

Report to	Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	16 December 2021
Lead Member / Officer	Councillor Bobby Feeley (Lead Member for Well-being and Independence)/Phil Gilroy (Head of Community Support Services)
Report authors	Ann Lloyd/Mark Dixon/Lisa Harte
Title	Homelessness and Housing Support Services

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 To update Partnerships Scrutiny on the implementation and effectiveness of the Multi-Disciplinary Service and cross-service Corporate approach in delivering homelessness services in line with Welsh Government's vision for homelessness and housing related support.
- 1.2 To report on the actions arising from the internal audit of 'Accommodation Provision for the Homeless' December 2020, as per the referral by the Governance & Audit Committee in January 2021.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To provide members with the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the multi-disciplinary service which was implemented from April 2021, following the restructure of the homelessness service in line with the Welsh Government's vision for homelessness and housing related support to also examine the effectiveness of the cross-service Corporate approach, in addressing homelessness as a wider Council responsibility and not just that of Community Support Services. To provide members with an update of the actions taken on the 'Accommodation Provision for the Homeless' Audit Report, December 2020.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. For Scrutiny to be assured that the implementation of the multi-disciplinary homelessness service and cross-service Corporate approach is in line with the Welsh Government's vision of homelessness and housing support and is contributing to the Homelessness Prevention Service's aim to ensure that everyone is safeguarded and supported to live in homes that meet their needs; and
- 3.2. That Scrutiny reviews progress with addressing the audit actions and decides whether it requires any further update reports on progress with the improvement action plan, or to refer to the Governance & Audit Committee. The Chief Internal Auditor will be providing a summary of the progress made to Governance & Audit Committee on the 16th March 2022 as part of the Internal Audit Update report.

4. Report details

- 4.1. Since March 2020 when we saw the initial increase in numbers of households being accommodated in emergency temporary accommodation due to the Covid Pandemic the number continues to vary between 150-180. As we source permanent move-on accommodation, we have new households presenting as homeless, thus seeing the numbers remaining pretty consistent. We have continued to see a rise in the number of single under 35s present as homeless, which in the main, is due to people no longer being able to sofa surf, or stay with families who were shielding through the pandemic. We have seen a reduction in the number of families presenting which is being attributed to the Welsh Government stopping evictions and the Court process not yet having caught up with the backlog of cases.
- 4.2. Once households are in emergency temporary accommodation they are staying longer than before the Covid Outbreak, as there is a lack of suitable permanent move-on accommodation to move them into. Over the last 18 months we have secured tenancies for 99 households in social housing following the suspension of the Allocations Policy for Social Housing, of which over 50% have come from Denbighshire's Community Housing portfolio.

- 4.3. Whilst we continue to develop our plans for the transition to the Welsh Government's Rapid Rehousing Approach the use of good quality emergency temporary accommodation is an integral part of the plan. However, we need to ensure that through the corporate approach and providing the right support to homeless households we reduce the length of time spent in emergency accommodation.
- 4.4. The Corporate approach to address homelessness is detailed in Appendix 1.
- 4.5. We are fully aware that the biggest barrier to addressing homelessness is sourcing affordable or social housing as permanent move-on accommodation. This is reflected in the exponentially high growth in the numbers on the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) register. One way of supporting this is to increase the Council's Community Housing portfolio either by re-purposing existing stock or developing new units and during 2022/2023 we are expecting a large number of Social Housing properties to come on-stream from both the Council and other Registered Social Landlords. This should help to reduce the SARTH waiting list and hopefully see a number of homeless households permanently accommodated.
- 4.6. An update on Denbighshire's approach to Affordable Housing is detailed in Appendix 2
- 4.7. We are not going to resolve the issue of sourcing permanent move-on accommodation without sourcing properties in the Private Rented Sector. Since September 2020, we have secured 6 properties through the Welsh Government's Private Leasing Scheme pilot against a target of 33 properties. This is due to the Covid pandemic and the high demand for rental properties because of the current housing market situation, landlords are not engaging with the scheme. We are awaiting further guidance from Welsh Government about the national roll out of the scheme which is offering secure tenancies for a longer timescale.
- 4.8. An update on the implementation and impact of the Multi-Disciplinary Team is available at Appendix 3.
- 4.9. Further information on the Housing Support Grant is detailed in Appendix 4

4.10. Internal Audit's original review of Accommodation Provision for the Homeless was completed in March 2020 giving a low assurance rating because of the number of risks/issues raised. A follow up review was concluded on October 2020 (see Appendix 5 for the full report).

4.11. Strategically, the co-ordinated approach through the Strategic Housing & Homelessness Group and cross-service management team provides better engagement amongst services to help those impacted by homelessness. However, operationally the Covid-19 pandemic and staffing issues resulting from a recent restructure has affected continuity. This has impacted on record keeping and monitoring, developing guidance, and in some areas, has caused confusion over roles and responsibilities.

4.12. The Internal Audit follow up report shows that six actions are marked as completed, ten actions are in the process of being addressed, and two actions are not yet due to be followed up. While progress has been made with implementing some of the actions, a number of actions relating to major risk issues still need to be addressed. This is in despite of the efforts of staff to implement actions within the Audit plan. Therefore, our Low assurance rating remains.

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

5.1 The Housing and Homelessness Strategy 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 delivery of Homelessness services is funded through both core budget for the statutory elements of the service and Housing Support Grant from Welsh Government for the non-statutory elements such as Multi-Disciplinary Team and

the wider wrap-around support from specialist services e.g. domestic violence and abuse, family support and debt advice.

6.2 Developing our own emergency accommodation will not only provide better quality accommodation but will also be less expensive than using Bed and Breakfast (B&B) style accommodation, thus saving the Council money.

6.3 There are no additional costs associated with this report.

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

7.1 A Wellbeing Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

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

8.1. The Housing and Homelessness Strategy Phase 2 Plan went to Cabinet Briefing in November 2020 and Full Council in December 2020. Updates on implementation of the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan have been provided to the Strategic Housing and Homelessness Group at their quarterly meetings commencing in February 2021.

8.2. The principle of the Council providing accommodation in-house, and adopting a sequential approach to identifying suitable premises for achieving this which would avoid where possible the location of this type of accommodation in areas already experiencing high levels of deprivation, has been discussed at Cabinet Briefing, and also at the meeting of the Rhyl Member Area Group held in April 2021. There will be ongoing consultation across all Member Area Groups to ensure we are addressing homelessness right across the County.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 Not applicable because there is no decision required from this report.

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

10.1 Not applicable because there is no decision required from this report.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000

11.2 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.