

# Task and Finish Group: Housing and Homelessness Provision within the Vale of Glamorgan



New Council temporary accommodation at Court Road, Barry



# Contents

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
1. Foreword from the Chair	2 – 3
2. Executive Summary	3 – 4
3. Recommendations	4 – 5
4. Introduction	5 – 6
5. Background	6 – 7
6. Review Findings	7 – 40
7. Conclusion	40 – 41
8. Glossary of Terms	42 – 43

## Appendices

- A. Members, Support Officers and Other Contributors
- B. Checklist for Scoping
- C. Timetable of Review
- D. List of Meetings of the Task and Finish Group
- E. (i) Homelessness Budgets & E. (ii) Welsh Government Hardship Grant Funded Expenditure: Spend on Block-Booked Hotel B&B Accommodation for Homeless Clients, including Ancillaries breakdown. (For 2020/21 (April 2020 to March 2021) & 2021/22 (April to September 2021)).

## 1. Foreword

It is the case that many local authorities within Wales are facing the challenge of providing housing provision to those citizens presenting as homelessness, which has been exacerbated by the challenges and changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

At present it is estimated that there are 244 households residing in all forms of temporary accommodation within the Vale, including hostels, B&Bs and hotels. Rates of people presenting as homeless remain high at 34 presentations a month on average.

The Council, through its Housing Team and partners have offered considerable help, time and resources in addressing these issues during the pandemic, with much work being done by the Vale of Glamorgan Council and other local authorities in providing solutions to this ongoing issue from the perspective of housing and homelessness provision.

At the meeting of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee on 14th October, 2020, the issue of contingency and forward planning for homelessness and those in temporary accommodation during a 'second wave' of COVID-19 was raised during the presentation of the report on the Coronavirus Recovery Strategy, which led to a recommendation to set up a Task and Finish Working Group to look at the future of Housing and Homelessness Provision, with a further report on this in February 2021 establishing this Group which I was subsequently elected to chair. It was agreed that the scope and timetable of review for the Group be focused on the current, immediate, priorities faced within housing and homelessness provision (regarding allocation, legislation and finance), as these areas could be impacted by any future withdrawal of funding from Welsh Government or elsewhere.

I think I can speak for all Members of the Task and Finish Group when I say that our work has been both interesting and compelling but also at the same time challenging. Interesting and compelling as we consider the provision of homes and accommodation for those presenting as homeless and in need and the various facets of this process, such as housing allocation and support provided by the Council and its partners. But also challenging, due to the potential costs and resources required in order to build on and improve on these processes as well as other limits and constraints on what can be achieved practically.

It was felt by Members at the outset that the Task and Finish Group be more focused on the current, immediate, priorities faced within housing and homelessness provision and in particular, to look at the legal, financial and allocation limits or restraints as well as the direction provided by Welsh Government in terms of policy on homelessness i.e. Rapid Rehousing Transition Planning, but also to look at bolder, 'out of the box' solutions too. As a result, we felt that it was important that our report was measured and realistic and I hope that we have managed to achieve this. As such, whilst there are some specific and important recommendations that can be initiated now, there are other recommendations that focus on the requirement for further work in order to ensure that there is clearer evidence before decisions are made.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Task and Finish Group for their substantial contribution to this report. I would also like to thank the many officers from the Vale of Glamorgan Council who gave up their valuable time to brief the Group. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank the many other people and organisations who also made significant contributions to our work.

Councillor Sandra Perkes

Chair - Task and Finish Group of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee

## **2. Executive Summary**

In reviewing the housing and homelessness provision as part of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's recovery from COVID-19, the Group received evidence from a wide range of sources. This report provides a summary of the Group's approach and the research conducted to inform the review.

The review took in a wide range of evidence and presentations, covering key areas in order to inform the final comments and recommendations from the Group on provision, from allocation priorities around Housing and Homelessness provision, through to its legal and budgetary considerations (particularly in light of the pandemic) as well as information on the provision of help and support for vulnerable and other groups in order to aid them with permanent accommodation and testimony from 'expert' witnesses within the Council and externally concerning housing and homelessness provision.

From the evidence and research gathered, a few key areas were identified that would be crucial to the success of housing and homelessness provision:

- Allocation Priorities: for the Council to review the way homes were allocated to ensure homeless households received a sufficient priority which enabled them to secure permanent accommodation and to seek non-officer input on how to assess the 'reasonableness' for allocating housing, in light of the potential need to house all those presenting as homeless but also to consider existing tenants who wished to transfer to a different property as well as those residents on social housing waiting lists.
- Support and prevention of homelessness: ensuring that an appropriate package of support was in place to help deal with vulnerabilities of various kinds and that people were supported into accommodation and to stay in that accommodation or progress elsewhere, thus breaking the cycle of homelessness.
- Expansion of housing stock (in particular more permanent housing), and the types of accommodation urgently required: the need to continue to focus on sustainable single person accommodation as the main demographic requiring housing and the need to look at best practice by other Local Authorities, greater collaboration with the private sector and for the Council to take an innovative approach on how to increase such housing going forward.

- Funding: for the Council to consider current funding arrangements and to look at possible additional streams of funding from Welsh Government (WG) or other bodies.
- Also, the importance of the legislative framework and guidance or direction provided by Welsh Government would be crucial on how the Council implemented the necessary actions and changes to its housing provision.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 1) That the Council continues to hold 'off the shelf' plans in order to develop temporary accommodation and prioritises as part of its housing development programme the inclusion of new build and the acquisition of existing properties.
- 2) That the Council builds on and develops the 'Housing First' approach towards people who were homeless and other vulnerable groups.
- 3) That the Council ensures greater provision for people who were 'job-ready' in order to help them transition from benefits to employment in order to maintain their current accommodation and to transition to more permanent accommodation if appropriate. This should include looking at increasing the opportunities for tenants to seek employment and apprenticeship opportunities within the various departments of the Council and its services.
- 4) That the Council provides further modular accommodation with intensive, wraparound support, such as seen at the Court Road development.
- 5) That the Council ensures greater provisions for accommodation for older persons (particularly within the rural Vale), in order to increase downsizing opportunities for older tenants occupying large homes and free up that accommodation to be utilised by those persons living in housing that has become unsuitable (including those residents living in temporary and homeless accommodation).
- 6) That the Council undertakes a review of its assets and existing housing i.e., a review of the Council's de-designation strategy in order to increase the supply of single person housing and to look at reviewing previously de-designated units as well as investigating the potential conversion of other properties to types of housing most needed.
- 7) That the Vale of Glamorgan Council investigates at a regional level the potential of collaborating with other Local Authorities to purchase Modern Methods of Construction units, to ensure the most economical use of monies are made for each local authority and to increase the pace and scale of social housing for homeless clients.
- 8) That the Council explore the possibility of accelerating the process between planning for new build social housing sites and move in ready for tenants, i.e., complete the building of such housing units off site. As part of this, the Council should look at examples of best practice in other Local Authorities in Wales and elsewhere.

- 9) That the Council build carbon neutral properties and invest in original stock to bring up to a similar level where able in order to ensure sustainable accommodation and to reduce fuel poverty.
- 10) That the Council considers prioritising local residents during the first phase of housing allocation at rural sites, but then considers allocating such housing to residents elsewhere within the Vale of Glamorgan if there is insufficient demand or priority within the local area itself.
- 11) That the Council reviews the opportunities of expanding the One Stop Shop provision at Holton Road i.e., greater inclusion of 3rd Sector services to complement the work undertaken by Pobl. As part of this, consideration should be given to promoting and publicising the services available to all residents within the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 12) That the Council develops a land disposal protocol which prioritises the disposal of surplus Council owned land for new Council house building in addition to purchasing land within the private market, and further, Council officers liaise with Welsh Government officials regarding surplus public sector land.

#### **4. Introduction**

All five of the Council's Scrutiny Committees in considering their work programmes for 2020/21 were requested to put forward items for consideration for review and the most appropriate forms of scrutiny for each of these, including "task and finish".

At its meeting on the 14th October 2020, the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee, identified housing and homelessness provision as part of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's recovery from COVID-19 as an area that should be reviewed by the Committee and consideration be given to setting up a Task and Finish Work Group in order to achieve this. This recommendation is in line with the Council's adopted Coronavirus Recovery Strategy (min C334 21st September 2020) where an action specifically was agreed to work with partners to sustain the reduction in homelessness achieved during the crisis.

The initial meeting of the Task and Finish Work Group was on 20th April 2021, where the scope and outcomes of the review by the Group were finalised and agreed, with a strong emphasis on the current, immediate, priorities faced within housing and homelessness provision (regarding allocation, legislation and finance), as these areas could be impacted by the eventual withdrawal of Welsh Government (WG) funding for emergency accommodation (such as the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation (B&B)):

- Focus: An examination of housing and homelessness provision as part of the recovery phase ('Phase 2') that the Council will be undertaking due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Objectives and Purpose: the review will look to cover the key areas of current and in the near future housing and homelessness provision and policies – allocation

priorities, emerging legislative and funding challenges or developments – and to offer recommendations on how to approach, implement or to improve on these in order to ensure that temporary and permanent accommodation can continue to be offered to the homeless once WG emergency legislation ends.

- Desired Outcomes: these included –
  - An understanding of the current funding situation of the Council in terms of housing and homelessness provision,
  - To understand the legal status around housing and homelessness provision – what the Council can and cannot do legally in this area once emergency legislation has been removed and what the potential impact of such changes will have on housing and homelessness provision currently in place due to COVID-19.
  - The need to review allocation priorities around housing and homelessness provision and to suggest improvements if required.
  - The need to review, understand and to suggest improvements to the provision of help and support for vulnerable and similar groups in order to aid them with permanent accommodation.
  - The opportunity to review ‘best practice’ from other and/or similar local authorities as well as potential testimony from ‘expert’ witnesses within the Council or externally (such as Shelter Cymru and Citizens Advice Bureau).

Membership of the Group is shown at **Appendix A**, together with Officers of the Council and the many other organisations and people who have made valuable contributions to the review, as well as a full list of the amended scope for the review of Housing and Homelessness Provision and the amended timetable of the Task and Finish Group for its review at **Appendices B and C** respectively. A list of the meetings of the Task and Finish Group is on **Appendix D**.

## **5. Background**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic Homeless provisions were set out within the Housing Wales Act 2014 (HWA 2014) which dictate that a local authority must offer assistance to those who were eligible for assistance (s61) (this generally meaning they are not persons from abroad/subject to immigration control), that they are homeless or facing homelessness within 56 days (s55) they are priority need (s70), and they have a local connection (s80 and 81).

Section 68 of HWA 2014 provides that interim accommodation must be provided if the local authority has reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need for accommodation.

If all of the above were satisfied, then the Local Authority has a duty to accommodate until such time as it can discharge its duty by offering accommodation which is suitable (s75) and available for at least 6 months. Only when the accommodation is unreasonably refused or has been accepted can the duty be discharged (s76)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was recognized by the government that people who were street homeless could not safely shield from the virus nor could they necessarily find places to self-isolate, keep clean etc. It was therefore recommended within the guidance documents which were created, that all persons who were street homeless were automatically to be considered as priority need and eligible for assistance, this included people who were without a local connection and people who may have no recourse to public funds.

In the main the priority need test was no longer a factor in the assessment process.

The Welsh Government have been keen to keep all of those who were accommodated in emergency accommodation from returning to the streets and generally to try to bring homelessness to an end. They have made several public statements pledging this.

In response to the pandemic, the Vale of Glamorgan Council booked emergency accommodation in various hotels across the Vale as the hotels were unable to use their accommodation for tourists as the pandemic prevented social mobilization. It was clear that hotels were likely to want their accommodation back and the Vale have to calculate where to house these people in the long term.

## **6. Review Findings**

During the course of the review, the Group has considered the following:

- Allocation Priorities around Housing and Homelessness Provision.
- Legal Overview of the Homelessness Process and the Effects of the Pandemic on that Process.
- The Current Budgetary Situation for Housing and Homelessness Provision.
- Update(s) on the provision of help and support for vulnerable and other groups in order to aid them with permanent accommodation from:
  - (i) Social Services;
  - (ii) Housing Services; and
  - (iii) Pobl (Housing and Community support provider for the Vale of Glamorgan Council).
- Overview of possible options to expand temporary and permanent accommodation in the short term.
- Update(s) and testimony from 'expert' witnesses within the Council and externally concerning housing and homelessness provision / support from:
  - (i) Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale;
  - (ii) Shelter Cymru; and
  - (iii) The Private Sector team (Vale of Glamorgan Council).

- Update from the Council's Operational Manager Public Sector Housing on possible options for addressing housing and homelessness provision.
- Overview / update from Welsh Government (WG) representatives on the work currently on-going within WG in relation to re-housing initiatives and associated strategies, etc.
- Update from the representative of Newydd Housing Association.
- Update from the Council's Section 106 Officer.
- Summary of the Group's Work and Assessment of the Themes and Issues Raised.
- Final review of the report from the Task and Finish Group on Housing and Homelessness Provision within the Vale of Glamorgan.

### **Allocation priorities**

During the early stages of the review, the Group received an overview of the current situation, challenges and issues faced in terms of allocation around housing and homelessness provision.

The structure of the Housing Solutions services within the Council was divided into three areas, each with a distinct role:

1. The Housing Solutions service. This dealt directly with homelessness including offering advice, support and resolution of this as well as more preventative measures;
2. Temporary Accommodation provision. This included the management of the Ty Iolo Hostel, as well as providing temporary accommodation both directly (such as through the Court Road Depot development using modern methods of construction (MMC)) and other existing Council housing stock and indirectly (such as through private sector landlords and Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation located at Tadross in Holton Road, Barry, Holiday Inn Express and Celtic International Hotel at Rhoose); and
3. Homes4U service, which, in conjunction with partners in the Registered Social Landlord (RSL) sector (such as Hafod and Wales & West Housing) focused on the allocation of homes to residents within the Vale of Glamorgan. The service's use of a Common Housing Register with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) meant there was no need for people to complete separate forms to apply for housing. Unlike other Authorities, lettings were based on a choice-based system and not points. Allocation of housing was based on banding by colour and need / priority (Gold = highest most urgent need (such as excessive overcrowding, though to Silver = medium need and finally Bronze = lowest or no direct housing needs identified). This was also reflected in the data provided on the numbers and proportion of people waiting on the Homes4U waiting list (6,396 households waiting overall, with 60% being in the Bronze band, and only small percentages waiting in the Gold and Silver bandings).

There had been an increase in the use of temporary accommodation over the last year (a 700% increase in light of the pandemic), with 90% of people in such accommodation

being single people and a high percentage of complex cases e.g. vulnerable, mental health, drug and alcohol dependant.

The average time spent in temporary accommodation was over a year for single persons (with families moving on quicker).

The Council provided Housing services and solutions in liaison with the private sector (such as Cartrefi Leasing Scheme and the private rented sector), with the Housing Wales Act 2014 allowing the Council to discharge its housing duties into the private sector, due to demand outrunning supply for Council owned properties.

The Housing Solutions service worked on a 'Housing First' approach, which entailed the provision of 'sustainable' housing through, for example, the removal of as many barriers and restrictions to people accessing housing as possible, via close liaison with Supporting People services and RSLs.

Tied in with the above approach was a strong focus on preventing homelessness, such as mediating in landlord or neighbourhood disputes in order to mitigate the risk of removal or eviction of people from homes.

In terms of the Housing Solutions team structure, this was a relatively small team but with wide ranging roles and responsibilities, from Homes4U allocation services to co-ordinating and procuring private rented sector housing stock.

In terms of the scale of homelessness within the Vale, the Authority was seeing (as were other Councils within Wales) significant levels of homelessness, with the true scale somewhat masked by 'hidden' forms of homelessness, such as people 'sofa-surfing';

The Vale's Housing Solutions team had performed extremely well when compared with similar teams elsewhere in Wales in alleviating homelessness.

The pressure on housing provision was overwhelmingly coming from single people, with 55% of Homes4U applicants awaiting one bed properties.

Mention was also made of the ongoing need to provide supported accommodation, such as for victims of domestic abuse, people with complex needs or young people through various bodies (Pobl, Llamau, LD properties and Platffom, etc.) and utilising onsite or 'floating' support services.

The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing also set out the emerging and interconnected issues and questions around housing allocation to the Group for their consideration and comment:

- The increase in homeless presentations and the expansion of those people falling into the priority need categories for accommodation due to the end of the 'intentionality' clause within existing legislation, and in turn,
- There had been an increase in the use of temporary accommodation (such as B&Bs and hotels) but with the underlying risk that such arrangements could come to an end after September 2021 with the possible end of Welsh Government

(WG) funding and the return of tourism; in addition, there were the further demands caused by

- The need to move people on from temporary to more permanent accommodation and the ongoing challenge to try to implement this; and
- The need to provide housing for those people requiring specialist or complex needs; these in turn, raised the questions of:
  - Could the existing allocation policy deal with the above challenges and in particular, help to move large numbers of single people from temporary accommodation to more permanent homes?
  - What types of housing did the Council need to build going forward?
  - How could the Council tap into and maximise fully the capacity of the private sector in order to house its clients and residents?

The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing also stated that there were a number of housing projects / social housing due to come on-stream, involving Housing Associations and the Council. Further builds would come down to a number of factors, such as S.106 funding, and the amount of Social Housing Grant made available to the Vale. However, there were potential challenges to rehousing a large number of single, vulnerable, people within one area or estate whilst at the same time maintaining 'balanced communities'.

On the question raised on the challenge of housing large numbers of single people, those with complex needs and ex-offenders within an estate or community successfully and for them to integrate effectively, it was explained that groups such as ex-offenders recently released from prison were risk assessed and managed via the Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) process, which was a common approach by all Authorities. All Councils had a responsibility to step in and help to house such individuals and groups. Social Services would attend a future meeting, who could explain the process of risk assessing people with needs or other issues when housing them within the community.

On people needing to go back on to the housing list if their personal circumstances changed, for example, if they moved into a single bed house and then started a family, it was suggested that such processes be 'future-proofed' in order to speed up and improve housing allocation. It was explained that in such circumstances, a tenant would have to remain at the property for a year before they could go back on the housing list. Such moves to larger properties would be beneficial as this would free up 1-2-bedroom homes.

### **Legal Overview of the Homelessness Process and the Effects of the Pandemic on that Process**

The Group were given an outline of the relevant legislation around the homelessness process and how this had been impacted by COVID-19 by a Senior Legal Officer.

Pre-pandemic, homeless provisions were set out within the Housing Wales Act 2014 which outlined the eligibility criteria for the Council to provide accommodation to those

people facing homelessness (such as that they were homeless or facing homelessness within 56 days, they were a priority need and they had a local connection). If these criteria were satisfied, then the Council had a duty to accommodate until such time as it could discharge its duty by offering accommodation which was suitable and available for at least 6 months. Only when the accommodation was unreasonably refused or had been accepted could the duty be discharged.

Due to the pandemic, guidance was issued UK-wide for Councils to automatically consider any persons who were street homeless as eligible for help with accommodation even if they had no local connection nor satisfied any of the other pre-pandemic eligibility criteria.

Due to the high costs incurred from enacting the new guidance, WG set up a £10m fund, with the Council using its share to help source extra accommodation, for example, utilising B&Bs and hotels.

Welsh Government (WG) subsequently outlined their desire to prevent a return to street homelessness. This would inevitably place the Council and other Authorities under considerable pressure to meet this desire, both financially and through sourcing accommodation. The Senior Legal Officer reiterated the challenges mentioned previously in the allocation presentation around WG funding coming to an end after September and B&Bs and Hotels wanting their accommodation back once restrictions were lifted. As stated previously, a large number of those homeless / in temporary accommodation were single persons, who, in conjunction with persons presenting as homeless who would have not been eligible previously for housing (such as persons from outside the Vale), were the driving factors for larger numbers of people on the housing waiting lists. This meant the Council would be facing a considerable challenge over funding and housing going forward. However, talks were ongoing with the WG over funding and with the B&B / Hotel owners about the extension of block-booking rooms post-September (this has subsequently been extended in to 2022).

The Council also faced additional legal challenges, including:

- WG had placed a stay on repossession proceedings and evictions for several months. The stay on evictions was still in place but expected to be lifted shortly (the stay on evictions was subsequently lifted on 1st July). This would mean an inevitable rise in the numbers of people presenting as homeless to the Council and asking for assistance.
- WG had also changed the time evictions could be sought by private landlords from 1-3 months to 6 months; they did this using the temporary powers given under the Coronavirus Act 2020. There was a proposal to keep the eviction period permanently extended, which would give people additional time to pay off or otherwise resolve their debts and arrears to landlords. However, this risked putting off some landlords from renting out their properties.

To conclude, the Council currently faced uncertainty in terms of housing legislation, as until the WG made Authorities aware of what they intended to change or extend under

the proposed revised Housing Wales Act, there was no way the Council could adequately plan for dealing with the funding, housing and legal issues that could arise (for example, would the pre-pandemic priority need test for homelessness support come back or not). With all that said, the legislation should come into being in April 2022 and councils should have a better idea on the changes the new legislation would bring prior to that date.

It was asked if the Council could follow the example of Cardiff Council and buy the hotels and B&Bs that the homeless were currently housed in. It was explained that Cardiff Council had bought several hotels and had converted them into 'Assessment Centres'. However, this meant they were not permanent forms of accommodation and the Vale of Glamorgan Council had therefore deemed this solution as inappropriate at this time in order to deal with longer term housing / homelessness provision.

On the Tadross Hotel being a suitable property for the Council to buy and convert into accommodation and if there was any sign of private sector landlords 'pulling back' from renting out properties due to changes in legislation, it was stated that the purchase of the Tadross or other hotels could be a possible option going forward. On the question of landlords, it was explained that although the new legislation's emphasis on tenant rights may put off smaller private landlords due to the additional financial costs, many of the landlords that the Council dealt with operated on a larger scale and could absorb or price in the potential costs incurred around the legislation. Also, none of the Council's landlord partners had raised any concerns around these proposed changes to tenant rights and there had been no evidence of a 'pulling back' by landlords so far.

On what tenants in houses in multiple occupation (HMO) had to pay, in terms of bills and Council Tax, it was explained that the amount charged differed from landlord to landlord, but generally a small service charge of between £5-15 was paid by tenants, with Council Tax usually covered by Housing Benefit.

On the question whether the date for the new Housing Bill to be approved was known yet, and if any information on the content of this Bill could be shared with the Group beforehand, in order that the Group could make recommendations that would be realistic against this new legislation, the Senior Legal Officer replied that it was currently under consultation, in particular around the tenancy agreements themselves and their wording. She added that by October 2021 Authorities should have a better idea on the changes the new legislation would bring. The combination of the ongoing pandemic and the need to look at budgets by WG had delayed the new legislation. With all that said, the legislation should come into being in April 2022. The Officer would share any updates on the legislation with the Group as soon as these became available.

Subsequently, there have been further updates on the legislative situation around housing and homelessness provision:

- It has been established that there is nothing in the new amendments to the Housing Wales Act which amends priority need.

- The Act will make into law (expected on 1st July 2022) that 6-month notice periods are mandatory, and succession will now be able to take place twice and with carers added to the list of people who can succeed a property after the death of a tenant, in addition council tenants will be able to take in lodgers.
- The 6-month notice period has been in place throughout the pandemic under the Covid legislation but will now be brought into law. A notice to quit cannot be given in the first 6 months of a tenancy and then it must be a 6-month notice. This effectively gives every occupier 12 months security before they can be removed.
- On joint tenancies, the new Act will allow one party to give 1 months' notice, but the remaining tenant takes over full rights to the property and it appears they will simply take over the contact and remain in situ despite under occupying the property.
- The additional rules on succession could mean the Council may house a few people who would not necessarily be housed in other circumstances. However, the Council could still downsize them to smaller properties if they are under occupying. The ability under the new tenancy contracts to sublet or take in lodgers could allow people to remain in less affordable properties and also assist in housing people who need single accommodation (accommodation which we have a large shortage at the moment).
- The guidance on priority need remains guidance and good practice. However, now that Wales is to be reduced to a level zero in the pandemic it is assumed (although the Welsh Government have not confirmed) that the requirement to accommodate all homeless persons on public health grounds due to the pandemic will be discontinued. This was never law but was permitted under guidance for public health reasons, which was followed by the Council.
- However, it is generally accepted that the Welsh Government Housing Minister will want as good practice to continue to follow the guidance that Local Authorities should scrap the priority need requirements and accommodate everyone presenting. There have been discussions about bringing this into law and the Minister does have the necessary powers to amend the Housing Act, but it is anticipated this will be undertaken by way of a Homelessness Bill which has yet to be listed on the governments legislative programme.

### **The Current Budgetary Situation for Housing and Homelessness Provision**

The Group was provided, by the Operational Manager Accountancy, with a summary of the current finances behind the staffing and services provided by the Housing Team.

The budgets and funding for Housing Services came from two distinct sources:

1. Housing Revenue Account (HRA), sourced from Council house rents and therefore ringfenced for Council tenants; and
2. General Fund Housing, sourced from non-Council housing revenue, Welsh Government (WG) grants, Council Tax and Housing Benefits.

Figures for Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for staff was also included in the information provided to the Group as well as Gross and Net budget costs.

The Operational Manager Accountancy also advised Members that she could 'drill down' into the figures if required by the Group.

The above figures (plus a further 'drilled down' version) are shown in **Appendix E (i) and E (ii)** of this report.

The WG Hardship Fund figures were shared with the Group for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 periods, which were broken down by the amount used for block booking of hotel accommodation, ancillaries (including security for the hotels, to pay for any minor damage caused by residents and the cost of transporting people to the accommodation via taxis), with the money spent by the Council on this provision being reclaimed via the Fund.

The Officer reiterated the points made previously by officers around the implications of WG funding for temporary accommodation ending in September 2021, hotels and B&Bs wanting their rooms back and uncertainty around changes to housing guidance / legislation and how these could adversely affect Council Housing Funding and housing / homelessness provision.

On the comments made concerning figures for block booking in 2020/21 and 2021/22, the expenditure in the financial year 2020/21 was £1.266m and for the first six-month period of 2021/22 spend was already £1.046m. It was explained that the demand for temporary accommodation had steadily increased during 2020/21 and therefore a higher number of rooms were being purchased in 2021/22.

On the £10m funding provided by WG to 22 Welsh Councils., it was explained that funding had in fact increased from the original £10m in order to keep up with the demand for housing and homelessness provision that Councils needed to make.

On the figures around damage, and how this damage was caused and how this was dealt with. It was stated that such damage was sometimes deliberate, sometimes accidental. Any instances of criminal damage could result in a reprimand, arrest or even eviction, although the Council would still be obligated to house those responsible. Also, there were restrictions on causing deliberate damage within tenancy agreements / conditions, as well as the need to address such behaviour in order to prevent it repeating in future.

On the significant underspend in 2020/21 for the housing budget, this was due to the exceptional circumstances around the pandemic and the underspend would be kept within the Housing budget and used to recruit a Rapid Rehousing Officer in order to bolster the Private Rented Sector Team.

On the plans for and the capacity of the Older People's Village in Penarth, which could help to alleviate the pressure on housing within the Vale over the medium to longer term, it was explained that the Village was at an early concept stage, but once constructed, could help rehouse people to more appropriate accommodation, thereby freeing up housing for those on the waiting list. In terms of capacity 72 units in the extra care scheme (Wales and West Housing Association) would be built and a separate 30 self-

contained units for older people were also being developed by the Council at the location.

As a further update on WG Hardship grant funding, WG have subsequently agreed to fund all hotel accommodation costs for 2021/22 and have confirmed that they will fund the first 6 months costs for 2022/23 and will consider funding costs for the last 6 months of 2022/23 if a robust justification can be presented.

## **Updates on the Provision of Help and Support for Vulnerable and Other Groups in order to aid them with Permanent Accommodation**

### **(i) Social Services**

The Operational Manager Locality Services updated the Group. He explained that Adult Social Services did not provide permanent accommodation, unless it was associated with an individual's care and support needs, but rather supported individuals and families to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible. This was in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Codes of Practice, which upheld the principle of improving the wellbeing of people with caring and support needs as well as carers themselves. The Act could be seen as having two main functions:

1. To support and improve the wellbeing of local citizens, i.e. providing people with information on managing their health or social circumstances and to provide access to low level support services such as those provided by the Third Sector or Homes4U;
2. To provide care and support to individuals, who would otherwise not be able to meet their own wellbeing outcomes, following an assessment.

The majority of contact between people with care and support needs and Social Services was through the Intake and Assessment Teams, although people could also access Adult Services through the Integrated (hospital) Team and the integrated mental health teams. Occasionally people with low level care and support needs who were homeless or at risk of homelessness, would contact the Intake and Assessment Team. The team could offer support through referrals via:

- Low level wellbeing or mental health services, such as through MIND in the Vale.
- The Third Sector 'Broker', and Armed Forces Liaison Officer based in the Council's call centre (C1V) who linked people to support from the Third Sector, which included housing and homelessness support.
- Social workers could also help to connect people to a range of support services in order to help people to become more resilient and independent which could ultimately help with issues and needs around accommodation and avoiding homelessness.

Social Services could offer direct accommodation in very limited circumstances, such as an individual requiring substantial care needs and the need for certain individuals to be placed in residential accommodation or nursing homes. Approximately 10 residential or

nursing home placements were commissioned per week within the Vale of Glamorgan (both elderly persons and others with substantial or complex needs).

On the process around placing a vulnerable person or someone who had complex needs within the community, such as housing them in a block of flats, it was explained that the Housing Team would lead on any such decision here, but Social Services would subsequently offer support to any person with care and other needs who was residing within a block of flats or other housing within the community. It was added that Social Services did not allocate housing in such instances, this would solely be the Housing Team and would be subject to a thorough assessment of a person's needs.

Social Services would act as 'advocates' if their clients experienced any issues around housing with social workers speaking to housing providers or would refer such issues to an independent advocate if there was any perceived conflict of interest.

On the numbers of people moving from social housing to care homes and were people moving into specific types of housing that met their needs (i.e., accommodation for over 55s), over the last five years there had been a gradual decline in people moving into care homes, as people preferred to live in their own homes for as long as possible, a trend which had been exacerbated by the pandemic. However, Social Services could support people who wished to stay in their homes, such as with making adaptations to their accommodation. Many such residents preferred to stay in their current homes but would, if necessary, consider moving to more suitable accommodation if the adaptations did not work.

## **(ii) Housing Services**

The Supporting People Co-ordinator outlined to the Group that the Supporting People Team received £4.7m per year from Welsh Government (WG). This contributed to 4,000 units of support within the Vale of Glamorgan. The aim of the WG here was:

- To prevent homelessness.
- To help maintain a suitable and stable home for residents by helping to build up their capacity to do so.
- To provide access to suitable housing and related services.
- Helping to raise awareness and understanding of housing support.

The Supporting People Team also offered the following areas of support and assisted with a number of different accommodation issues:

- Drop-in support. This normally would involve face-to-face contact with a Housing Officer or support worker dealing with housing issues and related matters, such as financial issues. Such support could offer brief interventions and quick resolutions. Pivotal to this had been the One Stop Shop on Holton Road. However, due to the pandemic, there had been limited physical access

to the building, but alternatives had been provided such as contact and support via telephone.

- Services and support for older persons and independent living such as Golau Caredig; again, contact had been affected by the pandemic, with most support and services having to be conducted via telephone. However, it was anticipated that post-pandemic that such support would again be provided via face-to-face contact at people's homes. The support offered included setting up utilities, applying for blue badges, benefits, etc.
- 'Floating Support'; this involved longer term forms of support, such as helping tenants with large rent arrears and preventing people falling into homelessness. Support workers could, in such circumstances, help tenants negotiate a pay plan with landlords, to encourage and provide service users with the skills to budget more effectively, thereby preventing existing debt and arrears impacting on a service user's ability to get accommodation in future.
- Provide refuge support (i.e. users of Women's Refuges), which included helping to source accommodation and other essential items.
- Sourcing supported accommodation; however, it should be noted that there was currently a shortage of such housing.
- Support (via Pobl) around hostels and other accommodation for ex-offenders as well as developing their life skills. Such measures could help to prevent ex-offenders falling into homelessness and to stop future re-offending.
- Support for service users with mental health issues in order to move away from a clinical setting and to live within the community and their own accommodation, as well as helping substance misusers in supported accommodation (such as through the Wallich Charity).

In terms of numbers, 80 people were waiting for floating support due to the pandemic, with 60 persons waiting for supported temporary accommodation. The Supporting People Co-ordinator explained that the Council had far fewer of this type of accommodation compared to other Local Authorities as well as shortages in general for one bed properties.

The Supporting People Co-ordinator also referred to dispersed accommodation that was provided, such as the 'gender-neutral' refuge (in conjunction with Atal Y Fro and Newydd Housing) which utilised units of flats supported by the IRIS (Identification and Referral to Improve Safety) Team. These covered male, trans and female (with older children) survivors.

The Supporting People Co-ordinator also explained that the Council was going through a tendering process, with certain services to be increased due to extra funding from September 2021 which would help to reduce the waiting lists and such persons could also be referred to drop-in services and support in the interim too. This extra funding could also fund support workers in areas like the private sector housing scheme to support people housed after previously being homeless.

On how long people were on the floating support waiting list, it was explained that the Council was going through a tendering process, with certain services to be increased due to extra funding from September 2021 which would help to reduce the waiting lists and such persons could also be referred to drop-in services and support in the interim too. This extra funding could also fund support workers in areas like the private sector housing scheme to support people housed after previously being homeless

### **Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)**

The Housing Solutions Manager also updated the Committee on the MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) process and housing, explaining that Councils had a duty to accommodate various groups not previously eligible for housing due to the emergency legislation brought in by WG due to the pandemic.

This had led to significant numbers of single persons and others accommodated in shared accommodation projects, B&Bs, etc. which had posed a major challenge to the Council due to how quickly this legislation needed to be implemented, with similar measures in Scotland being done more gradually (which had been implemented a number of years prior to the pandemic).

The Housing Team worked closely with Adult and Children Services and had a Mental Health Advisor 'embedded' within the team. The Housing Solutions Team now also had an embedded Occupational Therapist providing support to those tenants with mobility issues ensuring that properties offered via Homes4U were appropriate to meet their needs.

In terms of MAPPA there were three categories of offender that were dealt with:

- Category One: All Registered Sexual Offenders.
- Category Two: Violent or other sex offenders not subject to notification requirements.
- Category Three: Other dangerous offenders.
- A fourth category, offenders involved in terrorism, would be included in future.

The MAPPA levels included:

- Level 1, (ordinary agency management), where all risk assessments were in place, with officers assigned for day-to-day monitoring and with a robust action plan. Any 'gaps' were identified in the Risk Management Plan;
- Level 2, (an active multi-agency approach is required (MAPPA meetings)), where the relevant partners met in order to resolve issues and plug any 'gaps' in managing an offender;
- Level 3 (active approach involving senior representatives), where senior leaders such as the Operational Manager or Head of Service attended multi-agency meetings and discussed risks.

Such multi-agency meetings included representatives from Probation, Public Protection Unit, Police, Council (Housing, etc.), Victim Liaison Officers, Mental Health Teams and other support agencies.

For ex-offenders, there were a number of 'approved premises' which they could be allocated to for temporary accommodation at various locations throughout Wales.

This process followed the four pillars - 1) supervision, 2) control, 3) treatment, 4) victim safety (such as 'exclusion zones').

Previously there was no statutory obligation to provide temporary accommodation to ex-offenders simply due to their MAPPA status, however, the pandemic had changed this with WG removing the Priority Need Test previously applied making everyone homeless now a priority.

Ex-offender housing needs were rigorously assessed by the Police and other key agencies before implementation, as well as being heavily managed, therefore limiting their ability to re-offend.

At the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), the emphasis was on ensuring that the victims of ex-offenders could live safely within the community and to address the issues around the ex-offender's previous behaviour. If required, then victims / survivors of ex-offenders could have target hardening and other measures taken at their homes, as well as relocating them to new accommodation if necessary.

In conjunction with the above, Integrated Offender Management (IOM) brought a cross-agency response to the crime and reoffending threats faced by local communities. The most persistent and problematic offenders were identified and managed jointly by partner agencies working together.

The Housing Solutions Manager explained that a 'one size fits all' solution was not suitable for housing and supporting ex-offenders, as each person had their own needs and differing levels of self-management of their housing requirements. In some cases, Authorities would need to look at a 24-hour complex needs support package for ex-offenders or to move to general needs accommodation, both private and social housing.

It was crucial to support ex-offenders with various issues underlying their behaviour (such as substance misuse) in order to 'unpick' these and thereby try to prevent re-offending.

The Housing Solutions and Supporting People Team Leader finally added that housing support could be provided for ex-offenders, but for other help and advice, they needed to be 'signposted' to the appropriate agencies who worked in partnership with the Council in order to support them.

On the query on how long the ex-offenders kept their accommodation, it was explained that ex-offenders in the MAPPA process could be on licence and return to prison in the long term, or for those under IOM, in the shorter term. The aim would be to keep their accommodation whilst in prison, via housing benefit and other means of support.

Following the query on how many offenders were on the MAPPA categories, it was explained these involved only a small number of ex-offenders as not all ex-offenders needed support to get accommodation and with the most challenging individuals kept within Council housing stock. In terms of IOM, up to 30 people could be managed under that programme, mostly in temporary accommodation due to their short-term priorities or needs.

On 24 hours complex needs accommodation, this involved temporary accommodation, with a maximum of 10 such services users to a house (depending on what the landlord could accommodate). For those looking to progress to more permanent accommodation, they would go to general needs housing. Ultimately such accommodation and support were limited by resources.

It was crucial to support ex-offenders with various issues underlying their behaviour (such as substance misuse) in order to 'unpick' these and thereby try to prevent re-offending.

The Housing Solutions and Supporting People Team Leader finally added that housing support could be provided for ex-offenders, but for other help and advice, they needed to be 'signposted' to the appropriate agencies who worked in partnership with the Council in order to support them.

### **(iii) Pobl (Housing and Community support provider for the Vale of Glamorgan Council)**

The Group was updated on the housing, and other, support provided by Pobl by its Area Manager. She stated that Pobl's role in collaboration with the Council was to provide housing and other forms of related support at varying levels of intensity to various people (such as street homeless) all with the aim of ensuring that any underlying or immediate issues (such as substance misuse) were dealt with and then to develop in a person the capacity and skills to manage and keep their accommodation and to prevent homelessness in the medium to longer term.

The levels of support varied from intensive, multi-agency support to lower levels of help, and to assist in getting people temporary accommodation through to supported housing or independent living and refuges.

It was important to understand the reasons why people sought support from agencies such as Pobl, which could range from issues around trauma, isolation, unexpected changes in lifestyle (due to the pandemic or other extreme circumstances) or lack of peer group or family to help build the skills and confidence to help keep a home.

In order for support to be effective, Pobl provided help and advice exactly when it was needed and how was it needed to their customers, with an emphasis on flexibility, prevention, person-centred (such as listening to customers and staff and 1-2-1 support, informal or group work), focussing on the positives to build resilience in clients and to have 'elastic tolerance' (i.e. accepting that people would make mistakes and "relapse") and an understanding of the reasons behind a client's needs and behaviours, as not everyone was ready to be a tenant from the start.

Support was also given to landlords, as well as the tenants, within the private rented sector in order to help with the challenges they faced and thereby ensure that they in turn could continue to provide help and support by continuing to provide housing to tenants.

Pobl also offered 'added value' support, such as walking activities, Community Action events with other providers and involving the community, through to Agored Cymru training around budgeting and how to be a tenant, linking in with foodbanks and publishing a monthly magazine during the pandemic in order to keep customers informed.

The Area Manager cited several examples of customer feedback, illustrating the variety and the extent of the support given via Pobl, such as the intensive support given to people moving out of temporary accommodation and linking in with the community or existing support networks in order to help achieve this.

In terms of feedback, Pobl looked at both the positive and negative responses, in order to look at what went well and what needed to improve.

Pobl were involved in several projects, including:

- The Barry Offender's Project, providing young and adult offenders accommodation, often with complex needs, which had been successful due to building relationships with offenders and landlords in housing them effectively.
- One Stop Shop.
- The Private Rented Sector Scheme, which assisted people in keeping their accommodation within this sector.

In terms of the success rate for such projects in getting people into accommodation:

- 15 units for adult offenders had been commissioned for.
- For the One Stop Shop, over 300 people had been supported over the last year, including those with housing / homelessness needs;
- The Private Rented Sector Scheme had supported 260 people and had been crucial in housing people who otherwise could not be housed within the Council sector, due to shortages; and
- With floating support, 270-280 people had been supported;
- These did not include the numbers on the existing waiting list for housing, however.

On the different levels of support provided via Pobl, it was explained that support was tailored to the individual concerned, from a one-off drop-in session through to looking at longer term support or signposting for accommodation and related needs.

## **Overview of Possible Options to Expand Temporary and Permanent Accommodation in the Short Term**

The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing updated the Group on the following underlying issues concerning the expansion of temporary or more permanent accommodation.

The two key elements around any such expansion would be:

1. Welsh Government (WG) Phase 2 – Planning Guidance for Homelessness and Housing Related Support Services. The WG felt that there was an opportunity, due to the measures taken during the pandemic, to keep in place the means of reducing or removing rough sleeping and preventing a return to homelessness. Also, to review existing types of temporary accommodation and to stop using unsuitable accommodation, as well as developing new types of temporary accommodation. In order to achieve these goals, the following four elements were required: support (such as continuing to support those people in emergency provision or newly presenting as homeless), plan (such as moving away from using hotels and B&Bs to more sustainable forms of accommodation such as through repurposing, expansion of private rented stock, modular accommodation and redesignation of existing general needs properties), build (such as building accommodation to improve the quality of emergency provision and to increase the availability of permanent housing) and transform (such as moving away from night shelters and ‘floor space’ to more sustainable and effective forms of emergency accommodation); and
2. Potential options being used by other Councils. The Officer explained that neighbouring Councils were undertaking a number of projects around the expansion of temporary or more permanent accommodation, such as redesignating existing blocks of flats or other accommodation (or in the case of Cardiff and Swansea, to repurpose office blocks) in order to provide temporary accommodation, and new build purpose designed accommodation by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). Swansea Council were also an example of a Local Authority looking to expand their private sector leasing scheme in order to increase such housing capacity.

## **Update(s) and Testimony from ‘Expert’ Witnesses within the Council and Externally Concerning Housing and Homelessness Provision / Support**

### **(i) Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale**

The Group welcomed the Senior Team Leader, and the Team Leader of the Private Rental Service (PRS), at Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale (CACV).

They explained the PRS was funded by the Welsh Government (WG) in order to help tenants within this sector who were struggling to pay rent or in rent arrears, thereby also helping to prevent evictions and homelessness occurring within the private rental housing sector during the pandemic. The nature of this service had changed over time.

However, there were also debt support workers, based within the Vale office of the CACV who also helped Housing Association and Council tenants, as well as their private equivalents.

The PRS team had 4 debt caseworkers and 3 generalist advisers, who helped private tenants with various short – and longer – term issues around housing, such as dealing with debt and debt relief, bankruptcy, tenants struggling to pay utility bills and / or Council Tax and joblessness as a result of the pandemic. The team could provide various forms of assistance with such issues, such as helping tenants to prioritise debt repayments, look at potential, additional, funding and benefits they could receive that may help their financial situation, as well as minimising overall debt by advising them on how to switch utility and other service providers and budget more effectively, thereby avoiding eviction under Section 8 and 21 notices. Due to the pandemic, the service had provided support remotely i.e., contact with services users had been made via email and telephone which had in fact helped to increase the service's responsiveness and had also been working with WG to encourage tenants to apply for the Tenancy Hardship Grant that had recently been introduced.

A common issue raised by service users was the removal of the £20 top up grant for Universal Credit (UC) which could lead to tenants and others to struggle financially. Another issue frequently raised was the difficulties faced by under-25s in paying rent and bills for housing and to access one-bed properties, which were in short supply and often expensive to rent. Finally, there was the issue of access to the internet, which could be costly and difficult for some groups to access, but which was vital, i.e., in order for them to complete their UC diary.

From 23rd August, CACV would be re-introducing face to face appointments for those clients who could not access telephones nor the internet (i.e., those clients who were homeless). For those clients who could call the service via the telephone, support workers would undertake 'triage' in order to see if it would be more appropriate for them to receive face to face support or to do so remotely.

The PRS had helped people in the Vale (i.e., to prevent them from becoming evicted or made homeless), with the following figures provided after the meeting:

Period 01/01/2019 – 29/02/2020 – 426 issues dealt with

Period 01/03/2020 – 23/09/2021 – 936 issues dealt with

There were a variety of different reasons why the client may have been faced with threatened homelessness such as relationship breakdown, Local Authority/Housing Association/private landlord possession action, domestic violence etc. and may not

necessarily be as a result of the pandemic. The figures above reflect clients living in the Vale of Glamorgan assisted by all Citizens Advice services.

It was expected that autumn / wintertime that demand for services and advice by clients from CACV on the stay on evictions recently being removed and related housing issues would pick up.

Furthermore, on evictions and the potential numbers of these that could be seen in the near future. The Homelessness Consultant, Shelter Cymru responded that due to the current backlog, process and delays around evictions since the stay on them had been removed, it was too soon to say on numbers, etc. with most clients not approaching Shelter Cymru until they had received their court papers – which could be 6-8months. However, the volume of work undertaken by Shelter Cymru around evictions was 25% higher now than 6 months ago. The Private Rented Procurement Officer added that it could take 16-18 months to take an eviction case through court. The CACV Senior Team Leader stated that once the backlog and processing of eviction cases had increased then CACV would see a huge increase in people coming to them for help around housing and homelessness issues

The limited scope and nature of the Tenant Hardship Grant and the low take up on this was raised. Due to its criteria, it only covered a 'niche' number of potential claimants, therefore it was a challenge for tenants to access this Grant and in turn difficult to raise awareness of it. The low take-up of the Grant was also mirrored by only a very small number of those tenants applying for it actually being deemed eligible to claim it i.e., those applicants in employment, had to prove financial hardship). The Housing Solutions and Supporting People Team Leader and CACV Senior Team Leader would look to see how they could collaborate in order to raise the Grant's profile at a more local level and if possible that someone from PRS attend a future Landlord Forum in order to raise awareness there. On the parameters and eligibility criteria for the Tenant Hardship Grant being changed, at this time the WG were not looking to change the criteria but only trying to raise the profile of the Grant instead.

## **(ii) Shelter Cymru**

The Group then welcomed the Homelessness Consultant from Shelter Cymru who briefed the Group on his role and the work undertaken by Shelter Cymru around homelessness. His role at Shelter Cymru was to help with homelessness prevention and as part of this respond to technical queries concerning housing issues and legislation raised by the relevant officers within Shelter and to meet with case workers from each Welsh Local Authority.

80% of the work around housing and homelessness issues came via Shelter Cymru Advice Line, with more complex issues going to the caseworkers from any of the Local Authorities. As a result, Welsh Councils faced a huge challenge in dealing with these myriad issues, particularly with the WG abolishing priority need for housing criteria. This had been done within a short time, whereas in other areas, such as Scotland, such changes had been implemented over 7 years.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council had closely followed WG guidance, whereas other Welsh Councils had been more hesitant and had struggled in meeting the sudden rise in accommodation needs.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council had more than doubled the number of single persons / applicants placed into temporary accommodation, such as through hiring rooms at the Holiday Inn Express near Cardiff Airport. Due to such measures by the Council, the feedback had been very positive around the work of the Vale's Housing Team and how they had dealt with the situation.

Levels of demand for temporary accommodation had varied considerably within Wales, with rural Councils seeing fewer cases compared to more urban areas which were struggling with the numbers of homeless presenting.

The Homelessness Consultant explained that Shelter Cymru's lobbying group were looking to cement the changes made during the pandemic and abolish the homelessness criteria around priority need. It appeared that WG wanted to go along the lines of the Scottish model and convert the current guidance into more permanent legislation thereby cementing a legacy of eradicating homelessness. The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing felt that the challenge here would be that although Councils would no longer have to deal with contentious issues and decisions, should priority need be finally abolished, they would then have to assess how to move large numbers of people from temporary to permanent accommodation and look at measures, such as 'streamlining' the overall housing provision process.

The Homelessness Consultant predicted a 'perfect storm' whereby in the near future there could be an increase in evictions, with a property 'boom' leading to private landlords selling up their properties (a concern also raised by the Team Leader of the PRS) and therefore removing rental properties from the housing market, as well as the removal of the £20 'top up' for Universal Credit (UC).

On the Council's housing allocation policy, the Council worked under a set allocations policy, which prioritised the rooms given to those in need and used the dual homelessness and 'reasonableness' criteria on allocating accommodation to people. However, there was no set definition of reasonableness in law or elsewhere, therefore such decisions were subjective, and the Council had the discretion to decide on this. Therefore, Officers should perhaps ask for a non-Officer perspective in how to apply reasonableness as a criterion. The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing suggested this could be an area that the Group should consider as well as the impact of prioritising the homeless had on existing tenants and their needs, i.e., if they tried to move from their accommodation due to changing circumstances. The Homelessness Consultant added that in terms of legislation, the focus was on homelessness itself, rather than allocation and that Councils were obliged to prioritise homelessness as a result.

On examples of 'best practice' for moving away from priority need for housing criteria other than Scotland, the Homelessness Consultant was not aware of any direct comparisons here but referred to some European countries (France, Germany and the

Nordic countries), where there were better protections around tenants within the private sector, such as a longer lease and tenure and a stronger emphasis on renting, which may well help to minimise homelessness in these countries.

On Shelter Cymru campaigning for fairer rents within Wales, the Homelessness Consultant had not heard anything specifically on this but there was general unease over the increase in rent prices over the last year. However, the main focus at this time was on removing the priority need criteria, although Shelter Cymru did have an input in recent legislation around private rents. Campaigns tended to be driven by what people were telling caseworkers on the 'ground' were their main concerns and issues.

### **(iii) Private Sector Team (Vale of Glamorgan Council)**

The Group was then briefed by the Private Rented Procurement Officer at the Vale of Glamorgan Council on the work of his team within the Council.

He worked as part of the Housing Solutions Team looking after the Vale Assisted Tenancy Scheme (VATS).

VATS assisted people coming through from a homeless background into getting accommodation, i.e., helping them to provide their first month's rent in advance and / or a guaranteed bond to landlords in the private sector.

VATS worked with landlords and letting agents to source and to occupy their properties with people who were able to afford to pay the level of rent required within the private rental sector.

VATS used an online system which could help tenants by enabling them to apply for and receive the relevant benefits.

Three secondees from Pobl also helped with licences in order to track affordability / any problems that occurred for failing tenancies for rented accommodation within the private sector.

VATS had been running for 15 years; it used the market rate rather than the local housing rate which meant, for example, an average top up of £100-150 for a 3-bedroom house within the Vale of Glamorgan.

Clients would be assessed in terms of their finances, benefits claimed and affordability to rent.

There had been no 'churn' in private rental properties as yet around debts and evictions, due to the backlog of such cases in the courts.

The number of properties that had been helped over the last few years were as follows:

- First 6 months in 2021 – 20;
- 2020 – 40+;
- 2019 – approximately 79.

The Housing Solutions Team organised 'Landlord Forums' and held a database with 200+ private sector landlords registered to it. The Council kept these landlords up to date on legislation and regularly asked landlords if they held one bed properties (currently in short supply) which they could fill with applicants via VATS.

The Council worked closely with landlords which ultimately helped to prevent homelessness i.e., the Housing Team would liaise with landlords if tenants were struggling to pay rent in order to see if this could be resolved. Over the last six months, such collaboration and measures had helped to save 36 tenancies (with 112 tenancies saved over the last 3.5 years).

A big challenge for the Housing Team was that there were not enough properties out there for people presenting to them; particularly one bedroom accommodation. It was also difficult for landlords to convert properties to one-bedroom flats due to current legislation i.e., landlords would have to pay for safety measures such as water sprinklers to be installed.

It was important now to revive the Private Rented Sector Forum as well, which gave a voice for local landlords to WG, as well as sharing ideas on best practice with other Welsh Councils.

Welsh Councils, such as Gwynedd and Anglesey, had implemented 3-6 month tenancy guarantees. The Vale of Glamorgan Council had also sought to implement such measures (6–12-month tenancy guarantees) with local landlords and encourage more landlords to sign up to these.

WG were looking to roll out a leasing scheme throughout Wales (local councils would lease a landlord's property over a number of years). The Vale had sought landlord help with this, but they had not had a significant response to it as yet; plus, insurance and mortgage providers generally were not happy with such leases.

Also, another challenge lay with many tenants and landlords still using letting agents rather than VATS and the Housing Solutions Team, with up to 20 applicants applying to rent a one-bedroom property.

The Private Rented Procurement Officer added that there was a need to look at new ways of attracting landlords to taking on tenants via the Council i.e., offering a guarantee to cover any malicious damage. Key selling points for the service, currently, were:

- No finder's fee (unlike letting agents).
- The longer the Council had a working relationship with private landlords, the greater the trust fostered, and the establishment of a relationship based on fairness and even-handedness to landlords and tenants.
- The Council was open minded and realistic with landlords, accepting that they needed to earn a living.

The Private Rented Procurement Officer stated that the market rate for housing rents had increased with certain rentals rising from £620 to £700 per month, but this could drop in future if the market 'cooled' down.

He also explained that, over the lifetime of the scheme, 342 people had been housed, with the longest tenancy being 15 years and an overall success rate of 95% during the pandemic. For the remaining 5%, involving the more challenging tenancies, VATS would support both the landlord and the tenant, for example, the landlord would be supported if it was necessary to remove the tenant in order to keep the landlord on board and to keep the house available for future tenants. Conversely, VATS would look to liaise with Environmental Health to ensure that landlords were maintaining a property if required.

### **Update from the Operational Manager Public Sector Housing on Possible Options for Addressing Housing and Homelessness Provision**

As part of this update to the Group, the Operational Manager Public Sector Housing asked if the Group had any suggestions or ideas around housing and homelessness provision, suggestions included:

- Acquiring empty housing stock in the Vale.
- The use of Housing Associations and RSLs to bring housing back in to use (i.e. as seen at Thompson Street, Barry) or by providing new builds, which would see more single accommodation coming online.
- The possibility of 'de-designating' property currently assigned to over-55 years only and the need to move away from a system that could be incentivising temporary over more permanent forms of accommodation and housing solutions. This would involve:
  - Increasing the housing supply;
  - Looking at expanding private rented sector housing; and
  - Reviewing the allocation process.
- To ensure that commercial property developers were meeting their quotas for affordable homes. The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing stated that the Council's Section 106 Officer had been very successful in ensuring that developers met their obligations in providing affordable housing.

### **Overview and update from Welsh Government (WG) representatives on the work currently ongoing within WG in relation to rehousing initiatives and associated strategies, etc.**

The Group welcomed the representatives from Housing Policy, Education and Public Services at Welsh Government (WG), who provided an overview of the work and policies currently being developed or undertaken by WG.

A key plan for Welsh Government (WG) policy on homelessness was the Rapid Rehousing (RRH) approach which would help to reform WG and Local Government's

(LG) approach to homelessness and to ultimately help to prevent it in the first place. This would involve not just co-operation between WG homelessness teams and their counterparts within Welsh Local Authorities, but also colleagues within Housing Strategy, landlord development teams, private and social housing landlords and to look at building and allocation priorities.

The physical, financial and mental effects of homelessness were also highlighted, illustrating the intolerable nature of living this way for people affected and show a key rationale why WG wished to not return to the pre pandemic status quo and for the removal of the priority need for housing criteria.

The journey of getting to this position, included the enactment of the 2014 Housing Act, with section 2 outlining the provision and ultimate prevention of homelessness, making Wales one of the first countries to look at prevention, with WG and local Councils monitoring tenancies. In 2019, due to rising levels of homelessness in Wales, WG requested a Homelessness Action Group (HAG) in order to look at how this could be tackled. The subsequent report from HAG recommended a transitional approach by both WG and LG over five years to a rapid rehousing and 'Housing First' approach, which would become the 'default' position. This would include a transitional timescale in order to allow time for housing stock to be up-scaled and with a corresponding downscaling of acute spending, although such funding would remain in place for short term support / accommodation for a smaller number of people going forward.

The Pandemic had also acted as a further catalyst for change in homelessness policies, with the need to get homeless persons with both complex needs and those without into temporary accommodation quickly. This had provided WG and Local Authorities with a much clearer and accurate picture of the level of homelessness in Wales, which was much higher than previously thought. 12,000 people across Wales had been housed in temporary accommodation, with approximately 6,000 still being housed this way at present.

The 2021 Programme for Government set out the WG's commitment to fundamentally reform homelessness services in order to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing. The core principles of RRH included:

- A clear move away from an emphasis on housing people in temporary accommodation to helping the homeless into more permanent, 'settled' housing instead; this would be done at the same time as addressing their other support needs rather than done afterwards.
- The removal of the criteria for homeless people to satisfy 'housing readiness' or manage a tenancy to access settled accommodation; with the view that temporary accommodation did not provide people with the appropriate experience and skills in order to become a successful tenant.
- A package of assistance and multi-agency support would be offered, tailored to individual and specific needs of those accessing accommodation in this way, thereby also preventing or deescalating the development of complex needs or chronic problems.

RRH did not negate the need for emergency temporary accommodation when it was clearly required and necessary but simply stated the best outcomes (for the person and the public purse) were achieved when people could access an affordable, secure and decent home quickly and with the right support if they needed it.

Resourcing and support for RRH included a clear political commitment across political parties both locally and nationally, WG ministerial commitment to looking at this holistically and working with social and private sector landlords, stronger joint working with partners (due to the pandemic), the opportunity to look at best practice from the Scottish model of RRH, and a commitment to a more trauma informed housing management culture across many social landlords, as well as a greater connection between housing support and the provision of homelessness advice.

Challenges to this new approach included a culture of 'passivity' and acceptance of temporary accommodation and housing readiness, limitations on housing supply, current limitations on providing a wholly coordinated approach between all key partners and bodies (such as WG, LG and the NHS), and the pressures on frontline housing staff as well as on the allocation of housing.

The WG knew and appreciated the importance of a co-ordinated, partnership-based approach to ensuring that RRH was successfully implemented and co-produced such as with private and social landlords, local Councils, third sector organisations and with people who had a lived experience of homelessness.

The guidance on RRH would be published within the next two weeks, with a green paper to be released over the next few months.

The WG were, in conjunction with local Councils, putting in place a plan in order to help local Councils to implement and transition over to the RRH approach within the next five years.

The plan and guidance provided would help local Councils achieve the RRH approach, based on the various data available on all aspects of homelessness, Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA), local housing supply and demand, with this currently being the 'best time' to get a truer picture of the scale of homelessness in Wales.

As part of this, Local Authorities would be undertaking a needs assessment of the 6,000 homeless persons currently in temporary accommodation, which would give them data on key trends, etc. and various levels of needs (from low level support, to intensive, 24/7 requirements) that these and other homeless people who presented needed support for. It was accepted that a small number of people would not be able to live independently and would need to rely on supported accommodation, but these could still be helped into more settled accommodation longer term.

In conjunction with RRH, Local Authorities would need to build up their Housing First capacity, with such projects having been shown to successfully break the cycle of homelessness for service users and through moving them on to independent,

permanent, housing with this being particularly useful for those service users with higher needs identified.

It was anticipated that the transformation from an approach based on providing temporary accommodation as the default to a more settled and efficient housing model would be challenging and would take time for Councils to implement due to resources and other factors. However, it was important to start thinking about this approach now in order to achieve it longer term. It was envisioned that under this new approach homeless people would move from temporary to settled accommodation or Housing First within days of first presenting, under a holistic and streamlined allocation system and approach.

Housing itself was obviously essential to the success of RRH and data on its availability, etc., in tandem with information on service users' needs, would need to feed into the various housing grants, the LHMA and Local Development Plans (LDPs).

Furthermore, this new approach would need to be built into the wider Affordable Housing Strategy and the target of 20,000 affordable homes within Wales.

The RRH approach also needed to acknowledge the key demographics involved so that the appropriate housing, support and solutions could be implemented, i.e. 80% of those people presenting as homeless fell under the single person category.

On the allocation of housing and vulnerable groups, the Housing Policy Officer replied that, i.e., the majority of survivors of domestic abuse would initially be housed within a refuge; furthermore, under the Allocation of Housing Regulations 1997, it was for the Local Authority to allocate housing based on the criteria laid down. Such allocations were complex, with local Councils having to look at the supply of appropriate housing in order to meet those people falling under housing priority and their needs, as well as against the housing waiting lists, 'points' system, needs assessments and at those people who were considered housing ready. He acknowledged there was not enough housing within housing allocations, but RRH would ultimately be looking to resolve these by improving the housing process and supply which would include those people accommodated in refuges. Although there may be a perception of people 'jumping the queue' with housing, this was not the case, as individuals' needs, and history would be carefully considered when housing was allocated to them. The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing added that the Council had the final say on housing allocation and it was a challenging process with acute shortages in housing (as opposed to blockages in the system) versus high demand and attempting to house people in the highest categories for Homes4U versus the need to accommodate the homeless. The need to use large scale, longer term temporary accommodation in order to meet demand continued to prove to be an expensive but necessary option.

The Chair commented that part of the challenge with the current housing approach and the proposed one of RRH, was the legacy of not building social housing for a long period of time and the selling off of existing social housing stock previously.

On other models of best practice for RRH, the Housing Policy Officer replied there were not many such models, although Housing First had been taken up in parts of Europe and the United States. Another model of note however, was Finland, where their RRH (which also combined a Housing First approach) had seen 80-90% of temporary housing transformed into permanent or semi-permanent types of housing. This also included substantial numbers of accommodation for single people, which they would move out of once they started a family. Although some Welsh Councils had looked at this model (such as Cardiff), the primary focus would be on the approach adopted by Scotland.

On the question raised concerning the funding that had been made available to Local Authorities up to March 2021 for temporary, 'instant' housing, which the Vale had used to good effect and whether such funding be available in future, the Housing Policy Officer replied that such funding in future would tie in with the Affordable Housing Strategy and could be part of a future budget and funding from WG. He added there was a need possibly for Local Authorities to draft such plans around temporary / instant housing in the meantime anyway so they could be 'on the shelf' in readiness for when funding may become available; this could be an avenue that the Task and Finish Group also looked at as part of their review. There would also be a spending review soon and setting of the WG budget which could have as one of its priorities funding for instant social housing. Hardship funding would also be secure until April 2022.

### **Update from the Representative of Newydd Housing**

The Housing and Communities Director, Newydd Housing Association briefed the Group on the work done by the organisation with supporting social housing provision and preventing homelessness.

Newydd Housing Association was working extremely closely with the Vale of Glamorgan Council regarding housing and homelessness provision; for example, Newydd was a member of the HOMES4U allocations scheme whereby the Council was entitled to 100% nominations on new developments and re-lets.

Newydd had 1,774 properties within the Vale, making it one of the larger housing associations operating within the area.

Newydd had been instrumental in delivering a number of schemes over the last few years that had helped to address housing and homelessness provision i.e. in 2020/21, Newydd had taken handover of 65 new 1 and 2 bed homes in Barry and Penarth at locations in Junction House (The Goods Shed), St. Paul's Church, Dinam Hall and 21 Porthkerry Road. These had been delivered in conjunction with Newydd Housing, the Council, WG and private partners, with funding from various sources, such as Innovative Housing Grant Funding, Social Housing Grant, community funding and Town Centre Regeneration loan funding.

In terms of projects currently on site, Newydd were involved with housing projects at the Seaview Labour, the Castle Hotel and The Windsor in Barry, with completion between

March and October 2022. These would involve the delivery of a substantial number of both 1- and 2-bedroom units.

In terms of future plans for housing projects, two of particular note were:

- The second phase of the Goodshed 2, Barry, in order to develop the land to the Western side of the existing development in Barry providing 34 homes (8 x 2 Beds and 26 x 1 beds). The relevant plans had been submitted, with a response expected in December 2021. The development would also be subject to the necessary funding being secured.
- 50 Holton Road, Barry; there were proposals to refurbish this location by providing 9 x 1 bed homes.

Newydd were also involved in homelessness prevention measures in order to sustain present and future tenancies within the association, including:

- Tenancy Ready modules delivered via Google Classroom.
- Risk assessment of tenants' needs (based on high, medium or low scale).
- Support from 3 Financial Inclusion Officers who provided advice on benefits, grants and other forms of funding (such as discretionary grants) to tenants as well as helping to mitigate the effects of the removal of the £20 uplift for Universal Credit (UC) on them. As part of this, Newydd were also involved in raising tenant awareness of the changes in UC through a series of communications with tenants via different methods.
- The provision of digital training to tenants of Newydd, as well as working with the Vale of Glamorgan Council to provide training in order to enhance tenant employability within the job market.
- Maintaining tenancies through –
  - A new, more tenant centred approach to income collection, in order to encourage tenants to approach Newydd if they had any financial difficulties to see how their tenancies could be supported;
  - A tenancy sustainability strategy, involving targeted intervention to those tenancies that were struggling, as well as building stronger relationships with tenants and working closely with all the relevant teams within Newydd to improve tenant services.

The Housing and Communities Director explained that Newydd did have a Customer Services Team that tenants could contact (the contact details for which she shared with the Group). She also said that home visits to tenants were often done if needed. During the pandemic, tenant satisfaction rates in areas such as maintenance and repairs had dropped due to the inevitable backlog in works generated, but this had now been largely cleared.

The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing wished to reiterate that Newydd was a key partner for the Council regarding housing provision, particularly with the development of additional single person accommodation.

On the key to success in letting out single person properties and building a sustainable community, the Housing and Communities Director used the example of the previous development at The Goods Shed, where Newydd had worked closely with the Council in order to deal with large concentrations of single people within the flats. As part of this measures had been put in place to provide ongoing (and where required intensive) long-term support for tenants at the location, with close collaboration with officers from the Vale, as well as funding for an additional housing officer from Newydd. A mix of both tenants coming from a homeless and non-homeless background would also help to create a sustainable and more balanced local housing community. The Operational Manager added that such examples of best practice should also be shared with other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in order to make similar schemes elsewhere sustainable.

The Housing and Communities Director stated that Newydd's team of Financial Inclusion Officers would be holding 'drop in' sessions in Barry for Newydd tenants regarding UC. Furthermore, due to Newydd being a medium sized organisation, close team relationships were fostered, with all relevant staff within the association having been given the relevant training to support residents, i.e., Newydd's inhouse maintenance team were given safeguarding training. Housing officers were also now redeployed back on to Newydd sites following remote working due to the pandemic.

### **Update from the Section 106 Officer**

The Council's Senior Planner / Section 106 Officer provided an overview and update to the Group on Section 106 Agreement and the process around this.

The agreement was a legally binding agreement with a developer / landowner to restrict development or use of land, require operations or activities to be carried out in, on, under or over land, land to be used in a specified way; or require payments to be made to the Authority either in a single sum or periodically.

The types of planning obligations that could be secured included were: in kind contributions such as the developer carries out required works directly on site, such as affordable housing (where viability permits), on site / off site financial contributions (such as improved public transport, pedestrian access and traffic calming measures, or funding towards community facilities), and maintenance contributions to facilities the developer had funded.

Section 106 fell within a varied planning and guidance framework i.e. Planning Policy Wales Ed. 11, Technical Advice Notes 2: Affordable Housing, the Welsh Government guidance on 'Delivering Affordable Housing Using Section 106 Agreements, A Guidance Update' (2009) and the Vale of Glamorgan Adopted Local Development Plan (LDP) (2011-2026) and new standards on affordable housing via WG.

Under the LDP the Council had undertaken strategic viability assessments on a number of sites across the Vale, with the Council's policy requirements remaining achievable

and realistic. Local planning requirements meant that residential developments needed to have set levels of affordable housing (including mixed use schemes), i.e. 30% in Barry; 35% in Llantwit Major, Rhoose and St. Athan; and 40% in Cowbridge, Dinas Powys, Llandough and Penarth amongst others.

There was a target for the provision of 3,252 affordable dwellings during the lifetime of the current LDP (2011-2026), with an additional 1,622 affordable dwellings having already been delivered between 2011 and 2021. The tenure of affordable housing was also subsidised by the developer.

Section 106 negotiations included the initial assessment for Section 106 implications, the relevant service areas consulted, negotiation with the developer or landowner to secure the planning obligations, assessment of any viability assessments either in-house or by the District Valuer Services, through to the signing of the final Section 106 Agreement with planning consent and the decision notice issued.

Development viability for affordable housing looked at various factors around development costs, land and planning obligations; where a building site was not viable for affordable housing, money could be provided by the developer instead via a two-stage process either within the host ward or directed to an area of acute need, following approval by the relevant Heads of Services and Cabinet Members.

The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing stated that the contributions made via Section 106 agreements had been substantial and probably surpassed those made via social housing grants.

On how developers felt about providing social housing; the Section 106 Officer stated that housing developers were used to working within the Section 106 framework, although some sites and negotiations were still challenging due to genuine issues around viability or due to potentially large infrastructure costs. In such cases, it was essential for the Council to look at the absolute need within such wards and to seek more bespoke solutions, such as had been done in St. Athan previously.

On whether RSLs provided funding via Section 106, the Section 106 Officer explained that the agreement was between the housing developer and the Council only, with the RSL buying or having been allocated the site later and contributing by making the relevant homes on the site available via HOMES4U at a subsidised rate.

The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing referred to the current requirement to let out Section 106 properties within the relevant ward locally, although the housing needs of residents within the wider Vale may be more acute. His suggestion was to certainly prioritise local residents for accessing Section 106 housing, but then to allocate them to residents elsewhere if there was insufficient demand or priority within the ward itself.

The Section 106 Officer echoed the Operational Manager's comments on allocation of Section 106 housing locally, adding that under the current LDP review there was the potential for Council partners, such as the NHS, WG, etc. to collaborate on developing

additional housing sites in the future and this could be something to be included as a recommendation within the final report from this Group.

On the LDP target of 3,252 affordable dwellings being met, the Section 106 Officer explained that the Council was still on track to achieve this target, but this was reliant on additional and suitable sites becoming available in the future. The Council still had five years in order to reach this target and it would also continue to look at future projections on where housing was most needed, in conjunction with RSL partners and in tandem with the ongoing and ambitious house building programme it was undertaking.

### **Summary of the Group's Work and Assessment of the Themes and Issues Raised**

At the concluding meeting of the Group, a number of comments and conclusions were made, including:

Members raised the question about intermediate rent schemes, to which the Operational Manager Public Sector Housing responded that there were only a small number of such properties that were run under this scheme for the most on demand types of properties (1 and 2 bedroom properties) and Housing Associations such as Newydd would probably not be repeating this model elsewhere, but there would still be a need or demand for such intermediate rent scheme accommodation, hand in hand with low cost accommodation and housing ownership and single person accommodation.

The figures from the Local Housing Market Assessment would be useful for identifying allocation priorities for the Council i.e., single persons and other groups potentially in most need of housing.

On Members' queries on allocation priorities for people living locally or having a connection to a local area, the Operational Manager Public Sector Housing clarified that such prioritisation existed in rural areas for local lettings of new builds but not in the Barry and Penarth areas. It was recognised that it was difficult for local people to get on the property ladder in certain areas of the Vale due to the income levels required. Such prioritisation could also be controversial however, as the people with the most housing need may not necessarily qualify as having a local connection to an area where housing was available; one possibility was to prioritise local residents for new housing first and then if there was insufficient demand from this group, then allocate to other residents within the wider Vale who were in most need of housing.

A possible solution was raised regarding rural areas and housing shortages by attracting more private landlords who may have properties in these areas to collaborate with the Council, with the PRS Officer previously suggesting that it may be possible to attract and retain private landlords through guaranteeing rent payment, bonds, etc. The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing caveated that although a good suggestion, the number of private landlords within rural areas was considerably smaller than in the more urban areas of the Vale. Also, guaranteeing rents, etc., although an excellent means of incentivising private landlords to provide social housing, could leave the Council more liable to underwriting any losses accrued.

It was suggested that the Group needed to take a 'bold' approach on incentivising and securing current and future private landlords who wished to offer accommodation via the Council and preventing them from selling up. It being added that that it may be better for the Council, rather than seeking to underwrite landlord losses, to look to offer other forms of support to landlords instead and look at best practice in this area, such as what other Councils did. The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing cited Cardiff Council and some other Local Authorities as examples where a social lettings model had been implemented whereby landlords gave up their property to the Authorities for 5 years and then had these back in a reasonable condition and with rent payments secured. This could be a model that the Vale looked at, but it was not without significant financial and other risk.

With regard to the current banding system for housing allocation (Gold, Silver, Bronze), it was noted that typically those people in Silver and Bronze banding had a longer wait due to having been assessed as having less housing need.

The success of the Council's 'modular' housing such as at Court Road was referred to, which the Operational Manager Public Sector Housing confirmed had been extremely successful and was a model of good practice that other Councils were also looking to implement, as it enabled Authorities to quickly but efficiently build properties in order to deal with housing pressures rapidly (six months compared to 2 years using conventional housebuilding methods). The Council would be looking to undertake this approach elsewhere in the Vale, when suitable land and locations became available.

On modular housing being a steppingstone for permanent housing, the Operational Manager Public Sector Housing agreed, stating that the modular accommodation was for temporary accommodation only.

On the nature of the housing at Clare Gardens and similar sites and Section 106 housing, it was explained that these were mainly family homes rather than one bed properties and were not part of the process of getting people out of B&Bs, etc. However, at Subway Road and the Windsor sites, these would provide accommodation for people currently in B&Bs and temporary accommodation.

It was queried if any people currently in B&Bs, etc. had local connections and therefore could be rehoused within the rural Vale; it was explained that the majority were from the Barry area, with any from Cowbridge being a priority for housing at Clare Gardens, etc.

There was currently circa 100 people concentrated in a small number of hotels. WG funding annually for this amounted to £2.5m and had been extended to March 2023 but with the expectation for Councils to have a transition plan in place in order to transition people in B&Bs into more permanent accommodation.

On the question if the new housing projected would absorb the existing numbers of people in B&Bs and temporary accommodation (i.e., hostels), the Operational Manager Public Sector Housing explained that a significant number of people in the hotels and other forms of temporary accommodation would transition to the new housing and

therefore free up temporary housing for others presenting as homeless. However, there would be a continued need for a significant amount of temporary accommodation.

The potential for the Council to purchase Tadross was suggested, and it was explained that the Council would be interested in buying larger properties for housing if they became available on the market. This was an approach several Councils were looking at. Potential schemes would need to be financially viable, although, this was not generally an issue as temporary accommodation produced higher rental returns.

The need for the Council to utilise empty spaces and properties more going forward was stressed, with the Operational Manager Public Sector Housing stating that the Council were looking at this, including any surplus housing owned land which could be used for modular units similar to the Court Road scheme. There may be other opportunities due to increases in remote working, which might free up office space that could potentially be converted.

It was confirmed that any homeless people in temporary accommodation would be in the Gold banding on the housing accommodation list, but with such large numbers, there would still be some competition for such spaces.

The suggestion made at November's meeting by the WG Housing Policy Officer on having 'on the shelf' plans in order to obtain funding for temporary / instant housing was referred to, with agreement on having a recommendation for the continued use of such plans and funding, particularly for medium- and longer-term housing development within the final report.

The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing commented on Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) forward funding new accommodation developments and claiming this back later, via the Social Housing Grant. This meant the Vale were able to maximise the take up of Social Housing Grant including any slippage monies that became available at the end of the financial year.

In relation to the query raised on systems of housing priority or allocation used by the Vale and elsewhere, the Council operated a choice-based system (via Homes4U) with other Authorities also moving over to a similar approach. Whatever system was used the Council would still face the challenge of allocating a scarce housing resource. As part of this, it was essential to manage people's expectations around housing and the new IT system to be used by the Vale would allow people to have feedback on the bids they made for housing. The Group agreed that it was important that people on housing lists were made fully aware of the housing situation and how their banding and need impacted their eligibility but there was also the need to point people towards the right kind of housing for them as well.

On the point about support for people within temporary accommodation to increase their employability, etc. the Operational Manager Public Sector Housing stated that help was provided and there were 'drop in' sessions taking place several times a week that assist with employability and ultimately securing permanent accommodation. On the similar point regarding people receiving help prior to being rehoused if they had been involved

with anti-social behaviour, it was explained that such help was available (i.e., Newydd Housing Association had carried out some good work in pre-empting and addressing reasons for ASB) and there was intensive support and management available when people first moved into homes, but people could not be compelled to engage with support providers. There were some new tenants with complex needs and vulnerabilities, but 'housing' was a key part of assisting them to regain independence and address the issues faced.

It was suggested that a recommendation for the final report should urge building on the 'Housing First' approach to people who were homeless and other vulnerable groups. The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing stated that the WG were already looking at this and did not want landlords to act as 'gatekeepers' but rather look to put people in safe, secure accommodation with support.

There should be a recommendation about more provision for people who were 'job-ready' and further modular accommodation with intensive, wraparound support, such as seen at the Court Road development. As part of this, it was suggested there was a need to look at how the Council could strengthen its policy on unwanted Vale of Glamorgan Council land so it can be prioritised for the development of affordable housing, as well as looking to see if other public bodies had similar unused land in order to use for housing.

Members also raised the issue of provision of housing for older persons, where there were shortages of such accommodation within the rural Vale compared to more urban areas such as Barry. Part of this may also require looking at how Planning dealt with applications for flats for older persons that could be added to existing properties within the Vale, particularly rural areas, although it was noted that a separate process for this was already being undertaken by the Planning Department. This had to be balanced however with the need to look at 'de-designating' properties traditionally assigned to older persons (i.e., one-bedroom flats) in order to accommodate the homeless, as well as ensuring balanced communities as a result of such changes. Another recommendation for the final report therefore could be for greater accommodation provision for older persons (particularly within the rural Vale) in tandem with looking at the opportunities of de-designating properties previously assigned to older persons for wider use by 'at need' groups.

On greater 'wraparound' support for tenants of all types (from those recently housed and in temporary accommodation to those more settled and in permanent accommodation), it was recommended by the Group that tenants who needed housing, medical, mental health and social care / support and provision should be able to access this in a more holistic and timely manner so that their needs could be met more effectively. Existing tenants could access such support already via a referral form with relatively small waiting lists involved. It was suggested that practitioners from mental health, alcohol and substance misuse services be seconded to the Council to help with this support. The Operational Manager Public Sector Housing cited the example of Cardiff Council and its multiagency care and support 'hub' for entrenched rough sleepers that could be

an approach which could be adapted for use within the Vale and for the Council to liaise with health workers in order to assist homeless persons not registered to a GP.

It was suggested that it would be useful for the Council's Housing Services to look at best practice elsewhere and identify case studies around helping the homeless and tenants with complex needs.

Finally, the Group reiterated the importance of funding for housing and homeless prevention measures, from new build and homelessness prevention monies to short term or emergency funding and the need for 'off the shelf' plans that could be used to access such funding quickly.

## **7. Conclusion**

The Task and Finish Group has completed a thorough investigation and it has produced a number of recommendations to improve the service. That said, it is also clear that there is a requirement for much further work before any major decisions are taken in regard to the longer-term provision of housing and accommodation for the homeless and other residents within the Vale of Glamorgan.

Key to the success of housing provision and tackling the ongoing issue of homelessness, was the need to look at:

- Allocation policies, ensuring that the priority of housing the homeless and those groups in most need, such as single persons under-55 was met but also the need to balance this with also addressing the needs of other categories of residents within the Vale, such as older persons (such as providing adapted or bespoke forms of accommodation) and existing tenants that wished to move on to larger or different types of properties, thereby also freeing one or two bedroom accommodation and to seek non-officer input on how to assess the 'reasonableness' for allocating housing too. The pressure due to COVID-19 and the Welsh Government's intention to not return to pre pandemic levels of street homelessness, with a 'Rapid Rehousing' (RRH) approach and a transition plan to move people from B&Bs, etc. to more permanent forms of housing, would mean additional pressure on the Council's dedicated but relatively small Housing Solutions team, in terms of time, financial and staff resources, as well in terms of the allocation of housing and ensuring these were sustainable, would need to be addressed. The need to move large numbers of single people from temporary accommodation to more permanent homes, particularly in light of the RRH approach would also need to be addressed by looking at a wide range of housing options from a social housing and private sector context and collaboration with partners and social housing providers from all sectors in order to achieve successful, sustainable and cohesive, 'balanced' communities.
- Support and prevention of homelessness. There are currently a number of services that support the implementation of these measures, from the Council's Housing Solutions service and the use of the 'Housing First'

approach, the Private Sector team and Social Services through to organisations such as Pobl, Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale, Shelter Cymru and social housing providers like Newydd Housing Association. These would need to be expanded upon, with rising demand and the adoption of RRH by WG.

- Expansion of housing stock particularly for more permanent housing and for the types of accommodation urgently required. This meant focusing on single person accommodation as the main demographic requiring housing and the need to look at best practice by other Local Authorities, such as approaches undertaken by Cardiff and Swansea (i.e., repurposing, office and other non-housing buildings and utilisation of empty or disused spaces) greater collaboration with the private sector and RSLs and for the Council to take an innovative approach on how to increase this going forward such as greater support for landlords and de-designating properties previously assigned to older persons. In terms of temporary accommodation there was need to look at containing and expanding the successful 'Modern Methods of Construction' (MMC) model within the Vale for fast and effective means of accommodating the homeless.
- Funding for housing and homelessness provision was crucial to the success of the recommendations and suggestions made within this report, such as the continuing to hold 'on the shelf' plans in order to obtain additional funding for temporary / instant housing, as part of its housing development programme through to the continued funding and support from WG for temporary accommodation and the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) forward funding new accommodation developments and claiming this back later, via the Social Housing Grant. This meant the Vale were able to maximise the take up of Social Housing Grant including any slippage monies that became available at the end of the financial year.

## 8. Glossary of Terms

<b>Agored Cymru</b>	<b>Agored Cymru: uses innovative and flexible approaches to developing qualifications to meet skills needs in Wales. Apprenticeship programmes are available, supporting employability and progression for learners in Wales.</b>
<b>CACV</b>	<b>Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale.</b>
<b>C1V</b>	<b>Contact One Vale. The Council's main point of contact and first port of call for people seeking support services.</b>
<b>HMO</b>	<b>House in multiple occupation: is a property rented out by at least 3 people who are not from 1 'household' (for example a family) but share facilities like the bathroom and kitchen. It's sometimes called a 'house share'.</b>
<b>Housing First</b>	<p><b>Housing First is a housing and support approach which:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gives people who have experienced homelessness and chronic health and social care needs a stable home from which to rebuild their lives.</b></li> <li>• <b>Provides intensive, person-centred, holistic support that is open-ended.</b></li> <li>• <b>Places no conditions on individuals; however, they should desire to have a tenancy.</b></li> </ul>
<b>IOM</b>	<b>Integrated Offender Management: a cross-agency response to the crime and reoffending threats faced by local communities. The most persistent and problematic offenders are identified and managed jointly by partner agencies working together.</b>
<b>LA / LG</b>	<b>Local Authority / Local Government.</b>
<b>MAPPA</b>	<b>Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements or MAPPA is the process through which the police, probation and prison services work together with other agencies to assess and manage violent and sexual offenders in order to protect the public from harm.</b>
<b>PRS</b>	<b>Private Rental Service based at Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale.</b>
<b>RSL</b>	<b>Registered social landlords are independent housing organisations, mostly housing associations.</b>
<b>RRH</b>	<p><b>Rapid Rehousing approach:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A focus on helping people into permanent accommodation at the same time as, rather than after, addressing any other support needs;</b></li> <li>• <b>No requirement to be assessed for 'housing readiness' in order to access accommodation;</b></li> <li>• <b>Offering a package of assistance and multi-agency support, specially tailored to individual needs where this is required;</b></li> <li>• <b>Helping people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness with lower or no support needs, and in doing so preventing complex needs or chronic problems from occurring or escalating.</b></li> </ul>
<b>VATS</b>	<b>Vale Assisted Tenancy Scheme: VATS assists people coming through from a homeless background into getting accommodation and works with landlords and letting agents to</b>

	<b>source and to occupy their properties with people who are able to afford to pay the level of rent required within the private rental sector.</b>
<b>WG</b>	<b>Welsh Government.</b>

## **Appendix A - Members, Support Officers and Other Contributors**

### **Members of the Task and Finish Group**

Councillor Sandra Perkes (Chair)

Heather Smith (Representative from Tenant Working Group / Panel), and Vice-Chair)

Councillor Julie Aviet

Councillor Christine Cave

Councillor Amelia Collins

Councillor Sally Hanks

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Nick Jones (Operational Manager Public Sector Housing)

Carolyn Michael (Interim Head of Finance/S151 Officer)

Charlotte Raine (Senior Planner / Section 106 Officer)

Mark Thomas (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer)

Hedd Wyn John (Supporting People Co-ordinator, Housing Services)

### **Citizens Advice Cardiff (CACV)**

Colette Ireland (Senior Team Leader)

Colin Mcinery (Team Leader of the Private Rental Service (PRS))

### **Newydd Housing Association**

Oonagh Lyons (Housing and Communities Director)

### **Pobl (Housing and Community support provider for the Vale of Glamorgan Council)**

Lorraine Griffiths (Area Manager Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend and George Street Project Newport)

### **Shelter Cymru**

Mark Lawrence (Homelessness Consultant)

### **Welsh Government**

Simon Prothero (Housing Policy Officer, Education and Public Services)

Carl Spiller (Housing Policy Officer, Education and Public Services)

# Appendix B: Checklist for Scoping

<b>Task and Finish Group</b>	Housing and Homelessness Provision within the Vale of Glamorgan
<b>Chairman</b>	Councillor Sandra Perkes
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An examination of housing and homelessness provision as part of the recovery phase ('Phase 2') that the Council will be undertaking due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Objectives and Purpose</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review will look to cover the key areas of current and in the near future housing and homelessness provision and policies – allocation priorities, emerging legislative and funding challenges or developments – and to offer recommendations on how to approach, implement or to improve on these in order to ensure that temporary and permanent accommodation can continue to be offered to the homeless once WG emergency legislation ends in September 2021.</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Desired Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand the current funding situation of the Council in terms of housing and homelessness provision.</li> <li>To understand the legal status around housing and homelessness provision – what the Council can and cannot do legally in this area once emergency legislation has been removed and what the potential impact of such changes will have on housing and homelessness provision currently in place due to COVID-19.</li> <li>To review allocation priorities around housing and homelessness provision and to suggest improvements if required.</li> <li>To review, understand and to suggest improvements to the provision of help and support for vulnerable and similar groups in order to aid them with permanent accommodation.</li> <li>To review 'best practice' from other and/or similar local authorities as well as potential testimony from 'expert' witnesses within the Council or externally (such as Shelter Cymru and Citizens Advice Bureau).</li> </ul> <p><b>If time is available, to also have as outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>To understand the staffing and resources required by the Council in order to deal with these challenges.</b></li> <li><b>To review current governance arrangements.</b></li> <li><b>To review the current house building programme and surplus land or land disposal for housing development.</b></li> <li><b>To review homelessness policy and strategy and how these could be improved, or new ones developed.</b></li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>Information Required</b>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Previous legislation on housing and homelessness provision.</li> <li>● Emergency legislation on housing and homelessness provision during COVID-19 (including Welsh Government guidance to local authorities, housing services and social landlords regarding COVID-19).</li> <li>● Upcoming amendments and changes to the Housing Wales Act 2014 and their potential impacts as well as competing challenges to funding and resources for Local Authorities resulting from these.</li> <li>● Letters from the Welsh Government Housing Minister on the extension of emergency legislation for COVID-19.</li> <li>● Audit Wales: Financial Sustainability of Local Government as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic (October 2020)</li> <li>● Housing Business Plan.</li> <li>● Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018-2022 and monitoring reports.</li> <li>● Local Housing Market Assessment 2019.</li> <li>● Coronavirus Recovery Strategy.</li> <li>● Housing Strategies Update Report.</li> <li>● Welsh Government regulation and legislation concerning social housing and its supply.</li> <li>● Evaluation of the current system of housing allocation.</li> <li>● Cost and statistical analyses on housing provision.</li> <li>● Funding options.</li> <li>● Review of research or work undertaken in other parts of UK to improve housing provision.</li> <li>● Relevant Annual and Service Plans.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>Format of Evidence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Briefing reports.</li> <li>● Presentations.</li> <li>● Background information – current Policies.</li> <li>● Site visits.</li> <li>● Consultation.</li> <li>● Interviews with Service Users and/or Expert/External Witnesses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>Methods to be Employed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Meetings.</li> <li>● Visits.</li> <li>● Interviews.</li> <li>● Research analysis.</li> <li>● Discussions with External Witnesses and Council Officers.</li> <li>● Develop an action plan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7</b></p>	<p><b>External Witnesses and Council officers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Service Users.</li> <li>● Officers from Housing, Legal, Finance and any other relevant service lines.</li> <li>● Representatives from Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale (CACV).</li> <li>● Representatives from Shelter Cymru and Pobl.</li> <li>● Representatives from external partners from the multi-agency ‘coordination cell’ (such as Probation, Health and Social Services, Registered Social Landlords and Community Safety).</li> <li>● Other relevant stakeholders to be determined throughout the review.</li> </ul>

<b>8</b>	<b>Timescales (including start and finish dates)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Initial meeting to consider scope and current practices and options.</li><li>• Final report to be determined by the Scrutiny Committee by no later than March 2022.</li></ul>
<b>9</b>	<b>Resources and Budget</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• VOG Officers and Elected Members time.</li></ul>
<b>10</b>	<b>Outcome</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommendations of the Task and Finish Group to be submitted for consideration to Scrutiny Committee and, if appropriate, recommendations to be made to Cabinet.</li></ul>

## Appendix C: Task and Finish Group, Timetable of Review

**N.B. Meetings to be held approx. on a six weekly basis . Each meeting held to last approx. 2 hours.**

Meeting 1	Tuesday 20 <sup>th</sup> April 2021 @ 6pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment of Chairman and Vice Chairman</li> <li>• Scope and Objectives of Review</li> <li>• Timetable of Review</li> </ul>
Meeting 2	Tuesday 1st June 2021 @ 6pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand the current funding situation of the Council in terms of housing and homelessness provision.</li> <li>• To understand the legal status around housing and homelessness provision – what the Council can and cannot do legally in this area once emergency legislation has been removed and what the potential impact of such changes will have on housing and homelessness provision currently in place due to COVID-19.</li> <li>• To review allocation priorities around housing and homelessness provision</li> </ul>
Meeting 3	Tuesday 13th July 2021 @ 6pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To review the provision of help and support for vulnerable and similar groups in order to aid them with permanent accommodation.</li> <li>• To look at how to expand temporary and more permanent accommodation in the short term.</li> </ul>
Meeting 4	Tuesday 7 <sup>th</sup> September 2021 @ 6pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To review ‘best practice’ from other and/or similar local authorities as well as potential testimony from ‘expert’ witnesses within the Council or externally (such as Shelter Cymru and Citizens Advice Bureau).</li> </ul>
Meeting 5	Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup> October 2021 @ 6pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration of Proposals and Recommendations</li> </ul>
Date to be confirmed.	TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report of review to Scrutiny Committee</li> </ul>

**Further topics for consideration (should there be time available):**

- **To understand the staffing and resources required by the Council in order to deal with these challenges.**
- **To review current governance arrangements.**
- **To review the current house building programme and surplus land or land disposal for housing development.**
- **To review homelessness policy and strategy.**

## **Appendix D**

### Meetings of the Task and Finish Group

The Task and Finish Group met on 7 occasions, as follows:

- 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021
- 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021
- 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021
- 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021
- 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021
- 14<sup>th</sup> December 2021
- 9<sup>th</sup> February 2022

### Homelessness Budgets for Task & Finish Group

		2020/21	2020/21	2021/22	2021/22	
	Description of budget	Gross Actual spend	Net Actual spend	Gross Budget	Net Budget	FTE
<b>HRA Budgets</b>		£	£	£	£	
Housing Admin Team	Process H4U applications and provide reception function for the Housing service	112,401	112,401	106,541	106,541	4.4
Housing Solutions - Incentive to move	To improve the availability of accessible HRA properties,	0	0	5,000	5,000	
Ty Iolo Hostel	Homelessness hotel (mainly families)	436,354	216,955	467,207	238,962	7
Temporary Accommodation	HRA properties held for temporary accommodation	33,266	-183,664	41,246	-190,665	
Homes 4U	Choice-based letting scheme	63,198	45,625	77,838	62,538	2
<b>General Fund Housing Budgets</b>						
Homelessness & Housing Advice (Staffing Team)	Ensure compliance with Housing Wales Act 2014 (statutory obligations)	442,097	442,097	572,398	572,398	10.5
Accommodation Payments - Temporary Accommodation	Private Landlord temp accommodation	286,958	44,288	325,000	10,000	
Accommodation Payments - Bed & Breakfast	B&B accommodation (currently funded from WG Hardship Grant)	15,374	15,374	27,164	27,164	
Spend 2 Save budget - VATS	Rents in advance payments for TA clients	21,999	21,999	48,000	48,000	
Spend 2 Save budget - Cartrefi Management fees	Fees for management of temporary accommodated clients	106,063	106,063	100,000	100,000	
		<b>1,517,710</b>	<b>821,138</b>	<b>1,770,394</b>	<b>979,938</b>	

#### WELSH GOVERNMENT HARDSHIP GRANT FUNDED EXPENDITURE: block-booked hotel B&B accommodation for homeless clients

##### 2020/21 (April 2020 to March 2021)

Block Booked Hotel rooms £1.266m

Ancillaries (including security/damage/taxis) £52k

Housing Benefit income received on hotels 2020/21 £266k

##### 21/22 (April to September 2021)

Block booked Hotel rooms £1.046m

Ancillaries - to 24th May only - (including security/damage/taxis) £42k

**WELSH GOVERNMENT HARDSHIP GRANT FUNDED EXPENDITURE: Spend on block-booked hotel B&B accommodation for homeless clients**

**2020/21 (April 2020 to March 2021)**

Hotel rooms £1.264m

Housing Benefit income received on hotels 2020/21 -£266k

Ancillaries £54k

**Ancillaries breakdown:-**

Security £44,972

Private landlords £5,918

Taxi fares £362

Repairs/damage £1,170

HIE "christmas meals" £975

**Total ancillaries 2020/21 £53,398**

**21/22 (April to September 2021)**

Hotel rooms £1.046m

Ancillaries - to 24th May only - £44k

**Ancillaries breakdown:-**

Security £38,975

Private Landlords £1,200

Taxi fares £159

Repairs/damage £3,172

**Total ancillaries 2021/22 (to May) £43,506**