

Appendix 1 – Corporate Approach to Homelessness

The Council is now taking a more strategic and corporate approach to homelessness which is being driven by a cross-departmental team of Heads of Service led by the Chief Executive. More appropriate emergency temporary accommodation which is owned and operated by the Council is being put in place to reduce the reliance on Bed & Breakfast establishments, hotels and the private rented sector (PRS) and will also make it easier for clients to access support services. So far the Council has purchased Epworth Lodge on Brighton Road in Rhyl to provide 8 units of emergency temporary family accommodation. The property is expected to be handed over to the Homelessness Prevention Team in early 2022. Work is also taking place to identify other premises that could be used for emergency temporary accommodation for single people and couples which will further reduce the need to use B&B establishments and hotels. The progress that has been made in identifying and securing our own accommodation has been recognised in the internal audit report.

The intention is that this approach will be formalised in a Framework which will be presented to Cabinet for adoption following further consultations with members over and above those which have taken place so far which are described in paragraph 8.2 below. The idea of the Framework is to provide clear reference for where the Council will look to provide its own emergency accommodation across Denbighshire. A copy of the draft Framework has been included for comment below.

DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

DRAFT FRAMEWORK

PROVISION OF IN-HOUSE ACCOMMODATION TO HELP ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the Framework is to provide the context for the Council providing in-house emergency/temporary accommodation for people who present as being homeless as opposed to using the private sector (e.g. private landlord accommodation, hotels, guest houses, B&Bs etc), along with ensuring there are sufficient options to move those people into suitable permanent accommodation.

2. Context

2.1 A significant number of households present to the Council as being homeless each year and the number being accommodated increased during the pandemic. The Council and other social landlords operating in the county have insufficient vacant units available at any one time to move all these households into permanent accommodation. As a consequence, the Council has been obliged to make arrangements for clients to stay in privately owned emergency/temporary accommodation of various types which is unsatisfactory for the clients and expensive for the Council. There are also other implications on Council priorities and communities.

2.2 To improve this situation, the Council proposes to make changes to its property portfolio to provide as much of the emergency/temporary accommodation needed to address homelessness as it can in-house. There are benefits both to the individuals concerned and the wider community from doing this. It will enable households who find themselves in this situation to be placed in accommodation which is more suited to their needs than that which is often currently available, and it will enable them to receive an enhanced level of support on the journey towards finding permanent homes. The visitor economy will stand to benefit to as holiday accommodation which has been taken up for the provision of temporary accommodation as an interim solution can be returned to its substantive use.

2.3 Providing in-house emergency/temporary accommodation alone will not address the problem if there is insufficient suitable permanent housing into which the households affected can be moved. There is a risk that they will become “stuck” in emergency/temporary accommodation, which is not ideal for them and the Council will have to revert to using the private sector option for those new households presenting as being homeless. So for this approach to be sustainable we also need to ensure there is a sufficient supply of suitable permanent accommodation which households can be moved into when they leave emergency/temporary accommodation.

2.4 The households presenting as homeless in the main tend to;

- be single person households;
- with a majority being aged under 35; and
- most have been living in Rhyl immediately before presenting as homeless;

2.5 Of course families and single parents with children also present as homeless and not all homeless families/individual have been living in Rhyl prior to becoming homeless. Homelessness can happen to anyone, from any of our communities.

2.6 The reduction applied to housing related benefits which can be accessed by single persons aged under 35 living in anything other than social rented accommodation means that the provision of additional social rented units suitable for this particular client group is highly desirable to facilitate their transition from temporary to permanent accommodation.

2.7 All social landlords operating in the county have a role to play in providing the type of accommodation required.

2.8 In terms of its own existing housing stock, the Council owns a number of flats for over 55s which were built before the provision of lift access to upper storeys became common place and some of these could usefully be re-purposed to accommodate single person homeless households as more new accessible homes for over 55s are constructed. This could either be in well managed emergency/temporary accommodation or as permanent accommodation.

2.9 Re-purposing this type of Council owned property alone will not be sufficient to satisfy the need for this type of accommodation. There will also be a requirement to purchase and convert or build new additional units to provide the necessary emergency/temporary accommodation and permanent homes which will need to be affordable for the client group to live in given their limited means.

2.10 The constituent parts of the Rhyl West ward are currently ranked amongst the 11 most deprived areas in Wales principally because of the concentration of people facing issues in their lives regarded as being causes of deprivation living in a relatively small area. Parts of the town's East, South East and South West wards are also ranked amongst the 200 most deprived areas in Wales. The Council and its partners have adopted strategies and made significant investments to try and address the underlying causes of these high levels of deprivation in the town. The location of additional accommodation to address homelessness in these areas could potentially undermine the progress made and should therefore be avoided where possible. Not all of the people who present as being homeless come from Rhyl and the town should not become the default location for all our new in house provision. There is therefore a need to look at communities other than Rhyl for locating our in-house accommodation, whilst recognising that there will be a requirement for some provision in the town to meet the needs of the county's largest community which does include areas which suffer from deprivation and as a consequence are likely to generate an element of the county's homelessness

2.11 Property prices are generally lower in Rhyl than in other communities in the county and in situations where it becomes necessary for the Council to acquire properties in other communities to deliver this provision, purchase prices are likely to be higher. However the Council will retain the asset (i.e. the building) and if in the future the need for such emergency/temporary accommodation is not as high, the asset can be sold.

2.12 Locating a disproportionately large concentration of accommodation to address homelessness in any one location could replicate the situation which led to the high levels of deprivation in the Rhyl West ward and should also be avoided where possible.

3. Outline approach to delivery

3.1 In order to balance the need to deliver the in-house provision required against other priorities particularly in relation to tackling high levels of deprivation, it is proposed that a sequential approach is adopted to identify suitable locations for the provision of accommodation to address homelessness.

3.2 With a constantly changing property market, the candidate sites and premises available will vary over time and a pragmatic approach will be required to deliver additional provision within a realistic timescale and to maximise the benefit from any funding opportunities which may become available.

3.3 The proposed sequence for locating sites and premises for delivering in-house provision is therefore;

1. communities other than Rhyl, but generally those in the north of the county where the need is greatest, support services are readily available, where most clients come from and where they would generally prefer to live;
2. those areas of Rhyl which are not amongst the 200 most deprived in Wales;
and
3. the remaining areas of Rhyl which are amongst the 200 most deprived in Wales but avoiding these if possible.