

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

7 FEBRUARY 2023

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

NATIONAL EMPTY PROPERTIES SCHEME

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to confirm participation in Welsh Government's National Empty Properties Scheme and seek approval from Cabinet to enter into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council as lead authority for the National Empty Properties Scheme.

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**:

- **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 focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
- **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.
- **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 On the 17th November 2022, the Minister for Climate Change wrote to all local authorities to notify them that Welsh Government (WG) had granted approval for a national empty homes scheme, building on the previous empty homes scheme delivered as part of the Valleys taskforce. It confirmed that Welsh Government was committing £50million to the scheme split equally over 2 years, 2023-24 and 2024-25. Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) has been appointed as the lead body to administer the scheme on behalf of local authorities.

- 3.2 A notional allocation will be provided to each participating local authority based on the number of long-term empty properties in their authority for each financial year. The actual allocation for Bridgend will be dependent upon the Empty Properties in Bridgend as identified in the 2023–24 statistics when released.
- 3.3 The notional allocation at this time for 2023-24 is up to £1,243,224.93* (*this includes any surveyor costs incurred through applications processed within Bridgend).
- 3.4 To take part in this scheme local authorities are required to enter into a Service Level Agreement with RCT, commit to the principle of match funding on a case by case basis to the level of approximately £124,322.49, and undertake the necessary property surveying work for each case. Discussions have taken place between council officers and Welsh Government officers and an informal in principle agreement to be part of this scheme has been made, subject to approval by Cabinet.
- 3.5 The scheme will be fully operational from 1st April 2023, however, Welsh Government is intending to launch the scheme on 30th January 2023 to enable applications to begin to be processed leading into 2023-24. The main terms of the scheme are set out below:
- The property would need to be empty for 12 months to qualify for the grant;
 - The applicant must live in the property as their main residence for 5 years upon completion of the works;
 - Only one application per person;
 - The maximum grant per application will be £25,000;
 - Energy efficiency improvements will be a requirement as part of the works undertaken on the property;
 - A minimum 15% applicant contribution will be required;
 - Any other costs above the grant and contribution must be met by the applicant;
- 3.6 Processes and procedures are currently being finalised by RCT.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 Members are requested to confirm participation in the scheme and agree to enter into the Service Level Agreement with RCT to take part in the scheme and ensure compliance with WG terms and conditions. Members are requested to delegate powers to the Chief Officer, Finance, Performance and Change and the Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services to complete negotiations and sign the necessary paperwork.
- 4.2 The ability to undertake property surveys is a potential risk to the scheme, as recruitment of surveyors has been unsuccessful over a period of many months, and as a result the service has had to rely on agency cover. To mitigate this risk, a recent agency appointment has been made with this specific scheme in mind. This is an interim arrangement put in place whilst recruitment for a permanent post is

undertaken. Welsh Government has confirmed that surveying costs are able to be claimed through the scheme and will be calculated on a case-by-case basis.

- 4.3 Regular meetings are being held with WG and RCT to progress this scheme and fuller details will be available after the conclusion of these meetings.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

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

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 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.

- 6.2 As no change is proposed to the application of the intentionality test, there will be no impact on the Council's equality duties.

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

- 7.2 A summary of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment are as follows:

Long Term: This scheme will reduce the number of empty homes within communities and bring into use an empty resource for individuals and family homes. This will sustain communities and tackle properties that may have become poor quality of unattractive.

Prevention: It will reduce the number of empty properties within communities preventing them from further deterioration and neglect whilst supporting housing demand

Integration: It will allow families to live and work within communities and provide opportunities that may not otherwise been available to them

Collaboration: The project will allow individuals to access funding which will allow them to tackle poor quality and unattractive properties. The scheme will be delivered in partnership with another local authority.

Involvement: Investing in a community will support strong and resilient communities and Welsh culture.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 The actual allocation for Bridgend will be dependent upon the Empty Properties in Bridgend as identified in the 2023–24 statistics when released. The notional allocation at this time for 2023-24 is up to £1,243,224.93* (This includes any surveyor costs incurred through the applications processed within Bridgend)
- 8.2 There is a requirement for the Council to match fund on a case-by-case basis at a contribution level of 10% up to the value of £124,322.49. Contributions will be met from within current capital budgets. Once the actual allocation for Bridgend for 2023-24 is approved, the Capital Programme will be updated accordingly.
- 8.3 Notional allocations and contribution level for 2024-25 are not available at this time and will be dependent on available statistics.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet delegate authority to the Chief Officer, Finance, Performance and Change and Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services to:
- 9.1.1 negotiate and enter into a service level agreement with Rhondda Cynon Taf as lead authority for the National Empty Properties Scheme;
- 9.1.2 approve any extension or amendment to the service level agreement and to enter into any further deeds and documents which are ancillary to the service level agreement.

Carys Lord
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Background documents:

None