

**Report to:** Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019

**Lead Member/Officers:** Cabinet Lead Member for Well-being and Independence  
Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm/Head of  
Community Support Services

**Report Authors:** Principal Manager & Service Manager: Community Support  
Services

**Title:** Safeguarding and meeting the needs of homeless people

## **1. What is the report about?**

1.1 To review how the Council is working corporately to prevent homelessness, provide emergency/temporary accommodation to those that present as homeless and what we do to move those in emergency/temporary accommodation into long term sustainable accommodation.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

2.1 To report on the progress of the new corporate approach to dealing with homelessness, including the new draft Corporate Homelessness Action Plan, along with the restructure of the Homelessness Prevention Team (Community Support Services).

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

For Scrutiny to comment on;

3.1 The new corporate approach to dealing with homelessness via the Strategic Housing and Homelessness Group;

3.2 The new draft Corporate Homelessness Action Plan;

3.3 The restructure of the Homelessness Prevention Team;

3.4 Any other issue relating to Homelessness; and

3.5 That a report on the progress of dealing with homelessness is reported back to Scrutiny in approx. 12 months

## **4. Report details**

4.1 Having a secure, affordable home is a basic human right. For a host of complex reasons individuals/families can on occasions “fall out” of the housing market and associated public support mechanisms and become homeless. How the Council responds to such incidents is rightly a corporate priority.

4.2 Unfortunately homelessness is on the increase nationally, and locally. Appendix 1 provides a range of data showing how homelessness in the County has increased in recent years.

4.3 It is important therefore that we have corporate “ownership” and a corporate approach to support those that find themselves homeless and to prevent/reduce homelessness in the first instance. We have made a good start in this regard with the adoption of the Council’s Homelessness Strategy 2017-2021 and associated Action Plan, a copy of which are attached as Appendix 2 & 2a.

4.4 In February 2019 a multi departmental report was taken to CET regarding increases in homelessness, the continued unavoidable use of B&B’s and hotels for emergency/temporary accommodation, and the need for a more co-ordinated corporate approach to reducing homelessness and responding to homelessness, accepting that the Housing Strategy Action Plan needed a more corporate approach. A draft multi-departmental Action Plan formed part of that report which needs to be considered alongside the Action Plan developed at the same time as the Homelessness Strategy (the new draft Action Plan is attached as Appendix 3).

4.5 Since the CET report, the Lead Member for homelessness (Cllr Bobby Feeley), the Lead Member for Housing (Cllr Tony Thomas) and the Council’s Homelessness Champion (Cllr Brian Blakeley) have been in discussions with the Corporate Director for the Economy and Head of Community Services to consider how best to improve the Council’s corporate/strategic approach to homelessness.

4.6 It has been decided to relaunch the Housing Strategy Lead Member/Officer Group and create a Homelessness Group, to meet together bi-monthly. Appendix 4 is a report explaining the working of the Group, the principle being to bring the Homelessness Strategy and Housing Strategy together and to develop a single homelessness action plan, which reflects a broader corporate approach, the delivery of which will become the responsibility of the Lead Member, Cllr Bobby Feeley.

4.7 To ensure we are meeting our safeguarding needs and to respond to homelessness agenda we need to ensure the draft Action Plan is refined so that it covers a wide range of Council functions including, Education and Children’s Services, Community Housing, School Transport, Planning and Public Protection, Working Denbighshire etc. In addition we will need to work with a number of external partners, particularly Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), Mental Health Services, Citizens Advice, Police, Substance Misuse Services and our range of Supporting People Providers.

4.8 One of our priority actions is to reduce the use of hotels and B&B accommodation for emergency/temporary accommodation. Such accommodation is not ideal, but will always form part of our emergency provision, however at the moment there is an over reliance on this type of accommodation. So for example we could provide such emergency/temporary accommodation through our own Community Housing provision by investing Housing Revenue Account into different solutions, and RSLs could do similar. Similarly we can work closer with the private rental sector to secure alternatives to hotels and B&Bs.

4.9 We have recently done much work with landlords in the private rented sector which has seen us obtain an additional 18 leased properties since January 2019 and our aim is to secure an additional 30 by April 2020. These leased properties allow us to provide more suitable temporary accommodation, which has the potential to turn into a permanent tenancy, thus providing a long term sustainable solution to that homelessness case (See case study at Appendix 5).

4.10 There is more we can do through our Supporting People portfolio to ensure those in our Supported Housing projects can successfully move on to live independently. To do this we need to remove the blockage of households ready to move into their own tenanted property after addressing their support needs. This involves us developing a Multi-Agency Move-On Team who will work with the citizens to support their move into their own tenanted property whether this is in the private rented sector or through Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) into social housing. If we can increase the flow of households through supported housing this will reduce the time spent in emergency/temporary accommodation.

4.11 Another project of note is we have secured funding from Welsh Government (WG) to pilot "Housing First" across the County in partnership with Conwy. The team have all now been recruited and the first citizens will be engaged in early July. Appendix 6 is a Housing First briefing paper that explains the project. This addition WG funding is however against a backdrop of WG considering a new formula for funding Supporting People Grant, now known as the Housing Support Grant. Appendix 7 is a brief paper on the WGs potential redistribution of the Housing Support Grant.

4.12 Working with the 5 other Local Authorities in North Wales we have developed an overarching Regional Homelessness Strategy which was signed off in December 2018. (Copy attached as Appendix 9).

4.12 Within the Homelessness Prevention Team we are undergoing a structural change to ensure we are working as an efficient and effective service. The focus moving forward will be on Early Intervention and Prevention, this is both on having a stronger presence in the community but also working closer with a range of partners who can support those households to prevent homelessness such as Jobcentre Plus and Citizen's Advice Denbighshire. (See the new team structure in Appendix 8).

4.13 There is much work ongoing to ensure we respond to the homelessness issue effectively. We can only do this through strong leadership and corporate working. This report, and the numerous appendices, highlights the complexities of the issues, but also the range of actions we are committed to across a number of Services, to ensure a truly corporate approach.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

5.1 The Action Plan contributes to supporting Denbighshire's Corporate Plan 2017-22 in the following areas:

- Everyone is supported to live in homes that meet their needs
- The Council works with people and communities to build independence and resilience
- Younger people want to live and work here and have the skills to do so

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1 The actions in the revised draft Action Plan have not been costed. The actions are dependent upon a number of services. Most actions will be "business as usual" and will be funded from existing budgets. Some actions may require additional funding, such as investment by the Housing Revenue Account into new facilities, other actions will be dependent to WG Grant funding.

6.2 During 2018/19 efficiencies were achieved with the Homelessness Prevention Team by removing the Deputy Team Manager role. This allowed us to restructure the team by utilising underspend within the Supporting People Grant to bring in more appropriate front-line resources. We introduced a social worker and occupational therapist into the team to support more complex cases and ensure citizens get access to the appropriate support in addition to their housing needs.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1 Wellbeing Impact Assessments have previously been completed and shared with Scrutiny and Cabinet in 2017 during the development of the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan. A revised Wellbeing Impact Assessment will be completed on finalising an updated corporate homelessness Action Plan.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1 The Homelessness Strategy and original Action Plan was primarily based on the findings of the 2016 Homelessness Review, which was informed by significant consultation. Following Partnerships Scrutiny in November 2017, the Strategy and Action Plan were approved by Cabinet in December 2017.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1 The report sets out that the action plan is being delivered within existing resources. Some of the resource is funded via Supporting People grant and as the report highlights, the distribution of this grant is currently under review at a national level. The outcome of the review may impact funding available to the region and so this risk should be closely monitored as the review progresses.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1 Appendix 7 sets out the risk regarding WG funding of the Housing Support Grant. Regionally, through the Regional Collaborative Committee, we are lobbying the Welsh Government about how they allocate funds in the future.

10.2 If resources and funding cannot be secured to develop more suitable emergency/temporary accommodation, this would result in the continued predominant use of hotel/B&B style accommodation. We will continue to work with our Supported Housing Providers, RSLs and Community Housing to identify potential properties that can be used for emergency accommodation.

## **11. Power to make the Decision**

11.1 Section 7.4.2(b) of the Council's Constitution outlines Scrutiny's powers in respect of scrutinising and reviewing the Council's performance in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas.

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