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| SUBJECT: | Preventing Homelessness Update Report |
| MEETING: | Adult Select Committee |
| DATE: | 10th July 2018 |
| DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: | All |

1.0 PURPOSE

To provide an update on the progress being made with regards to homeless prevention and tackling homelessness. The report highlights performance and a small improvement in homeless prevention, current risks and actions being taken to improve performance.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To consider the progress the Council is making in relation to preventing homelessness and tackling homelessness in relation to the wider costs of homelessness.
- 2.2 To use this report to scrutinise whether services are being delivered in line with contributing to increased prevention.
- 2.3 To identify any areas of underperformance or concerns that the Committee consider may require further investigation.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, the Council has a duty to both respond to homelessness and to prevent homelessness. The Act provides the power to discharge related duties into the private rented sector. Strengthening prevention activity and identifying new housing options are on-going priorities for the Council and includes engaging with private landlords to increase access to private accommodation as a key mechanism for the Council to discharge its homeless duties, minimise over reliance on social housing and the need to utilise bed & breakfast.
- 3.2 Preventing and tackling homelessness in Monmouthshire has and continues to be extremely challenging. The key reasons are the volume of homeless demand is high, compared with the availability of social housing, general demand for social housing is high, accessing the private rented sector is difficult and market rents are high. The rural nature of Monmouthshire further compounds the situation.
- 3.3 The Council, therefore, on an on-going basis continues to identify opportunities to strengthen homeless prevention and to improve services. The Council's performance is broadly consistent with last year, although homeless prevention levels improved to 61% in 2017/18 from 58% the previous year. **See Appendix 1** for a summary overview.
- 3.4 The following are key steps, with the support of Welsh Government funding, that have been taken to strengthen prevention and increasing housing options.
 - Appointed a temporary accommodation assistant to increase the management capacity of temporary accommodation, which supports homeless prevention. The post also supports private landlords and the development of Monmouthshire Lettings (MLS) as a concept and brand, to increase access to private rented accommodation.
 - Further development of MLS including distinct branding and offering landlord incentives to encourage take up such as rent guarantees and 'golden hello's.'
 - Appointed a specialist Young Persons Accommodation Officer in January 2018 and subsequently acquired Supporting People funding from April 2018. In addition,

Supporting People funding has also been secured to appoint a specialist Universal Credit Support Officer. The additional funding increases the alignment of the Supporting People programme with homeless prevention.

- Expanded the financial inclusion support through the transfer of two part-time Benefit Advisors from Social Care into the Housing Options Team.
- Reviewed the approach to prison leavers and established a spot purchase arrangement with Cornerstone. A previous sub-regional arrangement was ineffective.
- The private leasing scheme has transferred back to the Council, which will help to increase budget and management control.

3.5 The following are key risks going forwards:

- On-going lack of social housing and the difficulty accessing private rented housing.
- Due to the level of leased accommodation and the withdrawal of the temporary accommodation management fee in April 2017, there is a projected financial pressure of approximately £148,000 by April 2019.
- Universal Credit Full Service commenced on 27th June 2018. A key feature is housing costs being paid directly to claimants. There is a risk some households may experience difficulties managing their rent, resulting in an increase in rent arrears and potential evictions.
- The Private Leasing Scheme, managed by Melin Homes until 7th June 2018 has declined in units significantly to 42 units. As a result the net stock of temporary accommodation has contracted significantly.
- Accommodate applicants in emergency situations, which can result in B & B use.
- There is a need for emergency hostel accommodation in the south and access to disabled accommodation is limited.
- Accommodating households with complex needs due to the lack of suitable accommodation and the need to safeguard both the applicant and other households.
- There is no certainty of Welsh Government funding being maintained in the future.

3.6 The Council has an action plan to help mitigate against the above risks. An overview of this is attached in **Appendix 2**

3.7 It is also appropriate that the Committee is aware that the Council has a statutory duty to establish a Homeless Strategy during 2018. This is being developed on a regional basis. A Gwent Strategy is due to be completed by December 2018. The expectation is that opportunities to improve the general service will emerge from the pending regional strategy and regional working, although this is unlikely to emerge until 2019.

4. REASONS:

4.1 The Council has a legal duty to prevent and respond to homelessness under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and the power to discharge this duty into the private rented sector.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 In addition to staffing, the main core service costs are B & B and expenditure to prevent homelessness. The core service was delivered within budget.

5.2 A decision by the Department of Works and Pensions to remove the temporary accommodation management subsidy from April 2017 (value approximately £383,230) and the 'replacement' funding by Welsh Government of additional Rate Support Grant (£148,000) has created for following budget pressure:

- An over-spend of £82,995 for 2017/18. This pressure was expected and has previously been factored into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The projection for 2018/19 is a £148,000 overspend, however, this is due to be offset by a one-off payment from Welsh Government. The payment of £228,000 from Welsh Government is expected imminently. The balance will be invested in additional prevention activity.

5. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 5.1 There are no negative implications associated with this report, although there are implications associated with the contraction of homeless accommodation. Homeless prevention and tackling homelessness supports both safeguarding and corporate parenting. **See Appendix 3.**

6. CONSULTEES: Chief Officer Enterprise; Cabinet Member for Enterprise; Head of Planning, Housing & Place-Shaping; Assistant Head of Finance

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- 7.1 This report is linked to previous report received by the Committee on 20th March 2018 in respect of Bed & Breakfast use, the Future of the Private Leasing Scheme on 23rd January 2018 and the Re-designation of Shared Housing on 8th February 2018

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Appendix 1

Overview of Performance 2017/18

In the event of homelessness, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires the Council to:

- Take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness (S.66)
- provide interim accommodation for applicants in priority need (S.68). The definition of priority need includes families with children and 16/17 year olds.
- help secure (this is not an absolute duty) accommodation and (S.73)
- a duty to secure accommodation for applicants in priority need (S.75)

In summary the current situation, reflects an overall improvement in both actual and projected performance and it is considered that that actions implemented are having an impact. The following is an overview of headline improvements:

- Context:
 - At 1st April 2018 3063 applicants on the Homesearch Housing Register
 - 1689 new applications were registered during 17/18
 - 405 households were re-housed during 17/18
- The current level of homeless demand has fallen. Contact from applicants requesting homeless assistance has fallen from 719 (16/17) to 533 (17/18). It is not known why the recent demand has dropped off. It is, though anticipated that this is a temporary dip and demand will increase again.
- Successful S66 case prevention work has increased. There has been an increase from 107 (58%) successful prevention cases (16/17) to 155 (61%) successful prevention cases (17/18). This the key indicator monitored by Welsh Government.
- Prevention casework being undertaken has increased. The number of prevention cases determined has increased from 183 (16/17) to **258** (17/18).
- The number of successful S73 homeless relief case work has increased. Of the cases where homelessness was relieved, there has been an increase from 108 (50%) successful prevention cases (16/17) to 113 (50%) successful prevention cases (17/18).
- The number of S75 homeless applications determined has positively decreased from 37 in 16/17 to 35 in 17/18.
- In 2017/18 the number of homeless applicants rehoused through the Housing Register was 74 and the number prevented through the Housing Register was 6. This is an increase on 16/17.

The following provides an overview where performance still needs to improve.

- There has been an increase in the number of applicants being placed with family/friends for up to 28 days due to lack of suitable accommodation available.
- Overall B & B use has increased. The number of single person or couples placements was 33, which is an increase from 13 and the number of families placed was 8, a reduction from 12.
- The average stay in B & B is 43.5 days for non-families and 12 days for families.

- B & B placements are generally out of the County although a new establishment has recently agreed to assist the Council within the County. However, vacancies can be difficult to access and the cost is higher than the out of County establishments.
- Now that the Private Leasing Scheme has been returned to MCC and with the success of Monmouthshire Lettings Scheme and homelessness prevention this should be significantly reduced in future.
- The level of temporary accommodation available to the Housing Options Team has declined due to the reduction in the private leasing scheme.

Appendix 2

Overview of Key Actions to Strengthen Homeless Prevention & Develop Alternative Housing Options

The following actions will help to mitigate against budget pressures and help to provide additional housing options, helping to provide alternatives to using B & B.

- 'Lodgings based' Supported housing models are being investigated. A presentation by Nightstop was provided to officers on 7th December 2017. Other models have been acquired for consideration in relation to the Supporting People programme.
- A Young Persons Accommodation Officer was appointed in January 2018, providing a dedicated service for young people. This is being funded through the Supporting People Programme from April 2018.
- Acquire family 'hostel' type premises for the South of the County. The Council was offered a property by a housing association prior to Christmas, but this has fallen through. There is, however, a subsequent offer to buy a property for the Council to use as a family hostel in the south.
- Funding has been acquired from WG grant to temporarily offer 'Golden Hellos' for the Monmouthshire Lettings service. This ceases at the end of March 2019.
- Two part-time benefits staff have transferred from Social Care. This has enabled the Housing Options Function of Financial Inclusion to be strengthened.
- A small Homeless Prevention Reserve has been created to offer private landlords rent guarantees.
- The monitoring of the Housing Register is an on-going priority to ensure the Register works for the Council in respect of homelessness and prevention.
- Housing Options staff have met with Tai Calon Housing Association in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. Tai Calon from time to time, such as in locations close to Monmouthshire, may have vacancies that the Council may be able to utilise for homeless households. This as yet hasn't facilitated any opportunities.
- Discussions have been undertaken with a local housing association about both surplus non-viable stock that may be disposed of and alternative models, the latter of which perhaps could be funded through the Welsh Government Innovative Housing Fund. No proposals have emerged as yet
- A pilot supported lodgings proposal is currently being developed with a housing support provider.
- The 'Housing First' model is being investigated.
- Discussions are on-going with a group of Monmouth Churches who are interested in providing a night-shelter for rough sleepers during the winter. Discussions about the churches supporting the said supported lodgings are also being discussed.

- Development of a joint Regional Homeless Strategy with other Gwent Council's. It is hoped that regional solutions will emerge that may support Monmouthshire needs,
- On-going development and promotion of Monmouthshire Lettings. 16 properties acquired to date.
- The Council has withdrawn from a sub-regional Prison Prep Officer scheme that aimed to provide a dedicated and early intervention service for prison leavers. The Council has now signed up to a service provided by Cornerstone in Caerphilly.
- Introduce Positive Pathways for Young People – an early intervention protocol to identify young people at risk of becoming homelessness and developing a housing pathway accordingly to minimise the risk.
- Liaise with housing associations in respect of accessing existing stock.
- A Supporting People and Homeless Strategic Planning group has been established. The aim of this is to more closely align the Supporting People Programme and on-going commissioning with homeless prevention and to improve the evidence base.
- Temporarily making a Housing Options Team Manager 0.2 wte job share to strengthen management and supervision.