



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15TH NOVEMBER 2016

**SUBJECT: AN UPDATE ON THE HOUSING DIVISION'S USE OF BED AND
BREAKFAST FACILITIES FOR EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION**

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update in respect of the Housing Division's current use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) facilities for emergency accommodation. This is as a result of the decision of a Special Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 22nd October 2015 where, following extensive debate on the issue, Members asked that a further report on the use of B&B facilities as emergency accommodation be brought back to a future meeting of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for further review. This report responds to the Committee's request for the further review.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 A meeting of a Special Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee was held on 22nd October 2015 to specifically discuss the Authority's use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) facilities for emergency accommodation. The Special meeting was convened in response to a presentation made at full Council on 21st April 2015 by members of the Argoed Residents for a Safer Community. At that meeting, the residents outlined their concerns in respect of the use of B&B accommodation for homeless persons and called upon the Authority to support the Residents' Group in bringing about changes to legislation by ceasing its use of B&B accommodation for the housing of vulnerable persons in the County Borough.
- 2.2 The Interim Chief Executive responded by advising Council that the use of B &Bs for temporary accommodation would be examined at a future meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee. To this end a Special Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting was convened which discussed a report that provided a comprehensive overview in respect of the use of B&B accommodation within the County Borough for households presenting to the Authority as homeless. The report detailed the Authority's activities prior to and following the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, which introduced major changes to the way in which homeless clients needed to be assisted and housed. It outlined the statutory obligations placed on Local Authorities when discharging their homelessness functions and the procedures operated by Council Officers when dealing with persons presenting as homeless, together with the various options available to the Authority in respect of where homeless persons are accommodated.
- 2.3 During the course of the meeting, and in addition to the presentation of the Officer's report, the Scrutiny Committee received presentations from Cornerstone Support Services and Argoed Residents for a Safer Community in respect of the use of B&B accommodation for emergency housing. Members agreed that the matter of the use of B&B accommodation as emergency accommodation should be brought back to a future meeting of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for further review.

- 2.4 This report now outlines the efforts that have been undertaken since October 2015 in the strive to move away from the use of B&B for emergency accommodation and informs Members as to the current position.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 10 Year Homelessness Action Plan For Wales – 2009-2019, which sets out some guiding principles for the development and delivery of homelessness services.
- 3.2 Caerphilly Delivers: The Single Integrated Plan (2013-17); linking to the Prosperous, Safer Caerphilly and Healthier Caerphilly themes.
- 3.3 *People, Property & Places: A Housing Strategy for Caerphilly County Borough*, linking to aims 1 and 4 .
- 3.4 Caerphilly Supporting People Local Commissioning Plan 2015-2018.
- 3.5 The proposal also contributes to the following Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015:
- A sustainable Wales
 - A prosperous Wales
 - A healthier Wales
 - A more equal Wales
 - A Wales of cohesive communities

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide emergency accommodation for persons identified as being homeless and in priority need (defined at Appendix 1). Due to a lack of supported accommodation a number of homeless persons have to date had to be placed into Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation both within and outside the County Borough.
- 4.2 Since November 2014 the Authority has made a conscious effort to reduce its reliance on B&B accommodation for emergency housing. This has been done, in the main, by the creation and use of additional supported accommodation located at:
- Ty'r Fesen, Caerphilly – providing 10 rooms for homeless families and 3 rooms that are able to accommodate homeless singles and couples.
 - Ty Croeso, Newbridge – providing 10 rooms predominantly for single homeless persons (although couples can be accommodated if necessary).
 - Maes y Derwen, Tredomen – providing 18 rooms predominantly for single homeless persons (although couples can be accommodated if necessary) and
 - The Countryman, Bedwellty – providing 14 rooms for single homeless persons aged between 16 and 24.
- 4.3 This type of accommodation has 24/7 on-site management and provides greater support for homeless persons during the period their housing options are being investigated and where they are being prepared for suitable move-on accommodation.
- 4.4 The increased availability of supported accommodation has greatly assisted our ability to reduce the use of B&B accommodation to the extent that in November 2014 we had, on average, between 30-35 persons in B&B at any one time whereas during 2016 we have seen an average of 5 persons in B&B at any one time.

- 4.5 Whilst this situation is a notable achievement officers have been and are currently actively continuing in their efforts to identify additional supported accommodation so as to further reduce reliance on B&B accommodation.
- 4.6 To this end a block of 13 self contained flats located at Llys Tabernacle, Church St., Rhymney, owned by Wales and West Housing Association, was earlier this year identified as being suitable for adaptation to a 24hr supported housing scheme.
- 4.7 The facility itself, following slight remodelling, provides emergency accommodation for homeless persons referred to the project via our Housing Advice Team. Referrals to the accommodation will only be from those accepted as eligible homeless and in priority need that may require support. The accommodation at Llys Tabernacle provides the Authority with a relatively modern facility that will deliver a combination of independent and communal facilities. Clients will receive a 24/7 support service provided by Solas who currently provide similar services at the Countryman and Maes y Derwen.
- 4.8 Cabinet on 1st June 2016 agreed to support a partnership arrangement between the Authority and Wales and West Housing for Llys Tabernacle and the building has now undergone its conversion to a 12 room facility which officially opened under the new name of "Idris Davies House" on 31st October 2016.
- 4.9 This additional facility, making 12 more rooms available for use as emergency accommodation, would have almost certainly placed the Authority in a position whereby future B&B use would be unlikely or at best minimal (we cannot ever guarantee that we would never utilise B&B). Unfortunately, however, concerns have now been raised which has seen the Authority having to discontinue its use of the Countryman.
- 4.10 A recent inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation, Ofsted (Social Care) and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CCSIW) was extremely critical of the premises citing, amongst other things, the building's location and state of disrepair as contributing to the facility's inability to now provide supported accommodation of an acceptable standard.
- 4.11 The effect of this is that even with Idris Davies House now available there is an overall loss of 2 rooms for emergency housing, which is obviously disappointing. However, Officers are actively seeking additional, smaller facilities for use as similar supported accommodation. This will raise available room numbers to a level which should combat the need for future B&B use (although, as stated above, this cannot be absolutely guaranteed) without creating the potential for excessive void costs during periods where rooms are unoccupied.

5. Progress with the Social Lettings Agency

- 5.1 For some time the Authority has been preparing to develop its own Social Lettings agency, using privately owned properties managed by a partner Housing Association and providing affordable tenancies with support. To this end Officers have been actively working with private sector owners in an effort to increase the availability of properties for this purpose. The additional housing resource available to the Homelessness and Housing Advice team enables a speedier transition from emergency or temporary accommodation into well managed, suitable properties that are affordable for clients. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 now permits the Authority to also discharge its homelessness duty into the private rented sector and so access to a local Social Lettings Agency will be a positive mechanism to further reduce the reliance on B&B accommodation.

Unfortunately, interest from private sector owners has been relatively slow. To date only 5 properties have been secured and of these 2 were diverted to assist with the Syrian refugee programme. This initiative is currently being supported by funds provided by Welsh Government Transitional funding for which ongoing commitment has not been secured and which, in any event, will end at 31st March 2018. Officers are, therefore, closely monitoring progress with this initiative.

6. Conclusion:

- 6.1 The Authority has made meaningful progress in its efforts to reduce its reliance on B&B for emergency accommodation and, were it not for the unforeseen concerns raised in respect of the continued use of the Countryman, we would almost certainly be reporting at this time that our use of B&B, other than in extreme circumstances, had ceased. Unfortunately the Countryman issue means that the current position is such that we still need to source additional supported accommodation to properly address our clients' needs. To this end, Officers are actively working with our Housing Association partners in an effort to secure the provision of a suitable facility as a matter of urgency.
- 6.2 Members should be aware, however, that impending welfare reforms in the form of Housing Benefit caps will no doubt pose a threat to a number of households who currently rent in both the public and private sectors. It is estimated that in November 2016 the benefit cap will affect approximately 200 families, which could potentially increase the incidence of evictions. This may bring further pressures in respect of the availability of supported accommodation, especially in the case of family accommodation which is currently only available at Ty'r Fesen. Forthcoming trends, therefore, need to be carefully monitored to ensure that the extent of provision of supported accommodation, particularly for families, is sufficient to cope with any additional demand that may arise.

7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's EqIa process does not need to be applied.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The report itself is an information item and so brings no financial implications. Members should be aware, however, that both the existing and proposed activities outlined in this report are potentially under threat as a result of the uncertainty of future funding such as:
- Welsh Government Transitional funding has been made available to assist Authorities in meeting the additional demands of the Housing (Wales) Act. Originally promised as three year funding in 2015/16, it has now provided funding for 2016/17, however, currently there is still no WG commitment to a third year's funding for 2017/18. The uncertainty of future Transitional funding severely hinders forward planning.
 - Supporting People (SP) funding is critical to the successful delivery of many initiatives within the Homelessness field. It is pleasing to note that Welsh Government have committed to protecting the SP budget for 2017/18, however, there is no certainty that similar protection will be afforded in future years.
 - The Authority's ambition to move away from the use of B&B accommodation in favour of managed supported accommodation, if not carefully considered (in terms of the amount of accommodation we secure) brings the potential for void costs during periods where rooms are unoccupied.
 - Impending welfare reforms will affect affordability for tenants, which may well place additional burdens on the available supported accommodation.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no personnel issues. This report is for information purposes only.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 Any views of the consultees listed below have been incorporated into the report.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

12. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 To provide the Committee with relevant information in respect of progress made in reducing the Authority's reliance on Bed and Breakfast accommodation following a commitment to do so at the full Council meeting of 21st April 2015 and the subsequent meeting of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 22nd October 2015.

13. STATUTORY POWER

- 13.1 Housing Act 1996, Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation)(Wales) Order 2006, Housing Act 2004, Housing (Wales)Act 2014.

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Consultees: Cllr Dave Poole - Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing
Cllr Sean Morgan – Chair Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Gez Kirby - Vice Chair Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Christina Harrhy – Corporate Director, Communities.
Shaun Couzens - Chief Housing Officer
Suzanne Cousins – Principal Housing Officer (Housing Portfolio)
Fiona Wilkins - Public Sector Housing Manager
Claire Davies - Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Standards)
Lee Clapham – Emergency Housing Manager
Malcolm Topping – Supporting People Manager
Lesley Allen - Principal Accountant
Kevin Fortey – Housing Development Officer
Todd Rawson - Solicitor
Housing Advice Team

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Priority Need categories of households who may present to a local authority as homeless

Background Papers:

1. Report to Special Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 22nd October 2015 entitled: *"The Use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation for Emergency Housing"*
2. Report to Health Social Care and Well Being Scrutiny Committee on 3rd May 2016 entitled: *"The Provision of Floating Support to Bed And Breakfast Establishments"*