

Meeting of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	19 DECEMBER 2023
Report Title:	HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME STRATEGY (HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY) 2022 - 2026
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:	To seek approval to adopt and submit a final Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022 – 2026 to Welsh Government, which has been updated following a period of public consultation. This document will replace Bridgend County Borough Council’s (BCBC) existing Homelessness Strategy 2018- 2022. Having this strategy in place is a Welsh Government requirement.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval of the final Housing Support Programme Strategy (Homelessness Strategy) 2022-2026 and Action Plan for submission to Welsh Government.

2. Background

- 2.1 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

2.2 The format of the Strategy attached at **Appendix 1** is prescribed by Welsh Government to all Local Authorities in the Housing Support Grant Guidance.

2.3 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.

2.4 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 a further increase of 104%, with 873 applications and, as at the 20th of February 2023, an additional 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 4th July 2023, there were 2,629 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, then increasing 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 4th 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.

2.5 On 18 July 2023 Cabinet approved a 12 week public consultation on the draft Housing Support Programme Strategy and Action Plan.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 Following Cabinet approval a formal public consultation period on the draft Housing Support Programme Strategy and Action Plan was held between 20th July 2023 and 12th October 2023. Links to the online consultation were shared widely with stakeholders.

3.2 The consultation received 33 online responses. Of the responses:

- 81.3% agreed with the Strategy's aim
- 78.1% agreed that the Strategy clearly explains the challenges the Council faces in delivering homelessness and housing support services
- 65.6% agreed with the Council's strategic priorities and objectives as set out in the Strategy
- 78.7% either agreed or partially agreed that the Action Plan details the steps that will be taken to deliver the Strategy

3.3 In addition to online responses, a response to the consultation was received from BCBC's Social Services & Wellbeing Directorate (both adults and children).

3.4 The draft Strategy and Action Plan were also presented to an all member briefing on 15 September 2023 and to the Subject and Overview Scrutiny Committee 3 on 25 September 2023 for comments and consideration. The Committee made the following recommendations:

- To strengthen the Strategy in terms of support for veterans and Armed Services personnel.
- To maximise effectiveness of the Strategy, that the strategic priority objectives be reviewed to ensure that they are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound) and set out in the Action Plan and the timescales be broken down further detailing the year and month in which each action is planned to be achieved, so that progress can be clearly measured.
- That the Strategy be made more user friendly and as easy to navigate as possible.

3.5 It should be noted that in developing the Strategy and prior to public consultation, key stakeholders were consulted when formulating the priorities and actions that have been identified and included in the Strategy and Action Plan. This has included relevant internal and external stakeholders and the Council's key partners.

3.6 The Strategy at **Appendix 1** and Action Plan at **Appendix 2** have been revised, taking into consideration the comments received during the consultation period. Sections 1 to 4 of the Strategy outline the current position in Bridgend, whilst section 5 to 7 details the direction of travel for housing and homelessness services. The Action Plan details specific actions, which will be taken forward. Once approved by Cabinet, the Strategy and Action Plan will be submitted to Welsh Government and published on BCBC's website.

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 Bridgend 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. A key priority is to increase BCBC's affordable housing supply to meet demand, with the intention of informing affordable housing schemes to meet these needs. Any schemes developed through Social Housing Grant 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.

9. Recommendation

- It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Housing Support Programme Strategy (Homelessness Strategy) 2022-2026 (**Appendix 1**) and Action Plan (**Appendix 2**) for submission to Welsh Government.

Background documents

None