

Meeting of:	Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday, 11 November 2020
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Homes and Safe Communities
Report Title:	Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018 - 2022 - Monitoring Report
Purpose of Report:	Second update to Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee on progress implementing the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan since the adoption by Cabinet on 17th June 2019
Report Owner:	Miles Punter, Director of Environment and Housing.
Responsible Officer:	Ian Jones - Housing Solutions Manager
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Council Margaret Wilkinson, Cabinet Member for Housing and Building Services Carolyn Michael, Operational Manager, Accountancy Committee Reports; Legal Services Mike Ingram, Head of Housing & Building Services Pam Toms, Operational Manager, Public Housing Services
Policy Framework:	This report is consistent with the Policy Framework and Budget.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 Act placed a statutory requirement on local authorities to undertake a Homelessness Review and to produce a Homelessness Strategy setting out how each Council, in partnership with other stakeholders, would identify and develop the services required to help and support those in housing need. • Following extensive consultation, a Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan were developed in the Vale of Glamorgan and adopted by Cabinet on 17th June 2019 (Cabinet Minute: 17th June 2019: C14). These documents set out how the Council, with assistance from its partners will deliver the required strategic outcomes for clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. • The Vale of Glamorgan Homelessness Prevention Action Plan covers the period 2018 to 2022 and is a working document which will be kept under constant review and updated as required. • This report, which was originally planned for March 2020 Scrutiny Committee, but which was delayed because of the cessation of Committee meetings, provides a further update to Members 	

of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee on the progress made to date in implementing the Strategy and Action Plan.

- It is also extremely important to acknowledge the significant ongoing challenges and pressures being placed on both the Council's Housing Solutions and Supporting People Services as a direct result of the Covid pandemic. During this period the Housing Solutions Service has received nearly 2,300 homelessness enquiries requesting advice and support, and have to date procured 86 units of B&B accommodation from 3 hotel providers. The service has placed a total of 269 households in bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, and there are currently 83 households in this accommodation who are managed very intensively with staff visits, drop in surgeries and floating support services. Despite these challenges and pressures the actions in the Homelessness Prevention Action Plan have continued to be progressed and a number of new actions have been undertaken.

Recommendations

1. That the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee continue to note the progress to date of implementing the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan.
2. That the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee note the new actions implemented and the additional significant pressures on the service, its staff and resources as a result of the COVID pandemic.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure that the actions in the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan are progressing and are driving improvements in the quality of the homelessness service.
2. For noting.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 took effect on 27th April 2015 and placed a number of new duties on local authorities in respect of homelessness, which included the following;
 - To provide assistance to anyone threatened with homelessness irrespective of priority need or local connection.
 - To provide appropriate help and support to any homeless person to help secure a suitable home.
 - To provide assistance at an earlier stage.
 - To provide new powers to local authorities to discharge their homelessness duty into the private rented sector.
- 1.2 The Housing Wales Act 2014 is the biggest change in tackling homelessness in Wales since the first Homeless Person's Act commenced in 1977. Its aim was to transform homelessness by creating a modern safety net where no one is turned away without help.
- 1.3 Section 50 of the Act also required local authorities to undertake a Homelessness Review and to produce a Homelessness Strategy which set out how the Council in partnership with other stakeholders would address:
 - the prevention of homelessness;
 - the availability of suitable accommodation for people who are homeless or may become homeless;
 - the availability of appropriate support and assistance for people who are homeless or may become homeless.

- 1.4** The adopted Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018-2022 and Action Plan set out the activities to be undertaken by the Council and its partners to deliver the required outcomes for clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness including:
- people leaving prison or youth detention accommodation,
 - young people leaving care,
 - people leaving the regular armed forces of the Crown,
 - people leaving hospital after medical treatment for mental disorder as an in-patient, and
 - people receiving mental health services in the community.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan has four themes and progress is being measured over the four years of the Strategy 2018-22 and reported quarterly to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.2** The required actions have been deemed low, medium and high to ensure that priority is given to the most important requirements of the service users and the service.
- 2.3** The overall aim of the strategy is to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity to help mitigate the pressures and challenges to both service users and the support services across the Vale of Glamorgan and this support is accessible to all and continues to be monitored to reflect current and future challenges.
- 2.4** The last six months have proven to be extremely challenging due to the pandemic, however the required actions have continued to be progressed as indicated in attached Appendix 1. During this period the Housing Solutions Service has received nearly 2,300 homelessness enquiries requesting advice and support. The service has also placed a total of 269 households in bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation. There are currently 83 households in B&B accommodation who are managed very intensively with staff visits, drop in surgeries and floating support services.
- 2.5** Since the last update provided, the Housing Solutions and Supporting People Teams have recognised the importance of including the recommendations of the LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness in Wales Report 'Out of The Door'. This commitment has been formally acknowledged as best practice at the National Supporting People and Homelessness Network and by the Ending Youth Homelessness Cymru Board. Housing Services has also appointed a LGBTQ+ champion who will focus on delivery of training when this can be provided both internally and externally by Stonewall Cymru.

- 2.6** New actions have also been identified for inclusion that are specifically aimed at increasing the temporary housing and support resources available to assist the Council with Phase 2 of the Covid recovery in line with Welsh Government (WG) requirements and to alleviate the significant challenges faced by these services.
- 2.7** As a result of the pandemic the Council has to date procured 86 units of B&B accommodation from 3 hotel providers. This resource has been created to accommodate single households and continues to be under pressure. 46 of the clients currently in B&B accommodation are under 35 years. It is therefore essential that move-on solutions are maximised across all tenures to help alleviate the extreme pressure on temporary accommodation. As a result, in addition to sourcing additional accommodation, including modular units, discussions have commenced internally to consider the need for re-designation of identified Council housing stock currently restricted to those aged 40 or over.
- 2.8** The Covid pandemic has adversely affected housing options over the last six months, particularly within the private rented sector. Courts suspended all evictions until September 2020 significantly impacting upon the availability of private sector housing. In addition, the 'lockdown' rules had a detrimental impact on letting what accommodation was available, which further reduced solutions to prevent homelessness and move households out of temporary housing. As a result, work to attract new landlords and maximise the opportunities within the private rented sector have begun to accelerate with the Council's Communications Team supporting the Housing Solutions Team with a private rented landlord survey to inform future effective promotional initiatives.
- 2.9** Attached at Appendix 1 is the updated action plan highlighting the full progress made to date since the adoption of the Strategy.

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

- 3.1** Looking to the long term - the Vale of Glamorgan Homelessness Prevention Strategy will support vulnerable people to attain the life skill required to maintain their home, integrate into the community and to live independently in the long term.
- 3.2** Taking an integrated approach - the Homelessness Prevention Strategy will be continually reviewed including by the Supporting People Local Planning Group and the Regional Collaborative Committee. These are made up of Members and senior officers from both the statutory and voluntary sectors, including Housing, Social Services, Health and the Probation Service to ensure homelessness support services remain strategically relevant and enable the development of new services where required with partners to support any emerging themes.
- 3.3** Involving the population in decisions - the needs of service users are monitored to ensure that the correct services are delivered to meet their individual requirements. In addition, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has been designed to help encourage households in need to also take responsibility for their housing

circumstances and to manage the options and solutions available to them. Support and assistance are provided by the services involved to enable them to learn to solve problems themselves in the future. The key message delivered by the Homelessness Service and the Supporting People Programme is "doing with" rather than "doing for" the service user, in order to reduce dependency on services and to enable the service user to live independently in the future.

- 3.4** Working in a collaborative way - the Council's Homelessness Prevention Strategy places collaboration and coproduction at its core through the consultation process undertaken to develop it and the ongoing integration with the Supporting People Programme where these principles are monitored on a local, regional and national level through regular reviews.
- 3.5** Understanding the root causes of issues and preventing them - the Council's Housing Solutions Service is responsible for delivering the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan and along with the Supporting People Team is required to collect needs data on clients quarterly and annually in order to inform service delivery and commissioning.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** There are no direct resource implications associated with this report. The Strategy is being delivered within existing departmental resources which include the Housing Support Grant (HSG) received from Welsh Government.

Employment

- 4.2** There is a statutory requirement on the Vale of Glamorgan to ensure appropriately experienced staff are in place to manage the statutory duties within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** The development and adoption of a reviewable four-year Homelessness Prevention Strategy is a statutory requirement of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

5. Background Papers

- (i) Housing (Wales) Act 2014 & Code of Guidance.

Operational Delivery Update Plan (Appendix 1)

High priority actions – YR 1 and YR 2 of Strategy
 Medium priority actions – YR 2 and YR 3 of Strategy
 Low priority actions – YR 3 and YR 4 of Strategy

- To provide a robust and targeted homelessness prevention service

Ref.	Action	Priority	RAG Status	Progress
A001	Undertake a feasibility study to determine costs of a Bespoke IT system	Low		<p>Progress delayed due to Covid, however the services of an external consultant has been secured and the completion of a written system specification is awaited on which to consult with staff prior to going out to the market to procure a system.</p> <p><i>2019/20 Update: Tender opportunity through Sell2 Wales in June 2020 with aim to appoint preferred supplier by the end of September 2020. New systems to be implemented over the following 18 months.</i></p>
A002	Ensure the Council continues to meet its statutory Homelessness obligations as stipulated within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014	High	Ongoing	<p>Since the pandemic Welsh Government has amended the way in which local authorities provide homelessness data. From March 2020 all local authorities in Wales were required to provide weekly data on the following –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of emergency accommodation units available The number of people in emergency accommodation The number of people moved into permanent accommodation A snapshot of the breakdown of households in emergency accommodation on a specific date <p>In August the frequency changed to monthly collections and the data snapshot for emergency accommodation is now required on the last Friday of each month.</p> <p>In addition to this the service also provides internal statistics to measure performance. In quarter one the Vale Housing Solutions Team had a successful prevention percentage of 88% and 80% for quarter two.</p>
A003	Develop a robust hospital discharge process for homelessness clients who do not meet the criteria for the Discharge Solutions Service	High	Ongoing	<p>Progress delayed due to Covid, however communication between services and wards following initial meetings and discussions is very good and ongoing.</p>

A005	Maintain close working relationships with all relevant agencies	High	Ongoing	Shadowing opportunities have been suspended due to Covid, however close working relationships have been maintained ensuring that services continue to be effective. As a result of Covid a multi-agency Central Co-ordination Cell has been created which meets fortnightly to discuss service pressures, emerging themes and new initiatives. Representation at these meetings includes Health, Police, Probation, Community Safety, Housing, Registered Social Landlords and Support agencies. These meetings are acknowledged as good practice and may continue after the pandemic.
A007	Housing Support Grant (HSG) to continue to fund Homeless Prevention Services	High	Ongoing	Homelessness prevention services again funded for 20/21, and Welsh Government are continuing to work on finalising the outcomes framework. Regional work still ongoing to develop the structure and remit of the new RCG (Regional Collaborative Group) which replaces the RCC (Regional Collaborative Committee). <i>2019/20 Update: HSG consultation meetings are ongoing with Welsh Government to develop the new grant monitoring and reporting framework. The HSG Spend Plan has also been submitted to Welsh Government for 20/21.</i>

- **To continue to develop and extend the availability of early housing advice and assistance.**

Ref.	Action	Target date	RAG Status	Progress
A009	Develop Rolling Homes4u advert	High		Despite recent delays in progress due to Covid, the Homes4U & Housing Management Steering Group met in September to continue discussions and the Housing Solutions Manager requested written evidence of the need for a rolling advert from the RSL partners. The Steering Group is meeting again in October to discuss this further and to discuss the review of the Homes4U allocations policy.
A010	Explore the possibility of developing Pilot Tenancy Ready Training opportunities within HMP Cardiff	High		No further progress since initial meeting with Welsh Government and suspended at present due to Covid guidelines. This will progress when

				<p>social distancing rules are relaxed.</p> <p><i>2019/20 Update: Meeting held with Welsh Government in January 2020 to progress this following a request to deliver a pilot project alongside Welsh Government and Cardiff CC before expansion across Wales. Awaiting further details from Welsh Government. The pilot will also help develop a new risk assessment and information sharing tool between Prisons, Probation, Housing and other key involved agencies. On track for completion by June 2020.</i></p>
A011	Maximise the use of social media	High		<p>Following initial meeting and legal advice the use of Facebook cannot be a tool used in the investigation of homelessness applications due to data protection regulations. Meeting arranged in October to discuss a social media private landlord survey to help maximise the landlords engaging with the Council's Housing Solutions Services.</p>

- **To ensure the most vulnerable are provided with support to maintain a home and to integrate into the community**

Ref.	Action	Target date	RAG Status	Progress
A012	To adhere to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (VAWDASV)	High	Ongoing	<p>Progress has been adversely affected due to Covid however regular meetings with Atal Y Fro, Social Services and the Council's Supporting People and Housing Solutions Team have taken place since April 2020 to discuss the challenges, emerging themes and accommodation demands. The MARAC process has been amended, including shorter meetings introduced every Monday and Friday in addition to the fortnightly MARAC meeting. This is to help manage the number of serious DA cases referred and discussed at the fortnightly meeting. Ongoing regular multi-agency meetings continue which include the statutory and third sector organisations to review progress on delivering the regional strategy.</p>
A013	Review of supported accommodation services	High		<p>Review remains on track for domestic abuse, mental health and young person's accommodation services to be recommissioned as required in April 2021.</p>

				<p><i>2019/20 Update: Consultation event held in June. Reviews of individual projects underway and ongoing in accordance with the Supporting People Programme Grant Guidance. As a result of the review and legislation emphasis will be to review domestic abuse and mental health provisions. All other support contracts will continue to be reviewed in accordance with Supporting People programme guidance.</i></p>
A014	Develop strategy for non- engagement within Supporting People Projects.	High		<p>Progress delayed due to Covid, however will be completed ahead of recommissioning of the supported accommodation services (A013).</p> <p><i>2019/20 Update: Initial meetings have taken place with Supporting People providers including Pobl and Llamau. Information gathered following meetings and draft report underway to inform new policy.</i></p>
A015	Analyse the support needs of clients in Temporary Accommodation	High		<p>This work continues and is concentrated on the many single households currently occupying the B&B units the Council procured as a result of the Covid demands. In addition, work is being recommenced to ensure that clients sharing temporary accommodation are managed by the same support provider.</p> <p><i>2019/20 Update: Initial discussions held between Supporting People Coordinator & Housing Solutions Manager to consider introduction of a new support initiative where residents within shared temporary accommodation receive support from the same provider to improve consistency and communication. Housing Related Support (HRS) form to be completed with all temporarily accommodated households.</i></p>
A016	Explore the need for a 24hr supported accommodation service for clients with mental health issues.	Medium		<p>24 hr complex needs project discussions have continued to progress with a potential local property being identified. Meetings have also been arranged in October to meet with the registered social landlords who expressed their interest in leasing and managing the proposed scheme. Currently also consulting with Members for their support with the scheme.</p> <p><i>2019/20 Update: Initial revenue costings received from current support provider in order to commence assessment of viability. Action to be included within Review of Supported Accommodation Action.</i></p>

A017	Explore the feasibility of dedicated Support workers for all temporary accommodation households	Medium		This work will now form part of the temporary accommodation analysis action (A015) following the identification of support needs.
A022	To support the recommendations from the LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness in Wales report 'Out On The Streets	High		Meeting being arranged to meet with Stonewall to ensure the service is fully compliant with the recommendations of the report.
COVID 001	Fully explore all Housing and Support initiatives to help alleviate the significant temporary accommodation pressures on the Council	High		A number of initiatives are currently being explored to increase the temporary and permanent accommodation resources across the Vale of Glamorgan and neighbouring authorities to manage the significant pressures on the services due to Covid, particularly for single households. Intensive support opportunities are also currently being discussed for households in temporary accommodation or who are being threatened with homelessness to ensure they have the appropriate assistance and guidance to save or sustain a tenancy.
COVID 002	Consider removing age restrictions on currently age designated Local Authority housing stock	High		Early discussions continue to look at removing the over 40 age stipulation for certain identified blocks of 1-bedroom local authority owned stock to increase the housing options available for the significant and increasing number of single under 35-year-old households placed in temporary accommodation.

- **To improve the support offered to private landlords to improve tenancy sustainability.**

Ref.	Action	Target date	RAG Status	Progress
A018	Further develop working relationships and initiatives to expand the opportunities within the Private Rented Sector (PRS)	High		A private sector landlord survey is to be developed with the Council's Communications Team. This will later inform a publicity initiative to attract private landlords and increase the housing options for households presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness. The initiative will also help support sustainable tenancy management and alternative options for landlords who may have issued notices to their tenants.

				<p><i>2019/20 Update: Quarterly Landlord Forum meetings arranged for the next 12 months. Most recent Forum was attended by over 55 landlords. New forum structure developed in discussions with landlords and will now involve additional time for networking. Welsh Government have also acknowledged the Housing Solutions initiatives within the private rented sector and are visiting the Service on 30th Jan to further explore these and learn from what we are delivering.</i></p>
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- **Completed Strategy Actions**

A004	Formulate a demand led training and induction programme for front line staff.	High		Induction tool now developed and being delivered to the newest members of the team in February. Shelter Cymru reviewed before final sign-off of the tool.
A006	Analyse the current equality monitoring data being captured	Medium		Annual data collated and submitted to Equalities Team Currently capturing data for 19/20
A008	Examine Scottish Legislation to support potential amendments to current Welsh Legislation	Medium		Progress delayed due to Covid since desktop analysis of the Scottish Legislation completed. However new WG guidance has removed the Priority Need test deeming all who present as homeless to be considered vulnerable. Information requested from WG on how long this guidance is to be in place given the significant demands this is placing on temporary accommodation and the increasing number of clients being placed in B&B accommodation (as of 12/10/20 74 single households are resident in B&B).
A019	Develop and implement a Supporting People Gateway to create a single point of access to all housing related support services	High		Completed. Gateway now exists for all support services funded by the Supporting People Programme with a clear referral and monitoring framework in place.
A020	Request that the Regional Collaborative Committee (RCC) for Supporting People co-opt a representative from each of the homelessness services in the Vale of Cardiff onto the Committee	Low		Completed. Request declined by RCC as Local Authority representatives from Housing already on RCC and able to update homelessness staff.

A021	Continue our work with partners to provide appropriate accommodation and support services for particular vulnerable groups	High		This work continues in accordance with Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Supporting People Programme Guidance (for support services) in line with resources and demands. Action to continue throughout strategy
A023	Develop a dedicated Support service for the private rented sector	High		Complete. Two new dedicated officers commissioned through the Supporting People Programme introduced specifically to increase the support available to private rented sector (PRS) landlords in addition to the support available for PRS tenants. Welsh Government also very interested in this initiative which formed part of the discussions during their visit on 30 th Jan.
A024	Develop Youth Homelessness & Early Homelessness Prevention/Intervention services	High		Completed. Funding bid successful to develop the Emphasis project that delivers homelessness prevention advice in secondary schools across the Vale of Glamorgan. The Youth Service has funded a part time post to expand and deliver services to young people in partnership with all Vale of Glamorgan Secondary Schools.
A025	Develop a standard service 'promise' to demonstrate commitment to the client	High		Completed. The 'Promise' is a two-way agreement signed by both the case worker and client which sets out the appropriate standards of behaviour and respect expected by each party.
A026	Ensure service delivery and customer engagement complies with Welsh Language standards	High		Completed. All staff are encouraged to learn Welsh and allowed time to attend courses. All public documents/forms have been translated and are available in Welsh on request. All currently used documents have been translated in accordance with the legislation
A027	Promote and provide opportunities for staff to access Welsh language courses.	Medium		All staff are encouraged to learn Welsh and allowed time to attend courses. Completed with existing staff
A028	Develop close working relationships with DWP and Vale wide Job Centre's	High		Completed. Close working relationships have now been forged with DWP and quarterly update meetings held and embedded in the procedures.
	Review & Improve the quality and range of information provided by the Housing Solutions team e.g. web site links, contact details of external organisations.	High		Completed. New documents developed to assist clients online. Information also provided on the Council's website on services available from partner agencies and 'drop in' support services across the Vale. This information will continue to be reviewed and kept up to date.
A029	Improve the quality and range of information provided by the Housing Solutions Service on the Council's website.	High		Complete. Website now updated and current.

A030	Residents are aware of the drop in support services that are available throughout the Vale	High		Complete, Leaflets produced and disseminated at events and available at key public venues across the Vale of Glamorgan. Information also available via Council's web pages and the Council's Supporting People inbox on auto reply.
A031	Continue to strengthen relationships with RSL's	High		Complete, Homes4U Steering Group now meets quarterly. Quarterly meetings also arranged for front line Homes4U officers. These meetings continue and are ongoing.