



Report of the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 13th December 2022

Homelessness Progress Report

Purpose	To brief/update the Scrutiny Committee on current homelessness pressures and how these pressures are being tackled.
Content	The report sets out how the Council is tackling homelessness, and what the key priorities and objectives are through the introduction of the Housing Support Programme Strategy. The report also provides an update on what impact the pandemic has had on homelessness and the current challenges that are currently being faced.
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the information provided and give views.
Lead Councillor	Councillor Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Service Transformation.
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1. Background

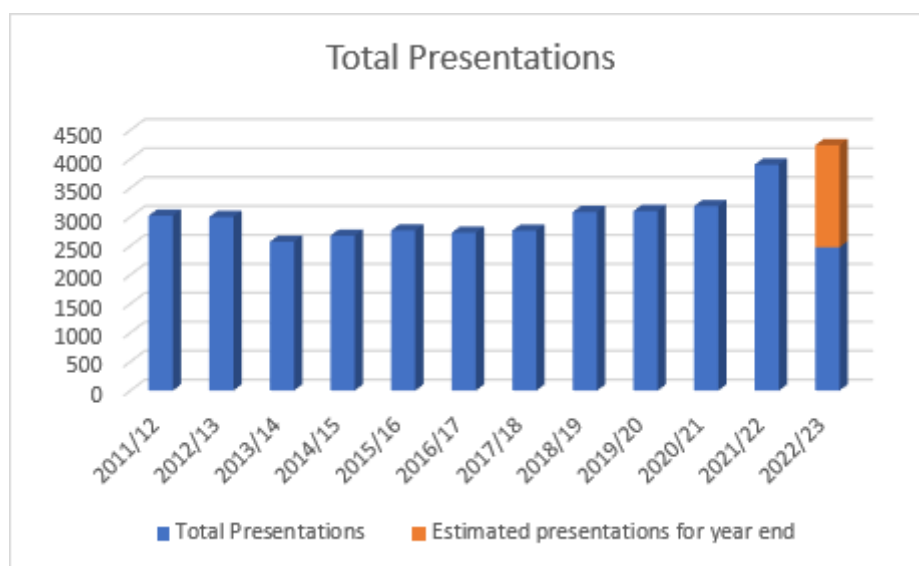
- 1.1 Since the pandemic, Homelessness in Swansea and across Wales has faced huge challenges. This report reflects on what impact the COVID19 pandemic has had on homelessness in Swansea and how this is continuing to create challenges going forward. The report looks at some of the reasons for homelessness and how the levels of demand have increased, particularly around the need for temporary accommodation through the Welsh Government's 'no-one left out approach'.

- 1.2 In April 2022, all Local Authorities in Wales were required to have a Housing Support Programme Strategy in place. The Housing Support Programme Strategy is a 4 year plan which sets out how Swansea is going to prevent homelessness and protect the most vulnerable people in the city. The report looks at the Strategy and Action Plan in more detail, in particular what the priorities are for the City in tackling homelessness over the next 4 years and beyond.
- 1.3 The Report also looks at some of the other challenges around key issues such as the shortage of properties within the private rented sector, the cost of living crisis and the impact of the Ukrainian Conflict.

2. Levels and Causes of Homelessness

2.1 The following section gives an overview of homelessness in the city. It should be noted that following the first lockdown on 23rd March 2020 this had far reaching effects on homelessness. At that time the Welsh Government took a 'no-one left out approach' which meant that the priority need test for homelessness was suspended. As we move out of the pandemic, whilst the priority need test is now starting to be applied again, there is an expectation for Local Authorities across Wales to continue to support those currently in temporary accommodation until they are able to secure long term settled accommodation. There has also been a recent amendment to the priority need test (Nov 22) to include those who are at threat of sleeping rough.

2.2 Total number of homeless presentations.



The above graph clearly illustrates that the number of people presenting as homeless is continuing to rise. In 2021/22, there were over 3,500 presentations compared to under 3,000 10 years previously in 2011/12. Even greater concern is that in the present year if the numbers continue to grow at the same rate there is likely to be well over 4,000 presentations. There is no evidence to suggest that the numbers are likely to subside.

2.3 Causes of Homelessness

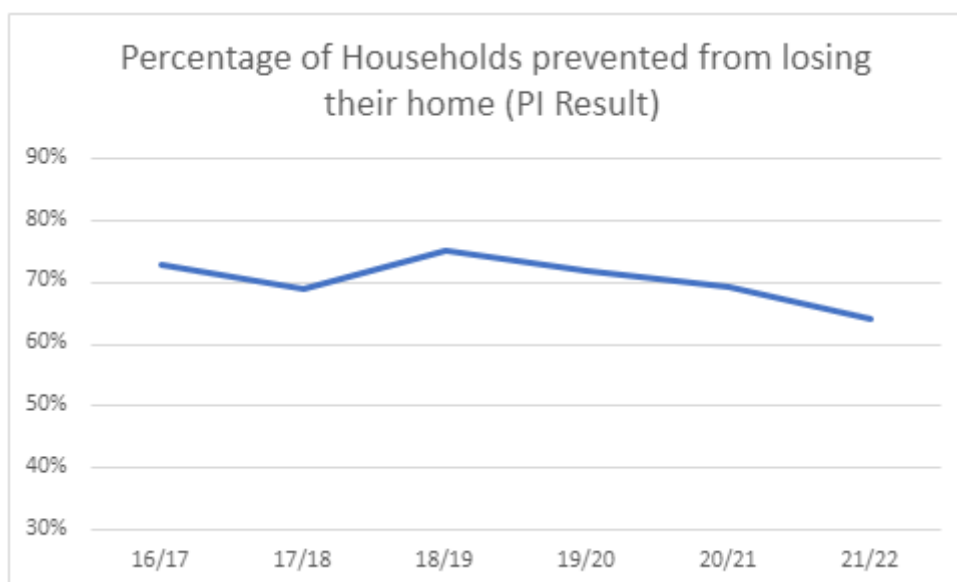
The reasons for homelessness have remained fairly constant and the main reasons why people are homeless are as follows;

- Relationship breakdown with family;
- Relationship breakdown with partner (both violent and non-violent);
- Loss of private rented accommodation;
- Leaving prison.

There are 2 main causes of homelessness that have led to the rise in presentations. Firstly, there have been large increases in homelessness due to parents or friends/other relatives no longer being willing to accommodate during the pandemic – which is reflective of the family pressures that increased and tighter restrictions on households mixing which meant that informal arrangements could not continue.

Secondly, there has been a sharp rise in the number of people being asked to leave private rented accommodation. Between Apr 21 – Sept 21 and Apr 22 – Sept 22, there has been a 75% increase in the number of households presenting as a result of notices to quit. A recent survey carried out in Wales does show that a significant number of landlords are nervous about the introduction of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, other reasons given included the impact of the pandemic where it has been difficult to evict unsuitable tenants and a number of landlords selling their properties due to the buoyant property market.

2.4 Total Number of Preventions

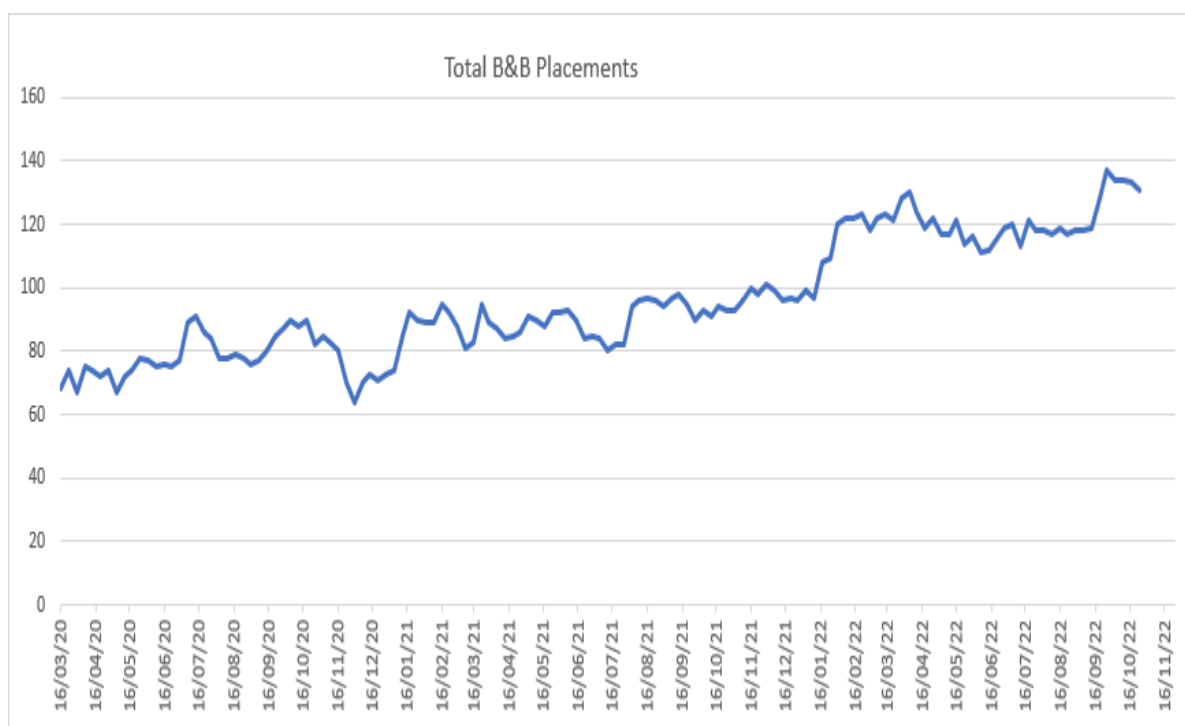


The graph above shows that preventing homelessness has become more difficult in the last 3 years. Again, the pandemic had a huge impact on the ability to prevent homelessness. There are more people presenting to us in crisis situations, lessening the options for early prevention. This is coupled with a reduction in the number of affordable properties to move-on to.

In the private rented sector less properties are becoming available, and those that are available have rents are simply too high for many households. In some areas in Swansea rents are being charged at double the current Local Housing Allowance rates.

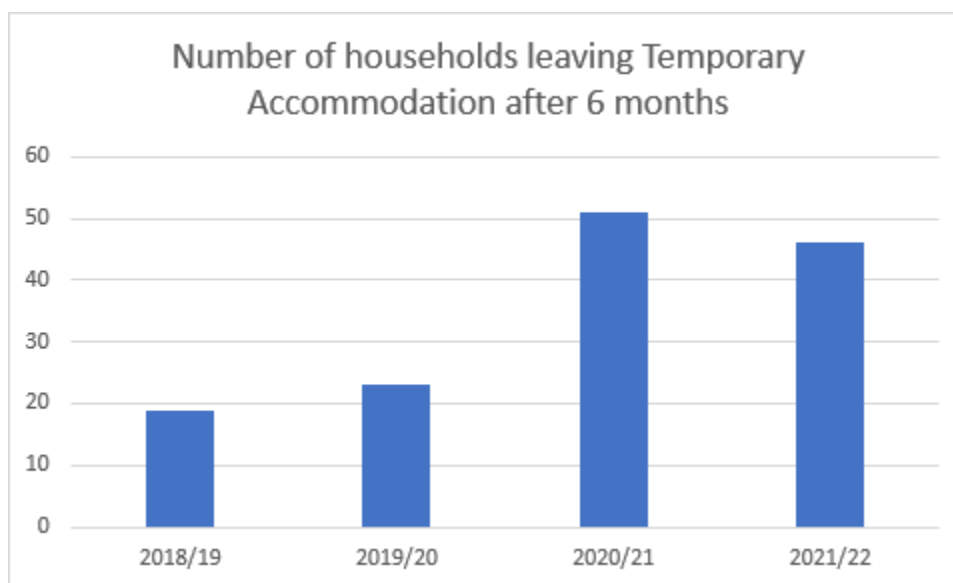
2.5 Numbers of households in temporary accommodation.

The Council offers a wide range of temporary accommodation, to support both families and single persons. There are currently unprecedented levels of households in temporary accommodation. For the first time there are over 200 households currently living in temporary accommodation. This is made up of approximately 15% families and 85% single persons. The biggest increase has been in the rise in the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation (B&B).



This is one of the most concerning pieces of data and is the best example of how the pandemic and the suspension of priority need has placed enormous pressure on temporary accommodation. In 2019/20 i.e. the year preceding the pandemic the average numbers in B&B were 30 households per night. This rose to 70 at the start of the pandemic, and the current levels are at around 130 households. It is important to note that the majority of households placed are single persons, although more recently there are more families having to be placed in B&B for short periods of time.

2.6 Length of time in temporary Accommodation



The graph indicates that since the pandemic people spend much longer periods of time in temporary accommodation. Since 18/19 more than twice as many people have been occupying temporary accommodation for longer than 6 months. Once again this is down to the sheer volume of people becoming homeless, coupled with the lack on move-on options. It should also be noted that there are a number of challenges with those individuals who have specific support needs and may need more specialist accommodation.

2.7 Families in B&B Accommodation

There are various types of family sized temporary accommodation which helps to avoid the need for B&B for families. However, in order to meet our statutory duty a placement in this type of accommodation can sometimes be the only option.

In 2016/2017, a total of 8 families were placed in B&B and these families were there for an average of 4 days. However, in 2021/2022 13 families were placed in B&B at an average of 10 days. This trend is continuing to rise despite increasing the number of family sized temporary accommodation units in the last 2 years.

In summary, more families are having had to be placed into B&B and those families are spending a longer period of time in this form of accommodation. This can be attributed to an increase in presentations, the lack of move-in options and external factors such as the Ukrainian conflict.

2.8 Rough Sleeping Data

The graph below shows a snapshot of the number of people sleeping rough on the one night count in November over the last 8 years.



The graph shows the dramatic reduction in the numbers of people sleeping rough at the start of the pandemic, due to the 'no-one left out approach'. However, it is also noticeable that there has been a steady increase in those numbers in the last 2 years. Currently the nightly average of people sleeping rough is 9, so approximately half of the rough sleeper numbers between 2017 – 2019.

Tackling rough sleeping is a key priority for the Council and therefore a considerable amount of data is held in relation to this issue. It is interesting to note that a number of people that are currently sleeping rough do have a tenancy they could return to, it is also worth noting that in recent years a relatively high number of those sleeping rough have come from out of the area. These cases can be difficult to deal with as there are often limited solutions.

Clearly this is a complex area, particular as a number of those rough sleeping will have spent time in temporary or supported accommodation. In addition, some will be experiencing issues around substance use and co-occurring mental health issues and therefore the role of the Rough Sleeper Intervention Team is vital. This is a very responsive service that operates 7 days a week and plays a major role in offering support and moving people on to more suitable accommodation as quickly as possible.

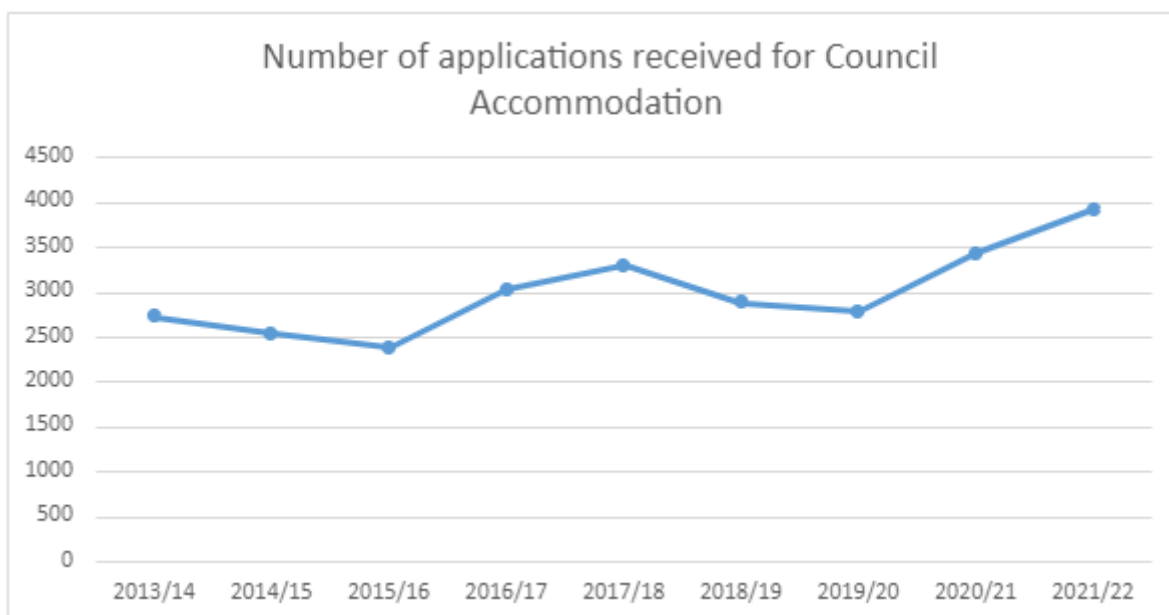
2.9 Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Swansea, like the other dispersal areas in Wales, are seeing growing pressures with the numbers of refugees that require assistance through each of the different Schemes. The Ukrainian crisis has added more pressure to the system.

Collectively with the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Welsh Government Super Sponsor Scheme approximately 250 Ukrainian Households are being supported. These households are either in hotel accommodation, living with sponsors or have recently found their own accommodation. It is difficult to predict how many of these households will need resettling in Swansea there

are already a number of households needing to move on from their sponsored accommodation.

2.10 Demand for council housing



The above graph shows that demand for social housing is increasing with a 44% increase in waiting list applications between 2013/14 and 2021/22. More recently, a further spike in demand has occurred and the Council is likely to receive over 4,000 applications this year. The largest demand is for one bed accommodation.

2.11 Summary of Key Trends

- Swansea is currently experiencing the highest number of homelessness presentations and this is not expected to decrease in the short to medium term.
- Demand for social housing has rapidly increased since March 2016.
- Preventing homelessness is becoming more difficult at present due to a lack of permanent accommodation.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation is at the highest level on record.
- People are in temporary accommodation for longer with fewer options to move on.
- The private rented sector is becoming increasingly difficult to accommodate people in.
- Additional issues such as the Ukrainian crisis is causing further pressures on the system.
- The greatest demand is for one bed accommodation.

3. Housing Support Programme Strategy and Strategic Priorities

- 3.1 The Housing Support Programme Strategy and Action Plan set out the single, strategic direction of the Local Authority for homelessness prevention and housing related support services for the next four years (2022 – 2026). It sets out the key priorities for the Local Authority and its partners based on findings from a comprehensive needs assessment and stakeholder engagement.

Link to Strategy and Action Plan:

www.swansea.gov.uk/housingsupportstrategy

- 3.2 In addition to taking into consideration the levels and causes of homelessness, the Strategy and Action Plan was developed through consultation with our partners and taking into consideration the priorities of the Welsh Government

These include:

- A continued focus on eradicating rough sleeping with a commitment to examine the potential need for legislative reform of the “priority need test”.
 - A new requirement from Welsh Government for all Local Authorities to develop Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans, which will show how the Council intends to move away from use of temporary accommodation over a five-year period to make the transition to a Rapid Rehousing model of homelessness.
 - Increased focus on the private sector. Welsh Government are keen to find ways to improve access and reduce evictions in the Private Rented sector.
 - Increase the availability of permanent homes. This is one of the biggest issues facing the Council in terms of resolving homelessness. Particularly around the lack of one-bed room properties across all tenures.
- 3.3 Following extensive consultation the Strategy was implemented in April 22 and sets out 9 key priorities;

Housing Support Strategy Strategic Priorities 2022-26	
Strategic Priority 1	Strengthen and increase services in place to prevent homelessness.
Strategic priority 2	Ensuring appropriate support is available at the right time for people who are at risk or are experiencing homelessness.
Strategic Priority 3	To develop and implement a 5 year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.
Strategic priority 4	Continue to develop and improve partnership working with key stakeholders to ensure a joined-up approach to homelessness prevention.
Strategic priority 5	Work in partnership to strengthen support provision for people with complex needs, including mental health, learning disability, substance misuse and VAWDASV.

Strategic priority 6	Continue to increase the supply of suitable and affordable accommodation.
Strategic priority 7	Work with service users and stakeholders to introduce regular mechanisms for engagement and co-production to inform service development and improvement.
Strategic priority 8	Strengthen support and accommodation provision for young people.
Strategic priority 9	Provide robust responses to support rough sleepers and eliminating the need for individuals to sleep rough.

4. **Current Achievements**

- 4.1 Through the previous Homelessness Strategy and since the implementation of the Housing Support Programme Strategy much has been achieved in tackling homelessness, despite the challenging environment that we have been working in since the pandemic.
- 4.2 Since March 2020, over 1,100 households have been successfully moved on from temporary accommodation into more suitable accommodation. This has been achieved by excellent partnership working with our Landlord Services colleagues and with the major Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) operating in Swansea. During this period the RSLs have taken a flexible approach with how they have allocated properties and have been supportive in meeting the increasing need of rising numbers in temporary accommodation.
- 4.3 During the last 2 years, the Council increased temporary accommodation stock in order to mitigate against the impact of the rise in numbers needing temporary accommodation. This has included self-contained accommodation for both single persons and families.
- 4.4 Through the More Homes programme and by using Welsh Government Phase 1 and 2 homelessness funding (put in place during the pandemic) we have been able to increase our levels of permanent and temporary accommodation through a number of different schemes. 20 x acquisitions of one & two bed flats during this period have been used for both temporary and permanent accommodation. Recently, the Council was successful in winning a Welsh Housing Award for the development of Bryn House, a new build site which combined 4 permanent flats with 4 'pods' used to provide temporary accommodation as an alternative to bed and breakfast. In addition to this, RSLs were also able to bid for Phase 2 funding giving a further 23 units of accommodation for use during the pandemic.

Further to the capital funding secured, revenue funding was obtained via the Phase 2 Homelessness funding to provide additional support via a range of 3rd sector partners and Health. These projects have continued post-pandemic via funding through the uplift in Housing Support Grant provided by Welsh Government in 2021/22.

4.5 More recently the Welsh Government's new Temporary Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) has made additional funding available to support a wide range of projects by local authorities and registered social landlords to create much-needed extra housing capacity across Wales. This can include:

- bringing unused properties that would otherwise not be re-let back into use as homes for individuals and families
- remodelling existing accommodation
- converting buildings into good-quality accommodation
- using modern methods of construction as a medium-term form of housing on some sites as they are developed for permanent housing

Swansea Council has so far submitted the following schemes:

- Work to bring major voids back into use – funding of £229,108 approved to fund an external contractor to deliver kitchen and bathroom works to 34 major void properties. This will increase capacity for the in-house team and enable void properties to be prepared for letting more quickly.
- Expression of interest submitted to fund a further 24 acquisitions of ex-council properties – awaiting Welsh Government decision.
- The remodelling of the former District Housing Offices in Penlan and Eastside into 10 flats using TACP Funding.

4.6 In line with Welsh Government priorities a rapid rehousing approach has been developed to provide additional support to those needing to move on from temporary and supported accommodation. Following an uplift in Housing Support Grant in 2021/22, more resources have been directed into rapid rehousing which has enabled more intensive support to be provided to the most vulnerable in the City. A 5 year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (2022 – 2027) is being finalised and this will be included in the Housing Support Programme Strategy as an appendix in line with Welsh Government requirements.

4.7 The successful *Housing First* project will continue to be developed and as a result resources have been targeted through the Housing Support Grant to increase the number of people being supported and housed via Housing First.

4.8 Ty Tom Jones was quickly developed as a direct response to the pandemic. Its model is to move people out of homelessness by taking a rapid rehousing approach. Through excellent partnership working, Ty Tom Jones has produced considerable success and as a result has enabled more resources to be dedicated to the project through the Housing Support Grant which has enabled the project to increase capacity.

- 4.9 In the last 12 months a supported housing review has been carried out with partners and in consultation with service users. One of the outcomes of the review was to ensure that people get the right property at the right time. Currently, a *temporary accommodation pathway* is being trialled which is looking at improving the way voids are allocated in supported housing. This is at the early stages of this but there are already positive signs of successful outcomes.
- 4.10 Reduction of evictions – The primary cause of eviction from social housing has historically been rent arrears. Whilst the legislative changes and stay on evictions implemented throughout the COVID19 pandemic had the intended consequence on eviction levels, the developing approach of Swansea’s Housing Service in respect of preventing eviction due to rent arrears had already begun to impact outcomes; as evidenced in a significant reduction in number of evictions in 2019/20 as compared with 2018/19. Moving forward since the pandemic, despite overall rent arrears levels continuing to rise, only 2 evictions have taken place; neither resulting in homelessness.

The Housing Rents Management Strategy 2022-2026 aims to effectively prevent rent arrears to ensure that Council tenancies are sustained. The strategy includes a specific objective and subsequent actions in respect of minimising rent arrears when they occur and supporting Council tenants to sustain tenancies and prevent eviction which further embeds the approach of eviction being a last resort. In addition, no evictions have taken place in regard to anti-social behaviour since 2019 with approaches to support tenants using other tools to modify behaviour and sustain tenancies in place.

Swansea, like other social landlords in Wales, have recently committed to the Welsh Governments pledge that there will be no evictions due to financial hardship for the term of the rent settlement in 2023-24, where tenants engage with their landlords. During this time we will continue to provide targeted support to those experiencing financial hardship to access support available.

- 4.11 Rough sleeping in the City still remains very low and when it does occur the appropriate advice and assistance is provided within 24 hours. This will remain as a priority going forward.
- 4.12 The Asylum and Refugee Coordinator has successfully developed a team to manage the on-going Ukrainian crisis. This team have had to develop rapidly to cope with the large numbers of Ukrainian people coming through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Welsh Government Super Sponsor Scheme.

5. Challenges going forward

- 5.1 Probably the greatest challenge is the issue of demand outstripping supply. There is a lack of suitable, affordable, move-on accommodation and given the high numbers in temporary accommodation and the continuing rise in homelessness it makes it extremely difficult to find appropriate solutions. The Council continues to look at ways of increasing the amount of affordable one bed properties, but also look at innovative ways of preventing homelessness.

- 5.2 The cost of living crisis is a real threat to tackling homelessness and it is anticipated that as a result of rising costs, energy prices and interest rates that there will be a further increase in homelessness through unaffordability. Whilst we can mitigate some of this through additional tenancy support and use of prevention funding, this will continue to be a major challenge.
- 5.3 There are major financial pressures to meet the cost of temporary accommodation. Since March 2020, the Welsh Government have provided a considerable amount of financial support to cover some of the costs of temporary accommodation. We have not yet received any confirmation as yet that the level of funding will continue into 23/24 and therefore there is a potential future financial risk to the Authority.
- 5.4 Rising immigration levels is clearly a concern locally and nationally. The Council are working closely with the Welsh Government to try and find solutions to the increasing numbers through the various schemes, however, as outlined previously, with limited solutions then this is adding to the pressure on temporary accommodation. The Council is committed however to continue as a City of Sanctuary and need to continue working with the Welsh Government and partners to find innovative solutions.
- 5.5 There continue to be a number of cases with complex needs through substance use and co-occurring mental health issues. These are difficult to find solutions to and it is vital that this is not simply seen as a housing issue and that there is strong partnership working with RSLs, Social Services, Health, Probation, Police and the voluntary sector in order to prevent homelessness.
- 5.6 The increased volume of cases and the lack of move-on creates added pressure on staff and this leads to a very challenging environment for those that are working on the front line providing support to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Increased caseloads means higher level of enquiries and therefore there is a need to ensure that the teams are appropriately resourced to deal with the extra demands.

6. Conclusion and Summary

- 6.1 The Housing Support Programme Strategy and Action Plan will play a key role in tackling homelessness over the next 4 years. Partnership working will be vital in ensuring that the priorities set out in the Strategy can be met. It is important to note the Action Plan will be regularly reviewed and will be a live document so this can be amended and updated to deal with any pressures that may arise that may have an impact on homelessness.
- 6.2 The current high numbers in temporary accommodation and the increase in the number of homeless presentations, coupled with the lack of move-on options is of greatest concern.

6.3 Moving forward, it is clear that this is and will continue to be a difficult period for homelessness as a result of combination of factors, such as legislative changes, the cost of living crisis and the Ukrainian conflict. Therefore, the Council may need to strengthen resources in this area in order to provide the appropriate levels of advice and support.

6.4 It is important to note that the challenges that are being faced are not specific to Swansea, and these issues are being experienced at a regional, national and UK wide level. Therefore, there will be a need to ensure that the Council continues to work collaboratively with other LA's, the WLGA and the Welsh Government to tackle the various challenges that are being faced.

7. Legal implications

7.1 There are no legal implications.

8. Finance Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications directly associated with this progress report. The financial implications associated with the prevention of homelessness are covered by revenue budgets within Housing Options and the Housing Support Grant Spend Plan 2022/23.

9. Integrated Assessment Implications

9.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, 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 Acts.
- 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.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

9.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

- 9.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.
- 9.2 An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) screening document has been completed as part of the Housing Support Programme Strategy (**See Appendix A**).

Engagement, consultation and coproduction will be incorporated into the future development and delivery of the Housing Support Programme in collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure a joined-up approach to homelessness prevention and housing related support ultimately aiming to improving people's outcomes.

The actions identified seek to support individuals to overcome any inequalities of access to affordable housing and support vulnerable individuals to sustain settled homes in which to build their futures. It is envisaged that the impact of the Housing Support Programme will result in improved services and be wholly positive for individuals experiencing homelessness both now and in the future.

Background papers: *None*

Appendices:

Appendix A – IIA Screening Form