



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020-21

16th MARCH 2021

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

**PROGRESS WITH THE
HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 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 Service in relation to the RCTCBC Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022 and the Action Plan supporting that Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 2.1 Note the information contained within this report.
2.2 Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 took effect on the 27th April 2015 and placed a number on new duties on local authorities in respect of homelessness which included:
- Provision of advice and assistance to anyone threatened with homelessness;
 - Provide appropriate help and support to any homeless person to help secure a suitable home;

- New powers to local authorities to discharge their homelessness duty into the private rented sector.
- 3.2 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has changed the way local authorities tackle homelessness, with aim is to create a safety net to ensure no-one is turned away without help.
- 3.3 Section 50 of the Act also required local authorities to undertake a homelessness review to produce a homelessness strategy which sets how the Council, in partnership with other stakeholders, would address the prevention of homelessness.
- 3.4 The Rhondda Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2018 – 2022 sets out its vision for Rhondda Cynon Taf where homelessness is prevented if and where it does occur, people are supported to secure accommodation and support as part of the below objectives.

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.

Homelessness Applications

- 3.5 The Covid-19 pandemic triggered no immediate overall increase in homelessness applications. Most individuals who presented as homeless required interim accommodation which triggered a surge in Bed and Breakfast placements. This was particularly relevant for single homeless people following the emergency measures put in place by Welsh Government to protect people at risk of rough sleeping.
- 3.6 Single people aged 25 and over account for 70% of all homelessness applications and placement in Bed and Breakfast accommodation in RCT. The main reason for homelessness from the 1st April 2020 to date is breakdown of relationship with family and friends, which has impacted on the number of households successfully prevented from homelessness.
- 3.7 Due to unprecedented demand, we have experienced a 29% increase in the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in 2020/21 with **701** households placed in 2019/20 and **659** as at 1/03/21.
- 3.8 Both Storm Dennis and the pandemic have had a significant impact on our homelessness service in 2020/21, increasing service demand for both temporary and permanent accommodation. It has also become harder to place homeless households in both the social housing and the private rented sector, largely due to the impact of

restrictions creating challenges for housing providers to prepare voids for re-occupation and delays in progressing applications for housing.

Progress and Update on Homelessness Strategy 2018 -2022

3.9 The RCT Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2022 is going into its final year. During the last two years, progress has been made towards completing the actions and a number have already been achieved, despite the significant and on-going challenges faced since March 2020 in delivering effective homelessness services.

3.10 **Objective 1: Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness from occurring, wherever possible, therefore reducing homelessness**

(a) Review of Personal Housing and Support Plans and Homelessness Decision Letters

To ensure our frontline service is responsive and co-ordinated to meet the needs of service users. We have worked closely with Shelter Cymru who carried out a consultation exercise with our Housing Solutions Team and service users to help us simplify the information we provide on our complex homelessness duties. The service developed new step by step guidance that ensures service users can identify what to expect when they make a homelessness application with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. This includes how to review all decisions we make as part of our responsibility to prevent homelessness or secure suitable accommodation.

A review of our decision letters in consultation with service users was also undertaken to ensure an easy to read format and provide a clear understanding of the legal duties owed to them at each stage of their homelessness application in conjunction with the above guide.

(b) IT Arrangements

An upgraded IT Homelessness Module has helped us simplify our assessment process and Housing and Support Plans to ensure they are accurate and can be provided following the outcome of a homelessness assessment. This has helped the client and support worker in understand their housing options and the actions required to help prevent loss of accommodation

(c) Improve Early Intervention and Prevention for those in need of Financial Support

We have also worked closely with our colleagues in Pontypridd Citizens Advice Bureau, DWP and the Housing Benefit Department to continue to maximise the use of Discretionary Housing Benefit Payments as well as ensuring effective pathways are in place for those impacted financially by Covid-19 and the impact of Welfare Benefit Reform. This has included setting up the CAB Financial Project which assisted 500 households with a dedicated housing and welfare advice service for those at risk of homelessness.

3.11 **Objective 2: Ensuring Appropriate Support and Accommodation, including Temporary and Emergency Accommodation, is Available to Meet the Needs of Homeless and Potentially Homeless People**

(a) Rapid Rehousing

To ensure the availability of appropriate accommodation for those with multiple needs, we have been piloting a Housing First programme for adults and young people. This offers accommodation to alleviate the initial housing need for people with very complex needs including drug and alcohol dependence and enduring mental and physical health problems. The programme provides intensive and a high level of outreach support to deal with the longer-term complex needs with the aim of referring service users into other support services.

(b) Housing First for Adults

The project is funded by Welsh Government and based on the principles of Housing First. We have supported 29 single homeless people through this new project. Many have experienced revolving door homelessness and have high complex support needs. It is also pleasing to report the project is currently working with 15 individuals to help them maintain their tenancies within the social housing sector.

(c) Housing First for Youth

The project is a partnership with Llamau who provide intensive support also based on the principles of Housing First for young people aged 16 -24. The project is currently supporting 7 young people including 2 of whom have been offered their first tenancy.

(d) Alternatives to Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

In recognition of the unsuitability of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, we have commissioned 13 units of interim accommodation with a private landlord, as an alternative to Bed and Breakfast for young people aged 16 to 24 and single homeless people.

Additional financial resources made available by Welsh Government under Phase 2 Grant Funding to assist with homelessness pressures impacted by of Covid-19 have helped:

- Provide an additional 4 units of refuge provision for women who have or are experiencing domestic abuse in partnership with Women's Aid RCT;
- The development of an additional 4 units of supported accommodation for young people aged 16 -24 in partnership with support provider Hafan Cymru and Rhondda Housing Association. The project is due online in the summer of 2021 and will be built using Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).

(e) Social Letting Agency

We are currently in the process of setting up a Social Letting Agency with the team recently recruited and in post to assist in increasing housing supply and to work collaboratively with private sector landlords.

It is still very early days but there has been some interest from private landlords helping to discharge our legal duty to 4 households to access accommodation in the private rented sector.

3.12 **Objective 3: Ensuring People with Housing Support Needs Have These Fully Assessed and Have Access to Services to Help Sustain Independent Living**

(a) Multiple and Complex Needs

Plans are well underway to develop a new regional multi- agency Substance Misuse and Mental Health Housing Outreach Team. This collaborative working model will build on the work of the general nurse funded by the Taff Ely GP Cluster and Cwm Taff Health Board in Rhondda Cynon Taf to assist single homeless people who do not engage with traditional health provision. The new model will comprise of two support workers and specialist nurse posts funded by Housing Support Grant and Cwm Taf Health Board. The new service will be co-located with the Housing First Team and will provide a range of health and wellbeing support for vulnerable adults with substance misuse, offending and homelessness profiles.

(b) Staff Training

Training has also taken place with our frontline Housing Solutions Team and Support workers to provide an update on homelessness prevention options, awareness of domestic abuse and homelessness/ housing legislation.

(c) Extending the use of Mediation and support for young people being asked to leave the family home

A programme of mediation between family members and young people has been running for some time and is managed by Llamau. A review of the service has increased staffing resources to two support workers offering support to both the young person and the family helping to prevent homelessness for young people aged 16 -24. The workers also support the young people to return home at any time if they were asked to leave at the time of presenting as homeless.

(d) Domestic Abuse Support for Males

We have put in place housing related support arrangements with Women's Aid RCT to help support males who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse Since the 1st April 2020, 18 males have been supported to remain in their own homes.

(e) Review of Support -Temporary Accommodation

In recognition of the high number of single homeless people placed in temporary accommodation with multiple and complex needs, a review of support arrangements has been undertaken to ensure all residents can access one to one support during their stay in all forms of temporary accommodation.

A more formal and wider review of these support arrangements is planned in 2021/22.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 No financial implications arising from this report as this report is provided for information.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The impact of key policies such as raising the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and suspending evictions have had some impact in preventing homelessness. Despite this progress, the pandemic has further exposed the severe shortage of affordable homes.

5.2 Post lockdown, we also expect to see an increase in the levels of homelessness. This will be particularly relevant to people being evicted from the private rented sector and an increase in newly unemployed people made homeless because of the pandemic

5.3 Whilst a considerable amount of work is being undertaken to address the immediate housing and support needs of single homeless people, further work is needed to reduce the number of people placed in bed and breakfast accommodation and explore more sustainable long-term accommodation options.

5.4 It is also vital we work in partnership with Health and our third sector partners to ensure appropriate support services are in place to address needs such as substance misuse and mental health.