

FULL COUNCIL REPORT

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Service Area	Housing / Adult Services
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	30 th March 2022

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report will provide the background to the development and requirement of Local Authorities to produce a Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy (Appendix 1) by April 1st 2022.
- 1.2 The strategy sets out the strategic priorities of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and its partner agencies for homelessness prevention and alleviation and housing related support services over the coming 4 years (2022-26).
- 1.3 The Strategy takes into consideration and refreshes earlier priorities that were included in the Council's former homelessness strategy, and the Housing Support Grant (HSG) Delivery Plan for 2021-22, replacing the need for a separate Housing Strategy.
- 1.4 The report seeks the approval from members to approve and adopt the first Merthyr Tydfil HSP Strategy 2022-2026.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION that

- 2.1 The Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022-2026 be approved.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Local Authority is required to develop a Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy (“the Strategy”) every four years, with a mid-point review every two years, which will outline the strategic direction of the local authority for housing related support services. This strategy provides a single strategic view of the local authority’s approach to homelessness prevention and housing support services. As such, it includes both statutory homelessness functions funded through the revenue settlement and non-statutory preventative services funded through the Housing Support Grant (HSG), replacing the need for a separate Housing Strategy
- 3.2 The Strategy, as the single strategic document on housing support and homelessness prevention, also satisfies the existing statutory requirements for a homelessness strategy under Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. There is no requirement to produce a separate strategy.
- 3.3 The Strategy takes into account how it can support delivery of the Welsh Government’s vision and aims for the prevention of homelessness and the transformational shift required to move to a rapid re-housing approach.
- 3.4 The Strategy identifies and sets out the key priorities for the local authority and its partners – based on findings from a comprehensive needs assessment (Appendix 2) and stakeholder engagement.
- 3.5 The Strategy also satisfies the existing statutory requirements for a homelessness strategy under Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. State whether the local authority’s Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022, published in 2018, has been reviewed, updated and incorporated into this single Housing Support Programme Strategy.
- 3.6 The Housing Service have undertaken a comprehensive needs assessment which is required every 4 years, with a light touch review every 2 years. The assessment:
- Provides a statement of what the local authority knows about the needs and future demand for homelessness prevention and housing support services;
 - Informs the strategic priorities;
 - Encompasses the statutory requirement for a homelessness review as well as the full assessment for the HSG
 - Is informed by, but not limited to, the following data:
 - Population needs assessment
 - Local authority well-being assessment
 - Homelessness statistics and other housing data such as waiting lists.
 - Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation
 - Feedback from service users
 - Regional Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence needs assessments
 - Relevant research/national publication
 - Outcomes data

- Needs data from providers, gateway panels
- Unmet needs data over the last 12 months from providers, homelessness reviews

3.7 The needs assessment and stakeholder feedback, along with Welsh Government Policy requirements, including a move to rapid rehousing have informed the development of the agreed strategic priorities for the delivery of HSG (housing related support) and homelessness prevention services.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

4.1 At the current time of writing the strategy, the Housing and HSG are facing unprecedented challenges. These will be addressed within the strategic priorities throughout the lifetime of the strategy, some of which are outlined below.

4.2 There has been an **exponential rise in demand for Housing and HSG services** both pre and post pandemic. The total Housing caseload increase for 2020/21 was up by 78% on the previous year to 1345 from 754 cases in 2019/20 (up from 530 cases in 2018/19). This increase is quite sizeable, but is not surprising given the changes to the homeless legislation due to the pandemic.

4.3 The vast majority of new presentations are single people, which has put increase pressure on our **lack of 1 bed accommodation** within the borough. Nearly two thirds of our Housing Register have requested 1 bed properties. This increase in demand has also resulted in a significant rise in numbers of those who reside in temporary accommodation - since the outbreak of the pandemic have increased three-fold (from an average of around 40-50 to 160).

4.4 A key challenge that we need to tackle head on over the lifetime of the strategy is to work with our partner RSLs and stakeholders to develop more 1 bed units and to broaden the range of supported accommodation currently available to us, to enable us to better meet this need.

4.5 Merthyr Tydfil has amongst the highest reported incidences of substance misuse, mental illness and poor well-being in Wales and **mental health** continues to be a lead need for those experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness post-pandemic. The Council has recognised the challenges with accessing mental health services both for those with high needs and those whose needs do not meet eligibility criteria.

4.6 The HSG Team has recently commissioned an innovative new regional scheme which links health (through the provision of substance misuse and specialist mental health nurses) and housing to support service users with often multiple and complex needs living in supported accommodation, to address their mental health, substance dependencies and housing needs through interventions delivered by a specialist support team. Although this seems to be successful to date in terms of outcomes and engagement, there is a recognition that there is more work to do in this area to ensure that service users have access to suitable housing and are supported with a range of needs to be able to sustain tenancies over the longer term.

- 4.7 The strategy recognises that the number of older people that live in Merthyr Tydfil is growing as people are living longer healthier lives. The proportion of the population that is over 65 will incrementally grow, and will need support to stay within their own homes, age designated housing, and expansion of extra care.
- 4.8 The development of an additional extra care facility in Merthyr Tydfil is a corporate priority and it is one of the key priorities in the Council's Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan.

5.0 HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME (HSP) DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 5.1 The strategy sets out the strategic priorities of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and its partner agencies for homelessness prevention and alleviation and housing related support services over the coming 4 years (2022-26). It refreshes earlier priorities that were included in the Council's former homelessness strategy, and the Housing Support Grant (HSG) Delivery Plan for 2021-22.
- 5.2 The HSG is an early intervention grant programme to support activity which prevents people from becoming homeless, stabilises their housing situation or helps potentially homeless people to find and keep accommodation. The grant is designed to augment, complement and support statutory services, thus ensuring that the overall local offer helps people into the right homes, with the right support to succeed. It makes a significant contribution to the implementation of Part 2 of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 which focuses on homelessness prevention.
- 5.3 The strategy incorporates the Council's homelessness prevention and support and covering the statutory homeless duty funded through the revenue settlement and non-statutory, preventative services funded through the HSG. The strategy recognises the inter-dependency between these elements and more widely with other public services providing support to vulnerable people.
- 5.4 The Strategy makes critical steps on meeting ambitions that are central to the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Economic Vision 2020-2035 that sets out the vision for modern homes and great places.
- 5.5 Through this strategy the Council will diversify housing supply by providing modern energy efficient homes and will ensure that everyone has a safe place to call home.
- 5.6 The Council will create places for people that are green, attractive and have a character that is distinctive to Merthyr Tydfil. In addition, this strategy will contribute to the Council's Placemaking Plan that creates a series of projects and specific interventions that form a blueprint towards a future, successful Merthyr Town Centre as the tourism capital of the Valleys & Beacons.

5.7 The strategic priorities also consider the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and changing legislation which removed the 'priority need' test and placed a duty on LAs to provide temporary accommodation to all those presenting as homeless. The priorities as aforementioned are also informed by the needs assessment and stakeholder feedback identified within the four year strategy are as follows:

5.8 **Strategic Priority 1 - Work to end homelessness**

Housing Support services exist to help prevent homelessness, social exclusion, isolation and institutionalisation. Prevention is core business in Merthyr Tydfil's homelessness services and fundamental to our approach is to return to business as usual with a focus on homeless prevention and a return to, and improvement on pre-pandemic performance levels.

We have a strong track record in prevention of homelessness. Our in house Housing Solutions Team is critical to homelessness prevention and alleviation – by seeking out accommodation options that meet people's needs.

Early intervention aims to reduce undue escalation to avoid a crisis situation, with knock-on impact to health, inclusion and independence. The Council will focus on the following areas to strengthen its approach to prevention:

- Action 1 - Developing Homelessness Early Intervention & Prevention work.
- Action 2 - Support for mental health and substance misuse - developing wider system joint working on co-occurring issues.
- Action 3 - Support for young people including an enhanced corporate parenting approach in relation to future accommodation needs.
- Action 4 - Support for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

5.9 **Strategic priority 2 - The right home at the right time in the right place**

Fundamental to the HSP is to help people live independently in the community. This includes not just access but assessing and influencing supply and suitable accommodation. Housing supply, particularly single bedroom units and additional supported accommodation is required to meet the need in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough particularly in light of the competitive private rented market. The Council will aim to build on the successes of its Housing First model towards Rapid Rehousing and a refreshed approach to supporting people find the right accommodation with the right support from the outset. We will do this by:

- Action 5 – Providing suitable accommodation towards rapid re-housing and responding to the 'new normal'. In line with Welsh Government policy direction, we will implement our Rapid Rehousing transition plan.
 - Increasing the supply of affordable housing for single people over the next 4 years.
 - Better incentivise our offer to the Private Rented Sector.
 - Work closer with Environmental Health and private property owners to bring empty properties back into use.

- Action 6 - Review of Covid impact on temporary accommodation, in particular bed and breakfast.
- Action 7 – Increase access to the Private Rented Sector.
- Action 8 - Ensure new homes are built to improve move on from temporary accommodation.
- Action 9 – Ensure the range of accommodation is broadened to meet the current and future need (including general supported accommodation, Extra Care and Young Persons Supported accommodation)

5.10 **Strategic Priority 3 – The right support at the right time**

We know that timeliness and suitability of support is something that our service users depend upon. We will continue to innovate our offer as more becomes known of user needs and ensure that service users have security and consistency of support through our contracting arrangements with providers.

We will build on the platform of the current model of support that provides assistance to people with high, medium and low support needs through working with our partners to improve the whole system of support.

- Action 10 - Supported accommodation and floating support– security and consistency for providers, encouraging flexibility and innovation, reducing admin.
- Action 11 - Improve multi-agency responses and system working.

5.11 The priorities take account of progress we have made through our most recent HSG delivery plan 2021/22. The Health Needs Assessment that was undertaken by Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB in 2020 is also an important influence on our plans, specifically our partnership approach to extending access to healthcare and mental health and substance misuse services that are a high priority for this strategy.

5.12 The work to analyse local data on homelessness, performance of current services and engagement with stakeholders has enabled us to establish these strategic priorities for our homelessness strategy, as well as a series of areas where we wish to take action over the next four years to strengthen our approach to preventing and alleviating homelessness.

6.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1

	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Neutral/Not Applicable
1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives	4 of 4	0 of 4	0 of 4
2. Sustainable Development Principles - How have you considered the five ways of working?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term • Prevention • Integration • Collaboration • Involvement 	5 of 5	0 of 5	0 of 5

3. Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	4 of 10	0 of 10	6 of 10	
4. Socio-economic Disadvantage	5 of 6	0 of 6	1 of 6	
5. Consultation and Engagement	Undertaken	Due to be Undertaken	Not Required	
	1 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1	
6. Data and Evidence to inform the proposal	Yes		No	
	1 of 1		0 of 1	
7. Biodiversity and the resilience of Ecosystems	Maintained	Enhanced	Reduced	Neutral /Not Applicable
	0 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1	1 of 1
Summary				
The main positive impacts are:	Statutory, third and private sector partners' work effectively together to make sure that people in Merthyr Tydfil have access to suitable housing and can stay within their local communities. The right support is available within local communities, to prevent those at risk of becoming homeless from losing their homes. We strive to secure appropriate accommodation as swiftly as possible for those that have become homeless, along with the right kind of personalised support, helping them to a secure future and optimising their wellbeing. Merthyr Tydfil is a place where homelessness is prevented or rare, brief and unrepeatable.			
The main negative impacts are:	N/A			

ALYN OWEN
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

COUNCILLOR GERAINT THOMAS
CABINET MEMBER FOR
REGENERATION, TRANSFORMATION
AND COMMERCIALISATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Statement of Need	16.03.2022	Civic Centre
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.