

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 OCTOBER 2022

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the provision of temporary accommodation within Bridgend County Borough Council.

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. **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.
2. **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 In March 2020, an emergency homelessness response was put in place by Welsh Government (WG) in recognition of the potential impact that Covid-19 could have on people who were homeless, especially people who were rough sleeping. Welsh Government amended its guidance in relation to homelessness and introduced an 'All In' approach and directed local authorities that no-one was to be without accommodation due to the public health imperative. WG introduced a Guidance Note which extended the definition of 'vulnerable' with regards to the 'priority need' criteria set out in the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. In effect this made all homeless persons eligible for an offer of temporary accommodation.
- 3.2 This required the Housing Service to secure additional units of accommodation on an emergency and immediate basis as pre Covid the Council had only 87 units of temporary accommodation placements and the use of floor space provision for emergency purposes. To respond to the crisis the service made arrangements with local hotels to secure accommodation. At the time, these hotels were the only ones

that remained open and had the capacity and willingness to provide such accommodation. It was expected that the use of these hotels would be for the short term only. Short block booking arrangements were entered into as part of the Council's emergency response to the pandemic. WG provided funding via the covid Hardship Grant.

- 3.3 At the end of that first tranche of bookings, which varied in duration subject to presenting needs and grant funding availability, the pandemic and its public health restrictions remained in place and tranches of 6 monthly bookings were required. WG was consulted at many stages during this period and encouraged block booking arrangements in advance which could be claimed from the WG Hardship Grant. Additional units, such as self contained holiday lets were also required to meet ongoing demands, including from families. Service Level Agreements (SLA's) between the hotels / other accommodation providers and the Housing Service were agreed. This was continued on the expectation that services would, within a short period of time, revert to pre covid conditions and therefore this arrangement would not need to be continued for a long period. New Service Level Agreements were therefore entered into with hotels covering 6 months block booking at a time which expired on 30th September 2022.
- 3.4 Subsequently, whilst the emergency pandemic state has rescinded, the housing service remains in a critical position and WG's emergency change to the definition of 'priority need' is continuing, with WG intent on amending primary legislation to continue the extension of the priority need definition, as highlighted above. These changes are due to come into effect on 24th October 2022. As such the additional placements the Council is required to make will continue to be a statutory duty. The tourism accommodation initially taken on a short term basis has become key in the Council's ability to meet its legal duties, without which the Council may face the risk of legal challenge from applicants. This is not a position that was predictable at the start of the arrangements with the hotels.
- 3.5 The additional expenditure incurred to meet these demands has, to date, been largely funded by the WG Hardship Grant and costs and funding received is outlined below. (Accommodation costs also include additional items such as security costs)

Table 1 – Temporary Accommodation costs

	Financial Year	Temporary Accommodation costs	Grants received
		£'000	£'000
Pre Pandemic	2019-20	135	25
Pandemic	2020-21	2,292	2,082
	2021-22	3,130	2,794
	To date 2022-23	2,035	1,479
	Projected 2022-23	4,233	2,525

- 3.6 Despite the Hardship Grant not being in place for 2022-23, WG recognised the need for homelessness accommodation to be secured in advance to continue the commitment to focus on support for homeless individuals and £1.479 million has

successfully been claimed from WG to cover these costs for the first six months of 2022-23. In addition, the accommodation element of the Hardship Grant was replaced in 2022-23 by a WG 'Homelessness - No One Left Out' grant funding of £1.046 million which will be claimed in the remainder of 2022-23. The combined value of WG support in 2022-23 is therefore £2.525 million.

- 3.7 In addition, budget growth of £2.192 million was approved by Council as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy setting process in February 2021 to continue the commitment to focus support for homeless individuals providing them with accommodation. The core budget, combined with the WG funding highlighted in paragraph 3.6 totals £4.717 million resulting in a projected under spend in 2022-23 of £484,000 against the projected accommodation costs of £4.233 million. However, requests for support can change and this budget will be closely monitored for the remainder of this financial year. Without the WG funding, there would currently be a projected over spend of £2.041 million.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The Housing Service has been under extreme pressure due to unprecedented demand for the service - in the 12 months to 25th May 2022, there were 1,656 household applications constituting 2,553 people including 658 children. The weekly rolling average for applications is 35 per week. Between Monday 3rd October and Sunday 9th October 2022 there were 39 applications.
- 4.2 In addition, the service has had to work within the context of constant change and unknown outcomes. WG has introduced a number of policy changes over recent months. These changes include the development and implementation of a Transitional Rapid Rehousing Plan (TRRP) to move people from hotels into other forms of suitable accommodation, new guidance on the definition of 'suitability of accommodation', and a requirement for a Homelessness Strategy.
- 4.3 Work on developing the Transitional Rapid Rehousing Plan is currently on-going and is hand in hand with the development of a Homelessness Strategy. These draft documents will be reported to Cabinet in the near future seeking approval to undertake formal public consultation. Although demand for temporary accommodation remains unpredictable the service is working to a position that meets WG requirements and where block booking of hotels for long periods would need to be reduced.
- 4.4 With the arrangements due to terminate on 30 September 2022, informal engagement with temporary accommodation providers was initiated from July 2022. This engagement was to determine whether the providers could continue to support the service under the remit of the previous Service Level Agreements. The providers were supportive and requested that accommodation be block booked initially for 6 months and in exceptional cases for 12 months. Due to the death of Her Majesty the Queen and all committee meetings being cancelled during the period of state mourning, an urgent delegated decision was made giving approval to suspend the Council's Contract Procedure Rules in order to enter into further Service Level Agreements to secure temporary accommodation to meet the Council's ongoing statutory duty. The Chairpersons of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees agreed that the decision proposed was reasonable in all the

circumstances and to it being treated as a matter of urgency and not subject to call-in.

4.5 Whilst most arrangements for this provision were secured successfully and the relevant Service Level Agreements were agreed, one supplier was unable to meet the requirements of the Council and the arrangement could not be renewed. As such, alternative arrangements had to be made urgently for 38 households. The Council's partner organisations such as the Wallich, Pobl and Registered Social Landlords supported the service to free up spaces within current projects, and ensured that some nominations waiting for completion were fulfilled, to allow us to move residents from the hotel into these spaces. Staff from the Wallich and Pobl supported the residents during the transfer process.

4.6 All 38 households were provided with offers of alternative accommodation. Some chose to make their own arrangements and the result is as follows:-

21 were provided with alternative temporary accommodation-

In the private sector

In Registered Social Landlord properties

In housing projects such as Brynmenyn Hostel, ABBA (Alternative to Bed and Breakfast Accommodation), Kerrigan Project

6 were provided with permanent accommodation

5 made their own arrangements with family/friends

1 required hospital admission

5 chose not to take up the offer of accommodation made

4.7 Although the arrangement with this particular provider ceased, the Service continues to rely on the private sector, tourism sector, established housing projects, and in hotels and B+B's throughout the County as temporary accommodation whilst alternative solutions are found. The Service also continues to work with Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) to secure permanent accommodation.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect upon policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

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

7.1 The report contributes to the following goals within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

- A prosperous Wales

- A resilient Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A globally responsive Wales

Long term	Providing temporary accommodation for people who are homeless whilst seeking a permanent solution
Preventative	Through a person centred approach preventing individuals and families being without accommodation
Involvement	Supporting people through this process and providing accommodation and outreach support if required through Housing Services
Integration	Ensure individuals have accommodation
Collaboration	Working in partnership with a range of providers

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 The projected costs of temporary accommodation in 2022-23 are £4.233 million. There is a core budget of £2.192 million for this accommodation. Additionally, WG funding of £2.525 million has been awarded in 2022-23 towards these costs, without which the service would have a projected over spend of £2.041 million.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the work being undertaken in relation to providing temporary accommodation in Bridgend County Borough Council and consider and make comments upon the report.

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Background documents: None