



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13TH OCTOBER 2020

SUBJECT: HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members with an update on the Homelessness situation within CCBC together with information on the actions and challenges faced during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Following the lockdown arrangements implemented as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, WG also issued new guidance in relation to how local authorities should manage homelessness and support rough sleepers.
- 2.2 The Minister for Housing and Local Government issued a statement on the 28th April 2020, making it clear that no one should be without suitable accommodation and support during this pandemic, including rough sleepers.
- 2.3 This has resulted in approximately 196 homeless households being placed in emergency/temporary accommodation, including some out of borough placements. The majority of these placements (approximately 149) have been for single persons.
- 2.4 This report highlights the actions taken to mitigate the increase in homelessness, which includes use of the private rented sector, Housing Association premises, B&Bs and hotels and a review of our allocations policy to ensure we provide support through social housing.
- 2.5 The report also includes some of the challenges faced during the pandemic as many of the individuals concerned are vulnerable and have complex needs, e.g. substance misuse, alcohol dependency, poor mental health, which is in addition to the limited availability of suitable accommodation within the borough to meet demand.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are requested to note the report and endorse the actions taken.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The report provides a progress update on the Homelessness situation within Caerphilly

County Borough and is for information purposes only.

5. THE REPORT

5.1 Homelessness Strategy

- 5.1.1 The Gwent Regional Homelessness Strategy was approved by Cabinet on the 12th December 2018. The strategy consisted of four priorities and ten objectives and were supported by an Action Plan which included regional and local tasks.

5.2 Actions to Date

- 5.2.1 The following actions have been implemented or are ongoing:-
- 5.2.2 A Regional Steering Group has been established to oversee the delivery of the strategy.
- 5.2.3 Reporting mechanisms established through the Homelessness Networking Group.
- 5.2.4 Benchmarking of data across the region is ongoing.
- 5.2.5 Accessible housing being identified within the county borough to provide suitable accommodation for those with disabilities.
- 5.2.6 Reviewed financial assistance available including use of Homeless Prevention Grant, Discretionary Hardship Payments, Tenant Support Officers, Debt Relief Orders, Discretionary Assistance Fund etc.
- 5.2.7 Re-designation of a number of one bedroom properties from older persons to general needs.
- 5.2.8 Co-ordinated access into more emergency temporary accommodation to reduce incidents of rough sleeping.
- 5.2.9 Increased supply of good quality accommodation in the private rented sector, including our Caerphilly Keys project.
- 5.2.10 Utilised findings of Local Housing Market Assessment and the Common Housing Register to increase the supply of new affordable housing to address increased demand from single persons.
- 5.2.11 Ensured adequate support in place for homelessness clients including Supporting People floating support services.
- 5.2.12 Implementation of the National Prison Leaver Pathway guidance in partnership with Probation Services.
- 5.2.13 Provided additional support following the roll out of Universal Credit.
- 5.2.14 Provided debt and money management advice using internal resources as well as working in partnership with CAB.
- 5.2.15 Other actions which were to be progressed have been reviewed and re-prioritised based on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.3 Current Priorities Include:-

- 5.3.1 The requirement to comply with new homelessness guidance issued following the statement by the Housing and Local Government Minister on the 28th April 2020 that no one should be without suitable accommodation and support during this pandemic, including rough sleepers.
- 5.3.2 The need to increase support to those threatened with homelessness to prevent a homeless situation from occurring.
- 5.3.3 Increase the provision of emergency temporary accommodation to meet increased demand on the service.
- 5.3.4 Maximise use of the private rented sector to assist in meeting demand.
- 5.3.5 Increase the level of remote support due to social distancing and potential risk of face to face visits.
- 5.3.6 Increase availability of social housing for homeless clients.
- 5.3.7 Access £10m grant funding provided by WG.
- 5.3.8 Submit bid to access additional £20m grant funding provided by WG. (Grant funding later increased by WG to £40m).

5.4 Current Position

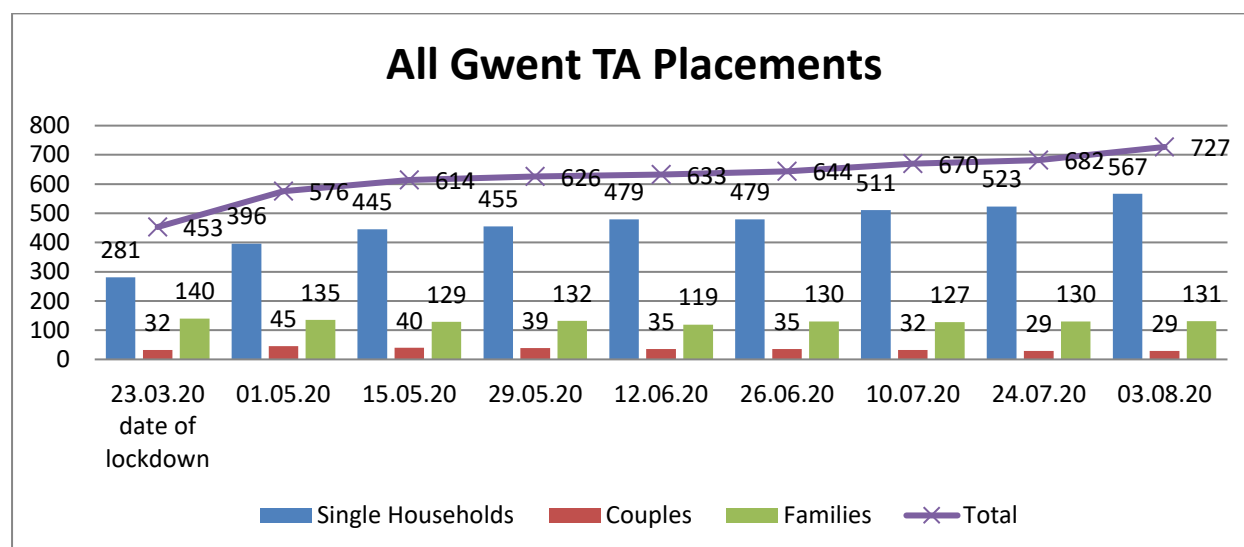
- 5.4.1 Staff have responded positively to the new regulations and guidance and reacted efficiently and effectively in dealing with the increased demand. The following table 1 provides a snapshot of the position on the 14th August 2020 together with a breakdown of the household types that have been supported:-

Table 1

WHO12 Household Type	Under 40	40-49	50 and over	Total
Couple with dependent child(ren)	6	0	2	8
Single parent household with dependent children – male applicant	5	2	0	7
Single parent household with dependent children – female applicant	19	4	0	23
Single person household – male applicant	84	23	17	124
Single person household – female applicant	23	9	2	34
All other household groups	9	0	2	11
Total	146	38	23	207

5.4.2 Table 2 below shows how homelessness has increased regionally during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Table 2



5.4.3 Table 3 shows the number of households that have been provided with emergency Temporary accommodation by each of the regional authorities.

All TA data collected from March 23rd to August 7th 2020 by each Gwent LA:

LA	snapshot date	Single Households	Couples	Families	Total
Blaenau Gwent	23.03.20	20	1	3	24
Caerphilly	23.03.20	81	11	34	126
Monmouthshire	23.03.20	13	3	4	20
Newport	23.03.20	138	14	86	238
Torfaen	23.03.20	29	3	13	45
Blaenau Gwent	01.05.20	31	4	3	38
Caerphilly	01.05.20	115	12	34	161
Monmouthshire	01.05.20	27	2	4	33
Newport	01.05.20	182	20	78	280
Torfaen	01.05.20	41	7	16	64
Blaenau Gwent	15.05.20	33	3	2	38
Caerphilly	15.05.20	116	9	29	154
Monmouthshire	15.05.20	52	2	6	60
Newport	15.05.20	209	20	78	307
Torfaen	15.05.20	35	6	14	55
Blaenau Gwent	29.05.20	34	2	2	38
Caerphilly	29.05.20	120	8	29	157
Monmouthshire	29.05.20	45	2	8	55
Newport	29.05.20	213	21	78	312
Torfaen	29.05.20	43	6	15	64
Blaenau Gwent	12.06.20	32	3	2	37
Caerphilly	12.06.20	122	14	22	158
Monmouthshire	12.06.20	42	3	8	53
Newport	12.06.20	234	7	72	313
Torfaen	12.06.20	49	8	15	72

- 5.4.4 As can be seen by the information provided, there has been unprecedented demand on the homelessness services as a consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic both locally and regionally, with this becoming a national trend.
- 5.4.5 Whilst good success has been achieved in supporting those threatened with homelessness, thereby preventing a homelessness situation from occurring, the significant demand has resulted in the need to provide many with emergency temporary accommodation, which has included the use of B&Bs and hotels.
- 5.4.6 Table 4 below provides a breakdown of the type of accommodation provided together with the number of units available in each:-

Table 4

Caerphilly	Fully supported CCBC managed facility	13 units
Newbridge	Fully supported externally managed facility	10 units
Rhymney	Fully supported externally managed facility	12 units
Rhymney	B&B floating support externally managed	5 units
Tredomen	Fully supported externally managed facility	18 units
Caerphilly	Floating support externally managed facility	9 units
Caerphilly	B&B floating support externally managed facility	12 units
Caerphilly	B&B floating support externally managed facility	7 units
Crosskeys	B&B floating support externally managed facility	15 units
Crosskeys	Hotel floating support externally managed facility	18 units
Blackwood	Hotel floating support externally managed facility	7 units
Barry	Hotel floating support externally managed facility	10 units
Risca	HMO floating support externally managed facility	4 units

- 5.4.7 Members will note that many of these were brought into use for the first time during lockdown and due to other B&B and hotel establishments closing within CCBC. During “lockdown” the use of an out of county facility has also been required to meet demand.

5.5 Reasons for Increased Demand

- 5.5.1 The increased reliance on emergency temporary accommodation is the result of a combination of a number of factors:-
- 5.5.2 All rough sleepers were to be accommodated and others presented as they did not have access to suitable accommodation or were no longer provided with facilities by family or friends, e.g. sofa surfers.
- 5.5.3 All homeless persons were to be afforded priority regardless of circumstances and offered accommodation.
- 5.5.4 As properties were not being let, households placed within emergency temporary accommodation were not able to move on, thereby taking up such accommodation for longer and not creating vacancies for others to utilise.
- 5.5.5 Due to Covid-19 and guidance issued by WG no work took place to bring void Council/social rented properties back into use until June 2020.
- 5.5.6 As households were not permitted to move home and restrictions limited our ability to undertake repairs, no allocations of void properties were made for an extended period.

- 5.5.7 In May of this year it was announced that up to 4,000 low-risk prisoners nearing the automatic release date could be released early. This was part of a National plan to protect the NHS and to avoid thousands of prisoners becoming infected. The main concern being sharing cells and close proximity. There were plans for these prisoners to be subject to licence conditions and could have been recalled at any time. However, there was confirmation that no prisoners would be released with symptoms of Coronavirus.
- 5.5.8 This would have placed most Authorities under immense pressure, but Caerphilly already had a robust Pathways Plan in place with probation that had been developed over the past number of years. It immediately gave us the upper hand with this type of scenario. Whilst the actual placements have become more difficult due to availability, the development of the HMO's helped immensely and as the 'pathway' was already in place, the release within Caerphilly was relatively smooth.

5.6 Ongoing Actions to Address Increased Demand

- 5.6.1 Officers have recognised that the current situation is likely to continue for the foreseeable future and have been actively working on ways of improving accommodation options with the key focus initially on avoiding the use of B&Bs and hotels.
- 5.6.2 In addition WG made £10m available to local authorities to assist with the additional costs associated with homelessness as a result of Covid-19.
- 5.6.3 Caerphilly's claims against this funding have been made for the following:-
- Payment of bonds and rents in advance
 - Furniture packs
 - B&B, hotel and other temporary accommodation costs
 - Additional support costs
 - Additional security costs.
- 5.6.4 To address the increased demand the following actions have been taken:-
- Increased focus on homelessness prevention
 - Increased promotion and use of the private rented sector including our Caerphilly Keys project
 - Increased use of Houses of Multiple Occupation
 - Agreed lease arrangements for RSL facilities
 - Increased use of B&Bs and hotels.
- 5.6.5 WG also made available a further £40m funding to support homelessness in Wales which was subject to a bidding process. It has been confirmed that Caerphilly was successful with our bid for Revenue funding totalling approximately £300k with another £335k being 'indicatively' approved for Capital. A further bid of £300k for Capital is still being considered by WG.
- 5.6.6 The request for revenue funding was to increase the level of housing related support due to the increase in homeless placements, to increase security in certain establishments to support landlords and provide reassurance to communities and to establish a new "triage team" to assess, monitor and support those with complex needs.
- 5.6.7 The approved Capital funding will be used to purchase additional accommodation which

contributes towards addressing current demand and focuses on bringing empty homes back into use. The element of funding currently awaiting approval is for the provision of four self-contained units to be sited at our existing Maesyderwen scheme to prepare clients for moving on to more secure accommodation.

5.7 Social Housing

5.7.1 Members will no doubt appreciate that we are operating in unprecedented times and new guidance on measures to safeguard against Covid-19 are being issued on a regular basis. This included advice issued in late June to allow some movement with the housing market including house viewings, allocations and sales. As a consequence, we have recommenced with the allocation of properties resulting in 110 new allocations since 1st August with a number of these previously being delayed due to Covid-19.

5.7.2 Operationally void properties have been prioritised to assist with homelessness and hospital discharges. As a consequence, 31 of the 110 allocations were offered to homeless placements. This would have been greater however a number of the properties had been pre-allocated prior to the Covid-19 lockdown. This work is ongoing and will enable those in temporary accommodation to move on, thereby creating a vacancy which can be used by others. This will subsequently assist by facilitating the move of placements from B&Bs and hotels into supported accommodation.

5.8 Challenges

5.8.1 Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide housing advice, assistance and, where necessary, accommodation for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Whilst this duty comes with challenges, homelessness is a national issue and one that needs to be accepted, addressed and supported across the county borough. Housing therefore requires the support of other stakeholders including Social Services, Health, Police, Probation, Prison Service, support providers, landlords, members and communities to address homelessness and its potential consequences.

5.8.2 Homelessness presentations can be made for a variety of reasons, e.g. relationship breakdown, loss of employment, eviction, abandonment, prison leavers and can include households as well as individuals.

5.8.3 Some homeless cases present with complex needs which are identified from their homeless application and interview process. This information is used to ensure suitable accommodation is provided to them and also to determine the level of support required. Each person has a key worker assigned to them to assist with identifying and addressing needs for every placement or referral we take. This person will stay with them throughout their housing journey to retain consistency and support levels

5.8.4 As members will be aware some homeless clients have substance mis-use problems including drugs and/or alcohol and may have mental health issues. Although specialist support is provided in such circumstances their behaviour can be unpredictable and has resulted in a small number of incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB). ASB is generally managed well by Housing or support providers acting on Housing's behalf, within the facility they are placed, but such behaviour can also take place outside the facility within the wider community, where Housing is not responsible.

5.8.5 The level of support provided will also be based on a risk assessment which is carried out prior to anyone being placed into temporary accommodation. The same support will therefore be provided whether the person is placed in shared accommodation or self-contained premises.

- 5.8.6 The Council will however take appropriate action if one of our placements has been found to cause unacceptable levels of ASB or if they have failed to comply with the terms of their placement/tenancy. Any action would need to be supported by evidence.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The report highlights the increased demand on the council's homelessness and Supporting People services as a consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic and the guidance issued by WG. This is a statutory service whereby we are required to provide housing advice, support and currently accommodation for all homeless households regardless of priority or intentionality.
- 6.2 Whilst Housing Services have a good supply of supported temporary accommodation within the county borough, this has been insufficient to meet such an unprecedented demand. This has been replicated nationally with authorities having to utilise B&B's and hotel accommodation as emergency facilities as well as acquiring additional facilities and using Houses of Multiple Occupation.
- 6.3 Staff and support teams have worked tirelessly to support these vulnerable clients during difficult times and although the service has performed well, due to the increase in presentations there is a requirement to increase the availability of accommodation. This includes emergency temporary accommodation and suitable move on accommodation. As the report indicates, this is currently being progressed via a number of initiatives and with the support of additional funding from Welsh Government.
- 6.4 The service being provided is to support some of our most vulnerable client groups and with the level of demand being experienced, the understanding and support of members and residents within our communities is appreciated at this difficult time.

7. ASSUMPTIONS

- 7.1 The actions contained within this report are being progressed in line with the agreed Homelessness Strategy and Welsh Government guidance issued during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic and to address the increasing number of homelessness presentations Caerphilly Homes are receiving.
- 7.2 Future presentations numbers are extremely difficult to predict particularly with the ongoing pandemic situation, uncertainty over future evictions in the private sector and the financial pressures being experienced by many households. However, it is clear that the situation is unlikely to improve in the short term and therefore the team will continue to strive to provide additional support, source new options for increasing accommodation and seek to access any additional funding that may be made available.

8. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 8.1 ***The Housing (Wales) Act 2014*** requires all Welsh local authorities to undertake a homelessness review and produce a four year homelessness strategy

8.2 Well-being Goals within the ***Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015:***

*A prosperous Wales** P2: Improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the county borough

- *A resilient Wales*
- *A more equal Wales*
- *A Wales of cohesive communities*
- *A globally responsible Wales*

8.3 ***Improving Lives and Communities: Homes in Wales 2010*** which sets out the national context on meeting housing need, homelessness and housing related support services.

8.4 ***Caerphilly Homes Service Plan (2018-2023)*** Priority Objective 7.

8.5 ***Caerphilly CBC Equalities and Welsh Language Objectives and Action Plan 2016-2020:*** Objectives 1,3,4,5,6,7,8 and 9.

8.6 ***Corporate Plan (CCBC, 2018-2023): Well-being Objective 3:*** “Address the availability, condition and sustainability of homes throughout the county borough and provide advice, assistance or support to help improve people’s well-being.”

8.7 ***The Caerphilly We Want (CCBC, 2018-2023) - Well-Being Plan: Positive Places -*** *Enabling our communities to be resilient and sustainable.*

9. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

9.1 This report contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act in that:

Long Term – supports the sustainability of cohesive communities for tenants and residents; providing a fair and transparent service for tenancy sustainment.

Prevention – supports tenants and assists in the prevention of eviction and homelessness. It supports the well-being of tenants and residents.

Integration – improved standards of housing and stable community environments.

Collaboration – joined up working arrangements within the organisation and with outside agencies to support tenancy sustainment.

Involvement – Engages tenants, residents and support agencies in relation to sustainment of tenancies.

10. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process does not need to be applied.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 As detailed throughout the report due to the increase in demand additional funding of £10m was initially made available to local authorities to assist with the increased costs associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 11.2 A further £20m was subsequently made available for local authorities to submit bids which Caerphilly Homes completed and submitted by the required deadline. Subsequently this funding was increased to £40m which covered revenue and capital costs.
- 11.3 Caerphilly Homes have received confirmation of our revenue bid for approximately £300k, a further £335k of capital funding has received indicative approval and a further bid of £300k is still being considered at the time of writing this report.

12. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 As detailed throughout the report the increased demand has had an impact on resources and additional support staff are being provided with the use of homelessness grant funding from WG and will be kept under review.

13. CONSULTATIONS

- 13.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

14. STATUTORY POWER.

- 14.1 Housing (Wales) Act 2014

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Cllr C Forehead - Vice Chair Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
Cllr L Phipps - Cabinet Member for Housing & Property
David Street - Corporate Director Social Services & Housing
Fiona Wilkins - Housing Services Manager
Sadie O'Connor - Senior Housing Advice Officer
Lee Clapham - Emergency Housing Manager
Shelly Jones - Supporting People Manager

Appendices: