

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 MARCH 2016

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY AND COMMON HOUSING REGISTER UPDATE REPORT – HOUSING SOLUTION INTERVIEW, HOUSING REGISTRATION AND NOMINATION PROCESSES.

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update the Committee on the Housing Solutions Service; to provide a pen picture of applicants who access the Common Housing Register (CHR), and those who do not; and explain the nomination process. The report will also advise Members of any barriers and issues in administering the CHR and how the service and its Registered Social Landlord (RSLs) partners intend to respond to these.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities.

- 2.1 The Housing Solutions Service contributes towards the Corporate Plan Priority 'Working together to help vulnerable people stay independent'. The Social Housing Allocation Policy (SHAP) helps to deliver the Corporate Improvement Priorities of "working together to help vulnerable people to stay independent" and "working together to make the best use of resources", It also helps to manage demand for social housing.

3. Background.

- 3.1 The Committee received a report on 15th July 2015 setting out the factors that led to the implementation and development of the SHAP and the CHR. The report also advised Members of how the service and its Registered Social Landlord (RSLs) partners have reviewed the SHAP and how they intend to manage the increased demand for housing solutions services, in a period of budget cuts.
- 3.2 There is a statutory requirement for every housing authority to have a Housing Allocation Scheme for determining priorities, and a procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation. In Bridgend County Borough the Allocation Scheme is known as the SHAP and the procedure to be followed in allocating housing is known as the CHR. The Authority developed the CHR in partnership with the 4 local RSLs Valleys to Coast (V2C), Linc Cymru, Hafod, and Wales and West Housing Association. Valleys to Coast are able to allocate up to 25% of their vacancies through their own allocation policy as set out in the Deed of Stock Transfer. For all other RSLs they offer 100% nomination rights to the Council.
- 3.3 Prior to the introduction of the SHAP housing applicants could request to be registered on one of the five partners registers without any prior qualifying interview or discussion. This resulted in a disproportionate number of applicants (69% -

3,184 of 4,614) being accepted onto the registers without any identified housing need. The SHAP was developed with the customer in mind and applicants are now only accepted on to the CHR following a Housing Assessment by the Council.

4.0 Current Situation/Proposal

- 4.1 Following the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 the Authority now has a duty to assist almost every applicant that presents as homeless, which increases the pressures on the service. The requirement to undertake reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness is a further pressure, with an increased focus on case management requiring increased levels of work. Everyone can apply to be considered for housing under the SHAP, however not every applicant will be eligible for housing under the Policy.
- 4.2 A Housing Assessment is completed by the Council in order to meet its obligations under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 but also in recognition that the Council appreciates the importance of offering applicants as much choice as possible regarding their housing options. Applicants are encouraged to express preferences about the housing accommodation to be allocated to them but the Council and its Partners' ability to meet these expectations are limited to accommodation that is available in the County Borough. See **Appendix A** for a synopsis of the Housing Assessment.
- 4.3 For applicants who are owed a duty under section 66 of the Act (Homelessness Prevention), the duty is to help the applicant by ensuring property does not cease to be available or to help secure accommodation. For applicants who are owed a section 73 (Homelessness Relief) duty, the duty is to help to secure accommodation and applicants who are owed a section 75 (Final) duty the duty is to secure accommodation. For applicants owed any of these duties under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, the Council will be entitled to make an offer of suitable accommodation anywhere within the Council's borough. There is insufficient social housing (of the right size and location) within the County Borough to accommodate all housing applicants. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 in recognition of this issue nationally enables Local Authorities to make an offer of suitable accommodation in both Social Housing and the Private Rented Sector where the offer is deemed suitable and meets the needs of the household. Applicants are advised of this and the options available to them during their assessment.
- 4.4 The Housing Assessment is an opportunity to gather all the necessary information from the applicant about their housing history, their current situation, their housing needs, and identify any support needs. In considering the options available to the applicant the Housing Solutions Advisor will have regard to the reasonable preference categories, suitability of the applicant's current accommodation including overcrowding and specific housing needs. All relevant additional information provided by the applicant or by other agencies, such as Social Services, Community Mental Health Team, Health, Police, Probation etc., on the applicant's behalf will be considered during the assessment.
- 4.5 Under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 the Authority must give reasonable preference for housing to:
 - All categories of homeless people;

- People occupying insanitary, overcrowded or otherwise unsatisfactory housing;
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds;
- People who need to move to a particular locality within the Borough to avoid hardship to themselves or others.

4.6 In addition the Council will give reasonable preference to reflect the housing needs of those applicants within the following categories, specifically but not exclusively:

- i. Those owed a homelessness duty as a result of violence or threats of violence likely to be carried out and who as a result require urgent rehousing, including:
 - Victims of domestic or other violence;
 - Victims of racist incidents;
 - Same sex couples who are victims of harassment amounting to threats of violence or violence;
 - Victims or witnesses of crime who are at risk of intimidation amounting to threats of violence or violence.
- ii. Those who need to move because of urgent medical reasons.
- iii. Applicants who suddenly lose their existing home as a result of a disaster e.g. fire or flood.

4.7 Following completion of a Housing Assessment, applicants are notified of the outcome in writing. For applicants who have no postal address, a care of address or email address is recorded if this is available. If there are no delivery options, the applicant will be contacted via telephone and advised that there is a letter for them to collect from Civic Offices. For applicants who are unable to attend the interview at the Council Offices, a home or hospital visit may be offered. Advice and help is given to vulnerable applicants and those with specific needs in order that they can complete a Housing Assessment. Applicants who are identified as being in housing need are placed in Bands according to housing need and those Bands determine the applicant's priority for the offer of accommodation (nomination):

Banding
<p>PRIORITY CASES</p> <p>Those applicants falling within the reasonable preference categories set out in 4.5 and 4.6 above and whom the following also apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A number of statutory agencies are involved; or ▪ There is a statutory requirement to intervene; or ▪ Immediate provision of housing will alleviate intense agency input ▪ Immediate provision of housing is needed because of a critical medical or welfare need including emergencies ▪ Under occupation of social housing and need to transfer to a smaller property in order to avoid loss of tenancy <p>The above categories are regarded as having exceptional need of housing and are prioritised. Examples of the type of applicants and households that are</p>

deemed to be priority cases are:

Pen Pictures – Priority Cases

1.

Applicant presents to the Authority fleeing domestic abuse. A homeless application is taken and a risk assessment completed to ascertain the level of risk posed to the victim.

Due to the high level of risk identified in the risk assessment questionnaire completed by a Housing Solutions Advisor, the applicant is referred to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (**MARAC**) which is a local meeting to discuss how to help victims at high risk of murder or serious harm. A domestic abuse specialist (Idva), police, children's social services, housing, health and other relevant agencies all sit around the same table. They talk about the victim, the family and perpetrator, and share information. Together, the meeting representatives write an action plan for each victim.

These circumstances meet the criteria of 'a number of statutory agencies are involved' thus, registration is in the priority band.

2.

Applicant presents to housing with a need to move because of a medical condition. The medical condition will not improve unless they move. The applicant has physical illnesses/disabilities and lives in a two storey property with a bath and overhead shower.

The health conditions cause the applicant to struggle in the current property. The conditions have a great impact on mobility.

The applicant is at risk of falls and is unsafe going up and down the stairs.

The applicant has difficulties with transfers and requires assistance. The applicant is also at risk of falls with bath transfers and requires a level access shower. The applicant finds the access into the property difficult and therefore needs a hardstanding for a car, ramped access or level access into the property.

The housing department request an Occupational Therapist (OT) assessment. On receipt the OT advises of the adaptations the applicant requires. The OT advises that the applicant would benefit from facilities on one level ideally a ground floor flat/bungalow. However if this is not feasible the property would need a ground floor and first floor toilet and a stair lift.

The OT provides an opinion on the urgency of the move. In the above scenario the opinion is, there is a critical need to move.

These circumstances meet the criteria of 'Immediate provision of housing is needed because of a critical medical or welfare need including emergencies' thus, registration is in the priority band.

BAND A

Those applicants assessed as having urgent housing need:

- You have an urgent need to move because of your disability and the need for an adapted property; or
- You are unintentionally homeless, in priority need and owed a duty by the Council; or
- You need to move on from supported housing; or
- You are owed a homelessness duty and as a result of violence or threats of violence likely to be carried out you require urgent rehousing; or
- You need to move because of urgent medical or hardship reasons; or
- You need to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability which you, or a member of your household has sustained as a result of service in the Armed Forces; or
- You need accommodation as a result of leaving the Armed Forces and the loss of military accommodation; or
- You are under occupying social housing and want to transfer to a smaller property in order to avoid financial hardship

Examples of the type of applicants and households that are deemed to be Band A cases are:

Pen Pictures – Band A Cases

1.

Applicant presents to housing homeless the same day. The Housing Solutions Advisor confirms that the applicant is homeless and undertakes a Housing Assessment.

The applicant suffers with mental ill-health and it is assessed that this condition makes the applicant more vulnerable than the average person who is street homeless. Therefore, the applicant is deemed priority need.

The applicant is accommodated in interim accommodation and both the applicant and the Housing Solutions Advisor agree Reasonable Steps to relieve the homelessness within 56 days. The 56 days has passed but it has not been possible to relieve homeless by helping to secure accommodation.

The applicant is eligible, homeless, priority need, unintentionally homeless and has a local connection. The applicant is owed the final homeless duty, duty to secure accommodation.

These circumstances meet the criteria of 'You are unintentionally homeless, in priority need and owed a duty the Council' thus; registration is in the Band A.

2.

Applicant presents to the housing department. The applicant is residing in a supported living scheme i.e. Women's Aid, Young Persons accommodation.

The applicant has been provided with housing related support to empower and maintain independence in their own tenancy. Both the applicant and the support provider are of the opinion that the applicant has achieved independence and can live independently.

The Housing Solutions Advisor agrees that the applicant needs to move into their own accommodation.

These circumstances meet the criteria of "You need to move on from supported housing" thus, registration is in Band A.

BAND B

Those applicants assessed as having non urgent housing need:

- You need to move for medical or hardship reasons; or
- You need to move because of overcrowding conditions or insanitary conditions; or
- You need to move because you are disabled and your property is not suitable and cannot be easily adapted; or
- You are homeless but do not qualify for Band A; or
- You need to move for reasons of employment, meeting needs in the local area; or
- You meet the criteria set out in these Bandings but you have no local connection with the area;
- You have a substantiated threat of homelessness within 56 days where housing will prevent your homelessness;
- You are homeless and housing will relieve your homelessness.

Examples of the type of applicants and households that are deemed to be Band B cases are:

Pen Pictures – Band B Cases

1.

Applicant presents to Housing Solutions as the property they are living in is overcrowded. The applicant is originally from Bridgend but has lived away in England for a number of years.

The applicant wishes to move back to the area however due to the number of years she has resided in England, she no longer has a local connection to the area but fits the criteria to be registered on the Common Housing Register due to being overcrowded.

These circumstances meet the criteria of 'You meet the criteria set out in these Bandings, but you have no local connection to the area' thus, registration is in Band B

2.

Applicant presents to housing as their accommodation is affected by damp. An environmental health report evidences the damp which has not been remedied by

the landlord despite the landlord being asked to make good this disrepair. The damp is not severe so as to make the property uninhabitable.

These circumstances meet the criteria of 'You need to move because of overcrowding conditions or insanitary conditions' thus, registration is in Band B.

NO PREFERENCE

Those applicants assessed as having no preference:

- You have a history of unacceptable behaviour which would not have entitled the authority to a possession order under section 84 of the Housing Act 1985;
- You have a recoverable property related debt of between £300 and £999 in your current or former home;
- You have a recoverable property related debt in your current or former home of less than £300 but have failed to enter into an immediate repayment plan with the Council/RSL.

Examples of the type of applicants and households that are deemed to have no preference are:

Pen Pictures – No Preference Cases

Applicant presents to housing and is deemed to be in housing need due to, for example, overcrowding however they have a property related debt i.e. rent arrears of £850.

These circumstances meet the criteria of 'You have a recoverable property related debt of between £300 and £999 in your current or former home', thus registration is in the No Preference band.

- 4.8 Table 1 below sets out the number of applicants within each Band on the CHR as of 25th February 2016. Those in the Residual Group have been assessed as not being in housing need. However, this group of applicants were historical applicants and had previously been given some priority for the time they had been waiting. They were therefore given the choice to remain on the register under the Residual Group if they wished. Those in the Residual Group are required to re-register annually along with all other applicants, and may be nominated for a property only when there are no suitable applicants in one of the other bands:

Table 1

Housing need priority given	Total number of applicants at 25/02/16
Priority Band	82
Band A	286
Band B	784
No Preference	24
Residual Group	106
Total	1282

- 4.9 Applicants who are identified as not being in housing need as per the criteria set out in the Bands of the SHAP as shown in 4.7 above are offered housing options advice, including details of any review and complaints process. Examples of the type of applicants and households that are deemed not being in housing need are:

Pen Pictures – Not in Housing Need

Applicant presents to Housing Solutions claiming the property they live in is unaffordable. The Housing Solution Advisor undertakes a financial assessment. This reveals that the applicant prefers non priority payments such as credit cards, catalogue, and television packages over priority payments such as rent, utilities and council tax. The property is affordable but for the applicant choosing to prioritise non priority payments. Thus, the Housing Solutions Advisor would deem there to be no housing need and refer the applicant to an agency for debt/financial advice.

Applicant presents to Housing Solutions as they want to move to provide care or support to a relative. A Housing Assessment is completed taking into consideration the proximity between where the person requiring care resides and where the person providing the care resides. The assessment evidences that the care and/or support can be provided from where the applicant currently resides therefore, there is no need to move so there is no housing need.

Applicant presents to Housing Solutions. The property they currently reside in is suitable for their needs as is the area they reside in. However the applicant would merely like to move area i.e. they want to live near the coast in Porthcawl. They would not be deemed in housing need as there is no need to move.

- 4.10 The Housing Assessment will help applicants determine if social housing is the best option for them. Applicants will be required to produce evidence of their eligibility and supporting information in order that the officer may consider all the facts. Examples of what cannot be taken into account are:

- Living in Private Rented accommodation and want to move to Social Housing (unless a notice has been served by the landlord);
- Adequately housed but wishes to move to a different area (unless there is a requirement for the applicant to move as per 4.6 above);
- Affordability where the applicants lifestyle choices make accommodation not affordable i.e. excessive mobile phone charges, catalogue, finance (debt advice is offered in these cases);
- Move to be nearer family (unless there is a requirement to give or receive care);

- 4.11 Members will recall from the report of 15th July 2015 that the Council and the RSLs have established a steering group known as the Allocations Panel, which meet once a month. The purpose of the group is to oversee the SHAP and CHR and the implementation of any changes. The Allocations Panel have been asked to develop criteria around low income households who fall just outside housing need, and report back to Bridgend Housing Partnership on the effectiveness of adding a further Band and the likely cost to the RSL partners.
- 4.12 The development of this new band has been agreed by the Council and the RSLs. The new band will focus on accepting applicants onto the Common Housing Register who wish to reside in the areas of the Borough where accommodation takes longer to let. Each RSL has provided the Council with a list of the areas they wish to include in this band which are primarily the valley areas. This band will not require a person to be in housing need and there will be a cap on the household income.
- 4.13 The lack of suitable nominations to void properties is a growing concern for both the Council and the RSLs, which can be partly attributed to the size and type of available housing in a particular area. In addition the number of failed nominations to void properties is of equal concern. The Council deems a property to be void and available for nomination when it is available for occupation in the following 4 weeks. This may be contrary to the terminology used by RSLs who deem a property to be void when the former tenant ends their tenancy. However the property may not be available for letting for a number of weeks/months if works of repair and/or improvements are required, or removal of belongings and cleaning if the property is abandoned. This can result in miscommunication in relation to voids and available voids between the Council and the RSLs.
- 4.14 The SHAP sets out that one reasonable offer of accommodation will be made based on the information gathered as part of the Housing Assessment. The offer will be regarded as reasonable if it meets the needs of the applicant in terms of size and type of accommodation and is in the applicants preferred area of choice. Those applicants that are homeless and in priority need may be offered suitable accommodation outside of their preferred area which may result in no further homelessness duty being owed. Applicants may be at risk in certain areas, if this risk is substantiated then these areas will be removed from their registration. The substantiating evidence may come from, for example, the police, probation, MARAC, Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).
- 4.15 Further offers of accommodation may be made to the applicant outside the applicant's preferred area of choice where it appears to the Council that the size and type of accommodation is suitable to the needs of the applicant. As it is not in the applicants preferred area of choice, any refusal of these 'further offers' will not result in automatic removal from the register. This will not apply to applicants that are homeless and in priority need.
- 4.16 Applicants are matched to a property based on the information they provided to the Council during their assessment, and any additional information they may provide the Council during their annual re-registration or change of circumstances as they arise. The RSLs send the details of void properties to the Council in order that they may match suitable applicants from the CHR and make a nomination to the RSL. Where a RSL states there is criteria attached to a void property this results in the

time to match and provide a nomination taking longer and the failure rate to increase. Examples of criteria that are applied by the RSL are:

- No support needs
- No drugs
- No Anti-social Behaviour (ASB)
- No Alcohol
- No Pets
- Persons over a certain age

- 4.17 The average time taken by the Council to provide a nomination once it has been notified of an available void is 2 days based on voids in the period 01/01/15 to 31/12/15:

Quickest	Average	Longest
2 minutes	2 Days	29 Days

Table 2 sets out the number of void properties provided to the Council in the period 01/01/15 to 31/12/15, and of those how many nominations were successful and how many failed due to lettings criteria or as a result of applicants who would otherwise come within the No Preference Band, be excluded or for who we are awaiting further information.

Table 2

RSL	No of Voids Total	No of Voids with criteria Nos./%	Successful Nominations Nos./%	Failed Nominations due to lettings criteria Nos./%	Failed Nominations due to applicants circumstances Nos./%
V2C	411	110 / 27%	198 / 48%	103 / 25%	109 / 27%
Wales & West	147	33 / 22%	95 / 65%	32 / 22%	20 / 13%
Linc-Cymru	122	3 / 2%	78 / 64%	13 / 11%	27 / 22%
Hafod	92	46 / 50%	80 / 87%	10 / 11%	2 / 2%

N.B there are 5 voids awaiting a decision by the RSL, 1 with V2C and 4 with Linc-Cymru.

- 4.18 Following a nomination from the Council the RSL will review the applicant's application and details and determine whether an offer of accommodation can be made. The RSL will consider such factors as former rent arrears, references, sustainability of tenancies and carry out an affordability assessment. At this point the RSL may not deem the nomination to be reasonable, or the applicant may not deem the accommodation to be reasonable. Examples of the grounds for which either party may deem the offer not to be reasonable are:

Applicant: Examples

- Not in their preferred area
- Property type i.e. applicant wants a bungalow but has been offered a ground floor flat
- Property size
- Not near shops, school, transport links

RSL: Examples

- Applicant has rent arrears
- Applicant has support needs
- Failing financial assessments
- Past anti-social behaviour

4.19 Table 3 sets out the number of nominations in the period 01/01/15 to 31/12/15 that have been refused by the RSL or the applicant:

Table 3

RSL	No of Nominations Total	Refused by RSL Nos./%	Refused by Applicant Nos./%	No of refusals by applicant not upheld Nos./%	No of refusals by applicant upheld Nos./%
V2C	488	176 / 36%	116 / 24%	111 / 96%	5 / 4%
Wales & West	192	61 / 32%	37 / 19%	29 / 78%	8 / 22%
Hafod	174	46 / 26%	47 / 27%	43 / 91%	4 / 9%
Linc-Cymru	133	26 / 20%	22 / 17%	18 / 82%	4 / 18%

4.20 The Council does not always accept the grounds that have been stated by the RSL and/or the applicant, and may request additional information to substantiate the refusal. This may result in a delay whilst the Council awaits qualifying information. The average time taken to provide a new nomination following a failed nomination in the period 01/01/15 to 31/12/15 is 2.32 days:

Quickest	Average	Longest
1 minute	2.32 Days	28 Days

4.21 With the exception of V2C the remaining RSL Partners will accept several nominations for a void property until a suitable match of tenant can be found. In some cases there may not be a suitable match as there is no one registered for that size of property in that particular area. The creation of a new band as highlighted in 4.12 above should assist in this process. V2C however will only accept three nominations from the Council before they advertise the void under their own choice based lettings scheme 'My Choice'. V2C use their ability to nominate up to 25% of their stock through the Deed of Transfer as highlighted in 3.2.

4.22 The Council does not have data on the percentage of properties that V2C house via 'My Choice' annually and cannot confirm whether this is in line with the 25% agreed allocation. The Council therefore is not in a position to determine if properties are not being let via the CHR as a direct result of the introduction of the Banding of the

CHR; the criteria that V2C apply to their voids; or that V2C will only accept three nominations before advertising properties on 'My Choice'.

4.23 For applicants who are eligible to join the Common Housing Register the applicant's requirements in relation to property size will normally be determined according to the standard indicated in the household table below. Exceptions may occur (subject to the applicant demonstrating ability to afford rent) which will include, but not exclusively:

- When the housing provider needs to consider the sustainability of an area;
- Where there is limited stock or low demand;
- Where a household member has a disability or health related condition which requires an additional bedroom. This must be supported by information from a relevant medical professional and subject to an affordability assessment;

Household	Bedrooms
Single person	1 or bedsit
Couple	1
Single pregnant woman	2
Single parent or couple with one child	2
Single parent or couple with two children of same sex	2
Single parent or couple with two children of opposite sex under 10 years	2 or 3
Single parent or couple with two children of opposite sex where at least one child is over 10 years	3
Single parent or couple with three children	3
Single parent or couple with four children	3 or 4
Single parent or couple with five children	4
Single parent or couple with more than five children	4

4.24 The following should be read in conjunction with the table above:

- For the purposes of sharing bedrooms the following apply:
 - Under 10 years old, mixed sexes may share a bedroom however, where a child is within twelve months of being 10 years old, an additional bedroom may be provided
 - Under 16 years old, same sexes may share a bedroom however, where a child is within twelve months of being 16 years old, an additional bedroom may be provided
 - Over 16 years old, own bedroom required
- Parlour type properties can be considered as having an additional bedroom to assist where necessary with housing larger families where larger accommodation is not available
- In all cases child refers to dependent child

- 4.25 The Council and its RSL Partners remain concerned about affordability and the forthcoming changes in relation to Welfare Reform and the introduction of Universal Credit. Affordability therefore is a critical element to any Housing Solutions advice and at present all four RSLs operate their own affordability assessments highlighted in 4.18, and the Council completes their own financial assessment as part of the Housing Assessment. In light of the proposed Government changes set out below it would be beneficial for applicants, the Council and the four RSL Partners to complete one common financial assessment. Discussions have taken place during monthly allocation meetings between the Council and RSL's to develop this.
- 4.26 The Government intends to bring Housing Benefit (HB) for social housing tenants in line with the private sector Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates from 1 April 2018. The policy will apply to tenancies signed after 1 April 2016, with entitlement changing from 1 April 2018.

Bridgend's weekly LHA rates from April 2016 are as follows:

Shared accommodation	£55.23
1 bedroom	£80.55
2 bedroom	£103.56
3 bedroom	£115.06
4 bedroom	£149.59

- 4.27 It is proposed that the rates will apply in the same way as they currently do for LHA, for example, irrespective of the number of bedrooms that are actually in the property, a couple's maximum HB will be restricted to the 1 bedroom rate, and a single person with 2 children under 10 to the 2 bedroom rate. This change also means that HB for single people aged under 35 without children in social housing will be restricted to the shared accommodation rate. The intention is that RSL tenants will only be able to claim the same amount of HB as a private tenant.
- 4.28 On 1st March 2016 the Government put in place a year-long exception for all tenants of supported accommodation in the social sector so that this measure will only apply to these tenancies from April 2017, rather than April 2016. As examples, this will include refuges for those fleeing domestic abuse, homeless provision, housing for ex-offenders, as well as supported housing for older and disabled people.

The actual cut in benefit for all other new social housing tenancies, and for new supported tenants after April 2017, will still take place from April 2018 as planned.

- 4.29 Table 4 shows the total number of applicants on the CHR by number of bedrooms, and the average number of vacancies that become available for bedroom sizes per annum. It can be seen that the percentage of applicants requiring a one bedroom property has increased, while the percentage requiring a three bedroom property has decreased. There has been an increase in the failed nomination rate for larger properties due to the demand for smaller properties which was expected with the introduction of the 'bedroom tax'.

Table 4

Number of bedrooms	Number of applicants on CHR at 25-03-16	% of all applicants	Average number of vacancies per annum	% of all vacancies per annum	Success rate of allocations %
1 bed <35	378	29.49%	85	12.71%	58 (14.29%)
1 bed >35	493	38.46%	123	18.39%	83 (20.44%)
2	219	17.08%	307	45.89%	181 (44.58%)
3	109	8.50%	146	21.82%	78 (19.21%)
4	73	5.69%	7	1.05%	5 (1.23%)
5	6	0.47%	1	0.15%	1 (0.25%)
6	4	0.31%	0	0.00%	0 (0.00%)
Total	1282		669		406 (60.68%)

The 'success rate of allocations %' column is based on the number of properties successfully allocated for each bedroom size as a percentage of the total number of properties successfully allocated e.g. for a 2 bed this is 181 as a percentage of 406.

The 60.68% calculation is based on the number of properties successfully allocated per annum (406) as a percentage of the number of vacancies per annum (669).

- 4.30 Given the above proposed changes by the Government set out in 4.26, the number of applicants aged <35 currently on the CHR requiring 1 bedroom (shared room), and the number of larger properties where the Council is unable to provide nominations it would appear that the development of a shared tenancy model would assist applicants, the Council and the RSL Partners.

	LHA rates from April 2016	Shared accommodation rates – rental income potential
Shared accommodation	£55.23 < 35 year old	£55.23
1 bedroom	£80.55 > 35 year old	£25.32 top up required
2 bedroom	£103.56	2 share = £110.46
3 bedroom	£115.06	3 share = £165.69
4 bedroom	£149.59	3 share = £165.69 4 share = £220.92

- 4.31 Not all properties will be suitable for shared tenancies, and not all applicants would be suited to living in shared accommodation. Some works to properties may be required to enable shared living to be developed for instance fire doors, locks on

bedrooms and bathrooms etc. and these works would have to be funded by the landlords; and it is accepted that some tenants may require support to understand their obligations as a shared tenant. The Council has recently commissioned a generic floating support service through the WG Supporting People Programme Grant and tenants could be referred to and access this service which provides support within tenants own homes and a drop-in shared support hub model.

- 4.32 As set out in 4.1 there are future cost pressures on the service arising from the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 as the Authority now has a duty to assist almost every applicant that presents as homeless. This has seen an increase in the number of applicants contacting the service from 2606 in 2014/15 to 3183 in 2015/16 (projected to end of year) an increase of 22%. This has also seen an increase specifically regarding homelessness from 673 in 2014/15 to 916 in 2015/16 (projected to end of year) an increase of 36%. The requirement to undertake reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness, and an increased focus on case management requiring increased levels of work has highlighted the need to recruit three additional full time Housing Solutions Advisors and an additional support officer in order to meet the demands of the new legislation.
- 4.33 Welsh Government (WG) approved an application for transitional funding to resource the new and additional services from 1st April 2015. However, the short term nature of the funding has meant that the service has been unable to recruit sufficiently experienced staff to respond to the changes in the legislation. One fixed term member of staff has been recruited for a 2 year period, and Agency workers have been recruited periodically however this is not the preferred model of delivery as it does not provide any sustainability for applicants or the team.
- 4.34 The inability to recruit has resulted in the average number of days taken to conduct a Housing Assessment rising from 11 calendar days to 18 calendar days (9 working days to 14 working days). Members should note that while indications have been given that funding may be available for 3 years, the confirmed funding commitment is for only one year. If and when this funding ceases, the ongoing resource requirements of the legislation will need to be assessed, and funding for the service assessed accordingly.

5. Effects on the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 These proposals are consistent with current Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There is a risk that demand for temporary accommodation will increase once the full impact of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 is felt, which may result in a budget pressure. Additional transitional funding has been identified by WG for the first three years of the new legislation to support the cost of implementation. As WG budgets for future years have not yet been confirmed, the current funding level of £222,476 is only guaranteed for the 2015-16 financial year, with no indication of

funding levels beyond this year. If and when this funding ceases, the ongoing resource requirements of the legislation will need to be assessed, and the service adjusted accordingly. As a result of efficiency savings achieved over a number of years the service is now very lean, and there is very little scope to meet additional statutory requirements, or for further cost reductions.

8. Recommendations

8.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the content of this report.

DARREN MEPHAM
Chief Executive

16th March 2016

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Background documents:

None.