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Risk management arrangements

Bridgend County Borough Council

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The team who delivered the work comprised Malcolm Latham and Jeremy Evans.

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We have concluded that Bridgend County Borough Council (the Council) has a clear corporate risk management process in place which is well understood at a strategic, corporate and operational level, although there is scope to strengthen the approach to managing residual risks.

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Summary report

Summary

1. Risk management is an integral part of good governance and is a process whereby:
 - there is shared awareness and understanding within the Council of the nature and extent of the risks it faces; and
 - there is regular and ongoing monitoring and reporting of risk, including early warning mechanisms.
2. The process should be ongoing, embedded in the culture of the Council and drive performance improvement. It is not about eliminating risk but about understanding risk and managing it more effectively.
3. Each organisation must decide what benefits it would like as a result of its risk management programme and plan its approach accordingly. The operational benefits of a systematic and consistent approach to risk management are considerable, including:
 - better management of change programmes;
 - increased focus on what needs to be done (and not done) to meet objectives;
 - supporting innovation and the delivery of better quality services with fewer complaints;
 - focusing actions and getting things right first time; and
 - protecting the Council's reputation.
4. Through effective risk management, the Council will be able to deliver:
 - an appropriate balance between risk and control;
 - more effective decision making;
 - better use of limited resources; and
 - more innovation.
5. In a recent Wales Audit Office review of risk management in children's social care, it was found risk management processes needed strengthening and the Council could demonstrate more clearly how it uses risk to support service delivery on an on-going basis.
6. Using the impact of homelessness corporate risk as a tracer, the purpose of this review was to answer the question: "Is risk management understood and embedded within the Council, supporting effective decision making?"
7. Our overall conclusion is that there is a clear corporate risk management process in place which is well understood at a strategic, corporate and operational level, although there is scope to strengthen the approach to managing residual risks. We have come to this conclusion because there is:
 - a systematic approach in place to identify and prioritise risks; and
 - the impact of homelessness risk is actively managed at a corporate and operational level.
8. Our findings are summarised in more detail under the following headings.

There is a systematic approach in place to identify and prioritise risks

There are clear reasons for the impact of homelessness becoming a corporate risk

9. The Council has defined risk as any potential development or occurrence which, if it came to fruition would jeopardise the Council's ability to:
 - achieve its corporate objectives;
 - provide services as planned; and
 - fulfil its statutory duties, including the duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement.
10. In this year's risk assessment review process the Council has identified the impact of homelessness as a specific corporate risk (Appendix 1). Previously, the impact of homelessness had been included along with other housing risks within the recession risk.
11. Although not a large financial risk (approximately £200,000) the social impact on the County Borough and the reputational impact on the Council were seen as significant. For some time, below average performance indicators, high numbers of homelessness presentations and the increasing demand on budgets for bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation without any resolution of the problem, had caused concern and were seen as problematic by members and senior managers.

The Council's approach to risk management is mainly a top down process driven by corporate and service objects

12. Recently Audit Scotland¹ identified risk management good practice in the public sector as being top down driven by corporate and service objectives. The Council has an annual process in place. This starts each year in June with the Council's Risk Management and Insurance Officer reviewing directorate key papers and business plans for potential corporate risks which are then including in a draft risk assessment document. Following a review process with directors, the corporate management board (CMB) and cabinet members, the risk assessment is published alongside the corporate plan in September.

¹ Audit Scotland Best Value toolkit: Risk Management July 2010

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13. In this process, once the risks that potentially impact on the Council's ability to achieve its objectives have been identified, they are assessed against a likelihood matrix (scoring 1-6) and impact assessment score (scoring 1-4) producing an overall risk score to rank the risk. Under this arrangement, the impact of homelessness scored 15 which placed it amongst the fourth priority grouping of corporate risks. Although there are much higher corporate risks in the first to third tiers, this still places the impact of homelessness high on the Council's agenda.
 14. There is scope within the current arrangements to strengthen the Council's approach to identifying and mitigating residual risks. For example, within the impact of homelessness corporate risk, the assessment identifies the possibility of Supporting People funding being withdrawn and the Welsh Government not devolving funding if the Council cannot show it is prepared to manage larger programmes. However, within the risk reduction measures there are no plans in place to address this contingency and ensure key services will be maintained.

Risk management is actively supported and promoted by senior officers, cabinet and elected members

15. In 2008, this concern about the homelessness issue led to the Community Renewal and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertaking detailed research culminating in a final report this year with 11 recommendations accepted by Cabinet in April 2011 (Appendix 2).
16. This research was extensive and key findings were fed back to managers and the cabinet as the review progressed. This approach contributed to raising the profile of the risk and the management of issues as they were raised. The scrutiny committee's approach also attracted additional scrutiny development funding, which increased the committee's expertise and contribution to scrutiny time banking. This has enabled the experience and research to be shared more easily with other councils.
17. Following up progress with the report's recommendations has now been included in the scrutiny committee's forward programme.
18. Recently, the Council recognised that there needed to be much clearer separation of responsibility between those of the Audit Committee and other scrutiny committees. In the past, the committees often looked at similar issues, involving risk and performance, which had led to some duplication. In July 2010, the distinction was made clear with the introduction of new terms of reference for the Audit Committee, following those set out in the CIPFA good practice guidelines. Following their introduction, the Audit Committee established a new forward programme and brought in meeting business changes. The Audit Committee's Chair and the Head of Internal Audit are confident that this clarity has improved the effectiveness of the committee and its members.

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19. The corporate risk assessment underpins the Audit Committee's forward programme. In this programme the audit committee receives briefings from officers and regular progress reports from the Risk Management and Insurance Officer. Within this arrangement, the committee feels it is adequately informed and is able to hold managers to account for the impact of risk mitigation action plans.
 20. As previously identified, corporate risks are informed by directorate business planning arrangements. Business plan delivery is formally monitored through the Council's quarterly business review meetings (QBR). This process is led by the Council's Chief Executive and involves the Leader, Directors, Cabinet Members senior managers and scrutiny chairs. This process includes monitoring risks impacting on business plan delivery.
 21. Consolidating these arrangements the Council had produced a draft Corporate Risk Management Policy which summarises the strategic approach, roles and accountabilities and risk management methodology. This policy is in the process of being finalised and should be formally in place by the autumn of 2011.

The impact of homelessness risk is actively managed at a corporate and operational level

Senior staff understand the need to manage risks effectively and the concepts involved

22. Operational responsibility for homelessness rests with the Council's Communities Directorate. Within the Directorate, management responsibility falls to the head of Regeneration and Development's portfolio.
23. On formation of the new Directorate three years ago, it became quickly apparent to the new management team that existing arrangements were not working effectively and staff had become resigned to the situation and performance was declining. Responding to this, the senior management team was strengthened by the appointment of the Head of Regeneration and Development, with a specific remit to develop a strategic and operational management approach to the issue. This resulted in a housing options and homelessness action plan (Appendix 3). The action plan, although more detailed is aligned to the corporate risks and mitigation measures.
24. Whilst these action plans follow conventional good practice, identifying actions, milestones and completion dates. There is scope to strengthen the current approach and increase ownership, by identifying the individual roles responsible for completing specific action rather than generally identifying service areas and teams.

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25. Along with these changes, directorate teams have been restructured and a greater emphasis placed on owning performance. To reinforce the new arrangements, senior managers have become more visible and staff through team meetings have been encouraged to own performance and improve working practices. Directorate business objectives now feed directly into manager and operational staff individual performance management targets.
 26. Effective risk management should lead to plans which address key risks that might be realised despite the controls that are in place (the residual risk). Specifically for councils, how they will ensure that key services are maintained and any adverse impact on key outcomes minimised.
 27. The Council's current risk management documentation does not always set this out clearly. Within the corporate risk assessment, the impact of homelessness risk identifies that Supporting People funding could be withdrawn or have to be repaid if the Council cannot demonstrate compliance with grant conditions. Linked to this risk, the assessment also identifies that the Welsh Government may not devolve funding if the Council cannot demonstrate sufficient preparedness to manage a larger programme. The Corporate assessment does not identify how this residual risk will be mitigated. If these two risks are then followed through to directorate action plans it is difficult to find reference to specific mitigating actions (ensuring compliance with grant conditions or managing larger programmes). Consequently, there is scope to strengthen arrangements by including specific residual risk mitigation measures within action plans.

Some performance information given to members can be confusing and is often not easily understood

28. Currently, information provided to members tends to be tables of raw performance data, which is often very comprehensive but can appear to contain little analysis. Some scrutiny members have found it difficult to understand why some indicators are reported as green when their own experience suggests the risk may be higher. Particularly, as under the current arrangements they believe the QBR process tends to focus on reported amber and red risks only.
29. Plans are in place to improve the quality of information provided to members through the development of new performance reports. This is an important development as it has the potential to improve the role of members in monitoring performance and management risk reduction measures.

Raising the impact of homelessness to a corporate risk has supported change

- 30.** Identifying the impact of homelessness as a corporate risk has resulted in change. The Directorate management team identified that there is more support throughout the Council to look at change. The base budget has been reviewed and reset, in the past it was continually overspent, with this overspend being met from contingency funds each year. Resetting the budget now means there is stricter financial control and much more transparency about what is actually being spent.
- 31.** In addition, more resources have been secured, for example, developing an additional three units at the Brynmenyn homeless hostel and strengthening the supporting people team from one to three.
- 32.** At a strategic level, the Council's Supporting People plan is being revisited to follow the Scrutiny Committee's report recommendation 10 (Appendix 2). Although there are no immediate plans to change the existing arrangement for these funds, it does show the Council is prepared to look at these more difficult issues and improve how resources can be used to meet objectives.
- 33.** A supporting people project board has been established with its first meeting held in May. The board is chaired by the Council's Chief Executive and includes the Communities and Wellbeing directors. It signals both the importance of the work and the need to resolve some of the difficulties that moving resources towards improving assessment and housing becoming a solution.

There is a greater focus on partnership working and programme planning

- 34.** Recently, the Directorate undertook an exercise with the housing associations to review the process whereby housing provision could be better matched to need. This exercise was needed because the Council had experienced increasing numbers of repeated nominations for housing being rejected; increasing the number of problem individuals in B&B accommodation.
- 35.** The multi-case review meetings involved cabinet members, housing association chief executives and directorate team members reviewing the allocation process. Understanding the problem meant the Council was able to commit to supporting these individuals if the housing associations were prepared to house them. This process took half of the individuals out of bed and breakfast provision.
- 36.** In addition, the cabinet members recognised the need to change member involvement on housing association boards. This has now changed representation to cabinet members' only, strengthened accountability and aligning decisions with corporate objectives.

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37. Recognising the importance of working with partners, directorate managers are working with the prison service to look at improving the arrangements for better managed offender release. Some of the homelessness problem the Council has experienced are the result of meeting unplanned demand from newly released offenders. Work is also to be undertaken with the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU Health Board) to look at mental health discharge arrangements to make better use of council facilities and reducing homelessness within this group of patients.
38. It will be important that current risk management arrangements operationally and at a corporate level include cross partnership risk management issues. This will require shared risk assessments and joint risk registers promoting a consistent approach to risk management within partnerships.

Areas for improvement

39. This follow-up review has identified a number of areas where improvements can be delivered. These are summarised below.

Areas for improvement

Strengthening current arrangements by identifying how residual risks will be managed to ensure key services are delivered.

Strengthening operational action plans to include management roles rather than just teams or departments.

Establishing an effective information reports which supports members' better understanding of performance and risk mitigation.

Including partnerships in the corporate and operational risk management process.

Appendix 1

The impact of homelessness in the Council's corporate risk assessment

Risk description	Impact	Risk reduction measures
<p>The impact of homelessness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The high costs, both in terms of finance for the Council and the wellbeing of individuals, of inappropriate temporary B&B accommodation. The position is exacerbated by stalled housing development projects both in the affordable and market sectors. 	<p>Homelessness often represents a culmination of several problems, such as debt and relationship difficulties. For many, homelessness leads to increased stress, depression and isolation. It is a time of change and uncertainty for adults and children. It can lead to a need for other costly service interventions.</p>	<p>New management has been appointed to improve performance.</p>
<p>There are 15 per cent more presentations per head of population than the Welsh average. Of these, 44 per cent more than the average were people in priority need.</p>	<p>In 2009-10 there were 665 homelessness presentations, of which 358 were people in need.</p>	<p>The housing options team prevented 113 cases of homelessness in 2009-10. There will be a greater focus on this area with discretionary support to persons so that they do not become homeless. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provision of rent in advance of payment; payments of bonds; and interim payments if there are delays or shortfalls in housing benefit.
<p>Changes made by the UK Government to benefit entitlements will affect many citizens.</p>	<p>The extent of the impact of changes to benefits is not yet known.</p>	<p>As soon as the UK Government's benefit policy is determined, the implications will be assessed and reports prepared for cabinet to consider.</p>
<p>There are currently 35 'households' in B&B accommodation. The majority being single adult males.</p>		<p>Develop the common housing register in partnership with registered social landlords. This will improve the nomination process and streamline access to social housing.</p> <p>Accessing alternative temporary accommodation e.g. 36 units of accommodation have been secured for leasing. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of homeless families.</p> <p>Bridgend Alternative to B&B Scheme</p>

Risk description	Impact	Risk reduction measures
		<p>(BABBA) commences in 2011. Six units are being built in partnership with the Wallich.</p> <p>Extension of Brynmenyn homeless hostel to provide an additional three units.</p> <p>Tenancy support services.</p> <p>Programme management arrangements are being established to manage the review and compliance arrangements.</p>
<p>There will be further pressures on leasing schemes from proposals to reduce housing benefit subsidy from 1 April 2011.</p>	<p>The average cost of keeping a single person in B&B accommodation is £290 a week. More than £15,000 a year.</p>	
<p>A number of changes will be needed to the management of the supporting people programme, in light of a national review, audit recommendations and emerging unmet need. This may place additional management requirements on the Council.</p>	<p>Supporting people funding could be withdrawn and previous funding have to be repaid if the Council cannot demonstrate compliance with grant conditions.</p> <p>The Welsh Government could decide not to evolve funding if the Council cannot demonstrate sufficient preparedness to manage a larger programme.</p>	

Appendix 2

Homelessness research and evaluation panel report recommendations

Recommendations

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| 1 | It is recommended that the Directorate develop clear performance measures in relation to the new initiatives in order that the impact of the action taken can be monitored and evaluated. These performance measures should also seek to incorporate the views of service users where possible. |
| 2 | In view of the significant amount of spending in relation to B&B accommodation, it is recommended that the use of B&B accommodation should be reviewed, with a view to diverting some of the budget towards enhanced prevention and support services. |
| 3a | The Panel's research has identified an urgent need for a greater choice of temporary and move on accommodation to be available as an alternative to B&B accommodation. |
| 3b | Increased provision of floating support should be implemented as a matter of urgency as a means of increasing the options available. |
| 3c | The effect of BABBA and similar projects on the Authority's B&B budget should be monitored, with savings invested in the development and expansion of such provision. |
| 3d | The Panel recommends that the nomination agreement with Valleys to Coast is reviewed and revised to reflect the scale of the homelessness situation in Bridgend. |
| 4 | It is recommended that methods of establishing / increasing supported tenancies be considered alongside the planned review of the way in which the Supporting People fund is distributed. |
| 5 | It is recommended that links between BCBC Adult Social Care and Housing departments be strengthened at an operational and strategic level, in order to enhance the outcomes for those presenting as homeless. |
| 6 | It is recommended that further work be undertaken with Adult Social Care and the ABMU Health Board to establish whether the difficulties in accessing mental health assessments as described above are isolated incidents or symptomatic of a systemic problem. |
| 7 | It is recommended that further work be undertaken to examine the way in which the Council, in partnership with Health, commission services, to ensure that this situation is not exacerbated. |
| 8a | Consideration should be given to the means by which the Council, in partnership with other agencies, can facilitate the establishment of parent support groups, where parents, particularly of older teenagers, can compare experiences and share solutions to challenging behaviour. |
| 8b | There is scope for further work to be done to establish whether there is evidence of unmet need in regard to the family mediation service. |
| 9 | It is recommended that, as part of the Member Development Programme, Members are provided with awareness training regarding the Supporting People function, in order to enhance their understanding of the range and impact of the services provided by the Supporting People Programme. |

Recommendations

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| 10 | The amount of funding that the Council allocates to Learning Disability services from the Supporting People programme should be benchmarked against that provided by other local authorities, to compare the level of service that the Council offers but also to ensure that the Council is getting value for money. This should be progressed speedily in order that the findings can be used to inform the review of the Supporting People Programme. |
| 11 | There should be Cabinet representation on the Supporting People Planning Group to ensure that the interests of the Local Authority are fairly represented by persons with the authority to make budgetary and political decisions. |

Appendix 3

Housing options/homelessness action plan - November 2010

Action	Who	When
Joint Working		
Review existing Protocol with Children's Services to align with recent Welsh Government Guidance / Best Practice info.	Housing Services / Children's Services / CYPP Task and Finish Group 16/17 year old Accommodation issues	Revised protocol being developed and draft will be available by 22 November 2010 for T&F Group. Completed protocol to form part of the overall Homelessness Strategy.
Review current use of accommodation including LA Hostel and Supported lodgings to reduce use of B&B. Develop model for Emergency Accommodation for move on of young people with support to accommodate a level of voids.	Housing / Supporting People / After Care Team	Application for Consultancy submitted to Homelessness network Co-ordinator to be operational by April 2011. Short stay with emergency access so that B&B is not used. Emergency Access Accommodation for assessment and placement under Section 188 Housing Act 1996.
Review existing services in order to develop an integrated team to deal with issues experienced by young people. Review will take a pathways approach, looking at access to, quality of service and experiences of young people	Housing Services / Children's Services/ Supporting People/ Health Services/ Employment Services	The Council Aftercare team has been tasked with developing a proposal to create a Multi Disciplinary team dealing with 16+. Paper to be completed December 2010 Presentations to be arranged for December 2010 / January 2011 from leading Authorities in England that have completed a Joint Commissioning Journey and achieved Budget saving. Heads of Service, Group Managers and Members to be invited. Application for Consultancy submitted to Homelessness Network Co-ordinator to be operational by April 2011.
Review existing processes in relation to determining homelessness under Housing Act to ensure decisions are legally correct to avoid unnecessary Appeals. Liaise with Legal Services on the legal definition of homelessness presentations and monitor the number of homelessness presentations.	Housing/Legal Services	Work has commenced on streamlining processes for interviews. Workshop being held on 26 November for staff to discuss interview process and gathering of information. Series of meetings planned with Legal from December 2010.

Action	Who	When
<p>Establish a robust procedure and protocol for the interview process and evidence gathering in respect to Homelessness Applications and Housing Options advice.</p> <p>Review homelessness presentations in the context of high numbers continually presenting and consider the application of greater preventative working.</p>		
<p>Review existing Nominations Protocol to ensure that the authority is able to secure the best opportunity of housing and outcomes for those who are deemed to be homeless and priority need having regard to applicants on the Housing Register.</p>	Housing/Legal/V2C	<p>Areas of concern to be highlighted by Homelessness Team in relation to nomination process. Meeting to be held with V2C to establish interim protocol ahead of Common Housing Register. Legal to be consulted to ensure Protocol complies with Guidance. Commence December 2010.</p>
<p>Development of Common Housing Register in conjunction with partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Allocation Policy including how to monitor allocations including previous tenancy • Common Inclusion Policy References, Medicals, Inclusion Panel, SNAP • Housing options; The One Stop Shop • System Specification (Assess IT capacity and needs of all partners) • Roll Out • Go live 	Housing Strategy; Linc; Wales and West; V2C; Hafod; BAH; homelessness; Legal; Customer Services.	<p>31/12/10</p> <p>31/01/11</p> <p>31/03/11</p> <p>8/11/11-31/03/12</p> <p>31/03/12</p> <p>18/05/12</p>
<p>Workwise review on housing and homelessness procedures with particular attention to the customer interface. Undertaken using in-house team.</p>	ICT & Customer Contact	<p>Draft report for the next BEIP Board with a possible start in January 2011.</p>
<p>Examine the use of e-procurement in the provision</p>	Housing/Procurement	<p>Establish robust invoicing procedures for B&B accommodation operational.</p>

Action	Who	When
of contracting B&B accommodation and associated costs of dealing with homeless cases.		Contracting (leasing/procurement) December 2010.
Review all cases in temporary accommodation to identify their paths to moving-on. All cases in temporary accommodation to be reported to Inclusions Panel to determine barriers to future nominations.	Housing, V2C, Hafod, Wales and West; Linc	December 2010 then quarterly.
Prevention		
Current Mediation Service to be reviewed including capacity to develop and deliver a communication strategy to ensure that all groups of young people are being appropriately referred in order to prevent homelessness. Mediation to get involved at an earlier stage than 16.	Housing Services / Llamau	Develop customer satisfaction and partner awareness survey of service. Report on findings and draft communication plan by April 2011. Potential to form part of 16+ paper.
Landlord Liaison: Evictions Empty Properties Lettings Standards	Housing, national Landlords Association (NLA), HB, and EVH	Landlord Forum Launched November 2010 to be held quarterly. Presentation made on empty properties and leasing arrangements. Questionnaire to be sent to landlords in attendance.
Discretionary Payment Fund operational	Housing	September 2010
Housing to engage with Personal Social Education Co-ordinator to ensure that young people receive appropriate education about housing and homelessness issues.	Housing Services / Education/ Advice Agencies e.g. Shelter Cymru, Llamau	Discussions have commenced in order to develop targeted lessons etc. to raise awareness. Sessions booked for Local Colleges. First session 12/11/10. Total of 10 session booked by 2011.
Supported Accommodation		
Linked with review of Supporting People Programme, Supporting People to review strategic relevance of existing projects/ services and reconfigure them in line with the outcomes of the programme	Supporting People	Supporting People are currently undertaking a review of the Supporting People programme to be completed by December 2011. Strategic relevance of Young Person projects to be completed in January 2011.

Action	Who	When
review.		
Supporting People Gap Analysis to highlight gaps in housing related support provision for vulnerable young people.	Supporting People	Gap Analysis to be Completed in December 2010 and outcomes incorporated into SP Operation Plan January 2011.
Supporting People to review existing methods of service monitoring and develop an outcome based framework to review and monitor service provision to ensure that Young People-specific housing related support services have met the needs of young people.	Supporting People	May 2011.
Complete Brynmenyn extension to create a further three rooms	Housing	COMPLETED.
Complete Bridgend Alternative to B&B	Housing/ United Welsh Housing Association	April/May 2011.
Develop additional direct access and move on facility	Housing/ Hafod Housing Association	March 2011 site purchase. Completion date to be determined.
Examine the current leasing arrangements and develop a three year leasing proposal, Identify service users/properties where the Council can discharge their duty. Examine list of empty properties considered suitable for leasing. Negotiate RSL properties to contribute to Leasing arrangements. Re-tender leasing arrangements.	Housing, Bridgend Housing Partnership, NLA	Meetings being held with providers to test market product September/November. Evaluation of need currently underway November/December 2010. Brief to be prepared for tendering January/March 2011.
Establish robust monitoring systems for the use of temporary accommodation. Develop a series of monitoring reports to highlight service users' path in temporary accommodation.	Housing	Reports operational for Team Leader November 2010.
Develop housing options in the private sector and alternatives	Supporting People / Housing / Social	Meetings arranged by HB and Housing to Discuss future implications,

Action	Who	When
to B&B to accommodate young people on a permanent basis, with appropriate support services.	Services.	regarding LHA November. Mapping required identifying need for leasing and longer term accommodation by client groups for Supported housing and PRS Leasing November/December 2010.

Lobbying, influence and horizon scanning

Develop evidence base to measure impact of Parc Prison on homelessness presentations, and develop lobbying strategy to secure additional Welsh Government resources, or change in policy.	HORD	End November 2010.
Work through WLGA and Assembly Members to influence the redrafting of the Homelessness Code of Guidance.	HORD	End December 2010.
Assess likely impact of changes in welfare benefits and Local Housing Allowance on homelessness in Bridgend.	Housing Strategy Team/Bridgend Housing Partnership	End February 2010.



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