



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

18th DECEMBER 2018

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2018-2022

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek approval for the Rhondda Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022 prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the feedback in respect of the Draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022 from the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on the 6th November 2018 and the actions taken in response, as detailed in paragraph 6.4.
- 2.2 Approve the Rhondda Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022 (attached as Appendix 1).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to undertake a homelessness review for its area. Based on the findings of that review, there is a further duty to formulate and adopt a Homelessness Strategy that will prevent homelessness and ensure suitable accommodation and satisfactory support is available for people who are or who may become homeless.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 New homelessness legislation in Wales became operational on the 28th April 2015 via Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This Act

placed new duties on Local Authorities to help anyone seeking housing advice and assistance, with an emphasis on prevention of homelessness via early intervention to tackle the causes of homelessness in a strategic and co-ordinated way.

- 4.2 Homeless prevention is defined as an intervention on the part of a service that enables a person who is threatened with homelessness to either remain in their current accommodation or to make a planned move to alternative suitable housing which is available for their occupation for at least 6 months.
- 4.3 The Act requires all Welsh Local Authorities to carry out a review of homelessness for their area and formulate and adopt a Homelessness Strategy by the end of 2018, with a new Homelessness Strategy every fourth year thereafter.
- 4.4 Welsh Government introduced a national performance indicator (PI) that each Local Authority has to report on annually to give some measure of how effective the new legislation is in preventing homelessness across Wales. This PI asks Councils to calculate “the percentage of clients (who are confirmed to be at risk of homelessness within the next 56 days) who have their homelessness successfully prevented following advice and assistance from the Council”. In 2017/18, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC’s performance was 75%, ranking us as the second highest performing Council in Wales in respect of this measure. This compares with a performance of 63% in 2016/17 and 49% in 2015/16.

5. REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS IN RCT

- 5.1 The review of our current homelessness services in RCT highlights how the Council has a very well developed and established multi agency approach, introduced prior to the new homelessness legislation. This includes help to prevent homelessness, ensuring suitable advice and assistance for people who are homeless and that satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless.
- 5.2 RCT provides a comprehensive housing advice and information service through our Housing Solutions Team based at the Housing Advice Centre in Sardis House, Pontypridd, ensuring a preventative, person centred and outcome focused approach to those who contact the service. This includes a key worker support service to help clients remain in their current home or find alternative accommodation.
- 5.3 Demand for homelessness services is increasing and the Council has a statutory duty to assist all persons who present as homeless or who are threatened with homelessness. In 2017/18, 764 households were

threatened with homelessness and contacted the Council for support. This represents an increase of 34% compared to 2016/17.

5.4 The legislation also places a duty on the Council to provide accommodation where individuals are accepted as homeless and in priority need. Due to the improved focus on the prevention agenda, more people are offered advice and assistance before they become homeless and can be referred to preventative services. This has enabled the numbers of households accepted as homeless to remain relatively static over the last two years, even though there has been an overall increase in demand for preventative services. The review highlighted the causes of homelessness are varied and complex but the three main reasons for being accepted as homeless in RCT over the last three years are:

1. Loss of rented or tied accommodation;
2. Parents unwilling to accommodate;
3. Breakdown of relationship due to violence.

5.5 The review highlights a range of specialist services that support the homelessness work, in particular:

1. There are specialist Mental Health workers co-located with the Housing Solutions Team to provide support to clients with a mental health need and deliver services to co-ordinate housing advice in The Royal Glamorgan Hospital Mental Health Unit.
2. The Council's Supporting People Team leads on commissioning all support services and ensures services are focused on early intervention and prevention as well as helping people live independently in their own homes and communities.
3. The Council, through Supporting People, commissions 93 units of accommodation for a range of client groups, including young people and those with a substance misuse and mental health need.
4. Rough sleeper numbers in RCT are very low and the Street Smart service commissioned by the Council in partnership with Adref assists any rough sleepers with access to essential facilities and advice.
5. The Council has reviewed the Housing Allocation scheme for access to social housing and along with Homefinder partners have implemented the Choice Based Lettings process to allow applicants for social housing to bid for properties, giving more choice and transparency when allocating social housing to those in greatest housing need. The new allocation Policy also ensures priority is given to ex-service personnel making an application for social

housing, including families who have to leave their accommodation because their husband, wife or civil partner died in service.

5.6 The review highlighted that although there are a wide range of prevention services across RCT that are working well, there are areas where more work is required to address need:

- There are limited services for male victims of domestic abuse.
- A high proportion of clients who present as homeless have complex needs with substance misuse and mental health problems increasing.
- Bed and breakfast accommodation is still used to place young people and those with a mental health need.
- There is a shortage of single person accommodation across RCT.
- Access to suitable affordable housing is difficult, particularly one bed single person accommodation.
- Demand for social housing is very high.
- There is a need to make better use of the private rented sector.
- A lack of specialist accommodation with support for young people.

5.7 The Homelessness Strategy 2018-22 (Appendix 1) has been developed in response to the findings of the review and outlines the strategic objectives which the Council, assisted by partners and stakeholders will strive to achieve over the next four years. Detailed actions have been identified under each of the three key objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness from occurring, wherever possible, therefore reducing homelessness.
- **Objective 2:** Ensuring that appropriate support and accommodation, including temporary and emergency accommodation, is available to meet the needs of homeless and potentially homeless people.
- **Objective 3:** Ensuring people with housing support needs have these fully assessed and have access to services to maintain independent living.

6. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

6.1 In undertaking the review of homelessness, the Council consulted with service users at the Housing Advice Centre and clients in temporary accommodation to get views on their experiences of what works well in homeless services in RCT and what barriers they faced when seeking support. In total, 24 clients shared their opinions over a four week period and the comments below illustrate the main themes from the feedback:

Positive: *“very helpful at Sardis House”; “to be honest all worked well”; “no problems, got my key worker”; “helped me a lot ,bidding for properties was easy”; “helpful staff explained options well so I understood”; “what works – support worker”*

Negative: *“long waiting time to be seen”; “personal issues discussed on reception”; “more contact from Housing Officer needed as situation is stressful”; “more supported accommodation needed”; “More affordable housing”*

6.2 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires local authorities to consult with such relevant stakeholders, including voluntary organisations, as it considers appropriate in relation to their proposed Homelessness Strategy. Such a consultation was undertaken between the 1st October and the 9th November, a period of 6 weeks. The Draft Strategy was sent to a range of organisations including the following:

- Registered Social Landlords operating in RCT
- Interlink
- Shelter Cymru
- Tai Pawb
- Cwm Taf University Health Board
- South Wales Police
- RCT 50+ forum
- RCTCBC- Housing Strategy
- RCTCBC- Equalities and Diversity Team
- RCTCBC- Adults and Children’s Services Teams

6.3 Nine detailed responses were received to the consultation. The feedback was broadly supportive of the review content and the strategic objectives and the document was considered to be very clear and well structured. Other specific comments can be summarised as follows:

- The good working relationships fostered by the local authority with housing partners are undersold.
- Additional actions to develop projects that sustain tenancies should also be added as well as actions to prevent or mitigate impact on individuals of possession proceedings.
- There is a need to strengthen the strategic links between this and other strategic plans. The recent funding announcements for a single housing grant should also be included.
- The good work being done in relation to victims of domestic abuse and to commission specialised support services was welcomed.
- The needs of 16+ young people cannot be met by using bed and breakfast accommodation and improved housing options must be

explored. Shelter Cymru in particular asked the Council to stop using bed and breakfast accommodation for any 16+ clients.

- The impact of welfare reform should be kept under constant review to ensure any actions required to mitigate impact are taken by the Council and partners.
- There is a need to develop a detailed action plan to ensure delivery and monitoring of progress against the Strategy.
- Health Partners should be more involved with improving services for people with mental health and substance misuse needs in particular.
- An Executive Summary and glossary of projects on offer should be produced to ensure the document is easily understood by all audiences, in particular our service users.

6.4 The Draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-22 was subject to scrutiny by the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on the 6th November 2018. At that meeting, Members broadly welcomed the document and considered it to be comprehensive. The Strategy and the objectives set out were supported with specific comments made as follows:

- There was concern at the lack of emergency accommodation for young people and a welcome for the review of temporary accommodation use that is being undertaken.
- Services for people with mental health issues should be improved given the rise in clients presenting with that need.
- Welfare reform and changes to benefits have had a negative impact on many communities and changes with universal credit will exacerbate these. Members wish to see actions that help mitigate impact for tenants.
- The moves to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for all client groups were welcomed and members sought reassurance that the impact on communities from the use of such accommodation for challenging clients were fully considered by officers prior to making placements.
- Members welcomed actions to be delivered with RSL partners to sustain tenancies, particularly for individuals with complex needs.
- There was concern about the lack of small unit accommodation in the housing stock and a request that the needs of this strategy inform the local housing market assessments undertaken by the Council and future housing investment priorities developed with RSLs.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken. The assessment identified that although the Strategy does not have an adverse impact on any particular group, information regarding homeless people with certain protected characteristics is not available

making a full evaluation of impact difficult. The key action going forward as part of the Strategy is, therefore, to improve monitoring in relation to black and minority ethnic groups, people with a learning disability, all groups within the sexuality strands and all groups within the religious strand.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 From the 1st April 2019 the Flexible Funding Grant from Welsh Government will be replaced by a new two grant approach i.e. the Children and Communities Grant and the Housing and Support Grant. The latter will create a ring fenced grant incorporating Supporting People, Homelessness Prevention Grant and Rent Smart Wales Enforcement funding. This funding will assist in the delivery of many of the actions identified in this Strategy. Other funding streams such as the Social Housing Grant from Welsh Government support delivery of increased social housing provision in the County Borough.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 Section 50 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 states:

(1) A local housing authority must (periodically, as required by this Section)-

- (a) carry out a homelessness review for its area, and*
- (b) formulate and adopt a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review.*

(2) The authority must adopt a homelessness strategy in 2018 and a new homelessness strategy every fourth year after 2018.

- 9.2 Section 51 of the Act relates to Homelessness reviews and states:

(1) A homelessness review under section 50 must include a review of—

(a) the levels, and likely future levels, of homelessness in the local housing authority's area;

(b) the activities which are carried out in the local housing authority's area for the achievement of the following objectives (or which contribute to their achievement)—

- (i) the prevention of homelessness;*
- (ii) that suitable accommodation is or will be available for people who are or may become homeless;*
- (iii) that satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless;*

(c) the resources available to the authority (including the resources available in exercise of functions other than its functions as local

housing authority), other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons for such activities.

9.3 Section 52 of the Act relates to Homelessness strategies and states:

(1) A homelessness strategy under section 50 is a strategy for achieving the following objectives in the local housing authority's area—

(a) the prevention of homelessness;

(b) that suitable accommodation is and will be available for people who are or may become homeless;

(c) that satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless.

(2) A homelessness strategy may specify more detailed objectives to be pursued, and action planned to be taken, in the exercise of any functions of the authority (including functions other than its functions as local housing authority).

(3) A homelessness strategy may also include provision relating to specific action which the authority expects to be taken—

(a) by any public authority with functions which are capable of contributing to the achievement of any of the objectives mentioned in subsection (1), or

(b) by any voluntary organisation or other person whose activities are capable of contributing to the achievement of any of those objectives.

(4) The inclusion in a homelessness strategy of any provision relating to action mentioned in subsection (3) requires the approval of the body or person concerned.

(5) In formulating a homelessness strategy the authority must consider (among other things) the extent to which any of the objectives mentioned in subsection (1) can be achieved through action involving two or more of the bodies or other persons mentioned in subsections (2) and (3).

(6) A homelessness strategy must include provision relating to action planned by the authority to be taken in the exercise of its functions, and specific action expected by the authority to be taken by public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons within subsection (3), in relation to those who may be in particular need of support if they are or may become homeless, including in particular—

(a) people leaving prison or youth detention accommodation,

(b) young people leaving care,

(c) people leaving the regular armed forces of the Crown,

(d) people leaving hospital after medical treatment for mental disorder as an inpatient, and

(e) people receiving mental health services in the community.

(7) A local housing authority must keep its homelessness strategy under review and may modify it.

(8) Before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy a local housing authority must consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as it considers appropriate.

10 LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

10.1 Homelessness is a key national priority as demonstrated by the Welsh Government Ten Year Homelessness Plan (2009-2019). This strategy, therefore, supports that national agenda as well as local priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan and Single Integrated Plan. Homelessness services are person centred and are, therefore, wholly consistent with the People Priority of the Council which seeks to ensure that people are able to maintain independent and positive lives. Many of the actions in the Strategy will also support the Place priority of the Single Integrated Plan which aims to ensure that in RCT we “create neighbourhoods where people are proud to work and live”.

10.2 The Strategy embraces an early intervention and preventative approach to homelessness and outlines a medium to long term commitment to improving the services and housing options available to people who are or are at risk of being homeless. The Strategy has been developed following a review which involved service users as well as partners in formulating the objectives and key actions. The strategy can only be delivered collaboratively with our partners and stakeholders and its success requires an integrated approach over the four years of the strategy. The strategy is, therefore, made in full consideration of the sustainable development principles. The strategy will also support the Council to contribute to four of the seven well-being goals, namely:

1. A more equal Wales
2. A prosperous Wales
3. A Wales of cohesive communities
4. A healthier Wales

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 The homeless review found that our existing services and prevention activity have helped deliver effective results in the face of increasing demands on services. It is anticipated there will be further increasing demands on Housing Advice, Homelessness and Supporting People services going forward.

11.2 The Homelessness Review and the Strategy developed ensure the Council discharges its obligations under Section 50 of the Housing

(Wales) Act 2014. Should the recommendation to approve the Homelessness Strategy be supported, the key strategic objectives will allow the Council to meet its statutory duties to homeless people and to prevent homelessness in accordance with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and build on the good work already in progress.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2018-2022

Background Papers

Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Meeting - 6th November 2018

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