



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 1PM

PRESENT:

Councillor S. Morgan – Chair

Councillors:

J. Pritchard (Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration & Climate Change), N. George (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property), S. Cook (Cabinet Member for Housing), E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care), P. Leonard (Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection) and C. Morgan (Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure & Green Spaces), Cllr. J. Simmonds (Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation).

Together with:

C. Harry (Chief Executive), M. S. Williams (Corporate Director – Economy and Environment) and R. Edmunds (Corporate Director – Education and Corporate Services).

Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), K. Denman (Housing Solutions Manager), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager) and E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Leader reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here To View](#).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education & Communities) and D. Street (Corporate Director Social Services and Housing).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. CABINET – 27TH JULY 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27th July 2022 be approved as a correct record.

4. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – TO NOTE

Cabinet was provided with the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, which detailed the scheduled reports until 14th December 2022.

Members were reminded that the Cabinet Forward Work Programme is a working document and thus subject to change. The Leader thanked Officers for populating the forward work programme so far in advance and Cabinet accepted that as a live document it would be subject to change.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the Forward Work Programme be noted. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

INTRODUCTION BY THE HEAD OF HOUSING

Given the themes of the reports being considered by Cabinet, the Leader called on Nick Taylor-Williams, Head of Housing to provide an overview of the significant pressures facing the Housing Service.

The Head of Housing confirmed that housing services were facing significant challenges not only in terms of increased housing need but also the increases in those presenting as homeless. The impact of the Pandemic was detailed, and it was noted that although Courts had suspended eviction proceedings during this period, they were now acting on evictions resulting in increased numbers requiring support. The impact of COVID 19 in terms of relationship breakdowns, financial pressures, household pressures and the cost-of-living crisis meant that more people were presenting as homeless. However, the service was working incredibly hard to assist those affected to access benefits and maximise their income by working with all partner agencies to secure positive outcomes for individuals.

The Head of Housing also updated Cabinet on one of the biggest legislative changes coming forward in the Renting Home (Wales) Act, which would give more autonomy to tenants but would also place greater pressure on Landlords, it was noted that Housing Services had already seen several Landlords leave the sector as a result. Cabinet noted that across the sector housing demand was outstripping supply and the Officer welcomed the exciting new build programme that the Council was bringing forward.

The impact of the humanitarian crisis across the globe was referenced and its impact on housing services explained, it was noted that Wales alone had seen 5000 arrivals and these numbers would continue grow as the crisis deepened, putting more pressure on private housing stock. The Head of Housing explained the asylum dispersal routes and confirmed that 2 reports would be coming forward in due course that would outline what the Council were doing and would set the scene for Caerphilly. The Officer emphasised that this position was shared across the sector with every local authority facing the same challenges.

The Leader placed on record his thanks and thanks of Cabinet to Nick Taylor-Williams, Kerry Denman, Kath Peters and the Caerphilly Homes Team for their hard work and commitment.

The Head of Housing acknowledged the thanks of Cabinet and would, following the meeting share these sentiments with the wider Caerphilly Homes Team.

5. RAPID REHOUSING TRANSITIONAL PLAN (RRTP) 2022-2027

Consideration was given to the report which sought to inform Cabinet of the new Welsh Government Rapid Rehousing agenda and how the Housing Solutions Team intend on delivering the Rapid Rehousing Transitional Plan (RRTP) 2022-27. The report also provided an overview of the key objectives of the RRTP and sought the views and comments of Cabinet so they can be reflected in the final submission of the plan to Welsh Government by the end of September 2022.

Cabinet noted that in October 2021, Welsh Government issued draft guidance to all Local Authorities on Rapid Rehousing and requested that local authorities develop their own Rapid Rehousing Plans. It was further noted that the RRTP would replace the Homeless Project Plan and sets out the action plan for Caerphilly to prevent and reduce homelessness in the borough. It would also ensure that service user needs would be accommodated as rapidly as possible. This would either prevent the need to access emergency accommodation or would support the service in reducing time spent in interim accommodation.

The seven key priorities of the plan were outlined which encompassed the prevention of homelessness, rough sleeping and meeting complex need, enhancing the Housing First Model, increasing access to permanent housing and the development of permanent housing within the borough, Common Allocation Policy review, Caerphilly Keys and the remodel and education of TA/Supported Housing.

Clarification was sought as to how support would be tailored to meet the needs of the individual and the Officer confirmed that all services across tenure would take a multi-agency approach that would include landlords to ensure individualised provision. The Landlord would be fully engaged from the beginning in an open and honest conversation on the needs of the tenant. Both the individual and the landlord would understand the journey they were taking together and in doing so would provide the best chance of securing positive housing outcomes.

Members queried how support plans were being used in the service and how often would they be reviewed, and the Member also sought clarification as to how those fleeing domestic, or any other form of abuse were being supported. The Officer confirmed that as well as the statutory full housing need assessment, tailored personal housing and support plans would be provided for all households as standard, support plans would be jointly reviewed by the Housing Solution Officer, the Individual and the Support Worker monthly. In this way individual support needs can be identified and working with partners like the Supporting People Team the appropriate intervention employed. This two-way communication and regular review process will help to quickly identify any change and with the agreement of the individual the appropriate support provided at every stage, and with the approval of the individual, this information can also be shared with the Landlord.

In terms of support for those fleeing abuse of any kind, Cabinet was advised that all frameworks across several remits would be employed to support the individual and this included the allocation of specialist support workers, a clear point of contact and a joined-up support network. The Officer confirmed that often it would be the victims rather than the perpetrator of the abuse that would leave the home and so they were exploring what mechanisms could be utilised in Caerphilly to change this, for example, removing the perpetrator from the home, with victims who were often female and children remaining in the home.

Clarification was sought on the importance of partners to the RRTP and the Officer confirmed that all partners across the board would be vital to the delivery of the plan. The role of key partners like schools, and General Practitioners was explained as they would be pivotal to the early identification of emerging issues. It was noted that a programme of workshops focused on prevention had been planned to help support key partners.

Reference was made to the commissioning of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and if there was any data available as to how much income had been maximised. Further information was also sought regarding permanent housing solutions and rough sleepers.

The Officer confirmed that the CAB had only just completed their first quarter, but the information requested could be provided a later date once the quarter figures had been analysed. The Officer went on to outline the types of support commissioned via the CAB and these were noted to include benefit advice, financial advice, debt reorders, budgeting advice. Advice appointments would be offered, face to face, by phone or at an individual home.

The Head of Housing asked Cabinet to note that although the CAB figures weren't available at this time it was worth noting that up to £3m of additional income had been generated from various benefit funding streams for eligible residents.

Regarding permanent housing solutions, Cabinet was advised that a permanent housing solution would mean different things to different individuals dependent on their needs. The RRTP would tackle rough sleeping and meeting those with complex needs by ensuring swift access to support services that are tailored and able to respond to the specific need. That both the landlord and the support providers work together to sustain this accommodation, by identifying what certain behaviours may have previously resulted in a loss of tenancy and work sensitively with that individual so that those behaviours, that might have led to an eviction are given more acceptance if they did not impact on the neighbouring community. Support packages would be heightened calling on partners from Housing First, employing a dedicated Housing Solutions Officer available out of hours and on weekends. The key objective rather than being a 'forever home' would be for a 'forever home or as long as that home is suitable'. Cabinet also noted the work being done to support vulnerable tenants with pets which can often cause an individual to fall out of tenancy.

Further detail was then requested on the Falling Out Project and the Officer confirmed that this joint project between the Housing Solutions Teams and CRISIS had reviewed service delivery pathways to try and understand why people fell out of service and make improvement recommendations. The recommendations from this work were now being taken forward and were also considered in the development of the RRTP. As a result of the project, key identifiers were established and these included a more person centred and trauma informed approach to service delivery, increasing awareness of the service, the need to employ a new IT System to improve data collation and maximise effective casework.

Clarification was sought as to how aware Welsh Government Ministers were of just how much preventative work was being undertaken and whether the Health Service made any funding contributions to the services provided.

The Officer confirmed that Welsh Government were given regular feedback on the level and amount of work that goes into prevention which is a key focus for the service going forward and advised that there was no additional funding provided by the Health Service.

The Chief Executive confirmed that a lot of the services provided by the Council were very much in the prevention and support category, and advised that inequality, be it social, economic, or health was a focus for the Gwent Public Services Board. Although no additional funding comes into that partnership, it did sit alongside the Regional Partnership Board which did receive funding and there, the preventative agenda is being considered with its focus very much around health and social care. Cabinet noted that the Council were actively lobbying Welsh Government in relation to funding.

The Leader and Cabinet thanked Officers for all their hard work and expressed how reassured they felt that the most vulnerable in our communities were being supported in this way and how much was being invested in the prevention of homelessness.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

1. The content of the report and supporting document that outline the RRTP be noted.
2. The final version of the RRTP be approved and be submitted to Welsh Government by the end of September 2022.

6. REVIEW OF ASYLUM DISPERSAL, AFGHAN RELOCATION AND UKRAINIAN SCHEMES

Consideration was given to the report which presented Cabinet with a 12-month review of the asylum dispersal process for their consideration and agreement and to provide updates on the Afghan and Ukraine resettlement schemes.

Cabinet noted that there is new emerging UK Government Policy of 'assumed dispersal' and the report sought to consider and explain the impact of the future landscape of asylum dispersal across Wales. The report also provided further information on the response to the evacuation of civilians from Kabul over the latter summer of 2021 and how the Council has supported families to settle in the area and the report also provided an update on the support offered to Ukraine nationals.

Cabinet sought assurances that relocated children were not being placed in poverty and the Officer advised that asylum seeking children were primarily supported by Home Office Commissioned Providers and this support had two elements, welfare and housing. The Home Office also provide support to asylum seekers with the legal process to make sure that their claims were progressing. For children placed in our schools there are general support mechanisms in place, particularly for children from ethnic minority backgrounds and commissioned providers would help support things like integration and language to make sure that they are settled in. In terms of poverty, asylum seekers are provided with a minimal amount of money for cost-of-living support, however children would be provided with additional things like uniforms, or provided with additional funding to ensure that they are not disadvantaged within the school system.

Clarification was then sought as to the support provided to Ukrainians to make sure they are integrating well into communities and if Local Ward Members are consulted and supported so that Members are aware of this potential need within their communities.

The Officer confirmed that Ukrainians refugees were being supported into the county borough in much the same way as other displaced individuals, on arrival Officers ensure that individuals are able to access benefits, that they have British residency permits or whatever documents they require to enable them to access the ability to work or to access education within the UK are in place. Essentially, looking at education, health and training including routes to health services to make sure that families are offered vaccinations, TB screening etc. Members were assured that none of these things were mandatory, health options are entirely open to the individual in just the same way as any other person accessing health services. The work of the Resettlement Support Team was outlined, and the Officer went on to detail the other commissioned support services available via the Afghan and Syrian resettlement programmes. In terms of integration support it was noted that this comes in a variety of different means including soft support around cultural differences, social events for guests and hosts, enabling children and families to meet up with their compatriots and build their networks.

Cabinet was pleased to note the appointment of a Ukrainian Arrival Liaison Officer from within the community to work with individuals and families.

In relation to Local Member engagement the Officer confirmed that Councillors would be engaged when a property comes online in a new area, however they would not necessarily be contacted with the address details of a family arriving in the ward area but would just be

advised of the arrival. A dispersed family would be integrated into a community in the same way as any other family arriving in the area. Cabinet was advised that properties were brought online by the Home Officer commissioned provider Clear Springs and not the Council and Local Ward Members are provided with the contact details of the Clear Springs Support Worker in case they have any concerns. Assurances were given that a multi-agency approach was adopted with all partners including Clear Springs if there are any potential problems or issues of concern.

Reference was made to the possible impact of the cost-of-living crisis and Ukrainian crisis on the number of people presenting as homeless. The Officer advised that most Ukrainian refugees, as the report explained, are in hosting arrangements which were only meant to be for a 6 to 12-month duration, at which point they cease, and then they would be reliant on the Council to house them and as Cabinet heard there are substantial pressures facing the housing service and this could lead to a greater number presenting as homeless. The length of stays on the housing register were explained and the Officer emphasised that demand was greater than supply. Considering the other asylum dispersal routes not only into Council stock but the ability to house in the private rental stock this could result in a greater number presenting as homeless.

Cabinet was assured that although this was a risk it was one that Officers were conscious of and were doing everything they can do to address it whether via our own funding or Welsh Government funding.

In conclusion the Officer confirmed that the challenges facing Caerphilly Council were being mirrored in every local authority area.

The Leader acknowledged the huge challenges facing housing services but were confident in the passion, commitment and hard work of Nick Taylor-Williams, Kerry Denman and Kath Peters and thanked them for their report.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report : -

1. The review findings contained within the paper after 12 months of asylum dispersal in Caerphilly as an approved Asylum Dispersal Area be agreed.
2. The changes in the resettlement landscape since the report on the 7th of July 2021. Notably the new policy of assumed dispersal and the extension of resettlement support to arrivals from Afghanistan be noted.
3. The continued humanitarian situation in the Ukraine and the increase in arrivals to Wales and Caerphilly noted. Cabinet recognised how the Ukraine nationals are being housed and the existing and proposed future support.

The meeting closed at 2.00pm.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 26th September 2022.

CHAIR