

SUBJECT: PETITION TO REINSTATE MONMOUTH NIGHT SHELTER AT MONMOUTH MARKET HALL UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF CHURCHES IN MONMOUTH
MEETING: CABINET
DATE: 6TH NOVEMBER 2024
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: MONMOUTH

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider a petition referred to Cabinet from a meeting of Council and received from Churches of Monmouth requesting the Council to facilitate the reinstatement of a homeless night shelter using Monmouth Market Hall, under the management of Monmouth Churches. **(See Appendix 1).**

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To consider the petition referred to at **Appendix 1.**
- 2.2 To agree to the action proposed by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development & Deputy Leader, to establish how the Council could work together with Churches in Monmouth to find suitable accommodation and provide support to homeless people in Monmouth.
- 2.3 To be report back to the Place Scrutiny Committee in respect of the action taken.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The petition was received by Place Scrutiny Committee on 11th July 2024 and in accordance with the Council's petition scheme it was referred to Full Council where it was considered on 19th September 2024.
- 3.2 As the action requested by the petition related to the exercise of executive functions, members referred the petition to a meeting of Cabinet for consideration.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Churches in Monmouth has operated a Housing Group for several years. The group recognises the issue of both housing and housing support needs in Monmouth together with the lack of affordable housing in Monmouth. The Group, therefore, has and continues to be, very active in supporting vulnerable and/or homeless households, including providing assistance to rough sleepers. The Group advocates on behalf of individuals and often liaises with the Housing Options Team. The Council very much welcomes and values the role the Group.
- 4.2 Due to the lack of affordable housing and incidents of rough sleeping, the Group considers there is a need for a night shelter in Monmouth to support any arising incidents of rough sleeping. The Group wishes to directly deliver such provision.
- 4.3 The Council subsequently received a Petition in March 2024, from Churches in Monmouth, requesting the Council to enable the group to reinstate and manage a night shelter in Monmouth. **See Appendix 1.** The Council has been requested to make available the Monmouth Market Hall to the Group for this purpose. The Petition is

sponsored and supported by Councillor Louise Brown and was considered by the Place Scrutiny Committee on 11th July 2024 and Full Council on 19th September 2024. Full Council passed a motion that the Petition should be referred to Cabinet.

- 4.4 Churches in Monmouth have previously provided winter night shelter provision in Monmouth. The Group has previously received practical and financial support from the Council in this regard. Initially, the Group utilised their own premises and for the most recent night shelter arrangement in 2020, the Council made available the vacant Monmouth Market Hall. This arrangement was provided under the emergency Covid-19 public health measures, to ensure nobody had to sleep rough during the pandemic. The arrangement ended when a prospective letting of the Market Hall office space had been identified, although due to various reasons, the anticipated letting did not materialise.
- 4.5 Since being last used as a night-shelter, the Council's Estates Service has continued to actively market Monmouth Market Hall for letting. Earlier in the year, the Council identified a new prospective tenant for the vacant office space and has since signed up to a lease agreement. As a result, Monmouth Market Hall is no longer available for any other use. Churches in Monmouth have been made aware of this letting.
- 4.6 Also of relevance, since the last night-shelter provision, Welsh Government homeless policy has changed significantly. Welsh Government has required local authorities to transform homeless services to a Rapid Rehousing approach for homelessness to be 'rare, brief and unrepeated.' Core aims of Rapid Rehousing are to prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping. A further core aim is when people need temporary accommodation, it is of a high standard. Ideally self-contained. Where prevention is not possible or appropriate, stable housing and support should be provided through a range of models, thereby, reducing the dependency on emergency housing.
- 4.7 To meet the requirements of Welsh Government guidance, the Council produced a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, which was approved by [Cabinet on 5th April 2023](#). The Priorities of the Plan are:
- Priority 1 - Prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
 - Priority 2 - Increase the supply of affordable and settled accommodation.
 - Priority 3 - Provide timely and effective support to sustain accommodation.
 - Priority 4 - Maximising resources and benefits through well connected partnerships
- 4.8 Welsh Government's Rapid Rehousing Guidance to local authorities is that the use of floor space for homeless purposes is not acceptable and Welsh Governments recent consultation of the 'White Paper on Ending Homelessness' intends to legislate against the use of shared sleeping space. **See Paragraph 7.**
- 4.9 Furthermore, Welsh Government has legislated in respect of rough sleepers. Homeless legislation has increased the responsibilities of local authorities by making Rough Sleeping a Priority Need category, meaning that the Council has a duty to provide interim accommodation whilst assessing their application, and a duty to provide ongoing to temporary accommodation, which would be subject to further tests such as intentionality or local connection.
- 4.10 As a result of the change in legislation and the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, the Council seeks to ensure that no-one who is eligible for housing assistance has a need to sleep rough . In addition to the responsibility to reduce rough sleeping,

service changes to increase homeless and support provision that will directly and indirectly benefit rough sleepers include:

- The availability of assertive outreach to identify and support rough sleepers. Currently delivered by Llamau;
- The introduction of Housing First supported accommodation for those homeless who have experienced chronic health and social care needs;
- The Council's portfolio of temporary accommodation has been increased, with a particular focus on single persons accommodation through the Monmouthshire Lettings Service. Identifying more accommodation, particularly in the Monmouth area is a priority.
- The availability of drug and alcohol support. Currently delivered by Gwent Drug & Alcohol Service.
- More funds are available to prevent homelessness through Welsh Government's Discretionary Homeless Prevention Grant and
- The establishment of the multi-agency Housing Intervention Panel to consider and identify solutions to complex cases.
- Acquiring temporary homeless accommodation or identifying opportunities to repurpose Council owned properties for homeless use.
- A Landlords Forum has been re-established for Monmouthshire to further encourage and support landlords to make available their accommodation.
- Continuing to support those people currently in accommodation who may be at risk of eviction due to difficulty maintaining the terms of their contract and, therefore, the possibility of not sustaining their occupation. E.g. through Housing Support, facilitating interventions of other support agencies, temporary accommodation management decisions etc.

4.11 The Council is committed to further improving and extending homeless provision and build on above, consideration is, therefore, also being given to:

- Expanding the capacity of the Assertive Outreach service;
- Expanding the capacity of the Housing First support service;
- Continuing to identify additional temporary and permanent single persons accommodation, particularly in Monmouth, through leasing (through the Housing Options Team's Monmouthshire Lettings initiative) and acquisitions (through the Council and local housing associations) of single persons accommodation, but prioritising Monmouth;
- Reviewing arrangements between the Council and Churches in Monmouth to strengthen the support available for vulnerable and homeless people and identify additional accommodation.
- Hold a Landlords Forum in Monmouth in the Spring.

4.12 Unfortunately there may still be instances of rough sleeping due to individuals losing their homeless duties and/or being ineligible for further assistance. For example, due to having lost temporary accommodation due to eviction, refusal of suitable offers of temporary/permanent accommodation, not having a local connection to Monmouthshire and non-engagement.

5. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

5.1 No negative implications have been identified with this proposal. **See Appendix 2.**

6. OPTIONS APPRAISAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1 An analysis of two options have been considered in Table One below, Option One is the preferred option.

Table One: Options Appraisal

Option	Benefit	Risk
<p>Option 1: The <u>recommended option</u> is to establish how the Council can work effectively with Churches in Monmouth to find suitable accommodation and provide support to homeless people in Monmouth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churches in Monmouth and the Council have a shared vision for homelessness and supporting vulnerable people • The role of Churches in Monmouth can potentially complement existing support arrangements in Monmouth. Thereby, increasing resources. • The proposal aligns with the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and the priority - Maximising resources and benefits through well connected partnerships • It will help to prevent more homelessness • There is potential to identify new landlords and additional accommodation • It will help increase awareness about homelessness in Monmouth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any arrangements to support individuals need to be with their consent. • Churches in Monmouth may not agree with or wish to align themselves with the Council's approach to homeless and supporting vulnerable people.
<p>Option 2 – not to work with Churches in Monmouth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no benefits to this option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There may be reputational risks associated with this option. • Vulnerable and homeless residents of Monmouth may not benefit from the potential complementary support that Churches in Monmouth may be able to provide.

7. REASONS

7.1 The Council has homeless responsibilities under Part 2 Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The Council is also expected to implement Welsh Government Rapid Rehousing Guidance.

7.2 Welsh Government's Rapid Rehousing: Guidance. How we will help those who experience homelessness find settled housing faster. First published: 24 August 2022
Last updated: 24 August 2022 specifically states:

What are the standards for temporary accommodation/ settled homes?

The pandemic has highlighted the need to ensure people are able to access to suitable accommodation of a standard that maintains a sense of dignity and respect. We have been clear that temporary accommodation is self-contained and as a minimum has en-suite facilities. Floor space will continue to not be tolerated under any circumstances.

- 7.3 Also, the Welsh Government Consultation on the White Paper on Ending Homelessness states and is setting out the intentions of:

Prohibiting shared sleeping space

502. *Shared sleeping space is currently permitted (within the prescribed timeframes) in basic and higher standard temporary accommodation.*

We understand shared sleeping space is rarely used but we propose to make clear in legislation, shared sleeping space is never permitted, regardless of the temporary or emergency nature of accommodation.

- 7.4 Working with Churches in Monmouth contributes to the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and the priority - Maximising resources and benefits through well connected partnerships.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications with this report. Should the proposed collaboration be successful with Churches in Monmouth, there could potentially be financial and cost avoidance benefits to the Council through increased homeless prevention and reduced use of Bed and Breakfast through identifying alternative accommodation and new landlords.

- 8.2 Any possible arising expenditure that may need to be incurred to prevent homelessness, such as facilitating access to private rented accommodation, would be funded from the Welsh Governments Discretionary Homeless Prevention Grant.

9. CONSULTEES

- 9.1 Cabinet; Senior Leadership Team; Head of Rural Development, Housing & Partnerships; Acting Head of Landlord Services; Housing Options Team Manager.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Welsh Government's Rapid Rehousing: Guidance - How we will help those who experience homelessness find settled housing faster. First published: 24 August 2022 Last updated: 24 August 2022

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