



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021-22

HEALTH AND WELL BEING SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE

22nd NOVEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, PUBLIC
HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY
SERVICES

Agenda Item No. 5

**Progress made by Community
Housing in relation to the Rhondda
Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy
Action Plan 2018-2022**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report will update members of the committee with the progress made by the Housing Department in relation to the RCTCBC Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2018 -2022.
- 1.2 The report also outlines the significant ongoing pressure on the Housing Solutions Service and support services resulting from the pandemic and the additional actions that have been taken.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members

- 2.1 Scrutinise the content of the report and comment on the progress made to date.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 placed a statutory requirement on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness services and develop 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.

The Rhondda Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2018 – 2022 set out its vision for Rhondda Cynon Taf where homelessness is prevented and if and where it does occur people are supported to secure accommodation and support as part of the below objectives.

3.2 Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2018 – 2022 Objectives

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

3.3 Homelessness Duties

- 3.3.1 The Housing Wales (Act) 2014 places duties on local authorities to help anyone seeking housing advice and assistance.

The specific duties are:

- **Duty to Provide Advice and Assistance:** The Council has a duty to provide advice and assistance to anyone including persons from abroad. For rough sleepers this includes outlining the various accommodation options available, as well as support to access relevant benefits.
- **Duty to Prevent Homelessness:** The Council is required to work with eligible clients to try and prevent homelessness or secure alternative accommodation. For rough sleepers this may include facilitating mediation with family members or addressing issues such as rent arrears.
- **Duty to Help to Secure Accommodation:** Where homelessness cannot be prevented, the Council must assist **all eligible** households to find suitable alternative accommodation. This may include assisting access into the private rented sector, or supported housing for those deemed vulnerable, as defined by the legislation.

3.4 Challenges arising from the Pandemic

- 3.4.1 The Covid 19 pandemic has presented an extraordinary challenge for the homelessness sector following the removal of the Priority Order and the new duty to secure accommodation to all individuals deemed to be homeless.
- 3.4.2 There has been a downward trend in 2021/22 for homelessness presentations for households with children due primarily to the eviction ban. However, there are higher numbers of single people presenting as homeless with the main reasons identified as due to 'Breakdown of Relationship with Family and Friends' and 'People leaving Prison'.

This is particularly relevant to male applicants aged 25+ who made up **60%** of homelessness presentations in 2020/21 in comparison to **53%** as at the 7/11/21. This has led to a reduction in prevention and relief outcomes with more applicants owed final duty (help to secure housing) in 20/21 (nearly half of presentations) than 2019/20 (**10%**).

3.4.3 Despite this significant increase in cases triggering the final duty to help secure accommodation, RCT performed significantly better than the Welsh local authority average.

3.5 Temporary Accommodation Placement

3.5.1 The change in legislation has led to **696 clients placed in bed and breakfast in 2020/21, a 64% increase when compared to 424 in 2019/2020**. Over **55%** of clients placed in B+B currently would not have been offered a temporary accommodation placement prior to the pandemic. This additional case load has placed additional pressure on frontline staff and services including the housing register.

3.5.2 Alongside the growth in demand, there has been a significant increase in the complexity of cases presenting as homeless with the most common reason for priority housing need being mental health. (**32%**).

4. HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN PROGRESS

4.1 The RCT Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2022 is nearing the end of its final year. During this time good progress has been made towards completing the actions and a number have already been achieved, despite the significant and on-going challenges faced this year in delivering effective homelessness services. The pandemic has enabled the Housing Solutions Team to re-evaluate work practice linked with the increasing number of single person applications and the more challenging client complexities linked with substance misuse and mental needs.

4.2 The COVID-19 pandemic has positively impacted on work processes for example the moratorium on evictions which resulted in a decrease in our homeless prevention applications between 2019/20 and 20/21 for households with children.

4.3 We have increased our housing led solutions and early intervention and prevention arrangements including Rapid Rehousing, extending outreach provision and enhanced collaboration across sectors and other council departments to address wider support needs.

4.4 Working in a collaborative way has also been essential to our new ways of working to achieve positive outcomes for our most vulnerable homeless service users.

4.5 **ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVE 1 - Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness from occurring, wherever possible, therefore reducing homelessness**

4.5.1 Care Leaver Pathway

A new joint working Pathway is being implemented between 16+ Team and to effectively manage referrals and accommodation options for care-leavers in a timely way and avoid “crisis” homelessness and TA placements.

4.5.2 Offender Pathway

In recognition that prison leavers are one of the highest needs for placement in bed and breakfast accommodation in RCT, a dedicated housing solutions officer is now co-located in Pontypridd Probation office to further enhance joint working and timely information sharing arrangements. New working arrangements include a revised referral pathway to provide clear information on the housing and support needs of prison leavers post release helping to divert prison leavers from a B+B placement.

Since March 2021 we have received 124 presentations for Prison Leavers with options Identified for 31 pre-release which included 3 being released directly to supported housing in the borough and 7 accessing supported housing post release.

4.5.3 Not Evicting into Homelessness

We have established a Task and Finish Group with our local registered social landlords with the aim of developing a working protocol by the end of March 2022 to end eviction into homelessness, as result of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour. Many landlords have already developed policies in this area, which will be shared to help develop and promote best practice in preventing homelessness in the social housing sector in RCT.

4.5.4 Tenancy Hardship Grant (THG)

This prevention option provides Welsh Government financial assistance to private rented sector tenants, not in receipt of Welfare Benefits, who have accrued rent arrears as a result financial hardship caused by the Pandemic.

To-date, we have received 30 referrals for THG and rejected eleven due to them not meeting the grant conditions. Two applications have been processed with the remaining applications currently being processed.

4.5.5 Crisis Report

The Housing Solutions Team are currently working with Crisis who are a national charity for homeless people with the aim of identifying why 25% of households who present as homeless in RCT drop out of the system.

This work is also being undertaken with five other Welsh local Authorities with the findings discussed at local authority level and will be fed back as learning points to other local authorities. To date, consultation has been undertaken with the Housing Solution Team and Mangers. An information sharing protocol has also been developed to enable a file audit of homelessness applications to be undertaken for those who have dropped out of the system.

An action plan has been developed with recommendations for 8 quick wins linked with service improvement and design Ideas for longer term service planning including early intervention and prevention work.

4.5.6 Complex Needs Panel

The Housing Solutions Service is also involved with the Serious Neglect Panel (SSNP) and the local multi-agency working arrangements agreed by the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board to provide an escalation process for managing cases of serious self-neglect linked with vulnerable individuals to offer support and prevent loss of accommodation. The SNPP will be chaired by the Local Authority area Adult Safeguarding Manager. The Vice Chair will be the Head of Community Safety and Community Housing.

4.6 **ACTION PLAN 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**

To meet the increasing demand and the new challenges, the Council has worked in partnership with private landlords, the third sector and housing association partners to deliver new and innovative approaches to adapt to the increased demand, changing environment, and the needs of clients.

Site and project development issues have delayed the commissioning of 4 bedspaces of supported accommodation for young people in the Penycraig and 8 bedspaces of supported accommodation for single people in Treherbert. Both projects are due to come online early Spring 2022. Revenue funding has also been identified to commission additional projects based on need when suitable buildings have been identified to support those who are alcohol dependent and young people (aged 16-24).

4.6.1 Enhanced Temporary Accommodation Arrangements

The Council has developed alternative forms of temporary accommodation during the last 18 months, which include shared accommodation managed by a private landlord. We also work with Cartrefi Hafod who provide leased properties in the community which are predominantly used to accommodate households with children

To meet the increased demand for temporary accommodation, we have secured additional bed and breakfast placements throughout RCT utilising WG Funding provided for this purpose. This includes bed blocking 93 rooms to ensure we have the capacity to meet any increased demand over the winter months. In recognition of the unsuitability of this type of temporary accommodation and the increasing number and complexities of individuals, it is important the needs of service users are thoroughly assessed to ensure they can be offered the right services at the right time.

Security arrangements have been agreed and are in place in some of our Bed and Breakfast establishments to help with the management and complexities of individuals placed.

Table 1: Breakdown of Temporary Accommodation Establishments used by RCTCBC,

- **Bed and Breakfast** - 10 Properties / 93 Rooms.
- **Directly with a private sector landlord** – 4 Properties / 18 Rooms.
- **Hostel and emergency bed (Young People)** – 11 bedspaces.
- **Hostel (Single people 18+)** – 12 bedspaces.
- **Private sector accommodation (leased)** – 22 Properties.

- 5 Bed = 1
- 4 Bed = 1
- 3 Bed = 11
- 2 Bed = 6
- 1 Bed = 3

4.6.2 Social Letting Agency

The Social Letting Agency (SLA) was established during the pandemic following approval of £129k Welsh Government grant funding to work in partnership with private landlords, to help develop affordable housing options in the private rented sector for homeless people.

The new team is made up of a Team Leader post and two Housing Officers who are based within the Housing Solutions service.

The current housing market and the high demand for private rented accommodation outstripping supply, has meant progress in attracting landlords to the scheme has been slower than expected. However, the team have made many useful landlord contacts and are an important link between the Housing Solutions Team helping where possible to secure private rented accommodation particularly for households with children.

The WG National Rollout of the SLA planned for early later this year will offer enhanced financial incentives for landlords particularly in respect of grants and flexibility on the application of the 10% charge to landlords, as part of their rental payment set at the Local Housing Allowance rate. It is hoped the new arrangements, will offer a more attractive package to landlords who are currently enjoying a very buoyant housing market led by high demand for private rented accommodation and people who can afford to pay market rents.

4.6.3 Supported Accommodation

The Council commissions various types and range of accommodation-based support services available for single homeless people. The schemes specialise in support for those with mental health, substance misuse and offending behaviour. In total there are 102 bedspaces funded by Housing Support Grant (HSG) in RCT to deliver specialist supported accommodation and help prepare people for independent living.

Additional HSG funding made available to all 24/ 7 commissioned projects this financial year will ensure the right level of staffing resources to meet the complex needs of client's currently being referred for some supported accommodation.

Access to all supported accommodation projects is managed through the Single Point of Access (SPA) with a Multi-agency panel overseeing referrals in to supported accommodation project. As from the 1st April 2021 over 1000 applications for a housing related support service have been received and processed by the Housing Support Grant Team with 82 single homeless people assisted to access a supported accommodation project and others offered support appropriate to their needs.

4.7 **ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVE 3: Ensuring people with housing support needs have these fully assessed and have access to services to help sustain independent living.**

4.7.1 Rough Sleeping

Incidents of rough sleeping are very low across many of our towns in Rhondda Cynon Taf and we do not experience the levels of entrenched rough sleepers as seen in many of the big cities.

Most experiences of rough sleeping are usually associated with the client not wishing to engage with support or being asked to leave their temporary accommodation placement due to unacceptable behaviour.

The Outreach Service based in Pontypridd and currently funded by Housing Support Grant is currently under review with the aim of expanding the service to provide a wider multi agency response in partnership with Probation, Dyfodwl and South Wales Police. This will help respond to the wider issues being experienced for example in Pontypridd Town Centre, which include street drinking, anti- social behaviour, and incidences of begging by clients known to local services.

4.7.2 Complex Needs

We recognise the increase in the number of homelessness presentations where the lead need is mental health, as well as a significant number of these presentations having co-existing substance misuse related needs. The Council in partnership with Area Planning Board (APB) Cwm Taf University Health Board, Bridgend County Borough Council and Merthyr County Borough Council have developed a Mental Health and Substance Misuse Outreach Health Team. This is an exciting new project offering medical and support interventions to those individuals placed in all forms of temporary accommodation and those assisted by the RCT Housing First Project.

The team is made up of:

- Administrative support.
- Independent Domestic Violence Advocate.
- 2x Co-occurring Support Workers (Barod).
- A specialist Substance Misuse Nurse.
- A specialist Mental Health Nurse.
- A General Practice Nurse.
- 4 x Trauma Councillors.

This project offers direct 121 support for service users with mental health and substance misuse issues ensuring they have access to outreach crisis intervention support and are referred to appropriate agencies. Additional work is ongoing to provide additional outreach services such as podiatry and dentistry.

Please see Table 1 below which outlines the referral reasons to the Outreach Health Project as at the 29th September 2021.

Table 1 Outreach Health Project

Reason for Referral	Number of Referrals (%)
Mental Health & Substance Misuse issues overlapping	54 (75%)
Difficulty engaging in generic services / fallen out of generic services for Mental Health and/or Substance Misuse	35 (48.6%)
High Risk individual with severe mental health / heavy substance misuse / high risk due to substance misuse & medication	27 (37.5%)
Only mental health support requested	18 (25%)
Physical health need	20 (27.8%)

4.7.3 RCT - Housing First

The RCT Housing First Project is an initiative to help those with high complex support needs and chaotic lifestyles who cannot break the cycle of homelessness.

The project is a partnership with local registered social landlords and support provider Pobl to provide an alternative accommodation and support model, by placing people directly into properties with no preconditions offering an independent living solution with intensive wrap around support.

The Housing First Team received additional funding this year to provide additional staffing resources, to allow an increase in referrals and to develop a pilot a project with registered social landlord partners for complex individuals living in social housing who may be at risk of losing their tenancies.

This will aim to prevent homelessness for our most complex cohort of individuals by maintaining tenancies through reducing the need for alternative accommodation and for a temporary accommodation placement.

Housing First Data as from the 1st April 2021 – 31st October 2021

- There are **36** people currently on scheme, with **4** new referrals received during October 2021, bringing the total for accessing the scheme since the beginning to **60**.
- The number of new Housing First tenancies started during October was **1**, bringing the total to **28**.
- **19** people (**52.8%**) on scheme are maintaining tenancies at the end of October 2021.
- **9** people (**25%**) on scheme are not residing at their tenancy at end of October 2021, due to prison/custodial sentence (**7**), hospital admission (**1**) and rehabilitation (**1**). These individuals are still being supported where they are residing.
- **10** people on scheme are not sustaining tenancies and are being supported via outreach.
- **8** are residing in emergency/B&B accommodation; and
- **2** are currently in prison but have NFA (no fixed abode) once they are released.

4.7.4 Short Term Offender Project

This is a new Housing Support Grant funded initiative in partnership with Kaleidoscope Probation and Her Majesty's Prison Service. This project will work with our most persistence repeat offenders who are often subject to short term sentences i.e., those

who are sentenced to less than 12 months in custody with the aim of providing one-to-one-person centred face to face support whilst in Prison, at the gate and wherever they are placed. The aim of the project is offer positive outcomes for repeat offenders, which include breaking the cycle of homelessness through harm reduction, diversionary activities and signposting to appropriate services. The project has received endorsement from the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Offender Management Group.

4.7.5 Cwm Taf Healthy Partnership C4c Wales

This is a more recent innovative partnership between Community Housing and Public Health Wales and Cwm Taf University Health Board and will explore how Housing and Health are intimately intertwined and work towards improved housing/ health partnership arrangements. This will aim to improve outcomes for residents/ clients/ patients through development of a mechanism to share, interpret and use data for action across partners in relation to housing and Health. This will lead to a better understanding of the services we need to commission to address the health and support needs of our vulnerable client groups.

5. **UP-DATE ON REGIONAL PROJECT DEVELOPMENT- HOMELESS AND HOUSING SUPPORT GRANT**

5.1 In addition to projects aligned to the RCT Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan, the service works in collaboration with Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend Councils through the Regional Housing Collaborative Committee. This is delivering additional Projects that benefit residents and service users in RCT.

5.2 LGBTIQ+ Specialist Project

A team of consultants are working under the direction of support providers Llamau's Management Team and in close partnership with the Housing Support Grant & Homelessness Teams in Bridgend CBC Merthyr CBC and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. The project will evidence the level of regional need and provide strategically relevant research in order to identify the potential needs and value of progressing with the development of a LGBTIQ+ specialist, regional project.

5.3 BME Scoping and Development

This regionally commissioned project will scope the needs of the BME population in Cwm Taf Morgannwg specifically for those experiencing Harmful Cultural Practices, alongside Housing related support needs. The project also provides specialized support and signposting to BME victims who are threatened by or at risk of Domestic Abuse, forced marriages, honour-based violence, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Both the above projects will provide regular update documents to HSG leads and the Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group (RHSCG). A final report will include recommendations for the potential development of an appropriate service designed to meet the needs of the specific client group for completion 31st March 2022 and to inform future local and regional commissioning arrangements.

6. LOOKING FORWARD - CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 6.1 Despite the work undertaken to date and the additional funding made available during the pandemic, here remains ongoing challenges post March 2022. These include:
- The significant pressure on temporary accommodation and high number of individuals placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
 - People remaining in temporary and supported accommodation longer than necessary due to limited move on housing options.
 - Meeting the housing and support needs of a small cohort of homeless individuals with high complex needs.
 - The possible removal of the WG Hardship Fund as from 1st April 2022 and the uncertainty of the medium to long term impact of the pandemic on homelessness and housing services.
 - Identifying suitable locations and buildings for the development of specialist projects.
 - Recruitment and retention within support sector of high- quality staff linked with uncertainty over funding and short- term contracts.
- 6.2 The current buoyant housing market is leading to higher demand and contributing to the lack of permanent accommodation options in both the social and private rented sectors. This remains an ongoing issue in being able to deliver long-term, holistic approaches to supporting those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- 6.3 Looking to the long term, the development of the Needs Statement and Housing Support Programme Strategy currently being developed by an Independent Consultant will be presented to Cabinet early in the new year for consideration. This will replace the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2018 -2022 and provide a new action plan based on the findings and recommendations of the needs assessment and the subsequent development of a “Statement of Need” for the period 2022 -2026.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The Council has made significant progress in delivering the actions identified by the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2022, in spite of the tremendous pressures faced by the service during the past 18 months. This has been possible through effective commissioning and partnership working plus the use of innovative new approaches to address the needs of our clients, particularly those with complex needs. The Housing Needs Assessment currently being completed will fully assess the current and emerging needs of our clients and recommend a new strategic direction for the Council which, if supported by Cabinet, will form the basis of the forward plan for Homelessness and Housing Support Services from 2022-26.