

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

21 JULY 2020

REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

WELSH GOVERNMENT GRANT – WESTERN VALLEY EMPTY HOMES PILOT

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with the background and financial and operational implications of the above project and to ask Cabinet to recommend to Council that match funding for the scheme is included within .

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:-**

1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – Taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 Welsh Government has introduced 2 initiatives to focus on bringing empty properties back into use.
- 3.2 The northern parts of Bridgend are within the Valleys Task Force (VTF) catchment area. On 30th June 2020 Cabinet approved phase 2 of the Valleys Taskforce Empty Homes Grant and approval was given to enter into an agreement with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) who shall run, and administer the Grant for those northern parts of the county only.
- 3.3 For geographic areas outside of the VTF initiative, Welsh Government has proposed a separately run initiative. This initiative is available to Bridgend, Swansea,

Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot Councils. Two of these authorities have agreed to take part, one authority has declined due to difficulties providing the match funding.

- 3.4 The 2 projects are distinct – the VTF initiative is open to people who wish to purchase an empty house, or owners of an empty property to apply for a grant provided the house has been empty for 6 months and plan to live in the property as their main home for at least 5 years. The Western Valleys Empty Homes project is a grant designed for landlords to bring the property back into use in exchange for nomination rights for social housing purposes.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The Minister for Housing and Local Government has agreed in principle to an allocation of capital funding of up to £169,000 for Bridgend in 2020-21 to establish a one year pilot. The offer of grant funding is subject to match funding of 35% being provided by the Council which is the same percentage of match funding the Council provides under the VTF project. Welsh Government has made this offer based on the following calculations:

Number of empty properties – 1350
Application 1% interest = 13 properties/units at £20,000 = max grant
Programme Value £260,000
WG funding contribution = £169,000
LA 35% contribution = £91,000

- 4.2 Specific locations of housing need would need to be identified to take part in the project. This scheme cannot be applied in conjunction with other schemes and a request made to Welsh Government to convert this scheme into the VTF project to ensure a consistent offer across the county was refused. A further request to allow this funding to be used as supplementary funding for RSLs to purchase empty properties was declined.
- 4.3 It is proposed that Cabinet agree to take part in the pilot and recommend that Council makes available the match funding of up to £91,000. Covid-19 limitations and the length of time left within this financial year may impact on the eventual outcome and 13 properties may not be achieved. Therefore the level of grant and match funding will be adjusted on a pro-rata basis.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There is no effect on policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

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

- 7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. These proposals align to one or more of the 7 WFGA goals as detailed below:

A prosperous Wales	Helping local people to acquire housing
A resilient Wales	Supporting local people and communities
A healthier Wales	Providing social housing to those in need
A more equal Wales	Increasing access to housing in the private sector
A Wales of Cohesive communities	Supporting sustainable communities
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	Supporting sustainable communities
A globally responsive Wales	Increasing the supply of social housing for people in need

7.2 A summary of the implications from the Well-being of Future Generations assessment, using the 5 ways working, is as follows:

Long term	Bringing empty homes into use will support objectives of the Act
Preventative	Would prevent a wasted resource within communities and support social housing
Involvement	Would involve private sector landlords
Integration	Benefits community development and sustainability
Collaboration	Would involve working with private sector landlords and social housing applicants

8. Financial implications

8.1 The Council will be required to provide a capital match funding contribution of £91,000, which will be funded from available capital receipts and will be subject to full Council approval.

8.2 As a pilot, funding would be required in this financial year and, at this stage, there is no further financial commitment to this project.

9. Recommendation(s)

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- approves BCBC's participation in the scheme and enters into an agreement with Welsh Government;

- recommends to Council that the capital programme be revised to include the full scheme costs, including £169,000 WG grant and BCBC match funding contribution of £91,000.

Gill Lewis
Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change
July 2020

Contact officer: Martin Morgans - Head of Partnership Services

Telephone: (01656) 642154

Email: martin.morgans@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal address: Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend

Background documents: None