



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy and Service Transformation

Extraordinary Council - 2 March 2021

### Homelessness Strategy Progress Report

**Purpose:** To provide an up-date on the progress of Swansea's Homelessness Strategy 2018-22. This is the mid-point review of the Strategy, which will explain the achievements so far, the impact and response of the Homelessness Service and its partners to the COVID pandemic, and the future challenges anticipated.

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#### For Information

#### 1. Background

1.1 There is a duty on local authorities, under the Homelessness (Wales) Act 2014 to produce a four-year Homelessness Strategy. Swansea's Homelessness Strategy was adopted by Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018. The Strategy runs from December 2018 to December 2022 and is now at the mid-point of its implementation period.

1.2 The Strategy sets out comprehensive and ambitious plans to ensure that every person has access to good quality advice, accommodation and support at the earliest possible opportunity in order to prevent homelessness. It was developed based on a review of homelessness in Swansea carried out in 2017, which established the trends and levels of homelessness and identified areas for service development. It was also influenced through consultation with service users, partners in the voluntary sector, housing and support providers, other public sector bodies and other local authority services. The Scrutiny Programme

Committee and Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee were also consulted during the production of the Strategy.

- 1.3 This report gives a summary of the key achievements of the Strategy during its first two years of implementation and provides information on levels and causes of homelessness in Swansea. It also reflects on the impact that the COVID19 pandemic has had on homelessness in Swansea and considers the challenges going forward.

## 2. Homelessness Strategy 2018-22 Strategic Aim and Objectives

- 2.1 The aim of Swansea's Homelessness Strategy is to ensure that every person has access to good quality advice, accommodation, and support at the earliest possible opportunity to prevent homelessness. The Strategy is intended to increase the ability of the Council and its partners to prevent homelessness wherever possible. Where it cannot be prevented, the Strategy aims to minimise the distress and negative impact of the experience through rapid and robust service responses. Five objectives have been set to achieve this:

- **Objective 1:** Ensuring service users are at the centre of service delivery
- **Objective 2:** Prioritising early intervention and prevention of homelessness
- **Objective 3:** Ensuring suitable accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless
- **Objective 4:** Ensuring appropriate support is available for people who are or may become homeless
- **Objective 5:** Providing robust responses to support rough sleepers and eliminating the need for individuals to sleep rough

## 3. Levels and causes of homelessness in Swansea

- 3.1 The Council is required to provide quarterly and annual statistics to Welsh Government to monitor levels of homelessness. The full suite of statistics can be found on the Welsh Government's website. The following section shows some of the key performance indicators and statistics indicating the level and causes of homelessness in Swansea.
- 3.2 The number of homelessness decisions made in Swansea during the years 2016-2020 is shown below. 2019/20 saw a significant increase in demand on the Homelessness Service.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Total Outcomes	2661	2643	2595	3060

- 3.3 Despite increased demands on the service the Council managed to maintain high levels of homelessness prevention with **72%** of households who were threatened with homelessness within 56 days

during 2019/20 having their homelessness prevented, which compares well to the Welsh average of **67%** and is above the Council's target of 70%.

3.4 Full year figures are not yet available for 2020/21 but in the first three quarters of 2020/21 (April-December), which covers the start of the COVID19 pandemic and the various lockdown periods, the target to prevent homelessness in 70% of cases has been achieved. However, homelessness presentations remain high despite the extension of notice periods in private rented accommodation (as a result of Welsh Government legislation to protect tenants during the pandemic) and very low/zero evictions from the social housing sector.

3.5 The main causes of homelessness continue to be:

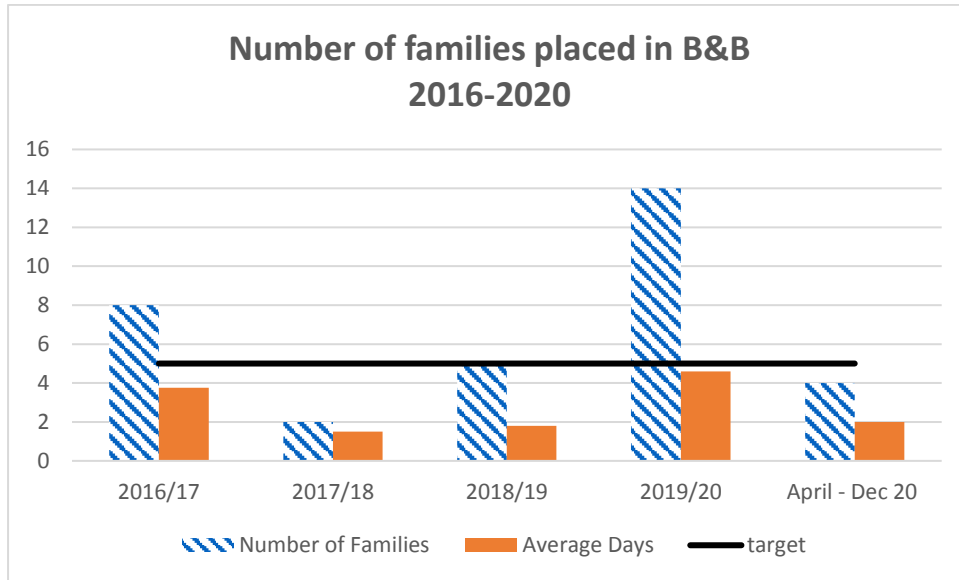
- Loss of rented or tied accommodation
- Parent(s) no longer willing or able to accommodate
- Domestic Abuse
- Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate
- Breakdown of relationship with partner, Non-violent
- Prison leaver
- In institution or care (e.g. hospital, residential home, refugee, army etc.)

3.6 *Temporary accommodation*

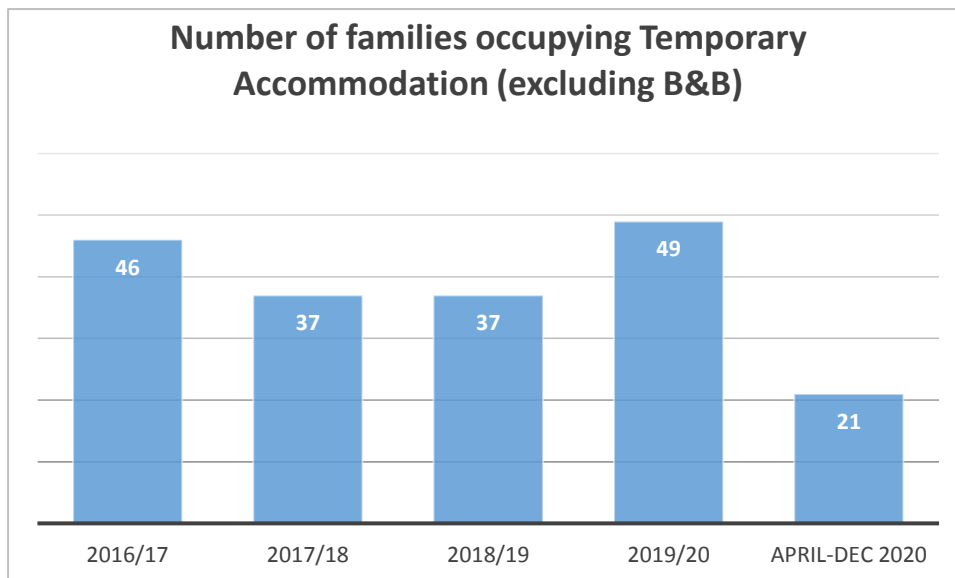
Where homelessness has not been prevented or alternative accommodation has not been found, the Council has a duty to secure temporary accommodation for applicants who are in priority need and unintentionally homeless. 138 households were assessed as in priority need and requiring temporary accommodation in 2019/20, showing an increase from previous years. The reasons that these households were considered to be in priority need were:

- Mental illness / learning disability / learning difficulties **36%**
- Physical disability **21%**
- Domestic abuse **15%**
- Households with dependent child(ren) **10%**
- Other special reasons **10%**
- A former prisoner who is vulnerable due to being held in custody **4%**
- Old age **2%**
- A care leaver or person at particular risk of sexual or financial exploitation, 18 years or over but under the age of 21 **>1%**

Services aim to ensure that wherever possible the use of B&B for 16 and 17 year olds is prevented and that families who are placed in B&B accommodation do not remain there for more than five days. Despite the increased pressures caused by the pandemic, this is being maintained. The Council has sufficient, suitable temporary accommodation for families and the BAYS+ Project continues to effectively support and accommodate young people and care leavers who are at risk of homelessness.

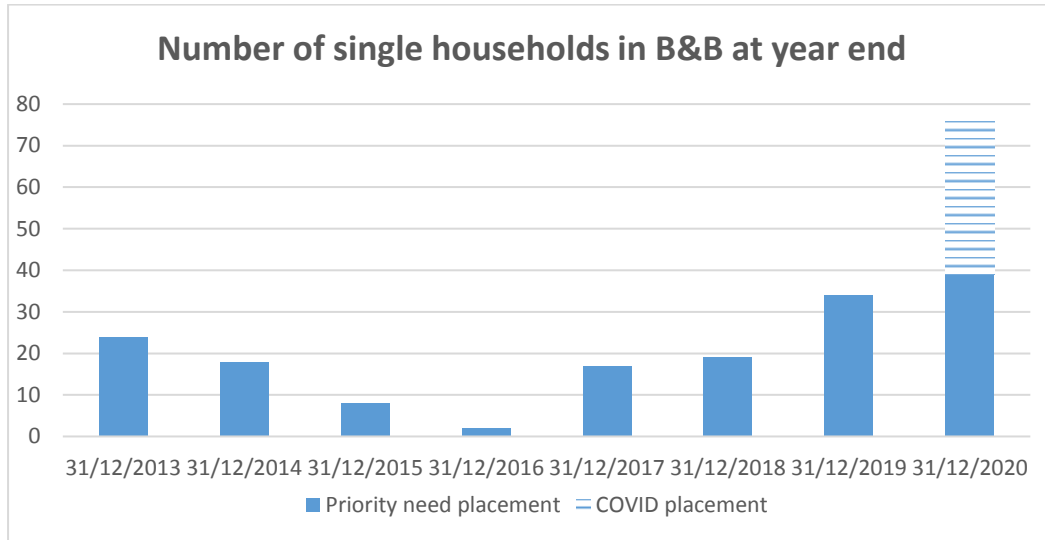


Use of B&B accommodation for families is avoided wherever possible, so the Council has temporary accommodation flats from its own stock that are used to house families, plus access to other types where required, for example women’s refuges. The number of families placed in temporary accommodation during the year has remained fairly consistent, and is showing lower numbers of households placed during the pandemic (April-December 2020, full year figures not yet available for 2020/21). This is largely due to the extension of notice/eviction periods during the pandemic.



*Use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for single households*  
 One of the aims of the Homelessness Strategy is to reduce use of B&B accommodation for all households. In recent years, the Council has invested in its ABBA (Alternative to Bed and Breakfast) Project to minimise use of B&B for single, priority need households. As a result of the pandemic and the Welsh Government’s decision to class all

households requiring temporary accommodation as vulnerable (i.e. it has suspended the priority need test required under current homelessness legislation), there has been a significant increase in the number of single households placed in B&B by the end of 2020. As of 31/12/2020, there were an additional 37 people in B&B accommodation, who would not normally qualify for temporary accommodation assistance under existing homelessness legislation.



### 3.7 *Rough Sleeping*

Since 2015, the Welsh Government has required local authorities to carry out an annual rough sleeping count. The actual counts of rough sleepers are single night snapshots. The estimated count is based on data collected over a two-week period with assistance from the voluntary sector, faith groups, local businesses, residents, health and substance misuse agencies, and the police. Due to the pandemic, the national count was not carried out in 2020 and figures for Wales were not produced. However, Swansea continues to closely monitor rough sleeping numbers so the local data is available. The number of rough sleepers has fallen dramatically since the start of the pandemic and the suspension of the priority need test.

#### Number of people sleeping rough in Swansea between 2015 and 2020

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Actual count</b>	5	16	21	18	19	1
<b>Estimated rough sleepers (2 weekly count)</b>	19	23	26	33	37	13

### 3.8 **Demand for social housing**

Demand for social housing remains high with over 4,000 households currently on the Council's housing waiting list; approximately 16% of these are households who are homeless or threatened with

homelessness. The highest level of demand is for one-bed properties, with around 76% of homeless households needing this type of accommodation

An analysis of council house lettings between 2016/17 and the first three quarters of 2020/21 shows that the proportion of lettings to homeless households has gradually increased since 2016 from 32% to 46%. However, there has also been a reduction in the number of council properties available to let, for example, there were 1499 lettings in 2018/19 but this reduced to 1341 in 2019/20. There have been less properties available for let during the pandemic due to COVID restrictions preventing/slowing down work to be carried out to make void properties available for let and a reduction in the number of end of tenancies across all tenures.

#### **4. Key achievements of the Strategy so far**

- 4.1 The delivery of the Homelessness Strategy aims and objectives is directly linked to the Council's Housing Support Grant Spend Plan, in addition to the core revenue budget for Housing Options. Welsh Government allocates Housing Support Grant to each local authority to spend on projects aimed at preventing homelessness and helping people to live in their own home or supported housing. The level of Housing Support Grant has remained static for a number of years. However, the Welsh Government has recently announced a significant up-lift to the allocation for all local authorities for 2021/22. Swansea's budget has increased from £14m to £18.4m.

The purpose of this is to enable local authorities to transform services to a rapid rehousing approach, to incorporate actions to address the impact of the additional duty to provide temporary accommodation to all households during the pandemic and to bolster existing services by improving third sector partners' staff terms and conditions and training to enhance recruitment and retention.

Specific reference is made to service improvements/enhancements as a result of the increased Housing Support Grant at relevant points in this section.

- 4.2 **Objective 1:** Ensuring service users are at the centre of service delivery

##### **Achievements**

###### *Youth Homelessness*

- Development of the Youth Homelessness Charter – The BAYS+ Service (i.e., the Youth Homelessness Team) held consultation events during 2019 with children and young people in schools, youth clubs etc., in partnership with SYSHP and End Youth Homelessness Cymru. The Charter was due to be formally launched in April 2020 however, the pandemic has delayed this.

### *Equalities*

- Improvement to equalities monitoring introduced for Housing Options (homelessness assessment and waiting list assessment). Completion of the form is voluntary and anonymous, but the findings will provide additional insight into how well the service is being accessed by people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
- Embedded PIE approach (Psychologically Informed Environment) within the Homelessness Service, which has enabled services to be delivered in a trauma informed, person centred way. The Homelessness Service successfully bid to be part of pilot project training from Cymorth Cymru for staff. Staff from Housing Options, the Tenancy Support Unit and the Council's Rents Team have all received this training.

### *Service Improvements*

- Housing Options reception and interview areas upgraded to create more welcoming trauma informed, person-centred environment, taking into account findings from Shelter "Take Notice" mystery shopping exercise.
- Improvements to IT and telephony – a new Homeless IT database has been purchased and will enable service improvements by providing information to service users more quickly and save officer time through better data collection. Housing Options and Tenancy Support Unit staff are now all equipped with laptops/mobiles to enable agile working. This was achieved prior to the pandemic. The changes ensured that the Homelessness Service and Tenancy Support Unit were able to continue to successfully operate during the initial months of the pandemic.
- The Welsh Government's "Homelessness Prevention Pledge" was signed by the Leader, Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy and Service Transformation and Chief Executive in March 2020.

### **Priorities for 2021/22**

- The development of the Homelessness Charter for the wider population has been delayed due to the pandemic. Work was due to commence in 2020, following on from the development of the Youth Homelessness Charter so that lessons could be learnt from the successful approach undertaken. The intention is to continue with this during 2021.
- Installation of Wi-Fi for public use in the Housing Options office and the Council's temporary accommodation.
- Development of a service user satisfaction survey for the Homelessness Service.
- Improvements to the use of Personal Housing Plans will be implemented based on findings from national research and made possible through the introduction of a new, more effective homelessness database.
- Development of key messages promoting housing advice and support services to ensure that the public and landlords are aware of the support the Council can offer.

### 4.3 **Objective 2:** Prioritising early intervention and prevention of homelessness

#### **Achievements**

##### *Prevention*

- Continuing to meet targets for Homelessness Prevention – 72% of households were prevented from becoming homeless during 2019/20.
- Bays+ Service prevented homelessness in 80% of youth homelessness cases during 2019/20.
- Homelessness Prevention Fund – The prevention fund plays an essential role in enabling the Homelessness Service to take direct action to prevent people from losing their homes or by providing funds to facilitate moves into alternative accommodation e.g. through payment of rent arrears, rent in advance, removal costs, bond/deposits etc. Going forward into 2021/22 the prevention fund will play an essential role to mitigate some of the economic impacts of the pandemic.

##### *Access to the Private Rented Sector*

- Whilst the pandemic has led to challenges in maintaining access to the private rented sector, the Private Rented Access Team, run by the Wallich, remains a high priority for the Council to support due to the success it has had in obtaining and sustaining accommodation in the private rented sector over the past two years.
- The Homelessness Service has provided extra funding to the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Budget (managed by Housing Benefit), due to additional demands on the existing budget caused by welfare reform. DHP remains an essential tool to prevent homelessness and making the private rented sector affordable.

##### *Social Housing*

- A commitment to keep Council tenants safe and secure in their homes and ensure no one will be evicted as a result of financial hardship caused by the pandemic has meant that there has been reduction in evictions for rent arrears from Council housing during this period to zero (between April and December 2020). However, prior to the pandemic, due to taking a more psychologically informed approach, there had already been a significant reduction in evictions for rent arrears in 2019/20, with a 37% reduction in evictions from the previous year (57 down from 91 in 2018/19).

##### *Youth Homelessness*

- Youth Homelessness Pathway Coordinator now in post to support homelessness prevention for young people aged 13-16.
- Bays+ Service has established three “training flats” in Council accommodation for young people. This scheme is working well and resulting in successfully preparing young people to move onto permanent accommodation. Funding secured to continue the scheme for 2021/22.



- Young Person's Housing First project established with 10 units of accommodation providing permanent accommodation and intensive support for young people with complex needs.
- The Homelessness Service participated in the "Big Conversation" through Housing Options staff giving homelessness presentations during March 2019 to young people aged 11-14 from seven different comprehensive schools in order to raise awareness of housing and homelessness issues amongst young people.

#### *Information*

- Improvements to homelessness and housing advice information online has taken place, including creation of an interactive map of housing areas (containing the type and size of housing in each area) to improve people's ability to make informed choices. Changes to layout of housing public webpages have made Homelessness and Housing advice more prominent to the public.

#### **Priorities for 2021/22**

- A focus for the up-lift in Housing Support Grant is to ensure that there are sufficient resources to manage increased demand on homelessness and support services, and changing Welsh Government priorities. A review of Housing Options and Tenancy Support Unit staff resources is underway to ensure this. Increased homelessness applications are expected as a result of the pandemic, therefore additional resources will be required to deal with higher caseloads and to ensure high rates of homelessness prevention and low waiting times for support can be maintained.
- Housing Support Grant spend for 2021/22 will also further prioritise homelessness prevention and early intervention by contributing to an increase in the number of Local Area Co-ordinators, with the aim of ensuring the whole of Swansea is covered.
- The Housing Service is strengthening resources in the Council House Rents Team to enable a more proactive, preventative approach. The Team intends to maintain the zero eviction approach for rent arrears wherever possible, building on the experience during COVID and the pre-pandemic work, which involved taking a more psychologically informed approach and focussing on early intervention, prevention and support to council tenants to sustain their tenancies, with eviction as a last resort.
- The Council will work with other providers of social and supported housing to develop pre-eviction protocols to build on the good work and new approaches developed during the pandemic. This will include a review of the eviction data that is collected and monitored from support housing projects and information available from Registered Social Landlords.
- Implementation of the findings and recommendations from the Systems Thinking Review of the Youth Homelessness Service carried out in 2020/21.

#### **4.4 Objective 3:** Ensuring suitable accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless

##### **Achievements**

###### *Access to Housing*

- It is a strategic aim of the Council to increase the provision of affordable housing across Swansea, to enable the delivery of 5000 affordable homes over the next 10 years. To achieve this, the Council's More Homes Delivery Programme has a target to deliver 1000 new Council homes and the Council will continue to support its Registered Social Landlord partners to deliver 4000 affordable homes through its strategic support and the allocation of Welsh Government Grant. The need for homes suitable for people with disabilities/mobility issues is also considered as part of the More Homes Strategy, for example the Council has worked with West Glamorgan Regional Partnership to use ICF (Intermediate Care Fund) funding to increase the number of accessible properties.
- The Council successfully bid for £5.4m from the Welsh Government's Phase 2 Homelessness capital funding to increase the amount of one-bed, permanent, affordable, accommodation. This will be delivered in partnership with local Registered Social Landlords (Pobl, Family Housing and Coastal) through a number of schemes that will provide between 70 to 80 additional units of permanent accommodation during 2021. A further example of how this funding has been used includes improvements to a mental health supported accommodation project to increase the number of self-contained units, which will ensure that they are COVID safe and provide better, more sustainable accommodation for vulnerable people. Full details of the Welsh Government Phase 2 Capital Funding can be found in the Cabinet report on 18/10/20.
- Close partnership working between the Council and Registered Social Landlords to ensure that allocation of social housing is prioritised for people in temporary accommodation during the pandemic.
- Working with the Council's Housing Benefit Section to identify where exemptions to the Shared Room Rate for people under 35 can be applied to individuals who have been in temporary accommodation for over three months. Work is on-going with the DWP to establish if similar exemptions can apply to those in receipt of Universal Credit.

###### *Temporary Accommodation*

- Development of Ty Tom Jones – a new temporary supported accommodation scheme established in partnership with the Council, Pobl, The Wallich and Goleudy (formerly Caer Las) with funding from the Welsh Government's emergency COVID fund to provide an additional 20 units of temporary accommodation to single people during the pandemic.
- Increased provision of adapted temporary accommodation for single people and families.
- Target to ensure that B&B accommodation is only used for families in an emergency and that the average stay is no longer 5 days has been achieved.

- A reduction in the barriers to accessing temporary accommodation including:
  - increased flexibility in some forms of accommodation regarding pets
  - increased availability of temporary accommodation for couples
  - use of the Prevention Fund to support people who are struggling with the high cost of supported housing if they are in work and therefore not entitled to full housing benefit/UC housing costs.

#### *Domestic Abuse*

- As a response to the pandemic, the Homelessness Service secured additional temporary domestic abuse accommodation with Swansea University between April and September 2020 to ease accommodation pressure during the first lockdown.

#### **Priorities for 2021/22**

- A comprehensive, large-scale review of all supported housing schemes funded via Housing Support Grant (due to commence in April 2021).
- A review of the Council's Housing Allocations Policy will take place following any future legislative changes implemented by Welsh Government in relation to priority need status.
- Continued development of new affordable housing via the Council's More Homes Strategy and Registered Social Landlord investment.
- On-going negotiations with Home Office to agree staggered asylum seeker move on from Home Office accommodation following a positive decision on refugee status, in order to reduce strain on temporary accommodation and allow a planned approach to refugee move on.

#### **4.5 Objective 4:** Ensuring appropriate support is available for people who are or may become homeless

##### **Achievements**

##### *Tenancy Support*

- The work of the Council's Tenancy Support Unit remains essential in preventing homelessness and providing support to households to maintain their tenancies. An aim of the strategy was to reduce waiting list for support to ensure that households are provided with immediate assistance either when moving into a property or to provide "on demand" support to alleviate a crisis situation. This has successfully been achieved with all households now receiving support within two weeks, or more quickly if a crisis situation needs alleviating.
- Specific support for BAME groups continues to be effectively provided via:
  - TSU specialist support worker for BAME households.
  - BASWO floating support in place to support BAME households
  - Specific homelessness caseworker for refugees.
  - TSU staff have been trained to provide assistance to EU Citizens to apply for "Settled Status".
  - TSU has access to a specialist, immigration solicitor to refer people who require additional assistance.

### *Joint Working*

- Working relationships have been strengthened between the Homelessness Service and the Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator, as part of the multi-agency Homelessness Cell set up during the pandemic, which has enabled good communications about BAME groups and issues they are facing during the pandemic and has ensured that information and resources are available to assist these groups.
- Establishment of the “Swansea Together” Food Provision Service, a collaboration of voluntary organisations (led by Matt’s Café and Zak’s Place) to ensure that everybody in B&B, and other forms of temporary accommodation who requires it, receives a substantial meal seven days a week during the pandemic. This has also been made available to people experiencing food poverty.
- Working relationships between Local Area Co-ordinators (LACs) and Housing Options/Tenancy Support Unit have been strengthened and developed, for example links were reinforced during the pandemic as support workers and LACs were liaising to provide food parcels and supporting those shielding.

### *Training*

- Prioritisation of training for homelessness, housing and support staff to understand and incorporate new, improved methods of working, for example training on Psychologically Informed Environments and Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- Development of new training modules by the Homelessness and Mental Health Nurses on supporting people with personality disorders for the homelessness and support sector.

### *Funding*

- Welsh Government Phase 2 revenue funding has increased the support services available to people who are homeless (in addition to the services that were already in place), with a particular focus on people in temporary accommodation. There are clear signs that the new approaches being trialled e.g. rapid rehousing, are having positive outcomes and improving engagement with service users who have previously be hard to reach. These posts include:
  - Four Rapid Rehousing Workers (Wallich and Goleudy)
  - Crisis Critical time Intervention Team
  - Platform Mental Health worker
  - Increase of Mental Health Homelessness nurse from part time to full time post
  - Barod Substance Misuse Worker focusing on people in temporary accommodation
  - Additional Housing Support Gant funding for 2021/22 will ensure the continuation of this support

### **Priorities for 2021-22**

- The long-term economic and social impacts of the pandemic are anticipated to significantly increase demand for housing support

services. Therefore, as part of the assessment of resources in the Homelessness Service and Tenancy Support Unit it is proposed to strengthen the TSU team to include more resources for rapid rehousing and pre-tenancy support.

- The Welsh Government commissioned Homelessness Action Group report (see background papers for link to full report) has given strong recommendations that the rapid rehousing approach is something that all local authorities should develop. Therefore, this will be a strong focus for the additional spend within the Housing Support Grant and the review of Temporary Supported Accommodation.
- The draft Spend Plan for Housing Support Grant 2021/22 has set out proposals for additional funding to enhance support services, some examples include:
  - More resources to support domestic abuse, in particular older victims, male victims of domestic abuse and support for perpetrators
  - Additional support workers specialising in mental health and substance misuse to enhance the multi-disciplinary approach to dealing with clients who have co-occurring diagnoses.
  - Provide resources to expand rapid rehousing approach across the Youth Homelessness Service
  - Increase in specialist welfare rights advice available for support staff and professionals
  - A proportion of the up-lift will also be set aside to increase contract values with support providers in order to bolster terms and conditions for front line workers and assist in recruitment and retention
- Research to be undertaken with BAME groups, as part of the development of the new Local Housing Strategy, to look at the barriers, issues and priorities for housing for these various groups.
- Development of specific information for refugee households, who are moving on from Home Office accommodation following a decision in their immigration status to explain the housing system and how to access it.

#### **4.6 Objective 5:** Providing robust responses to support rough sleepers and eliminating the need for individuals to sleep rough

##### **Achievements**

- Reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in Swansea to lowest levels ever recorded, as a result of Welsh Government instructions ensure all people who required it are provided with temporary accommodation during the pandemic, including those with no recourse to public funds.
- Housing First Project established providing permanent accommodation giving intensive, wrap around support, provided by The Wallich, for entrenched rough sleepers with complex needs. The scheme is currently supporting 16 households who are actively engaging with the team; 11 settled in their own permanent homes, 5 currently in temporary accommodation. The team continue to work with a small number of other households who are or have a history of sleeping

rough, with the aim of helping them accept accommodation of their own.

- Support for Rough Sleepers extended to weekends, provision is now available seven days a week. This has enabled support and assistance to be provided for every person found to be sleeping rough within 24 hours from first contact.
- Increase in the number of emergency bed spaces in Dinas Fechan and Paxton Street, including provision for couples. Plus an additional Mental Health emergency bed created.
- Improved partnership working with key organisations including the Police, Neath and Port Talbot Council, Environmental Health, Crisis, Barod, Primary Health Care, The Wallich and Goleudy through the creation of the COVID Homelessness Cell. Whilst this has been a requirement from Welsh Government during the pandemic the arrangement is working well and will continue in the future. The Cell enables information sharing and joined up approach to address the needs of rough sleepers and deal with any serious incidents when they arise.
- Review of the Cold Weather Plan has been completed each year and the plan has been renamed “Cold and Extreme Weather Plan” now including actions relating to any adverse weather. The Covid response has significantly changed the plan for 2020 as the Winter Night Shelter provision was suspended, due to COVID safety requirements. However, anyone found to be sleeping rough continues to be provided with temporary accommodation during this period.
- Improved monitoring on the numbers of former armed forces personnel accessing homelessness support services and strong working relationships with veteran support organisations such as SSAFA etc.
- Information leaflet developed for Councillors and the general public on support available for people who are rough sleeping.

### **Priorities for 2021/22**

- Ensure that the individuals who were previously rough sleeping or at risk of doing so, do not return to the streets when the pandemic ends. All households who require it are provided with temporary accommodation and the Council will work with partners and Welsh Government to access funding and develop services to ensure that the support and accommodation required is available.
- Welsh Government is currently considering potential options for the Priority Need test in Wales and it is considered likely that it will be removed in the future, leading to a duty for local authorities to provide temporary accommodation for all households who require it. The Homelessness Service will need to ensure that there are sufficient resources to deal with the increased demand for temporary accommodation, homelessness advice and assistance and tenancy support.
- Expansion of Ty Tom Jones – the new project has shown significant success in adopting a rapid rehousing approach with improved engagement and outcomes. Funding has been identified from Housing

- Support Grant to continue the project during 2021/22, and the project will be increased by an additional four units (bringing the total to 24).
- The need for a solutions centre to provide improved facilities for people who are sleeping rough was identified as an action in the Strategy. However, the pandemic has led to a re-evaluation of what is required, along with the impact of other service developments being undertaken by Health and the voluntary sector in the city centre. In addition, all homeless households are currently placed in temporary accommodation, and services have been enhanced to ensure individualised support is available for all who require it.
  - The development of Ty Tom Jones as a new supported housing project, with its focus on rapid rehousing, will provide the opportunity to look at increasing the amount of services that are delivered at this location. Whilst this cannot take place during the pandemic, the long-term plan is to provide space for either drop in services to be developed here or a more permanent base for services who require it. The drop in service approach, where support is available at set times during the week, has been shown to be effective in increasing engagement with previously hard to reach clients at Ty Tom Jones. In addition, there is the potential to provide additional facilities for those who are in less flexible accommodation such as B&B e.g. access to clothes washing and cooking facilities.
  - As part of the up-lift in Housing Support Grant, plans are being made to increase the number of service users supported by the Housing First Project Team to 25.

## **5. Homelessness during the COVID Pandemic**

- 5.1 The pandemic has led to many challenges, specifically an increase in mental health issues and substance misuse, a rise in domestic abuse and relationship breakdown, in addition to the inevitable economic impacts. This is placing great strain on homelessness, support and accommodation services. During the past 12 months, there has been a reduction in the number of properties available to let in all types of tenure, and therefore it is likely that people will spend longer periods in temporary accommodation over the coming months.
- 5.2 During the pandemic, Welsh Government has issued guidance to local authorities that all homeless households are to be considered vulnerable during the pandemic and therefore in priority need, this includes households with no recourse to public funds. This is to ensure that people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough have the support and resources needed to protect themselves and adhere to public health guidance on hygiene or isolation. Whilst there is temporary supported accommodation provision available for non-priority households in Swansea, this provision was insufficient to deal with the increased levels of demand. In addition, there are insufficient permanent, affordable, one-bed properties. This has led to a large increase in the numbers of people in B&B and other temporary accommodation. The additional costs associated with these “COVID”

B&B placements are currently being covered by the Welsh Government's Emergency COVID Fund.

- 5.3 Between April 2020 and December 2020, 300 additional single people have been placed in temporary accommodation, so far 53% have been provided with support and assistance to enable them to move onto suitable alternative accommodation.
- 5.4 The aim of the Welsh Government and the Council is to ensure that there is not a return to rough sleeping post-pandemic. In order to support this, the Welsh Government issued new guidance to local authorities in June 2020 that set a requirement to produce "Phase 2 Transition Plans", with the fundamental aim to ensure that everyone brought into emergency temporary accommodation during the pandemic is supported into long-term, self-contained accommodation. This was underpinned by a fund of £50m across Wales. Swansea successfully bid for £5.6m (£5.4m capital and £250k revenue funding), to increase the amount of permanent, affordable accommodation available for homeless people and to provide additional support, with a particular focus on rapid rehousing, mental health and substance misuse.
- 5.5 In order to deliver this, a strong partnership approach was adopted between the Council's Homelessness Service, Housing Support Grant Team, local Registered Social Landlords (Pobl, Family Housing and Coastal), key homelessness and support organisations including The Wallich, Goleudy, Crisis, Platform, Health and Barod (substance misuse). Close partnership working is continuing between the organisations who have received Phase 2 funding to ensure that all households in temporary accommodation are able to receive appropriate support and are housed in suitable accommodation as quickly as possible.
- 5.6 Other pressures arising from the pandemic will have an impact on demand for homelessness and support services, including:
- Continuation of the suspension of the Priority Need test, with the expectation that Welsh Government will enact future legislation to abolish it.
  - A lack of affordable, one-bed properties.
  - Reduced turnover of permanent social housing stock due to reduced end of tenancies during the pandemic.
  - An expected increase in evictions when the current extension to notice periods for evictions ends (due to end 31 March 2021).
  - The end of the furlough scheme (currently due to finish end of April 2021), which is expected to lead to increases in unemployment, causing financial difficulties.
  - Increasing levels of domestic abuse and family breakdown.
  - An increase in households requiring assistance following a Home Office decision on their immigration status.



- Increasing demand for mental health support arising from concerns about people's mental health, caused by loneliness and the stresses of the pandemic.
- Impact on staff across the homelessness and support sector, including high stress levels, higher caseloads, more difficult working conditions for front line staff due to managing social distancing and increased health and safety measures with challenging client groups.
- Continued unaffordability of the private rented sector for people under 35 who are limited to shared room rent allowance Housing Benefit/Universal Credit payments.
- An increase in poverty levels following the current planned end of the temporary £20 per week increase to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit. NB This is currently in place until April 2021 and a UK government decision is awaited on whether this will be extended.
- Continued challenge of a small number of hard to reach people. Whilst rough sleeping has significantly reduced with good outcomes for many, there are still people with extremely complex needs who services are struggling to engage with and solutions for this cohort are diminishing.

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 The aims and objectives of the Strategy remain robust and fit for purpose. Good progress has been made across all five objectives, with high levels of homelessness prevention being maintained.
- 6.2 When the Strategy was developed it was never envisaged that an event as serious as the pandemic would occur, which has led to huge challenges for organisations and the public to overcome. There have been significant changes in the way services are delivered and there is increased demand for homelessness and support services. However, whilst the Strategy has provided a clear focus for the Council and its partners to address homelessness over a four-year period, it has remained a dynamic, flexible document with the ability to adapt to changing priorities and challenges. Existing partnership working arrangements with the voluntary sector, support providers, Registered Social Landlords, Health, Welsh Government and other Council Services have been crucial in ensuring that the challenges of delivering the Strategy have been met.
- 6.3 Looking ahead, it is reasonable to expect that there will be an increase in the numbers of people who require advice and assistance for homelessness and housing related support. It is difficult to predict future demand but there is strong evidence to suggest that pressure on homelessness and support services will significantly rise in coming months, along with increased demand for affordable and secure, social housing. However, the Strategy ensures that the Council is in a strong position to deal with the forthcoming challenges.

## 7. Equality and Engagement Implications

- 7.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Our Equality Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

- 7.2 The Homelessness Strategy was subject to a full Equality Impact Assessment when it was adopted by Cabinet in November 2018. The full Equality Impact Assessment is available in the Cabinet agenda listed in the background papers below. The Equality Impact Assessment indicated that the Strategy would have a positive effect on protected groups. No negative impacts were identified. An action was included in the Action Plan to review Housing Options equalities monitoring systems, which has been completed.

## 8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications.

## 9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no financial implications directly associated with this progress report. The financial implications associated with delivery of the Strategy are covered by revenue budgets within Housing Options and the Housing Support Grant Spend Plan 2021/22.

### Background papers:

- *Cabinet Agenda 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Item 8 “Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan”:*  
<http://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=124&MId=7941&Ver=4&LLL=0>
- *Cabinet Agenda 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Item 9 “Covid-19 Phase 2 Funding Application – Planning Guidance for Homelessness and Housing Related Support Services and Innovative Housing Programme Funding Phase 4 (IHP4) Applications”.*  
<http://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=124&MId=9029&Ver=4&LLL=0> .
- *Welsh Government Homelessness Action Group Report:*  
<https://gov.wales/homelessness-action-group>

- *Welsh Government Homelessness Statistics:*  
<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness>

**Appendices:** None.