and explore available prevention measures. |
| | Review existing roles within Housing Solutions team and consider case for dedicated Prevention staff | On going assessment of service delivery cemented in demand levels within a challenging environment of staff recruitment and retention issues affecting the sector more broadly. |
| | Review Vale Assisted Tenancy Scheme to ensure people at risk of homelessness are prioritised | Consistency of role retention has proven a challenge to partnership enhancement, Allocations remain strong despite shrinking PRS sector. |
| | Monitor use of Prevention Fund to ensure it successfully contributes to sustainable tenancies, including data on use of Tenancy Hardship Fund. | The grant made available is fully spent each year. |
| | Review best practise in sector focussing on Councils with the highest prevention rates | Staff attend best practise seminars to learn about approaches employed elsewhere. A recent example was Manchester Council which is putting more resources into assisting people into private sector accommodation to reduce reliance on hotels. |

Objective 2: Provide the right support.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Ensure right support is available | Review and assess support outcomes | Monthly statistical analysis of partner returns on engagement levels and outcomes as outlined in contract awards via Supporting People team. |
| | Provide dedicated move on support to assist households in Temporary Accommodation to move on | Dedicated support services have been delivered by POBL, on-site drop-in services, tailored to client needs. |
| | Prioritise support for homeless people | Referrals from Housing Solutions teams have been triaged by Supporting people on the basis of need and urgency. |
| | Increased awareness and understanding of Housing Related Support Services, Mental Health services, Substance Misuse Services, Local Area Co-ordination and others | Temporary accommodation staff highlight and encourage support engagement to increase tenancy retention and tenancy readiness. |
| | Ensure all staff receive relevant training through a trauma informed, PIE approach. | Trauma informed 'PIE' approach is now embedded within staff training program, re-enforced through regular staff meetings and peer learning. |
| | Work with partners in Health, Adult Services and Police to ensure that crisis support, and intervention is available to people in need | Adoption and engagement with Rapid Rehousing Program on a departmental level through enhanced communications, utilising a broad range of meetings to strengthen relationships and buy in. |
| | Consider establishment of triage service | Community based One Stop Shop support services have been implemented to |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | enhance local profile and accessibility options. |
| | Commission specialist support to address any gaps in current provision | Work is currently underway on a third-party evaluation program of assessing needs, commissioned by Cardiff and Vale Health Board to identify targeted support services. This extensive work is due to report by the summer of 2025. |
| | Review existing supported housing pathways | Close working with Supporting people team to identify a rising demand for specific complex needs services. Full analysis of current evaluation program will determine future service delivery and allocation of resources. |
| | Strengthen nomination rights to supported accommodation | Increased demand for supported accommodation units is a rising challenge. Expanding options through private landlords partnered with support services have decreased pressures on availability but fails, to fully, address this issue. |
| | Review eligibility criteria for existing supported housing | Adopted a demand led, more fluid, approach to allocations in partnership with providers. New units delivered by private providers include closer management of delivery by temporary accommodation and supporting people internal staff. |
| | Develop specialist provision for individuals with complex needs | Awaiting evaluation program to inform commissioning decisions moving forward. |

Objective 3: Strengthen partnership working.

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Ensure effective partnership working underpins homelessness services | Set up a task force meeting amongst partners with the objective of implementing the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan | Engagement with partners via Steering Group Meetings and attendance to relevant housing forum meetings to re-enforce commitment levels. |
| | Review existing working arrangements between internal departments and identify areas for improvement | Strong personal, internal and external, relationships due to longstanding senior management positions has continued to improve relationships, allowing for honest and open discussions and negotiations. |
| | Promote the rapid rehousing message with key stakeholders | An extensive program of engagement with community councils has taken place to enhance awareness of housing crisis and Rapid Rehousing. Steering Group Meetings have highlighted the broad recognition of limited property resources and the challenging environment. |

Objective 4: Reinforce corporate buy in

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Other Council Departments support the Councils Homelessness work | Ensure homelessness prevention is adopted by all Depts and is featured in annual service plans. | Corporate adoption has been enthusiastic and long standing. Individual councillors have been proactive and supportive in their commitment to address the current crisis and recognise the efforts within departments to provide effective solutions |
|--|---|---|

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | <p>within the Rapid Rehousing program. A universally positive response from the wider community council members provided encouragement for front line staff and management alike.</p> |
| | <p>Educate all Members in relation to Homelessness prevention and the Homes4U Scheme</p> | <p>Engagement with members via departmental visits is an established and encouraged activity. This enables awareness of pressures and issue resolution via face-to-face discussions. A broad ranging program of community council presentations is expected to form a regular process of awareness raising and information sharing.</p> |