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| Meeting of: | CABINET |
| Date of Meeting: | 18 th JULY 2023 |
| Report Title: | HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME STRATEGY (HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY) 2022 - 2026, RAPID REHOUSING TRANSITION PLAN AND HOUSING PROSPECTUS |
| Report Owner / Corporate Director: | CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE |
| Responsible Officer: | MARTIN MORGANS HEAD OF PARTNERSHIP SERVICES |
| Policy Framework and Procedure Rules: | There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules. |
| Executive Summary: | <p>To seek approval for public consultation on the draft Housing Support Programme Strategy, to cover 2022 – 2026. This document will replace BCBC’s existing Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022. Having this strategy in place is a Welsh Government requirement.</p> <p>The report also seeks Cabinet approval to adopt and submit to Welsh Government a Rapid Rehousing Transitional Plan and a Housing Prospectus. Again both these documents are Welsh Government requirements, but do not require public consultation, in the same way that the above referenced Strategy does.</p> |

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to go out to public consultation on the draft Housing Support Programme Strategy (Homelessness Strategy) 2022-2026 attached as **Appendix 1** and for Cabinet to approve the submission of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan at **Appendix 2** and the Housing Prospectus at **Appendix 3** to Welsh Government.

2. Background

- 2.1 The format of all the documents discussed in this report have been prescribed by Welsh Government and follow the guidance and template documents provided to local authorities.
- 2.2 Housing Support Programme Strategy (Homeless Strategy) 2022- 2026

- 2.3 Part 2 of The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a duty on the Authority to carry out a Homelessness Review for its area and then formulate and adopt a Homelessness Strategy, based on the results of that review. Any review and strategy must look at the achievement of the following objectives:
- The prevention of homelessness
 - That suitable accommodation is and will be available for people who are or may become homeless
 - That satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless
- 2.4 An Independent Consultant was commissioned to undertake the review on behalf of the Authority. This offered an impartial and fresh perspective for the Strategy. This review has been one of co-production of the Strategy and all key stakeholder groups were surveyed or interviewed, including people that use, or have used homelessness services. Key statistics were analysed along with a review of relevant local and national policies to identify needs.
- 2.5 The Homelessness Review has provided the necessary information to draft the Homelessness Strategy as per Welsh Government guidance. The key messages from the review are:
- The period of 2020/2021 saw the highest level of presentations ever recorded by Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC), 1,612 presentations, which was likely influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic and the 'All In' approach.
 - In 2021/2022 there were 1,290 applications. This is a decrease in applications from the peak in 2020/2021 however, this number is still a marked increase on presentations compared to the figures at the time of BCBC's 2018 Homelessness Review and Strategy. During 2017/2018, 1,032 homelessness presentations were made, which is fewer than 2021/2022.
 - The demand for social housing has increased. The number of new applications added to the Common Housing Register has increased significantly from 147 in 2019/2020, to 428 in 2020/2021 - an increase of 191%. 2021/2022 saw an increase of 104%, with 873 applications and, as at the 20th of February 2023, an increase of 14%, with 993 applications.
 - The total number of applicants on the Common Housing Register at the end of each year has increased substantially. During 2019/2020 there were 816 applicants, in 2020/2021 that had increased by 81% to 1,477. During 2021/2022 the figure had increased by a further 45% to 2,143. As at 04th July 2023, there are 2629 applicants on the register.
 - The use of temporary accommodation has grown exponentially from pre-Covid levels with figures strongly impacted by the 'All In' approach during and post-Covid. The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each financial year shows:

- 2018/2019 - 71 households
 - 2019/2020 – 83 households
 - 2020/2021- 167 households
 - 2021/2022 - 199 households
 - 2022/2023 – 253 households
- Single person households consistently make up a significant portion of applications. In 2020/21 it was 73% of all applications, in 2021/22 single person applications accounted for 68% of all applications.
 - The majority of homelessness applications were from the 25 year+ category at 76% in 2020/21 and 75% in 2021/22.
 - Applications from 18 – 24 year olds accounted for 22% in both 2020/21 and 2021/22.
 - Applications from 16 – 17 year olds reduced from 6% in 2018/19 to 1% in 2020/21 to 3% in 2021/22.
 - There is a lack of private rented accommodation available within the Local Housing Allowance rate in Bridgend. An on-line search on Zoopla as at the 04th July 2023 showed the total number of properties to rent was 44. Of those, the search identified no available properties within the Local Housing Allowance rate for any property size, highlighting the significant lack of private properties available to rent at an affordable rate for those reliant on the Local Housing Allowance.

2.6 Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan

- 2.7 Welsh Government (WG) requires each local authority to have in place a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan to outline the actions that will be taken to reduce the use of temporary accommodation over a 5 year period. BCBC’s vision for rapid rehousing is *“Ensuring homelessness is prevented and where it cannot be prevented, to reduce time spent in temporary accommodation; ensuring people access permanent suitable accommodation quickly and with support to live independently.”*

The Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan attached at **Appendix 2** highlights the current position in relation to the use of temporary accommodation and identifies potential actions that will be investigated to reduce the use of such accommodation. The review has highlighted:

- temporary accommodation use has increased dramatically from a total of 87 units pre Covid-19 pandemic to a total of 225 units in July 2023. This represents a 159% increase in the total amount of units.
- 51% of this accommodation is in the tourism sector. These were not in use prior to Covid and the ‘All In’ approach to provide temporary accommodation for people presenting as homeless.

- An assessment of support needs, self-identified by applicants when making a homelessness application, showed that there were significant levels of support required with many indicating multiple support needs. This could range from help with alcohol, substance misuse, mental health, financial problems etc. In 2020/2021 84.4% required support, 83% in 2021/2022 and to date during 2022/2023 79% have indicated support needs.

2.8 The Plan has been developed in partnership and outlines a number of proposals that are intended to maximise current resources, increase the supply of accommodation options and progress collaborative projects which match appropriate accommodation units with support services for individuals with complex needs. Proposals will be developed in partnership and on a collaborative basis and include:

- working with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to bring voids back into use
- seeking to increase accessible accommodation through new build schemes
- working with RSLs and private landlords to increase the supply of accommodation
- developing specific projects to bring together accommodation units and support packages for complex cases

2.9 Housing Prospectus

2.10 WG require a Housing Prospectus (**Appendix 3**) to be submitted by local authorities to offer a rationale for the expenditure of the Social Housing Grant and the Programme Development Plan for new schemes and developments. The Prospectus outlines the needs and demands within Bridgend which will support Welsh Government's approval and scrutiny process of new development schemes. This document is based on the findings of both the Strategy document and the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and directs future housing developments to meet the needs identified.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 As the Housing Support Programme Strategy (Homelessness Strategy) is a strategic document, the Council is required to undertake a formal public consultation for a period of 12 weeks. Cabinet is recommended to approve the formal consultation period on the Strategy.

3.2 Discussions have been held with many of the key stakeholders when formulating the priorities and actions that have been identified and included in the draft Strategy. This has included relevant internal and external stakeholders and the Council's key partners. It is now proposed that a wider, public consultation on the draft Strategy is carried out over a period of 12 weeks to ensure that members of the public, who have concerns or are affected by the issues around housing and homelessness, are able to formally put forward their views as well as any stakeholders or organisations who have an interest in the issues and proposed actions. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires the Authority to consult with relevant stakeholders as it considers appropriate in relation to a proposed Strategy.

- 3.3 At the end of the consultation period, responses will be taken into account and necessary amendments made, with a final Strategy being presented to a future meeting of Cabinet for approval.
- 3.4 The review has identified a number of areas to be developed but one of the key messages was to reinforce that homelessness is a complex, cross cutting issue which not only requires a corporate approach but also a partnership approach to tackle. To further develop corporate and partnership responses to the Strategy findings, a draft Action Plan (**Appendix 4**) is being developed and will be reported to Cabinet alongside the final strategy for approval by Cabinet.
- 3.5 The Transitional Plan and Housing Prospectus are working plans and are not part of the formal public consultation process identified above. These documents have been developed using information gathered during research on housing needs and during discussions with stakeholders. Cabinet is recommended to approve both documents for submission to Welsh Government.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 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, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 Tackling homelessness is a Welsh Government priority. The report contributes to the following goals within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:
- A prosperous Wales – Reducing homelessness supports a prosperous Wales by reducing cost to the public purse.
 - A resilient Wales – Our Housing Support Programme Strategy aims to prevent and relieve homelessness, increasing the resilience of both individuals supported and the general structures in place to support the goal of achieving a position where homelessness in Wales is rare, brief and non recurrent.
 - A Wales of cohesive communities – Preventing individuals from becoming homeless will support cohesive communities.
 - A globally responsive Wales – Homelessness is an issue across the globe. These strategic documents set out the approach Brdgend will take to support Wales in its efforts around this agenda.
- 5.2 It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 The prevention and relief of homelessness supports the agenda around climate change. In particular the Housing Prospectus at **Appendix 3** sets out BCBC's housing need, supply and demand with the intention of informing affordable housing schemes to meet these needs. These schemes will be developed in line with Welsh

Government planning and standards requirements, which support moves to tackle climate change.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 Homelessness and housing support services play a key role in supporting BCBC's safeguarding agenda, both from an individual perspective with services often supporting vulnerable individuals, known to safeguarding agencies.
- 7.2 The priorities set out in the Housing Support Programme Strategy reference a need to improve collaboration with key stakeholders, with specific objectives around improving collaboration to implement the national care leavers and accommodation and support framework, a key part of Corporate Parenting implications.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. The cost of the public consultation will be met from existing budgets.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- approves a 12 week public consultation on the draft Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan (**Appendices 1 & 4**);
 - approves the submission of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (**Appendix 2**) and Housing Prospectus (**Appendix 3**) to Welsh Government;
 - note that the final Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan will be presented to Cabinet for approval prior to formal submission to Welsh Government.

Background documents

None