

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

19 NOVEMBER 2019

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

VALLEYS TASK FORCE EMPTY HOMES GRANT

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet to enter into a service level agreement with Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council for the Valleys Task Force Empty Homes Grant and to delegate authority to Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council to deliver and manage Empty Homes Grants to property owners within the Valleys Task Force Area of Bridgend.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan/Other Corporate Priority

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priorities:

- **Supporting a successful economy** – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
- **Helping people to be more self-reliant** – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.
- **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities

3. Background

- 3.1 The Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys was set up by the Welsh Government in July 2016 after the National Assembly election and the EU referendum. Lee Waters, the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport took up the role of Chair in 2018.
- 3.2 The Valley Task Force has a delivery plan called 'Our Valleys, Our Future' and has seven focus areas, included housing.
- 3.3 The Minister for Housing and Local Government has agreed to support the Valleys taskforce by rolling out an Empty Homes Grant to all local authorities in the taskforce areas as a pilot for the period from October 2019 to the end of

March 2020. £10 million has been set aside for empty properties over the next two years within those areas.

- 3.4 For the pilot stage £4,500,000 has been allocated to deliver the programme. No financial contribution is expected from local authorities for this phase of the Empty Homes Grant programme. For Phase 2 Local Authorities will be expected to make a 35% contribution towards the fund.
- 3.5 Empty private sector homes represent a wasted resource and financial expense both to the owners and the council and in many cases a missed opportunity to provide much needed affordable housing for residents. Not only are they a waste of a valuable housing resource, but they can cause a blight to communities and distress to residents affected by their unsightly appearance, and attract crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 3.6 Over the last few years, the council has developed many tools and approaches to encourage empty homes to be brought back into use which have had a positive impact.
- 3.7 This grant will furthermore support the delivery of the Council's and Welsh Government's priority of returning empty properties into use in the Valleys areas of Bridgend County Borough, to help regenerate communities, provide more choice and suitable accommodation for residents.

4. Current Situation / Proposal

4.1 Overview of current situation

- Welsh Government has awarded funding of £4.5 million to Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council ("RCTCBC") to support the roll out of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Empty Homes Grant Scheme across all the Valleys Taskforce Areas.
- RCTCBC are required to accept the terms and conditions of the funding as set out in the Offer Letter and will be liable to the Welsh Government if the conditions contained within the Offer Letter are not complied with or breached.
- The council will enter into a service level agreement with RCTCBC to enable RCTCBC to administer the Funding in the Council's administrative area and to comply with the Conditions.

4.2 Proposal - Eligibility and Conditions of Valleys Task Force Empty Homes Grant Scheme

- Applicants must be potential owner occupiers who plan to live in the property as their main residence for a period of at least 5 years.
- The property must have remained unoccupied for a period of 6 months prior to purchase and at the time of the grant application. Council Tax records will be used to verify this timescale.
- The property must meet the housing needs of the applicant's family who intend to occupy the property.

- Applicants are required to make a 15% maximum contribution to the total cost of grant eligible work.
- The Grant will be available for essential repair works to make the property safe and secure and free from any category one hazard.
- The Grant eligible work will be determined by the Council's Improvement Grant Surveyor.
- Maximum grant eligible towards cost of work is £20,000 (inc VAT)
- Ancillary fees can be added to the cost of works limits.
- Minimum cost of work limit of £1,000 (exclusive of VAT) - not eligible if works below this cost.
- Grant conditions are registered with a Full Legal Charge on the property on completion of the works for a 5 year period. Full repayment will be requested if the property is sold, or not occupied as intended during the 5 year grant condition period.

Delegation of authority to RCT CBC to undertake compliance checks on behalf of BCBC:

RCTCBC is responsible for the delivery and management of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme throughout the areas of the Valley Taskforce local authorities. As a result, the council is required to delegate authority to RCT CBC to deliver and manage the Empty Homes Grant Scheme in the Valleys Taskforce area of Bridgend which shall include:

- Reviewing applications and, if appropriate, challenging applications based on name and address and flag for further review/investigation any that raise concerns regarding future occupancy.
- Checking the date property became empty with BCBC Council Tax department.
- Approving applications
- Approving that works have been carried out in accordance with grant conditions and arranging payment of the grant.
- Notifying BCBC Council Tax of grant completion.
- At the annual anniversary of grant completion, the name of occupant is checked with Council Tax to check occupancy and that property is still occupied.
- On a sample basis (10%) annual verification checks that require the grant recipient to provide proof of occupation e.g. Water Bill.

As the responsibility for the delivery and management of the scheme in the Valley Taskforce Area of Bridgend lies with RCTCBC, the council is required to undertake the following:

- Promote the grant within the BCBC Valleys Task Force area.
- BCBC Council Tax department to provide RCT with written confirmation via email that a property has been empty for 6 months plus.
- Undertake investigations to check identity.

4.3 A service level agreement shall be entered into between RCTCBC and the council to cover this arrangement. A requirement of the service level agreement is for BCBC to supply surveyors and bill RCT for their time. As BCBC's Surveyors currently do not have capacity to undertake this role, it is proposed that surveyors from Neath Port Talbot CBC and RCT CBC be used to fulfill this role. This arrangement shall be dealt with in the service level agreement. BCBC will be informed when works are completed and signed off.

4.4 Future Projects:

4.4.1 A phase two of the Empty Homes Grant will begin in April 2020 and a proposal for the scheme is currently being developed. A further report will be provided to Cabinet regarding phase two should the council be looking to join Phase two.

4.5 Risks and issues

4.5.1 This is a low risk project for phase one as the authority does not need to make any financial contribution to this phase.

4.5.2 No issues are anticipated from this phase of the grant programme.

4.6 Next Steps

4.6.1 Cabinet will need to consider the above proposals and determine whether to progress with phase one of the scheme. If the decision is made to proceed, the next step is for BCBC to:

- Sign an SLA with RCTCBC to administer the grant within the Valleys Task Force of Bridgend County Borough.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

5.1 There are no effects upon BCBC's Policy Framework or Procedure Rules

6. Equalities Impact Assessment.

6.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics and an EIA status of low priority is considered appropriate at this stage.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment.

7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment is annexed to the report at **Appendix A**. A summary of the key elements are as follows:

- Long Term: The proposal to bring empty homes back into use as part of the scheme will drive local prosperity, by offering better environments to promote the health and wellbeing of those who live, work and Valleys of Bridgend in the long term.

- Prevention: By improving and bringing empty homes back into use it will strengthen
- Integration: The grants programme will provide opportunity to deliver a set of physical and social improvements through re-developing vacant, poor quality, under used or derelict empty homes.
- Collaboration: The project will allow property owners in collaboration with the council to tackle poor quality and unattractive properties; offering these properties a new lease of life and therefore enhancing the physical appearance and opportunities for people to buy homes in the Valleys area of Bridgend.
- Involvement: Investing in a community offers a means to connect with local stakeholders. Strong, resilient communities will reinforce the regional and Welsh culture which is a key feature in promoting visits and tourists to the area.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications for the authority from phase one, other than some officer time, due to the pilot stage of the programme being fully funded by grant. Approximately £300,000 has been allocated to the Valley Task Force Area of Bridgend. This is based on a 2% take up allocation of the current amount of empty homes in the Valleys Task Force area of Bridgend.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 Cabinet is requested to:

- 9.1.1 Approve the outline proposals for the Valleys Task Force Empty Homes Grant, as set out in the report;
- 9.1.2 Note and accept the risks and issues highlighted in paragraph 4.5;
- 9.1.3 Delegate authority to RCTCBC to deliver and manage the scheme within the Valleys Taskforce area of Bridgend in accordance with paragraph 4.2;
- 9.1.4 Delegate authority to the Head of Operations - Communities Services, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Head of Legal and Regulatory Services, to negotiate and agree the terms of the service level agreement with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and enter into the service level agreement.;

Mark Shephard
Chief Executive

Contact Officer: Nicola Lewis
Regeneration

Telephone: (01656) 815207

E-mail: nicola.lewis3@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal Address Regeneration Section
Bridgend County Borough Council
Civic Centre
Angel Street
Bridgend
CF31 4WB

Background documents

None

WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015 ASSESSMENT

WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015 ASSESSMENT

Project Description (key aims):

The Valleys Task Force Empty Homes Grant programme aims to bring empty properties back in to use that have been empty for six months or more. The grant offers funding towards improvements for owner occupiers and first time buyers.

Section 1	Complete the table below to assess how well you have applied the 5 ways of working.
Long-term	1. How does your project / activity balance short-term need with the long-term and planning for the future?
	<p>Empty private sector homes represent a wasted resource and financial expense both to the owners and Council and in many cases a missed opportunity to provide much needed affordable housing for residents. Not only are they a waste of a valuable housing resource, but they can cause a blight to communities and distress to residents affected by their unsightly appearance to attract crime and social behaviour.</p> <p>Over the last few years, the Council has developed many tools and approaches to encourage empty homes to be brought back into use which have had a positive impact.</p> <p>This grant will furthermore support the delivery of the Council's and Welsh Government's priority of returning empty properties into use in the Valleys areas of the Bridgend County Borough, to help regenerate communities, provide more choice and suitable accommodation for residents and furthermore complement concurrent programmes such as <i>Local Wellbeing Plans</i>.</p> <p>The regeneration planned for the Valleys Empty Homes as part of this project will drive local prosperity, providing support home owner occupiers and offering better environments to promote the health and wellbeing of those who live, work and visit the Bridgend Valleys.</p> <p>Short term benefits will see the enhancement and re-use of poor quality, unattractive, run down and dilapidated properties. This will support the empty homes team to tackle vacant, poor quality and unattractive properties; offering these properties a new lease of life and therefore enhancing the physical appearance of the streetscape and public</p>

	<p>realm. .</p> <p>Projects will encourage empty properties to come back into use by supporting owner occupiers and first time buyers. This will produce a number of benefits; empty and underutilised properties will be revitalised, breathing new life into the valleys, improving the image of the local area making it a more attractive place in which to visit or invest; more affordable housing will be readily available and the housing offer will improve. Quality housing will support the delivery of healthy communities.</p>
Prevention	<p>2. How does your project / activity put resources into preventing problems occurring or getting worse?</p> <p>This project will aim to bring empty homes back into use, preventing them from getting into disrepair.</p>
Integration	<p>3. How does your project / activity deliver economic, social, environmental & cultural outcomes together?</p> <p>The project will focus on delivering a set of physical and social improvements through re-developing empty homes. This will generate opportunities for good quality affordable homes for people in the Bridgend Valleys.</p>
Collaboration	<p>4. How does your project / activity involve working together with partners (internal and external) to deliver well-being objectives?</p> <p>The project will allow property owners and first time buyers work with Valleys Task Force and Bridgend CBC to get empty properties back in use.</p>
Involvement	<p>5. How does your project / activity involve stakeholders with an interest in achieving the well-being goals? How do those stakeholders reflect the diversity of the area?</p> <p>Investing in a community offers a means to connect with local stakeholders. Strong, resilient communities will reinforce the regional and Welsh culture which is a key feature in promoting visitors and tourists to the area. Increased visitor numbers will help to make the Cardiff Capital Region a more prosperous environment.</p>

Section 2 Assess how well your project / activity will result in multiple benefits for our communities and contribute to the national well-being goals		
Description of the Well-being goals	How will your project / activity deliver benefits to our communities under the national well-being goals?	Is there any way to maximise the benefits or minimise any negative impacts to our communities (and the contribution to the national well-being goals)?
<p>A prosperous Wales An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.</p>	<p>The project will be specifically dealing with poor quality dilapidated and underutilised property; bringing them back into full use, for residential end uses. Inequality will be reduced by facilitating more people to benefit from sustainable growth. Empty Home investment will lead to improved confidence and will specifically concentration on tackling regional inequality by helping the most deprived communities and those people with the lowest household income to access support affordable housing.</p>	<p>Project officers will closely review and monitor the way the project is delivered to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, of a high quality and value for money.</p>
<p>A resilient Wales A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).</p>	<p>The project will promote opportunities for building healthier communities and better environments by developing good housing and job creation. This will lead to a positive contribution to good quality physical and mental health.</p>	<p>Project officers will closely review and monitor the way the project is delivered.</p>

<p>A healthier Wales A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.</p>	<p>People in Wales will enjoy better health for longer through decent housing and quality environments. The investment will offer support for good housing and will also have a positive contribution to mental well-being</p>	<p>Project officers will closely review and monitor the way the project is delivered.</p>
<p>A more equal Wales A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).</p>	<p>This project will provide owner occupiers to be able to improve their homes and provide opportunity for first times buyers to get on the property ladder.</p>	<p>Project officers will closely review and monitor the way the project is delivered.</p>
<p>A Wales of cohesive communities Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.</p>	<p>People will feel that they have a stake in their community if that area can provide access to good housing, jobs, public services and leisure facilities.</p> <p>Bringing empty properties back in to use will help to build resilient communities, culture and language. Communities prosper where people can fully participate in their local environment.</p> <p>New housing will bring cohesive communities into the Bridgend Valleys and local facilities will be maintained.</p>	<p>Project officers will closely review and monitor the way the project is delivered.</p>
<p>A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh</p>	<p>The project presents a way to link with local stakeholders.</p>	<p>Compliance with the Welsh Language act will be monitored as the project progresses.</p>

language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.	During the marketing stage for this project all material / documentation was sent out in the Welsh and English language. On initial dialogue with applicants they were asked if they would prefer to correspond in Welsh or English.	
A globally responsible Wales A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.	Investment in new quality, energy efficient housing will contribute to sustainable energy consumption.	Project officers will closely review and monitor the way the project is delivered

Section 3 Will your project / activity affect people or groups of people with protected characteristics? Explain what will be done to maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impacts			
Protected characteristics	Will your project / activity have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristic?	Will your project / activity have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristic?	Is there any way to maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impacts?
Age:	Yes - greater building accessibility	No	Review of project progress
Gender reassignment:	n/a	No	Review of project progress
Marriage or civil partnership:	n/a	No	Review of project progress
Pregnancy or maternity:	Yes - greater building accessibility	No	Review of project progress
Race:	n/a	No	Review of project progress

Religion or Belief:	n/a	No	Review of project progress
Sex:	n/a	No	Review of project progress
Welsh Language:	Yes – provision will be made to ensure that peoples preferences are respected and catered for	No	Review of project progress

Section 4 Identify decision meeting for Project/activity e.g. Cabinet, Council or delegated decision taken by Executive members and/or Chief Officers

Cabinet

Compiling Officers Name:	Nicola Lewis
Compiling Officers Job Title:	Senior Regeneration Officer
Date Completed:	11/11/2019