

SUBJECT:	Homelessness & Prevention – Bed & Breakfast Use
MEETING:	Joint Adult & Childrens Select Committee
DATE:	20th March 2018
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	All

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Council's use of Bed & Breakfast (B & B) accommodation in respect of the Council's delivery of its homeless service and to consider the option of leaving units of homeless accommodation vacant for emergencies, specifically for families with children or for 16/17 year olds.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To consider the circumstances in which the Council is needing to use B & B accommodation for homeless purposes and the standard of service that is being provided.
- 2.2 To consider the benefits and viability of keeping accommodation vacant for contingency and emergency purposes.
- 2.3 To consider the options for avoiding the use of B & B
- 2.4 Establish a B & B policy for future consideration by the Committee

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, the Council has a duty to respond to homelessness. The focus of the Act is homeless prevention. However, where homelessness cannot be prevented the Council has other duties, including accommodation duties. In the event of homelessness, the Act requires the Council to:
- 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)
- 3.2 The Council has a range of accommodation that is used to discharge these duties, together with the duty to prevent homelessness. **See Appendix 1.** Nevertheless, accessing an adequate supply of this accommodation is an on-going challenge for the Council. Not only is homeless accommodation itself in short supply, but it is a small part of the wider Monmouthshire housing market, which also has an under-supply of affordable accommodation. The rural nature of the County further compounds the situation. **Appendix 2** provides a more detailed overview.
- 3.3 The challenge of providing homeless accommodation includes only having one family hostel (which is in Monmouth); the private leasing scheme has contracted over recent years; private sector accommodation is difficult to access (eg unaffordable or landlords won't accept homeless applicants); MCC accommodation is typically at capacity and there is a need to have regard to the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation)

(Wales) Order 2015, safeguarding and community safety issues. Although the hostel operates as emergency family accommodation, no accommodation is kept vacant for contingency or emergency purposes due to the day to day demand.

- 3.3 Should it not be possible to prevent homelessness and placements are necessary, every effort is made to place households in the most suitable type of accommodation and suitably located. The views and support of other professionals and agencies, such as public protection, social workers, health visitors etc will be considered to inform accommodation placements. On occasions the use of B & B is necessary. This, however, is an absolute last resort. B & B for any applicant is only used for an applicant if no other accommodation can be sourced or if the applicant themselves is deemed to pose a risk to other households or applicants. The latter is not uncommonly identified through risk assessment procedures.
- 3.4 As at the end of February 18, 39 B & B placements had been necessary. **Appendix 3** provides an overview of the placements to date for 2017/18. This is an increase from 2016/17.
- 3.5 It has been an on-going priority in respect of the Council's homeless service to continually seek to strengthen homeless prevention and to identify additional forms of accommodation. It is proposed that services continue to be reviewed on an on-going basis. **Appendix 4** provides an overview of proposed current key actions, some of which are in progress.
- 3.7 In this context, this report seeks to consider the option of keeping accommodation vacant for emergency purposes and with particular regard to families with children or young people 16/17.
- 3.8 Furthermore, at present the Council doesn't have a policy that covers the use of B & B. It is considered that it is appropriate to establish a policy that creates a working framework that sets the expectations of the Council and a basis for monitoring against.

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 4.1 The following options are available: which are fully evaluated in **Appendix 5**, are available:

- **Option 1** – Continue with the status quo and make no changes.
- **Option 2** – Leave a unit(s) of existing accommodation vacant (eg a room in the hostel, room in shared housing) as a contingency. This will have cost implications, mainly through loss of income. If this were to apply to accommodation managed by partners, the Council would have to cover the cost of any rental charges.
- **Option 3** - Seek to introduce further options that strengthens homeless prevention and introduce new accommodation options, particularly a supported lodgings scheme. Such schemes, however, will not provide provision for applicants assessed as unsuitable through risk assessment processes.

5. OPTIONS EVALUATION

- 5.1 Additional evaluation over and above that listed above is detailed in **Appendix 1**.

4. REASONS:

4.1 The Council has a legal duty to prevent and respond to homelessness under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 There are cost implications to the Council to placing households in B & B. The gross expenditure to Month 11 was £18,259. A level of this will be offset by Housing Benefit payments made directly to the Council.

5.2 There will be cost implications associated with keeping any units of accommodation vacant through lost rental income. For a unit of hostel or shared housing the loss of income will be over £6,000.

6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

6.1 The proposal to develop new measures to identify new measures to strengthen homelessness prevention and seek to introduce new accommodation options. Should the Council need to reduce the level of private leasing or phase out the PLS, this will impact negative impacts on homeless applicants in Monmouthshire. **See Appendix 6.**

7. SAFEGUARDING & CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS:

7.1 The provision of accommodation for any homelessness or to prevent homelessness supports both safeguarding and corporate parenting

7.2 A risk assessment procedure is undertaken prior to any B & B placement, which both considers the safeguarding of the applicant themselves or the safeguarding of other applicants/residents. **See Appendix 7.**

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

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS: Housing (Wales) Act 2014; Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness – Welsh Government, March 2016; The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2015.

10. AUTHOR: Ian Bakewell, Housing & Communities Manager

11. CONTACT DETAILS: E-mail: ianbakewell@monmouthshire.gov.uk Telephone: 01633 644479

Appendix 1

Housing Options Team - Accommodation Overview

The current demand for homeless demand is summarised as follows:

The Council received 719 contacts in 16/17 and 311 by Q3 of 17/18 (417 contacts are projected by the end of the 17/18) about homelessness and determined the following applications:

	15/16	16/17	17/18 Q3
○ S.66 (at risk of becoming homeless within 58 days)	248	183	180
○ S.73 (actually homeless)	95	217	160
○ S.75 (actually homeless)	37	37	24
○ Total	380	337	344

The following is the accommodation resource available to the Council for homelessness:

- MCC Family Hostel, Monmouth - 5 units of emergency family accommodation
- MCC Single persons Shared Housing, Countywide – 60 units (3 further units pending) of single persons accommodation
- MCC Private Leased Property – 1 unit of family accommodation
- MCC Low Cost Home-Ownership Property – 1 unit of family accommodation
- Melin Private Leasing Scheme – 56 units of family accommodation

Private leasing made the following contribution:

Year	Total number of Lets	No of Lets to Discharge Homeless Duty (Prevention)	No of Lets as Temporary Accommodation
2015/16	42	32	10
2016/17	38	21	17
2017/18 (to December 2017)	23	10	13
Total Lets	103		

- 53%, 59% and 66% of S.66 applications have been successfully prevented in Q1, Q2 and Q3 respectively. (16/17 performance was 58%). This would have included prevention through the private leasing scheme.
- Without the private leasing scheme (and shared housing), prevention performance will have been less with more people becoming homeless and possibly needing to be accommodated in B&B.
- 50%, 42% and 70% of S.73 were successfully relieved of homelessness in Q1, Q2 and Q3 respectively. (16/17 performance was 50%). This would have included the relief of homelessness utilising the private leasing scheme.

Again without the private leasing scheme, performance would have been less and more people would have remained homeless.

In the context of the lack of social housing, the private leasing scheme, therefore, plays a critical and necessary role for the Council in providing an alternative housing option to social housing, to prevent homelessness or rehouse homeless families in Monmouthshire and helps to avoid the use of B & B.

- Solas Young Persons Accommodation, Abergavenny & Chepstow – 21 units of accommodation for 16-24 year olds
- MCC Monmouthshire Lettings Service – 12 units (1 further unit pending) of family accommodation

Seeking to access the private rented sector and identify new opportunities is an on-going priority of the Housing Options Team in order to meet statutory duties. In this context, officers regularly engage and negotiate with private landlords to rehouse clients. This engagement often focuses on supporting individual landlords and providing assurances. This established practice has, therefore, been formalised, 'packaged and branded' into the development of Monmouthshire Lettings, which Cabinet adopted in March 2017.

Monmouthshire Lettings seeks to put the community at the centre of its core business of providing long-term affordable properties to rent, but delivered through a commercial approach that affords the opportunity to generate income to support long-term sustainability.

The service has been designed to encourage and attract private landlords to offer up their properties to let at affordable rents and to assist households (initially these will be households at risk of or actually homeless) to find suitable and affordable long term homes in the private rented sector.

The service has been developed to contribute to a number of key drivers including:

- The Council meeting its statutory responsibilities relating to the Housing (Wales) Act 2014
- The Council's Future Monmouthshire policy

- The on-going aim to improve homeless prevention performance and facilitate additional options
- Reduce the need to use Bed & breakfast

The proposal seeks to build on the existing and established approach and practice of the Council's Housing Options Team of working with private landlords. The proposal effectively brands and packages existing landlord services together with the provision of additional services.

Although the intention is for the proposed service to be initially offered free of charge, subject to the success of Monmouthshire Lettings, the medium term plan is to consider the possibility of introduce a competitive charge, thereby, helping to generate income for the Council.

Private leasing is regarded to be part of the Monmouthshire Lettings offer to private Landlords.

As at 20th February 2018, 11 properties have been acquired and 2 properties are currently being negotiated. This is an increase from the eight properties at 2nd January 2018.

The Council has acquired Welsh Government funding and is utilising this to encourage new landlords to join the scheme through a financial incentive of a 'Golden Hello.' In addition the Council can also offer a rent guarantee.

- B & B generally in Newport and Abertillery. There is currently very little provision in Monmouthshire due to the buoyant tourist trade.
- Private sector housing
 - The Council maintains a homeless prevention fund and will support applicants to access private sector accommodation through financial assistance. For example, assistance with letting agency fees; deposits; rent in advance, perhaps paying off arrears; financial incentives to landlords etc
- Other eg Cyfannol refuge, MIND supported housing, Bron Afon Housing Association – this is ad-hoc accommodation
- Social housing stock

Appendix 2

Other Accommodation Availability in Monmouthshire

• **Social Housing**

The main source of accommodation for low income and vulnerable households in Monmouthshire is social housing through Monmouthshire, Charter and Melin Housing Associations. The existing supply, however, is insufficient to meet the demand of the different strands of housing need in the County, including homelessness. The Council has a statutory duty through the Housing Register to provide 'Reasonable Preference' and 'Additional Reasonable Preference' to certain groups. For example, households with medical conditions. This means it would be illegal for the Council, should it wish to do so, offer all vacant accommodation to homeless applicants. The following provides an overview of the situation at April 2017 and Quarter 2 updates.

- At the end of February 2018 there were 2,886 live housing applications on the Homesearch register. At the end of September 2017 there were 3,159 live applications.
- In the 16/17 financial year there were 438 social housing allocations, 133 of which were in relation to older persons accommodation (the number of older people who typically need homeless assistance is very small).
- 76 homeless households have been rehoused through the Housing Register.

• **Accommodation Availability – Private Sector Housing**

As previously mentioned the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has provided the Council with the power to discharge homeless related duties utilising the private rented sector. Due to the lack of social housing stock, it is a priority for the Council to seek opportunities to re-house applicants using private sector accommodation.

Accessing private sector housing in Monmouthshire, however, is an ongoing challenge for both the Council and low income households for a number of reasons. This includes:

- The private sector housing market is buoyant in Monmouthshire and demand is high. High market rents, therefore, pose a challenge to the Council due to the typically large discrepancy between market rents and the Local Housing Allowance (the maximum housing benefit that will be paid out on a particular property). Landlords will achieve a far better return from their investment by letting their property at a market rent rather than at Local Housing Allowance levels.
- This means that with the majority of homeless applications, there is typically a shortfall between housing benefit levels and the actual rent creating an affordability issue for applicants or a funding issue for the Council.
- Accessing private sector accommodation can be expensive. Landlords or agents are increasing asking for six weeks rent in advance and a deposit equivalent to six weeks rent. Where lettings agencies are involved, administration fees are payable, including tenancy renewal fees.
- Landlords often regard the Council's client group to be a risk in terms of the rent being paid and damage arising to properties. Generally an incorrect and unfair perception.
- Many landlords refuse to accept housing benefit

- Many landlords refuse to utilise the Pobl Bond Scheme (which is Welsh Government funded) as a 'paper bond' can be seen as unattractive and there is a perception that the scheme may not pay out. The current position is that the number of Bonds being provided by the Pobl Bond scheme to enable applicants to access the private rented sector is minimal.
- Many landlords require a rent guarantor which can't be facilitated by applicants. The Council's ability to assist with rent guarantees is very limited, although a Homeless Reserve was established in 2017 to facilitate a small level of provision.
- Applicants themselves often aspire to acquire social housing rather than private rented, which can be encouraged by support agencies.

Due to the difficulty of the Council and low income households accessing the private rented sector, the private leasing scheme, therefore, has a very important role. Welsh Government expects the Council to maximise the use of the private rented sector.

Appendix 3

Overview of Bed & Breakfast Placements 2018/19

Placements in B & B were generally due to no homeless accommodation being vacant at the time but also placement was also necessary for other reasons such as suitability, or late presentations.

H'hold Type	Reason for Placement	Nights	Move On
Single	Domestic abuse. No shared housing vacancy	3	Shared housing
Single	Relationship breakdown. Mental health issues. Too vulnerable for shared housing	4	Hospital
Single	Parent asked to leave. Mental health issues. Too vulnerable for shared housing	4	Specialist accommodation
Single	Property closure. Health issues. No shared housing vacancy	3	Not known
Single	Relationship breakdown. Mental health issues. No vacancy in shared housing	16	Refused temp accomm
Single	Property closure. Mental health issues. No vacancy in shared housing	12	Shared housing
Single	Evicted from shared housing. Mental health issues	3	Police custody
Single	Property closure. Mental health issues	26	Not known
Single	Friend asked to leave. Mental health issues. Late afternoon presentation	1	Shared housing
Single	No fixed abode. Mental health issues. Shared not suitable	17	Returned home
Single	Evicted from Young Persons Accommodation. Mental health issues. Shared not suitable	2	Not known
Single	Prison Leaver. Health issues. Shared not suitable	48	Private leasing
Single	No fixed abode, mental health issues. Shared not suitable	14	Voluntarily left
Single	Fleeing domestic abuse. Shared not suitable	16	Hospital
Single	Pregnant. Shared no suitable	7	Hospital
Single	Pregnant. Shared not suitable	17	Voluntarily left

Single	Asked to leave friends, mental health issues. Late afternoon presentation.	1	Shared housing
Single	Relationship breakdown. Mental health. Shared not suitable	4	Returned home
Single	Evicted from Young Persons accommodation. Mental health issues. Shared not suitable	43	Voluntarily left
Single	Mental health	12	Evicted from B & B.
Single	Evicted for breach of tenancy, mental health issues	1	Shared housing
Single	Evicted, health issues	1	Shared housing
Single	Mental health issues	3	Voluntarily left
Single	Severe weather policy	6	End of eligibility
Single	No fixed abode, mental health issues	In occupation	
Single	Prison leaver, mental health. Shared not suitable	In occupation	
Single	Evicted from supported housing, mental health issues	In occupation	
Single	Evicted from supported housing, mental health issues	In occupation	
Sub-Total – 29			
16/17 year old	Evicted from Young Persons accommodation, 16/17 years of age	59	Found own accomm
Sub-Total 1			
Couple + 1	Asked to leave by family	4	Hostel
Couple + 1	Asked to leave by family	10	Parents until social vacancy
Single + 4	Loss of private rented	18	Moved to hostel
Couple + 1	Family can no longer accommodate	24	
Single + 2	Relationship breakdown	3	Voluntarily left
Couple + 1	Loss of private rented	8	Moved to friends
Single + 2	Fleeing threat of violence	7	
Single + 2	Asked to leave friends	32	Private leasing
Single + 1	Fleeing domestic abuse	1	Private leasing
Sub-Total 9			

Appendix 4

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

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.
- Discussions are on-going about scope to strengthen homeless prevention utilising the Supporting People programme, as expected by Welsh Government. It is anticipated that the programme will fund a recently appointed Young Persons Accommodation Officer, who provides a dedicated homeless prevention role for young people.
- 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 2018.
- Again through WG grant funding, the Council has appointed a Young Person Accommodation Officer from January 2018 to provide a dedicated resource in respect of young people hopefully increase prevention for young people. The proposal is that this post will be funded from Supporting People after April 18. This will also support Social Services and Childrens Services.
- 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 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 a possible lodgings based supported housing model 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. 12 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.

Appendix 5

Evaluation Criteria – Cabinet, Individual Cabinet Member Decisions & Council

Title of Report:	Homelessness & Prevention – B & B Use
Date decision was made:	
Report Author:	Ian Bakewell

What will happen as a result of this decision being approved by Cabinet or Council?

The proposed outcome is that the Council agrees to consider a range of options for strengthening homeless prevention and seeking to introduce additional housing options that reduces B & B use.

The proposal will create additional prevention and accommodation options eg supported lodgings; additional hostel provision in the south, which will support the reduced use of B & B

12 month appraisal

What benchmarks and/or criteria will you use to determine whether the decision has been successfully implemented?

The following benchmarks will be used to assess whether the decision has had a positive or negative effect:

- Requests/demand for homeless assistance
- Level of successful homeless prevention
- No. of B & B placements
- Average stay in B & B
- No. of families placed in B & B
- No. of 16/17 year olds placed in B & B
- The cost of B & B provision

12 month appraisal

What is the estimate cost of implementing this decision or, if the decision is designed to save money, what is the proposed saving that the decision will achieve?

No budget savings will be achieved by implementing this decision.

At this stage it is difficult to estimate the cost of delivering the proposed actions. These will be identified and considered as individual initiatives are developed.

12 month appraisal

Any other comments

