

Meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

2 December 2024

Recommendations / Information requested

	Recommendations / Information Requested:	Response:	Accepted / Partially Accepted / Not Accepted:
Homelessness and Housing			
<u>Recommendations:</u>			
1	<p>Members discussed how vital the Welsh Government Housing Support Grant funding had been, the freezing of the Grant had applied significant pressure across Wales and 18 months ago regular meetings between the 22 Welsh local authorities regarding Homelessness had ceased, which had previously been attended by a network of individuals who could provide operational feedback to Welsh Government.</p> <p>The Committee requested information regarding the nature and title of the previously held meetings and recommended that following receipt of the information requested, that a letter be sent from the Committee to Welsh Government to request the reasons for discontinuing the meetings, whether there were plans to restart them and if not, the reason why. (MM)</p>	<p>The meeting referred to is the Homelessness and Supporting People Network Meeting. It was a meeting for all 22 LA's to come together; primarily operational managers/leads.</p> <p>Whilst there are other forums where the Council can meet with Welsh Government, this meeting referred to above was a Council led forum, bringing operational officers together to share best practice and discuss concerns.</p>	

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2	<p>The Committee discussed the issue of vacant and derelict buildings in the borough and enquired whether there were any schemes or strategies that could potentially enable the Local Authority to take control of such empty buildings to turn them into social housing.</p> <p>The Committee recommended that when a Council owned property becomes vacant, all options should be explored including whether it could be utilised by another part of the Authority e.g. for repurposing as housing accommodation, prior to consideration of whether it is declared surplus, marketed for sale, or disposed of otherwise.</p> <p>The Committee highlighted the importance of the Authority looking at inventive ways of working with partners to bring properties back in to use which could inevitably reduce the costs. (MM)</p>	<p>The Council is committed to tackling the blight of empty properties and adopts a proactive approach by working with owners to bring their empty properties back into use. If however, properties continue to remain empty, are in a state of disrepair, are detrimental or a nuisance to the community, the Council will consider using its legislative powers to remedy the adverse impact on the community and bring the property back into use.</p> <p>A number of schemes can be utilised:</p> <p>Empty property loans</p> <p>Interest-free loans are available to renovate empty properties and make them safe to live in. These are sometimes known as 'Houses into Homes loans.'</p> <p>The money is available before work starts. It can pay for work on houses and commercial buildings. This includes turning a property into flats.</p> <p>Eligibility</p> <p>Anyone can apply. The most that you can borrow is £25,000 for each property and up to £250,000 per application.</p> <p>Any loan offered will be secured on the property and will take into account the existing mortgage. It can't be more than 80% of the property's value.</p>	

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		<p>Empty Property Grants</p> <p>Grants of up to £25,000 are available to renovate empty properties to make them safe to live in and improve their energy efficiency.</p> <p>The grant is available in instalments as the work is undertaken. A minimum 15% contribution is required from the applicant.</p> <p>Local authorities, Registered Social Landlords and Community Housing Groups are also able to apply for funding.</p> <p>Eligibility</p> <p>Any one can apply for a grant (as long as the associated local authority has opted to participate in the scheme) however, in order to qualify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The property must have been empty (unoccupied and substantially unfurnished) for a minimum 12-month period at the date of application and qualify as a chargeable empty property.• A chargeable empty property is a property that has been empty (unoccupied and substantially unfurnished) for at least 6 months and is listed as a domestic property for council tax purposes. In order to qualify as a Chargeable empty property, a property must have been valued and banded by the Valuation Office Agency and entered on the	

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		<p>Council Tax Valuation List. For more information, see: How domestic properties are assessed for Council Tax bands GOV.UK. For the purposes of the grant, the property must have been listed as a domestic property for a minimum of 12 months to qualify.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The property must be owned, or in the process of being purchased, by the applicant at the time of application; and• If successful, the applicant must live in the property for a minimum of 5 years post completion of the works as their main and only residence.• Some local authorities may have additional eligibility criteria. More information on these can be found on the application page. <p>Leasing Scheme Wales</p> <p>This scheme enables the Council to lease properties from private landlord for the purpose of increasing affordable housing stock, supporting the move on from temporary accommodation.</p> <p>Renovation Grants are available to bring a property up to standard. Extra grant is available if the property has been available for 6 months or more.</p>	

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		<p>Council owned property vacant example - Maple Tree House</p> <p>This Council owned building was empty and unoccupied, prior to being repurposed for temporary accommodation. It is currently in use providing 9 units of accommodation. Support staff are on site to support residents and the ongoing management of the project.</p> <p>Whilst no imminently available empty Council properties have been identified, this model will be considered should further opportunities arise.</p>	
3	<p>The Committee expressed concern that the proposed level of social housing would only address 50% of the current waiting list and asked whether there was an opportunity to review the figures and submit another bid in the Local Development Plan (LDP) process.</p> <p>Members were advised that following the Local Development Plan (LDP) being adopted this year, a local housing and marketing assessment would be undertaken every two to three years which would provide up to date figures to enable negotiation for the right mix and</p>	<p>The scale of affordable housing need and spatial distribution thereof were key considerations when determining the overall level and location of housing in the adopted Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP). During the RLDP period, development proposals are expected to deliver a target total of 1,711 affordable dwellings across Bridgend County Borough. The Plan's contribution to affordable housing provision has been robustly determined by considering the housing need identified in the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) alongside rigorous viability testing to ensure formulation of viable affordable housing policy thresholds and proportions. The affordable housing target only relates to sources of supply that are funded and delivered through the planning system and the Plan</p>	

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	<p>type of housing, however the actual review for the LDP would be 4 years from its adoption.</p> <p>The Committee recommended that Members be encouraged to examine the updated figures from the Local Housing and Marketing Assessment when considering the review of the LDP in 4 years' time, and that given Members' concern at hearing in the meeting of a development not meeting all of its percentage target to build social housing, that the proposed housing percentage targets be adhered to rigorously throughout the Planning process. (MM)</p>	<p>has made provision to deliver the affordable housing target within the designated settlement boundaries. As such, this target represents the added value the RLDP will contribute to affordable housing supply alongside a range of other delivery mechanisms.</p> <p>The 2024 LHMA has been completed since adoption of the RLDP (March 2024) and provides updated evidence to inform the appropriate mix of dwellings for new developments, particularly the types of affordable housing (namely intermediate and social rented) in short supply in different areas. The LHMA will be refreshed periodically in accordance with WG Guidance and the latest LHMA will provide the most up-to-date evidence on housing need to inform appropriate affordable housing provision on new developments. However, it must be recognised that the housing need identified in the LHMA represents the scale of the affordability gap in the market and the RLDP itself is not the only affordable housing delivery mechanism to help address such need. The Plan's contribution will therefore form part of several streams of affordable housing supply to meet this identified need, including SHG and other capital/revenue grant funded schemes, RSL self-funded schemes, reconfiguration of existing stock, private sector leasing schemes, discharge of homelessness duties into the private rented sector and re-utilisation of empty properties.</p>	

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		<p>Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) is also currently in development. The purpose of this SPG is to support and provide further direction on implementation of the affordable housing policies contained within the adopted LDP. It will outline how affordable housing should be delivered through the planning system throughout Bridgend County Borough. New affordable housing must meet housing need as identified in LHMA or respond to a local need identified by the Local Housing Authority, while enabling placemaking-led sustainable development. This multi-faceted approach is key to ensuring balanced, socially cohesive and sustainable communities. Once adopted, the SPG will be a material consideration in the determination of all planning applications for residential development including applications for renewal of consents.</p> <p>In summary, the RLDP is one mechanism to increase affordable housing supply. It has maximised nil-grant affordable provision as far as possible although cannot address all affordable housing need identified across the County Borough.</p>	
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4	<p>The Committee requested further information regarding the primary capital funding stream for the development of affordable housing, the Social Housing Grant, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Details of the local SHG partners worked with; b. A breakdown of the allocation of costs; c. What the costs were used for; d. Details of how the Council looks at the developments bid for; e. Whether the developments bid for were delivered on time and at the original contract price. <p>(MM)</p>	<p>Social Housing Grant only covers 58% of the total costs, the RSL will need to finance the other 42% of the cost of the development.</p> <p>A: Current partners are: Hafod V2C Wales & West Linc Beacon (formally Coastal) Trivallis</p> <p>B: Allocated Yr 1 (2024/2024): £10,427,287 Yr 2 (2025/2025): £13,129,808 Yr 3 (2026/2027): £11,405,634</p> <p>C: Costs are a combination of acquisition of land, acquisition of single off the shelf purchases and, construction costs.</p> <p>D: The council will consider the LHMA/LDP for need and waiting time data, consultation takes place with planning before making a final decision to support a scheme.</p> <p>E: Some schemes have been delayed, this can be due to a number of factors.</p>	

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		<p>Sunnyside Wellbeing Village was delayed due to contractors going into administration, this resulted in a further procurement exercise by the RSL, costs increased in the meantime for materials and remediation works.</p> <p>The Ridgway development for example was delayed for further acoustic measures having to be put in place and thereafter the land being re-categorised as employment land in the RLDP. Further work must be undertaken to permit development as an exception site.</p> <p>Sunnyside house is delayed due to the site needing to be remodelled to address flood consequences identified by the National Resources for Wales, costs increase as a result of measure that have to be put in place.</p> <p>The Council plays a partnership role with WG. However WG signs off and manages the grant. The Welsh Government Housing Funding team and the Housing Quality Standards team jointly carry out the administration of the SHG programme. The Housing Quality Standards team is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undertaking Concept and Pre Planning reviews of all schemes.• Liaising with RSLs to ensure design comments are taken into account.	

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liaising with the Housing Funding team to ensure no Construction stage applications are processed before design sign off (Pre Planning) has been achieved.• Undertaking Post Completion Reviews.• Reviewing Post Completion Review reports.• Reviewing the Programme Development Plans(PDP) and liaising with Local Authorities.• Liaising with the Housing Quality Standards team to understand the technical scrutiny status of schemes.• Checking and processing scheme approval applications and grant claims.• Issuing scheme approvals and paying grant.• Liaising with RSLs where applications are incomplete or appear incorrect.• Undertaking spot checks of documentation held on the review files.• Monitoring PDPs and applications to ensure all grant is paid when due.• Monitoring scheme completions to ensure Post Completion Review reports are received	