

**SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3 - MONDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2022**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3  
HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND,  
ON MONDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2022 AT 16:00**

Present

Councillor P Davies – Chairperson

H T Bennett	F D Bletsoe	S J Bletsoe	C Davies
M J Evans	RM Granville	S J Griffiths	M L Hughes
P W Jenkins	M Jones	MJ Kearn	W J Kendall
RL Penhale-Thomas	J E Pratt	T Thomas	G Walter
A Williams	AJ Williams	MJ Williams	

Apologies for Absence

N Clarke and I Williams

Officers:

Lucy Beard	Scrutiny Officer
Lynne Berry	Group Manager Housing & Community Regeneration
Joanne Ginn	Housing Solutions Team Leader
Ryan Jones	Strategic Housing Commissioning Manager
Jessica Mclellan	Scrutiny Officer
Martin Morgans	Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Ross Penhale-Thomas declared a personal interest as a full time employee of a housing and equalities charity of which Invitees were members.

Cllr Jonathan Pratt declared a personal interest as a Crisis Response Volunteer with British Red Cross.

Cllr Alex Williams declared a personal interest as a landlord in the private rental sector.

Cllr Melanie Evans declared a personal interest as a Pencoed Town Councillor.

Cllr Tim Thomas declared a personal interest as a full time employee of an organisation that represents the interests of property agents.

Cllr Martyn Jones declared a personal interest as a landlord in the private sector.

Cllr Amanda Williams declared a personal interest as a friend is on the housing register and in emergency accommodation.

Cllr Steven Bletsoe declared a personal interest as a full time employee of a membership organisation in the private rented sector and would not be taking part in any discussions relating to the private rented sector.

Cllr Heidi Bennett declared a personal interest as a landlord in the private sector.

Cllr Mike Kearn declared a personal interest as a relative is on the housing register.

Cllr Freya Bletsoe declared a personal interest as part of the family's income derived from the private rented sector and a friend is in emergency temporary accommodation.

Cllr Martin Williams declared a personal interest as a friend is in emergency temporary accommodation.

Cllr Richard Granville declared a personal interest as a person known to him is in emergency temporary accommodation.

15. **HOUSING POSITION STATEMENT**

The Head of Performance and Partnerships presented the Housing Position Statement explaining the purpose of the report was to update the Committee on policy changes to the housing services and the current rehousing and homelessness position.

The Chair read the Committee a written response received from the Coastal Housing Group who were unable to attend the meeting.

Referring to a recent statistical release from Welsh Government in which the Authority was the second worst urban local authority in Wales for social housing stock, Members asked what the plans were to reverse this trend and queried whether it was possible that commercial properties that were no longer in use following the pandemic could be converted into flats or apartments. The Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) were asked if it was possible to expand the housing stock in the County Borough to resolve the situation and improve the position.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships responded from the Authority's perspective and referring to the Programme Development Plan, Welsh Government were supporting circa £30 million per annum in terms of delivering social housing with a view to 470 houses being created over a two year period. In addition, there was Government money around the transitional phase which RSLs could bid for to improve the existing stock and fast track some accommodation being brought back into use. Within the Local Development Plan which was under Welsh Government (WG) consultation at the time they were looking at 7000 units within that plan, affordability was the key factor but with the right monies and policy in place they hoped it would take them forward in terms of development of their social housing stock and improve the reported position.

Members questioned whether the Social Housing Allocation Policy (SHAP) was still fit for purpose due to changes in pressures on people and housing since 2017 or whether a review was scheduled.

Officers advised that there was a strategy that would be consulted upon following its reporting to Cabinet and when the responses came in an action plan would be created part of which would be to review the SHAP in consultation with partners.

Members asked what options there were for the Ukrainian refugees, when their six months living with families ended for various reasons, given the social housing register wait time, whether there would an option be for families to make themselves homeless, as it was extremely difficult for them to rent from private landlords that request evidence of 6 months' rent and that potential tenants are in full time employment. It was asked whether the number of refugees in the County Borough was available.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships advised that there was concern in Housing from the refugee perspective and there was a working group led by the Head of Finance, Performance and Change monitoring the situation with multi sector involvement e.g., Social Services, Education supporting.

Officers referred to the war in Ukraine going on longer than initially anticipated by the Home Office when they advertised for hosts for a six-month period and they were seeing multiple such arrangements coming up and possibly exceeding the six month period at that time. Officers did not have the exact number to hand but advised there were around two hundred Ukrainian refugees in the County. Officers would not advise someone to present as homeless and thought it important that the homelessness services were there as a safety net for where relationships or host placements could not continue, which was the route in line with Welsh Government Guidance. In terms of the private

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sector, they were seeing some Ukrainian families move into private rental properties and they had been able to support people through that.

Members asked RSLs about their void timescales, and whether all the voids would be turned around in the average number of void turnover days.

The Chief Executive of Valleys to Coast Housing explained that voids were counted from when the keys came in to when the keys go out, and advised that at the end of October they had 114 empty properties though they would always have a churn of voids which was generally around 50 properties a month, so that number would continue to change, but where they were at the end of October and the turnaround from the keys going in and going out was around 69 days in terms of ones that they could turn around.

Members referred to the flats at Parc Derwen being the last of the accommodation to be provided on the site, they did not know which Housing Association had ownership of them but asked why the flats had been left until the end, whether it was due to planning and how did Housing Associations get a say in when these premises become available. They also queried why the properties were all flats as their concern was there would be people on the waiting list waiting for bungalows and asked how the Housing Associations were involved in determining the type of property that was allocated.

The Chief Executive of Valleys to Coast Housing advised that they work with the developers as part of the Section 106 agreement in terms of where the units are, where they are building and when they will be completed as part of the hand over and they knew the need locally was for one-bedroom flats and apartments which was what they were working on with the Local Authority.

Members expressed concern regarding restrictions on people while in emergency accommodation e.g., not having their children visit and curfews at night and asked what was being done to ensure that these residents did not feel like second-class citizens in the meantime and were given as much support to continue their lives.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that some of the difficulties mentioned were concerning safeguarding because temporary accommodation by its nature has a spectrum of service users being accommodated in that time. There had been challenges but he assured that in no way were any persons that present homeless deemed as a second-class citizen, and Officers were working tirelessly to find accommodation that is long term and provides a tenancy and safeguards them going forward.

Reflecting on the 254 adults and 143 children reported to be in temporary accommodation, Officers and Representatives of the RSLs were asked what their ideas were in the short and medium term to address the housing crisis.

RSLs and Officers provided their responses which included:

- Maximising the active development programme in the County: looking at land and opportunities as they came up.
- Working closely with partners in Bridgend as properties become available and allocating to those in need.
- Successfully securing Transitional Accommodation Grant funding to bring voids into use more quickly.
- Actively working with Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) to see how can improve processes.

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- Working through Trade Bodies with Welsh Government to see how they could be flexible with the funding streams to be able to respond much more quickly.
- All allocations going directly to BCBC and last quarter all available homes went through to the rapid rehousing programme.
- Looking at all opportunities to increase supply.
- Collectively working together to identify potential land or existing buildings for conversion and how to bring through the planning system more quickly.
- A trauma informed relational coaching model of housing management adopted.
- Maximising the Transitional Grant Funding and any other funding from Welsh Government.
- Looking at how to marry up the right type of accommodation with the right support needs.
- Reducing the use of hotels for temporary accommodation.

Members referred to Valleys to Coast Housing retaining 25% of their housing stock for self-allocation and asked if that was taken into consideration along with the 114 voids and whether it restricted their current support to the crisis.

The Chief Executive of Valleys to Coast Housing advised that the allocation to BCBC was 75%, but with the crisis they had been offering all stock to the Authority.

Members questioned whether there had been an increase in homelessness and rehousing applications from ex-armed forces personnel and if so, was there a problem there and what was being done in that case to specifically support them.

Officers responded that they had not historically and did not at present have a great deal of veterans in terms of housing need and therefore they had never tailored a service around that group. They explained their support services were neutral so support could be provided to anyone, but they could probe further to see if numbers had gone up and could circulate the figures to the Committee.

Concern was expressed regarding whether allocation of accommodation for disabled and elderly people was accessible and safe and allowing them to live independently as there appeared to be a delay for older and disabled people who were trying to get modifications and adaptations to their property via a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). Members queried what the Authority was doing to address the backlog following the Covid lockdowns.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships assured in terms of new builds going forward they were working hard with the RSLs regarding accessibility, identifying that they want longevity for their accommodation units. They had gone through an extensive period with the disabled facilities grant over the last two years with the prevention of access to people's homes but also on internal basis, taking control of the DFG in-house in the Authority, which meant there had been some challenges. They were going to go out to procure a framework for contractors which would give them that end-to-end engagement. They had also experienced recruitment issues within their Disabled Facilities Team, so it was a balancing act with them wanting to grow in resource but not being able to recruit.

Members asked for an update on the Housing First Scheme; any outcomes and the amount of people accessing it.

Officers summarised the service and advised from a Local Authority point of view they had really committed to it, in terms of investment and have had some really good outcomes both in terms of those who had been in accommodation and supporting those

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both rough sleeping and in temporary accommodation to get to a point where they could look at accommodation. They thought it was important to note that Housing First was not the answer for everyone as there was a small cohort that had too complex needs for Housing First, but they were keen to increase the accommodation models as and when the opportunities came around through the development programme.

Concern was expressed that there was difficulty in recruiting staff and a lot of posts still unfilled referred to in the report and if working for a small team could mean bigger caseloads and mistakes were more likely to happen. Members questioned what was being done to get more staff employed, had advertising been increased and was a bigger programme going to be put in place.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships responded that the reason they were going out to expand the Team was to bring a focus to the homelessness provision and the pressure points, that they were working really hard with Human Resources (HR) in terms of reviewing the job descriptions and person specifications to enable them to be proactive and use all relevant media channels supported via HR.

Members asked what the Authority was doing to engage with private rental landlords to enable them to help them help us to support housing shortfalls.

Officers explained the local housing allowance return versus the private rental sector was a big differential and somewhat mitigated the private rentals sector support, but they lobby WG regarding the local levels housing allowance to see if it could be increased. They had also introduced schemes to support service users within the private rental sector and if there are any breakdowns in terms of financial, any concerns from the landlord there would be this neutral partner. They were also looking at expanding a leasing scheme which had worked well and could also support tenants into the private sector with bond and rent in advance.

Members asked when the market did not work for them whether they could be innovative in the way their financial resources could be used, for example purchasing a hotel or a similar facility, and asked if there was a legislative reason this could not be done.

Officers advised that the instance referred to had moved quickly and they were not in position to move that quickly and they needed to look at what accommodation was needed going forward. They explained there were also restrictions on what they could fund and provide going forward. In addition, moving forward WG did not see hotel accommodation as fit for the purpose in terms of delivering a secure tenancy.

In response to a query about his vision to solve the crisis, the Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations advised that this was a national crisis across Wales and the United Kingdom and they were in position where they were facing deeper cuts because of external reasons that could not be avoided. He advised they needed to be looking at creative solutions and were working as a Cabinet with the Team to continue to look at different and new solutions going forward as well as with the RSLs.

Members were concerned that the number of people reported as sleeping rough was inaccurate, referencing a WG report which detailed those sleeping rough as of the 31 August 2022.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships clarified that they did not under report and reported in line with WG Guidelines at a point in time on a specific day WG asked to count on. He advised their third sector partner had undertaken the count and they only

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recorded as and when WG requested to as per the other Authorities, so there would be differentials either side of that point, it did not mean they were less active in terms of trying to mitigate or reduce those numbers. They were aware of all their rough sleeping community across the borough via their Reset Team.

Members referred to the provision of emergency housing following instances such as natural disaster, flooding, or natural or domestic fire and asked what the Council's strategy and policy is and how quickly they could get people who were victims of those type of scenarios into accommodation. With reference to paragraph 4.8 of the report and the new WG Guidance that deemed hotels unsuitable accommodation it was asked what work the Local Authority were doing for social and private tenants whose landlords did not have sufficient insurances to provide emergency housing and private homeowners who did not have sufficient insurances, so the default was to move to the Local Authority.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships responded that in the case of an individual household, they would deal with it as a homelessness presentation emerging, however if it was on a larger scale, they would invoke their emergency disaster recovery plans whereby they could facilitate short term accommodation within the Life Centre in Bridgend. With regard to the WG perspective that hotel accommodation was not fit for purpose for a long-term tenancy accommodation requirement, they were working with partners and looking at transitional fund opportunities and to not use hotels, which was ultimately their position statement.

Members discussed maintaining demographics across the community in order to reach the widest population. They wondered what was being done with RSLs, in particular, to ensure that they were maintaining sustainability of their communities so that older people can maintain their roots in their communities and enable them to move out of properties that are inhospitable or inaccessible for whatever reason and are able to maintain their independence in the local community in 1 or 2 bedroom properties or properties suitable for their needs.

RSLs responded that they help people stay happy and healthy in their homes, by utilising DFGs and adaptations and supporting third sector agencies like Care and Repair. In addition to the stock that they had in the area at that time, they always looked to develop new accommodation, where they could make ground floor flats in the area as accessible as possible and build smaller accommodation like 1 or 2 bed flats where they could and support through the Social Housing Grant is based on housing need for the area. They advised bungalows could be expensive to develop and there was not always the land to make those developments feasible going forward, but they certainly always looked to try and create mixed communities and where possible keep people in their homes.

With regard to the new Renting Homes (Wales) Act (the Act) which states that social housing properties have to be fit for human habitation, Members asked whether that would increase the void times as the houses needed to meet a specified qualified criteria such as carbon monoxide sensors and wired smoke alarms.

RSLs advised they were doing an assessment in terms of the requirements of the Act coming into effect and the increase in standards, but they would not want to see it impacting on voids. They advised that some of the things Members mentioned such as smoke and carbon monoxide alarms were already ensured. Although the Act did bring in a higher standard for a lot of rental stock and around thirteen different terms of fitness of human habitation and requirements, and they were going through what those standards meant and would bring about.

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Members raised concern regarding the backlog of repairs and maintenance of properties that had built up since the Covid pandemic and the need to address general maintenance for the wellbeing of particularly of the older people that were living and had lived in those properties for forty years or more.

The Chief Executive of Valley to Coast Housing assured members they were making headway on the backlog which was a result of the pandemic. She explained that they had a pot of money which they needed to prioritise based on the stock condition surveys for each of their properties. She advised they only received a dowry payment for the first five years following Housing Stock Transfer to meet tenant promises and that loss of investment had been noticeable in Bridgend, but they were addressing it and had been getting the support of the local members of the Senedd to take this forward. She concluded that all their properties had a stock condition survey which they use to prioritise, and they were making improvements, their complaints had reduced and the backlog around routine repairs had reduced.

The Chairperson advised that there were no further questions for the Invitees, thanked Invitees for their attendance and they left the meeting.

Following consideration of the report, the Committee made the following recommendations:

1. That the Committee write to The Group Manager Planning and Development Services and ask how to ensure better consultation between Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and housing developers regarding the types and corresponding numbers of accommodation being built and the prioritisation for properties for RSLs.
2. That the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) provide a written response on their short- and medium-term ideas to tackle the housing crisis and how to bring forward more opportunities.

The Committee further requested:

1. Information on how many veterans/ex-service personnel have presented homeless to the Authority and requiring accommodation.
2. Information from Development Control regarding previous social housing developments and how many social housing units had been diminished in return for 106 monies.
3. That the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) be asked if they could possibly provide information about the availability of the Physical Adaptation Grant (PAG) and the impact it has on housing waiting lists for people with disabilities or awaiting Disabled Facilities Grants.

## **16. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Committee with the Forward Work Programme (FWP) in Appendix A for discussion and consideration, requested any specific information the Committee identified to be included in the items for the next two meetings, including invitees they wished to attend, requested the Committee to identify any further items for consideration on the FWP having regard to the selection criteria in paragraph 4.3 and asked the Committee to note that the FWP for the Committee would be reported to the next meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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There were no further items identified for consideration on the Forward Work Programme having regard to the selection criteria in paragraph 4.3, and this could be revisited at the next meeting.

There were no requests to include specific information in the item for the next meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee approved the Forward Work Programme in Appendix A, noted that the Forward Work Programme would be reported to the next meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and noted The Recommendations Monitoring Action Sheet in Appendix B.

17. **URGENT ITEMS**

None