

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3 - THURSDAY, 19 APRIL 2018

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB
ON THURSDAY, 19 APRIL 2018 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor JC Spanswick – Chairperson

SE Baldwin	TH Beedle	P Davies	DG Howells
A Hussain	RMI Shaw	RME Stirman	G Thomas
E Venables	MC Voisey		

Apologies for Absence

N Clarke and DRW Lewis

Officers:

Sarah Daniel	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitees:

Lynne Berry	Group Manager Housing & Community Regeneration
Andrew Jolley	Corporate Director Operational & Partnership Services
Martin Morgans	Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Councillor Dhanisha Patel	Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations

35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:-

Councillor N Clarke
Councillor DRW Lewis

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

37. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report which was presented by the Scrutiny Officer which, was to:

- a.) Present the items prioritised by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC), including the next item delegated to this Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- b.) Present the Committee with a list of further potential items for comment and prioritisation;
- c.) Ask the Committee to identify and further items for consideration using the pre-determined criteria form;

- d.) Consider and approve the feedback from the previous meetings of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3, and note the list of responses, including any still outstanding at Appendix A to the report.

The report gave some background information, then referred to the attached Appendix B, the overall Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees (SOSC's), which included the topics prioritised by the COSC for the next set of SOSC's in Table A of the report, as well as topics that were deemed important for future prioritisation at Table B.

A Member was of the opinion that the subject of Empty Properties should be followed-up, and therefore, this important Item should remain on the FWP and revisited in 6 months' time.

RESOLVED: That the report be approved and noted.

38. **EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION**

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services presented a report on the provision of emergency accommodation for people presenting as homeless within Bridgend. The report also focused on the hostel provision at Brynmenyn, with a view to responding to Committee's queries regarding its quality and appropriateness of provision. Finally, the report also identified a number of 'long list' options for consideration as a potential replacement provision (for the Brynmenyn hostel).

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration gave an outline of the report and advised that the Housing Act (Wales) Act 2014 had changed the focus of support for homelessness and housing to prevent and relieve homelessness, and to ensuring that people in this position, receive help as soon as possible.

The table in paragraph 3.2 of the report, reflected that Total Presentations of people presenting themselves as homeless had increased in the last few years. This was due to the fact that everyone that was considered eligible was entitled to help; however, the number of 'final duty' priority need unintentionally homeless acceptances had substantially fallen.

She added that the Authority together with its partners had to respond in a reactive manner within a short timescale, to ensure that interim/emergency accommodation was available for people we had a homelessness duty to particularly those individuals who were regarded as vulnerable, until such time suitable permanent accommodation was found. If the number of homelessness applications and 'final duty' acceptances increased, then the expected demand for interim/emergency accommodation would also be higher.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration, confirmed that emergency accommodation was provided at the hostel in Brynmenyn, as well as in Ty Ogwr and Cornerstone, emergency bed space at the Kerrigan project and leased temporary accommodation. Although not part of this emergency accommodation, information on the nightly floor space (floor space at the Kerrigan run by Gwalia) had been highlighted in the report, in order to provide context to the needs of street homeless provision for those that the Authority had no housing 'duty' towards, but which nevertheless require a place to sleep overnight. This was in the form of a direct access provision which had 9 nightly floor spaces for street homeless people.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration confirmed that it was not just families that required emergency housing, as there was now a trend also for the support of single people without children.

The Cabinet Member - Future Generations and Wellbeing, advised Members that the main place in the County Borough at Brynmenyn Hostel, where individuals could be afforded accommodation as a matter of urgency, was mostly effective in terms of a provision of service. The problem was that the building was old and outdated, and required modernising as well as certain other adaptations.

A Member felt that the service that was being provided in terms of the provision of Emergency Accommodation was well regarded. There was an issue however with individuals being provided this in the valley areas, as they were remote from a town, with these people having limited resources to pay for public transport in/out of such a location, where there was more to offer them.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration, advised that there were floating support systems available for all areas which included the more remote areas of the County Borough. Housing Support Services actually encouraged and supported individuals to remain in-tenancy, regardless where this was within the County Borough, as it was important that all the different types of accommodation available were being taken up by tenants, whether this was through a Registered Social Landlord or by other means, as this meant that there were less people classed as being 'homeless.'

A Member asked if the situation could ever arise, whereby those people who presented themselves to the local authority as being homeless, were refused some kind of accommodation, whether this be temporary through being provided with emergency housing, or something more permanent.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration advised that the Council were required to meet its obligations under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, under which some individuals met the requirements of being offered emergency accommodation, though others did not. She advised Members that some people actually chose to sleep on the streets, and others were not able to secure or remain in-tenancy due to ongoing behavioral issues. These people were often then evicted because of their behaviours, which meant that although the Council had met its duty to house these people, it was unsuccessful. Under the direct access arrangements the Authority were still able to provide a further option for some of these people with direct access bed space if they subsequently sought this, whereby they would then be given access to the short term direct access provision ie an area of floor space. She added that there were a considerable number of complexities associated with homelessness was incumbent upon the Authority to attempt to resolve this.

A Member advised that he was aware from previous experience, that as many as 51% of single males who were looking to be housed on a more permanent basis, failed in this regard, He felt that this was far too high a percentage.

A Member asked what the success rate was for individuals who were initially provided emergency floor space, then proceeded to secure more permanent accommodation through a tenancy arrangement.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration, advised that they were initially interviewed and assessed for housing which included information on their health needs, requirements and their financial status. They would be offered advice and guidance and where suitable offered and provided with rented or temporary accommodation. Some people who were offered this proved to be successful in

retaining this, but the ones that did not were usually due to the fact that they were not ready to progress from emergency floor space to something more secure, due to a variety of reasons meaning that they were unable to see out the responsibilities associated with more permanent tenancy arrangements. People can present at the Civic Offices where accommodation options and access any advice they may require from appropriate staff.

The Head of Partnerships and Performance added that there was a pilot exercise ongoing that offered a more diverse, consistent and supportive process for landlords and tenants of the private housing sector, to reduce the number of people who were facing crisis arising from a letting situation, ie by getting into debt through rent arrears, and those who required support for reasons of ill-health etc. He added that there was a problem finding suitable accommodation for single males.

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services added that even though the facility in Brynmenyn was in need of replacing, it was still an excellent short term accommodation support service for single people or couples. It did however, lack a number of facilities.

The Wallich representative further added, that even though it was lacking in certain facilities, the Brynmenyn Hostel was regarded as one that could provide emergency accommodation for families, whereas Ty Ogwr was more suitable for single homeless people on an interim basis, prior to them being considered for referral to accommodation of a more permanent nature.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration informed Committee that the pattern of usage at Brynmenyn Hostel had changed in the last year or so, in that more single people, or one parent families had shown an interest in being temporarily housed there than previously. It was hard to ascertain if this pattern would continue moving forward, though this would be monitored in order to look at providing options of future provision of Emergency Accommodation,

A Member was aware that the service being provided was a fairly efficient one, though like other Members he noted that the facilities at Brynmenyn hostel were no longer deemed fit for purpose, due to a lack of adequate facilities to support peoples differing needs.. He was aware of the ongoing financial restraints facing the Council in finding a suitable replacement facility to this hostel. He felt there were avenues that could be explored, with a view to assist the funding of a new hostel, possibly through the Capital Revenue budget and/or support from partners. He added when the Authority recruit to the new post of Empty Properties Officer, whose main aim and objective would be to ensure that empty properties become occupied, the situation would hopefully improve. He further added that Officers should look at possibly utilising other empty Council owned buildings that may be suitable to use as Emergency Accommodation, as opposed to remaining empty.

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services advised that whilst he was entirely in favour of the possible options moving forward as outlined in the report, he confirmed to Members that any option that was pursued needed to be within budget and at present the Council had no scope under the MTFs for any further Capital spend. The next part of the process to be explored was the best way to proceed with the financing of an alternative facility to Brynmenyn.

A Member confirmed that he had visited the emergency accommodation facility at Ty Ogwr, and asked the costs to temporarily house a person there, how this cost was met, and the methods the Authority worked with Registered Social Landlords to deliver such a service.

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The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration advised that she would obtain this information and pass it on to Members, though there were some details regarding funding to assist with the problem of homelessness in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6 of the report. This was provided through a combination of Council funding, Welsh Government homelessness funding and Supporting People Programme Grant funding, for facilities such as B&B Leased Void (accommodation), Brynmenyn Hostel, and the Ty Ogwr and Cornerstone facilities.

A Member asked if the totals of funding detailed in the Table in paragraph 3.5 of the report were calculated over an annual period, to which the Head of Partnerships and Performance confirmed that they were.

A Member asked what work was being undertaken with The Council's Leaving Care team in order to prevent homelessness for people under the age of 25.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration, advised that Officers involved in the provision of emergency accommodation did work with Social Services to explore certain preventative measures for people who could find themselves in a vulnerable position, such as those leaving care. Discussions were taking place to discuss grant funding opportunities for developing new projects that would assist in any complexities associated with the future housing needs of young people. The plan was to have a joint approach to bring both their Social Care needs as well as housing related support mechanisms together at an early stage after individuals leave care. This included accommodation needs and any more complex avenues of support they may require.

A Member felt that Supporting People Programme Grant could be placed on a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda as a separate item and he agreed to complete a criteria form to support this.

He then referred to the Direct Access/Floor Space arrangements that were available at the Kerrigan facility that had been open in Waterton since November 2017 for age 18+ age group. He asked if the information in the report referred to floor space or bed space at the Kerrigan Facility.

The representative from The Wallich advised that there were 2 rooms at this facility used for the floor space provision, and people housed there under temporary arrangements slept in beds, rather than the fold-up type that was previously provided. Female and male visitors were also kept separately from each other.

A Member asked if there was any statistics available that could indicate the number of people who were sleeping as homeless on the streets in Wales.

The representative from The Wallich confirmed that there was data available but the figures fluctuated almost on a daily basis.

The Area Manager Pobl Group confirmed that daily returns on the above were provided to BCBC in terms of numbers who were given temporary accommodation at places such as the Kerrigan, and she confirmed to Members that last night there had been 7 people that were given a bed at the facility.

A Member noted that there were options outlined in the report for future provision of temporary accommodation that could house the homeless on a temporary arrangement, and asked if any of those were the preferred option at this point in time.

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The Head of Partnerships and Performance advised that no option illustrated in the report was off the table, and that these, together with any possible added ones would be given further consideration before a final choice was made.

A Member asked if consideration had been given to any vacated property owned/leased by the Council (for example a closed Extra Care facility) to be used as a form of temporary/emergency accommodation for the homeless. .

The Head of Partnerships and Performance advised that this was being considered together with other options with the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate.

A Member further suggested that the Assia Suite could also be considered as a suitable option for this purpose.

A Member felt that the report required further information on cost implications for the future options that were to be considered.

A Member asked if there was any funding to explore for the support of Emergency Accommodation provision, other than Social Housing Grant funding which appeared to be ever decreasing.

The Head of Partnerships and Performance confirmed that the Social Housing Grant funding was available and the use of Registered Social Landlords to provide such temporary accommodation options was less of a financial burden, as opposed to drawing upon any Capital Funding that may be made available by BCBC.

Conclusions

Members wished to thank all officers and external agencies in attendance at the meeting and for their comments and contributions to the report. The Committee recognised the excellent support service provided to people presenting themselves to the emergency accommodation provision and were encouraged by the partnership working in managing these provisions.

In relation to the options of a replacement facility in Brynmenyn, Members requested further information on each of the options before making a recommendation on their preferred option. They asked for officers to scope out further, all options presented to them and asked them to bring back to Scrutiny options on a replacement facility in the short, medium and longer term and to provide more detailed costings and timescales for each.

Members recommended that officers explore the opportunity to utilise surplus Local Authority owned buildings such as care homes that could be brought back into use.

Members recommended that a permanent direct access floor space needs to be established for longer term use and officers should take an integrated approach in development of any new facility. Members recommended the permanent direct access floor space could be used as a hub for service users to access a range of support services and suggested that they explore the successful model of the Assia suite at the Authority's Civic Offices which is central in location, therefore easier to access a range of external support agencies with ease.

Further Information requested

Members asked to receive information on the costs to house an individual at Ty Ogwr per annum.

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Members requested a site visit to the Kerrigan Project direct access floor space facility that is managed by Gwalia with a relevant BCBC officer so they are able to see what facilities are available and report back to the full Committee.

Members asked for the approximate figures of street homelessness in Bridgend. Members understood that this fluctuates on a daily basis, but asked for approximate figures so they could understand the scale of the problem.

39. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 12:00