

<b>Report to</b>	Communities Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of meeting</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> September 2024
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Rhys Thomas / Nigel Jones
<b>Head of Service</b>	Ann Lloyd
<b>Report author</b>	Nigel Jones / Leila Cravetto
<b>Title</b>	SARTH Inhouse provision update

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

1.1. To inform communities scrutiny committee of the progress to date and performance of the Single Access Route To Housing (SARTH) and homelessness triage service.

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

2.1. To update communities scrutiny committee and provide members the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the SARTH register, following service provision redesign in 2023.

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

3.1. For Scrutiny to be assured that the service provision redesign of SARTH is performing and meeting expectations set out at the time of the decision to bring the service back in house from the former commissioned provider, Flintshire County Council (FCC).

## **4. Report details.**

4.1. In November 2022 a business case was approved to discontinue commissioning the service from FCC and that the provision would be brought in-house within Denbighshire's homelessness service.

- 4.2. The identified disadvantages with FCC were poor customer experience, access and visibility of data to all partners, the protracted timelines from first contact to assessment, and the duplication of customer interactions at points of triage (SARTH triage at FCC, homelessness triage at DCC). Lack of evidence of quality reviewing data.
- 4.3. In addition to (4.2), FCC had indicated that the cost for service provision was to increase from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 by at least twice the current arrangement and likely to rise further as more precise provision costing was being established.
- 4.4. Principally the main objectives of the project were to ensure that ICT systems were developed to have as seamless transition from FCC to DCC possible, and that the focus would be on an “improved and streamlined customer journey” by making this more efficient and robust.
- 4.5. The service changeover proved difficult in planning due to complexity and cooperation from software consultancy services, however, the transition was executed during the first week of April although many delays hindered progress.
- 4.6. Initial ICT system changes delayed the access to data for a substantial period of time. This was out of our control as we were relying on software consultants (Open Housing – Capita), to allow portal interaction with DCC systems. Partner Registered Social Landlords (RSL’s) access through the portal is now fully functioning where relevant live data can be viewed at the point of contact. Previously such access would have been restricted, the changes in data access gives robust confidence that partners can offer customers properties based upon their needs and position within their priority banding in a timely manner.
- 4.7. A major concern with previous service provision was the substandard level of the reviewing process. Concerns following April’s implementation have confirmed this, a minimal paper exercise with no customer contact was the only review carried out. Since implementation into DCC, the approach to reviewing cases is to make verbal contact with the Customer, with a view to fully understanding their current needs, and whether they are appropriately within the correct priority banding, or at times relevant to still be on the register. Through a fully integrated SARTH and Homelessness triage service, every review is treated like a new

triage ensuring the conversation is captured and that it is not just a tick box exercise.

4.8. Customers accessing the service no longer face the frustration of duplicate triages as previously experienced (Homelessness and SARTH). For example, all homeless presentations will automatically be SARTH triaged as a concurrent process. Initially SARTH applicants do have a single need for the housing register, however, due to the integrated triage process they often have other needs identified and receive appropriate signposting to other services. It is also witnessed on a regular basis during SARTH triage that the customer has potential hidden homelessness.

4.9. As demonstrated above, major operational improvements have taken place in line with the strategic vision to revitalise a customer focussed service by “improving and streamlining the customer journey”. Following the first point of contact, assessments are now completed within the prescribed 28 day timeframe, which further demonstrates the improved customer journey. The previous service provision was upward of 3-4 months.

4.10. The housing register service naturally receives more than its fair share of MP, AM, and member enquiries. When the service was first reintroduced back in house, the majority of enquiries included criticism and complaints around poor service and lack of customer contact. Enquiries are still regular into the service, however, their context has changed into general customer queries around banding priorities and missing banding support documentation, rather than complaining about the service.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?**

1. The newly developed service sits within the homelessness service and fully integrates and compliments other areas of homelessness such as the strategic vision, HSG provision, and the prevention service both in house and commissioned services. Whilst the homelessness service primarily contributes “ A Denbighshire of quality housing that meets people's needs”, it also contributes across all areas of the corporate plan.

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

- 6.1. The cost of the service is funded in the main by the Housing Support Grant and contributions from the Social Housing Providers in Denbighshire. The contributions to the service were agreed at project stage and include; RSLs and Community Housing through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) contributing a sum equivalent to their service provision (generally based upon housing stock portfolio by authority area). The main element is funded by the Housing Support Grant (HSG)
- 6.2. The service provision has provided positive residual benefits across a wide range of council services, including homelessness and housing. Since implementation and due to the robustness of the service, it has allowed other non-performing housing related services to be integrated into the team, this includes the management of the specialist housing register and the specialist housing group. In conjunction with centralising these services and the relationships that have been forged with Partners, positive results in finding specialist adapted properties have increased the number of offers available to customers with complex needs.

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

**N/A**

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

**None**

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

9.1. Chief Finance Officer report not required as there is no further financial impact over and above allocated provision,

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

10.1. No identified risks providing continued funding streams as per 6.1 are maintained at the current levels and that provision within them provides sustainability to meet future pressures.

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

11.1 Local Government Act 2000, Housing Act 1985 (S8), Housing Act 2004 (S8), Local Government Act 2003 (S87), Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

11.2 Scrutiny's powers are detailed in Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and in Sections 7.4.1(e) and 7.4.2(b) of the Council's Constitution.