

Appendix D

Housing & Communities Monmouthshire County Council

Homeless Transition Plan February 2021

1. Have a move-on protocol in place with rapid re-housing at its heart

Current Situation

It is a requirement of Welsh Government, as per the Phase 2 Planning Guidance for Homelessness and Housing Related Support, for the Council to have a 'move-on protocol with rapid re-housing at its heart' for re-housing those in emergency/temporary homeless accommodation into suitable permanent accommodation.

At present the Council does not have a move-on protocol per se, although the Homesearch Housing Register policy facilitates the re-housing of homeless households through the use of quotas.

It is proposed to request the Homesearch partners to sign up to the draft protocol below, which is currently being consulted upon:

The Council is required to minimise the number of placement moves for any individual or family that experiences homeless. Settled permanent accommodation following a short period of time in emergency accommodation is the desire for all partners when working together to eradicate homelessness and promote sustainable tenancies.

MCC will work closely with the Monmouthshire Housing Partnership to facilitate adequate availability of social housing stock through local housing associations to help meet local homeless need through the flexible quota arrangement within the existing Monmouthshire Homesearch Housing Allocation Policy. The Council is committed to RSL's having the guarantee of immediate Intensive Resettlement Housing Support for those needing to be accommodated via the homeless route. In the short-term this will be provided through an interim reconfigured Housing Support Grant funded service provided by Pobl.

Should this support not be available this may prevent the Council from moving some applicants on to permanent accommodation.

On a homeless determination and a 2B Banding status assessment under the Homesearch Allocation Policy, Housing Options Officers will work closely with Homesearch Officers to ensure registration of housing applications and minimise delays in processing applications. The allocated Support Worker will be involved by providing individual support plans to illustrate the intensity of support to be delivered, as well as the individual's commitment to working towards a successful tenancy.

Any barriers to an offer of accommodation, such as previous rent arrears, will be negotiated by this triage, and if necessary, the Council will utilise the Homeless Prevention Fund to reduce/refund arrears. Any support issues such as previous behaviour or substance misuse issues which could inhibit an offer being successful, will be addressed via the support plan and evidenced by the involvement of the Substance Misuse Assertive Outreach Worker (also part of MCC bid), and Mental Health services.

To further support individual clients, the Council or support providers will refer clients into the multi-agency Housing Intervention Panel to consider and identify solutions. The Council, housing associations and support providers are committed to both referring clients and attending meetings.

As the Temporary Accommodation and Resettlement Support Service are delivered through the same Providers, there will be a seamless move with support during the resettlement process. High-intensity flexible, client-led support will be provided for between 12 to 16 weeks,

with ongoing support being provided via the RSL or generic floating support service after this period.

To help with the implementation of the above, the Council has established an interim arrangement with a Housing Support Provider to provide Re-settlement Support to facilitate move on to permanent accommodation. The interim arrangement is due to be formally established with effect from April 2021 following a review of the main Housing Support Programme to create the necessary funding capacity. Four existing projects have been re-modelled to provide to provide a Temporary Accommodation and Re-Settlement Service and a Tenancy Support Team.

Recommendation

- To establish and agree a Move-On Protocol between the Council and Homeseach partners.
- To underpin the proposed Move-On Protocol, formalise the existing interim Temporary Accommodation, Re-Settlement and Tenancy Support to become a contracted service within the Council's Housing Support Programme.
- To monitor the Protocol on an on-going basis

2. Improve the quality and reduce the dependency on emergency/ temporary accommodation solutions

Current Situation

As at 31st December 2020 there were 123 households in temporary accommodation. This included 66 households in B & B, of which 56 were single people. (This is an increase from 30th October 2020 when there were 56, mainly single people accommodated in B & B).

In addition the Council's other homeless accommodation (e.g. shared, private leasing and managed accommodation) is occupied at capacity. The historical reliance on Generic Floating Housing Support has highlighted the deficiencies both, in the diversity and range of the Councils temporary accommodation together with the type of housing support provision available.

There is a need, therefore, for the Council to increase the diversity and range of temporary accommodation including additional supported housing with dedicated and specialist support.

The dispersed nature of Monmouthshire also impacts on the accessibility to this accommodation. Often there is a need to displace applicants from their home communities in order to access temporary accommodation.

Furthermore, Welsh Government policy (Annex D) has now determined minimum accommodations standards for Phase 2 onwards. In summary these are:

- Minimum standards – e.g. self-contained and suitable for independent living; appropriate location
- Homes should be of high quality, innovative and sustainable
- Homes should be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the occupants
- Homes should be safe and secure.

Welsh Government are also advising that they no longer expect local authorities to use night-shelter type accommodation. This has implications for the Council as there has been a need to use vacant office space for temporary accommodation, although it has been possible to cease this practice.

There is a need to assess the Council's accommodation against these standards.

The following are types of accommodation are needed in Monmouthshire:

- **Emergency Family Accommodation**

Current Situation

At present the Council's only emergency family accommodation is a 5 bedroomed shared emergency accommodation situated in Monmouth. (This is temporarily being used as multiple needs accommodation and it is proposed to that the Council continue to with this arrangement).

In Caldicot, a 6 person property was purchased in 2019 by Monmouthshire Housing on behalf of the Council for use as emergency shared family accommodation. The property hasn't come into use as yet due to the need to finalise planning related requirements, but the Council's Planning Committee has recently approved a Management Plan. It is expected that the property will be available for letting in the next few months.

Further opportunities to provide emergency family accommodation through the Social Housing Grant Programme are also being explored and a newly re-furbished 4 unit scheme of self-contained accommodation is due to shortly become available in Caldicot.

Due to using the Council emergency family accommodation for Multiple Needs, the priority is to identify self-contained family accommodation to cover the North of Monmouthshire and to complement the accommodation secured in the south. A provisional site has been identified as part of the Social Housing Grant programme and a proposal is being developed with a housing association partner. *Should this option not progress for whatever reason there will be a need to continue to identify alternative options for emergency self-contained accommodation, particularly through the Council's development programme.*

Recommendations

- To cease using the emergency shared accommodation in Monmouth for families and utilise for an alternative homeless purpose e.g. Multiple Needs accommodation.
- Identify emergency self-contained family accommodation for the North of Monmouthshire
- **Self-Contained Temporary Family Accommodation**

Current Situation

The Council currently has a portfolio of family accommodation, which is made up of:

- Private leased units x 49 (which includes a number of RSL properties)
- However, 1 is rolling on during COVID and is likely to end, 2 terminate on 31st December 2020, 2 terminating on 30th September 2020 and 1 is on a monthly rolling lease with an RSL.
- Managed units (on behalf of private landlords) x 33
- MCC low cost home ownership unit x 1

Subject to landlord approval and financial sustainability, the aim is to continue with the existing portfolio and proactively seek to identify additional properties using the Monmouthshire Lettings Service branding.

The Council is presently in discussion in respect of a five unit scheme that would provide one units of self-contained family accommodation. This is due to be financially supported through the Council's Budget Mandate process 2021/22.

Running alongside recruiting private landlords there is also a proposal to target private sector tenants who may be starting to experience problems with sustaining their accommodation but as yet may not have reached out to the Council for assistance. Perhaps due to rent arrears, unemployment, debt etc. Initial contact has been made with a number of local letting agencies.

Recommendation

- Under the Monmouthshire Lettings branding, continue to engage with private landlords and promote landlord incentives, to seek to identify private sector accommodation. This will be funded through existing resources

- Seek to engage with private sector tenants and/or landlords who may be experiencing as an approach to providing any early interventions and to minimise the possibility of tenants presenting as homeless.

- **Housing First**
Current Situation

There is a need for a Housing First housing scheme in Monmouthshire to provide homeless people with chronic health & social care needs a stable home from which to rebuild their lives together with intensive, person-centred, holistic support that is open-ended. During 2020 the Council secured Phase 2 Homeless Grant Funding from Welsh Government to commence a Monmouthshire scheme in partnership with Pobl, which is an extension of the Housing First scheme in Newport.

Pobl co-ordinate the scheme and will use their own stock to provide accommodation but also will work in partnership with Monmouthshire Housing and Melin Homes,

To date the Housing First scheme has accommodated two individuals. There are a further six people who need the assistance of the scheme.

There is a cost of £36,000 p.a. to continue the scheme after 1st April 2021. It is proposed this will be funded from the Councils Housing Support Grant programme.

Recommendation

- To continue funding Pobl to provide the Housing First for Monmouthshire after 1st April 2021 from the Housing Support Grant Programme, with accommodation assistance being provided from Melin Homes and Monmouthshire Housing.
- To consider the need and opportunities for the provision of a Youth Housing First project. At this stage, however, no funding source has been identified.

- **Emergency & 24 Hour Multiple Needs Accommodation**
Current Situation

There is no emergency specialist Multiple Needs accommodation in Monmouthshire beyond the current interim provision of 4 units of shared accommodation in Monmouth under the supervision of a temporary concierge arrangement. The Council is currently using the family hostel as an interim arrangement, but the proposal is to make this permanent. Housing Support is currently provided through Llamau Assertive Outreach, which is currently funded through Welsh Government, Phase 2 Homeless Grant.

The Assertive Outreach Support x 2 also provides support to other high need applicants at two other temporary residential settings in Monmouthshire. The Assertive Outreach service also provides direct support to any arising rough sleepers identified.

Historically, Monmouthshire hasn't benefited from Multiple Needs supported accommodation. Therefore, there is a need to establish Multiple Needs accommodation in the County. Ideally, smaller schemes covering the North and South of the County rather than a single larger provision. Previously the Council has needed to rely on the availability of shared housing supplemented by generic floating support. Placement breakdown was common-place. This is still a source of provision together with Bed & Breakfast.

As previously mentioned the Council proposes to establish Multiple Needs Accommodation provision. The intention, subject to approval, is to convert the former shared emergency family accommodation to self-contained accommodation and explore the possibility of acquiring an additional property to create a provision of 5 units offering 24 hour specialist support.

Recommendation

- To work towards establishing two respective schemes to cover both the North and the south.
- In partnership with Housing Support Grant Commissioning, seek to develop a Multiple Needs support proposal for Monmouthshire. This will include exploring the feasibility and costs of potentially converting and reconfiguring the existing family hostel to achieve 5 units of self-contained accommodation and purchasing an additional property that has recently come on to the market.

The aim is to fund the revenue costs for the proposed Multiple Needs accommodation North, from the Housing Support Grant Programme. This is still to be confirmed and will be subject to other variables in the programme

- To consider provisional options for funding the capital costs for conversion.
- To explore and identify opportunities to establish a scheme to cover the south of the County.

- **Young Persons Supported Accommodation – Low to High Needs**

Current Situation

There are currently 21 units of supported accommodation across two separate schemes in Abergavenny and Chepstow provided by Pobl. Being dedicated accommodation for young people this is extremely important accommodation. The schemes, however, are for young people with low needs and aren't suitable for all young people, particularly those who are more vulnerable and with higher needs. It is not un-common for either the Housing Options Team or the Through Care Team to be unable to place in this accommodation. As a result, there has been a need to accommodate in other accommodation. Typically B & B or the Council's shared housing and previously with floating support. Such accommodation and support (generic floating support) doesn't adequately meet the needs of such young people.

Furthermore, there is no step-down accommodation in Monmouthshire for those young people who make good progress towards independent living, but aren't quite fully ready.

The Council, therefore, is seeking to remodel existing young person's provision through a partnership between Housing & Communities, Children's Services, Housing Support Grant Commissioning and Pobl. This will facilitate the provision of a new model of supported accommodation for young people with low, medium and high needs together with self-contained move-on accommodation.

The project is supported by Phase 2 Capital funding to facilitate the creation of self-contained units and additional communal space.

For young people who need to be accommodated in other temporary accommodation, such as shared housing, the Council is seeking to review and extend the Llamau Emphasis scheme.

Recommendation

- Housing & Communities, Housing Support Commissioning and Children's Services to work in partnership with Pobl to remodel existing Young Persons Supported Accommodation in Monmouthshire
- To re-model Llamau Emphasis Housing Support in order to provide dedicated Housing Support for young people in temporary accommodation and to be a member of a multi-agency team.
- To create a Homeless Prevention Officer within the Housing Options Team with a lead focus on Young People.

- **Low Need Single Persons Accommodation**

Current Situation

The Council currently has 70 units of shared accommodation (which is expected to reduce by 5/6 units to facilitate for the proposed interim Young Persons Accommodation). There will be a need for the Council to continue with the portfolio of

shared housing for the short to medium term. However, there will be a need to review the future of this accommodation in the context of Welsh Governments quality standard.

Recommendation

- Undertake an options appraisal against Welsh Government 'Annex D' Quality Standard of the existing shared to inform the future use of the accommodation e.g. improvements, possible disposal etc. The options appraisal will also be used as an opportunity to identify potential improvements to the service provided and the general standard of accommodation provided
- Seek to identify opportunities through Welsh Government Innovative Housing Programme with local housing associations
- Seek to identify opportunities through the Social Housing Programme.
- Continue to identify private sector opportunities under the Monmouthshire Lettings branding.

• Self-Contained Temporary Family Accommodation

Current Situation

The Council currently has a portfolio of family accommodation which is made up of:

- Private leased units x 49 (which includes a number of RSL properties)
 - However, 1 is rolling on during COVID and is likely to end, 2 terminate on 31st December 2020, 2 terminating on 30th September 2020 and 1 is on a monthly rolling lease with an RSL.
- Managed units (on behalf of private landlords) x 33
- MCC low cost home ownership unit x 1

Subject to landlord approval and financial sustainability, the aim is to continue with the existing portfolio and proactively seek to identify additional properties using the Monmouthshire Lettings Service branding.

Increasingly, however, the impact of inflation is impacting on the ability to secure accommodation with private landlords. Landlords are more regularly requesting higher rents more aligned to market rents due to the relatively low level of Local Housing Allowance levels in Monmouthshire.

Recommendation

- To continue to engage with private landlords and housing associations to identify private sector accommodation, using Monmouthshire Lettings Service branding. This typically will be funded through existing resources and the Private Lease budget
- At the time of writing there are two three pending schemes that the Council needs to secure in order to mitigate against B & B use. These individual schemes are projected to operate at a deficit. It is proposed the deficit will be funded from the Housing & Communities Budget Pressures Mandate 2021/22.

○ Domestic Abuse

Current Situation

The Council will provide homeless accommodation directly for victims of domestic abuse and specialist housing support is available through Cyfannol and the Llamau Modas service.

Cyfannol Women's Aid provides a five unit refuge in the County and the service of one crisis worker. In addition, a Gwent wide sexual violence service is available in Monmouthshire. Cyfannol are currently experiencing a 50% increase in the need for their crisis service.

Cyfannol have recently acquired direct funding to establish 2 dispersed properties in the south of Monmouthshire providing additional temporary accommodation provision.

In addition, the Council has acquired Welsh Government homeless grant for Cyfannol to enable them to extend their crisis service through the appointment of a part time Crisis Worker until April 2021.

It is proposed that the service will be extended into 2021/22 and will be funded through the Housing Support Grant Programme.

The Council is working closely with Cyfannol to ensure that both services are working closely for mutual benefit, particularly in respect of homeless prevention.

Recommendation

To continue to work closely with Cyfannol and ensure the service is fully utilised by the Housing Options Team to support victims of domestic abuse.

To continue funding the Cyfannol Crisis Worker x 0.5 through the Housing Support Grant Programme from April 2021 using the HSG uplift from Welsh Government.

3. Put rapid re-housing at the heart of services and utilise a range of support models (i.e. Housing First, CTI, floating support, assertive outreach) for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Current Situation

At present the Council does not have a Rapid Re-housing mechanism that will apply generally apply to all homeless applications.

The Council will seek to establish 'rapid re-housing' through the mechanisms of the Rapid Re-housing Protocol detailed previously in this report. There will be a need to monitor this.

In addition, it is proposed that the Rapid Re-housing principal will also be supported by a proposed relaxation of housing register exclusion criteria and an introduction of designated and ring-fenced 'move-on' permanent social housing. The intended availability of Intensive Resettlement Support will also contribute to Rapid Re-Housing by providing reassurance to housing associations. The Re-Settlement Support will provide the following benefits:

Resettlement Support is linked to Temporary Accommodation Support. Support, therefore, will in effect have started prior to an offer of accommodation:

- No waiting list for support
- Assurance to RSL that intensive work to sustain tenancy is in place prior to sign up
- Support is tailored to the individual's needs over a 12 week period with scope for extension in 6 week periods under agreement from Gateway Assessment Officers.
- No '3 missed appointments' and closure.
- Support Providers will explore ways to engage the individual on their terms i.e. evening / weekend appointments if necessary.
- Support can be daily/intensive/ flexible from the start of tenancy and will tail off as needs are met and client is supported to engage in substance use / mental health services.
- No set hours per individual
- If it is agreed that support is needed to sustain tenancy going forward (identified at 12 weeks) steps are put in place to facilitate a move to a step down provider.
- Named support provider/work given to RSL for liaison.

Welsh Governments expectation is that Councils utilise a range of support services through the Housing Support Grant programme to meet local homeless need. Over recent years the current availability of types of homeless services has been limited. There has been a heavy and disproportionate reliance on generic floating support, which is more appropriate for low level, short-term and generic support needs. Whilst there continues to be a need for generic floating support, which has the advantage of providing flexibility, it will not meet the higher needs or specialist requirements relating to the need in Monmouthshire.

The following are models of support needed in Monmouthshire:

- **Housing First** - the Council hasn't previously benefited from Housing First support provision. A Housing First project was established during 2020 using Welsh Government Phase 2 Homeless Grant funding, which effectively extended an existing service in Newport into Monmouthshire. Two clients have been accommodated through the scheme to date and a further six applicants that need this type of support. From April 2021, the project will be absorbed into the Council's Housing Support Grant programme.

Consideration will be given to whether there is a need for Youth Housing First

- **Young Persons Supported Housing – Low to High Needs** – See Section 2
- **Emergency & 24 Hour Multiple Needs Accommodation (North & South)** – See Section 2
- **Temporary Accommodation Support & Intensive Re-Settlement Support** – An interim arrangement through the Housing Support Grant Programme was established during 2020 to particularly support those clients living in shared housing and B & B and to assist people to move on to permanent accommodation. The current arrangement is a good-will arrangement with one of the Councils Providers, but will be formalised with effect from April 2021.
- **Young Persons Accommodation Support** – at the end of December 20 there were 37 young people (e.g. under 25) in temporary accommodation. And increase from 25 in July 2020. And a further three are expected to need accommodation imminently. This includes 3 x 16/17 year olds who are in B & B, all of whom are considered highly vulnerable and have needed to be moved due to behaviour issues. Such cases need to be appropriately accommodated and supported. Going forwards such cases will benefit from the proposal to establish dedicated and specialist housing support for young people in temporary accommodation rather than relying on generic and/or floating support.

To provide dedicated and specialist housing support, it is proposed to re-model Llamau Emphasis Housing Support in order to provide dedicated Housing Support for young people in temporary accommodation. The support will continue to be part of the Housing Support Grant programme and will be cost neutral.

Assertive Outreach – This support is currently provided through Llamau Assertive Outreach, which is currently funded through Welsh Government, Phase 2 Homeless Grant.

The Assertive Outreach Support x 2 provides support to high need applicants at the interim multiple needs accommodation and two other temporary residential settings in Monmouthshire. The Assertive Outreach service also provides direct support to any arising rough sleepers identified.

This project will continue in 2021/22 and it has been possible to absorb into the Housing Support Grant Programme due to the Welsh Government uplift

- **Floating Support** – there will be a need to continue with generic floating support, albeit with a lower capacity than currently to support people with lower needs and those who are able to move from specialist support due to their needs declining. This support is currently in place and Housing Support Grant available through the existing programme
- **Domestic Abuse Crisis Support** – the Modas service had 168 referrals last year and there are currently 32 open cases. In addition Cyfannol Women's Aid have seen referrals increase by 50% on 2019/20 demand. Abergavenny is a particular hotspot.

Cyfannol have been provided with Phase 2 Homeless Grant funding to employ an additional Crisis Worker x 0.5 in respect of the increased demand for domestic abuse

support. The post has also supported Cyfannol to set up two dispersed accommodation units in Monmouthshire.

It is proposed that this project should continue in 2021/22 as it has been possible to absorb into the Housing Support Grant Programme due to the Welsh Government uplift for 2021/22.

In addition it has been proposed that Perpetrator Programme is introduced through a regional Gwent project. It is proposed that the Council participate in this project and fund the participation through the Welsh Government Housing Support Grant Programme uplift from 2021/22.

- **Substance Misuse** – Using Welsh Government Phase 2 Homeless funding the Council has established a partnership with Gwent Drug & Alcohol Advisory Service. A significant proportion of homeless applicants have drug and alcohol issues. GDAS have provided an Assertive Outreach worker to specifically support clients in temporary accommodation.

A Rapid Prescribing service operates in other Gwent local authority areas through a specialist nurse delivering positive benefits and impacts in terms of managing and helping to reduce drug use, helping to reduce offending behaviour and contributing to general social stability.

This project will continue in 2021/22 as it has been possible to absorb into the Housing Support Grant Programme due to the Welsh Government uplift and the proposal is that the project will be extended to include Rapid Prescribing for five applicants.

- **Offenders & Prison Release** – There is a need to maximise the planning time in respect of offenders leaving prison. It is not uncommon to have little or no notice of an offender leaving prison. To maximise pre-release planning there are benefits of visiting offenders in prison to plan arrangements.

This is a need that is shared by other Gwent Local Authorities. It is, therefore, proposed to establish a regional project that the Council will buy into. The proposal is that this will be funded through the Housing Support Grant Programme from April 2021.

- **Mental Health Support** – Due to the high proportion of homeless applicants presenting and experiencing mental health issues, it is proposed through the Housing Support Grant uplift that funding be allocated to provide a Mental Health support worker based within a multi-agency team to triage individuals suffering with mental health and deliver crisis intervention.

Many of the homeless applicants the Council are supporting also require Health support in respect of their mental health. The Council has started to engage with Health in this respect but discussions are still in their infancy. It is a priority though to continue with these discussions to maximise the support available for those Homeless applicants who would benefit from additional support.

- **Other Support** – The need for the following support has been identified:
 - Out of hours support in recognition that support issues are not confined to working hours.
 - Contingency/flexible hours in recognition that some clients benefit from engaging outside of normal hours such as early evening.
 - 24 Hour supported mental health accommodation. MIND current provide accommodation for those with mental health needs in Monmouthshire. Support is provided through floating mental health support. This accommodation is for those with low needs. On occasions, it isn't possible

to accommodate those with higher needs. Therefore, in such instances it is necessary to place people in other accommodation which increases the risk of placement failure.

At present, however, there is no funding available to meet these potential services

Recommendation:

- To monitor the time taken to permanently re-house homeless applicants to understand performance.
- Subject to on-going need, to fund the following from the Housing Support Grant Programme:
 - Continuation of Housing First support
 - Continuation of Temporary Accommodation & Re-Settlement Support
 - Introduce Young Persons Accommodation Support for young people in temporary accommodation, through the re-modelling of Llamau Emphasis and to sit within a Multi-Agency Team.
 - Continuation of Llamau Assertive Outreach x 2
 - Continuation of Domestic Abuse Support x 0.5
 - Continuation of Substance Misuse Assertive Outreach and introduce Rapid Prescribing
 - Expand mental health floating support through an additional Mental Health worker to sit within a Multi-Agency Team.
 - Participate in a Regional Prison Release Scheme
 - Participate in regional Perpetrator Programme
 - Subject to confirmation, seek to fund the revenue costs of Multiple Needs Supported Accommodation for the North of the County

4. Increase the availability of social housing for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Current Situation

The broad approach to making social housing available for homeless people is:

- The operation of lettings quotas for the allocation of vacant units of social housing. Over recent years a fixed quota hasn't been utilised because natural turnover has facilitated a 20-25% allocation of accommodation to homeless applicants. But a fixed, higher or lower, can be set if required. This is monitored on an on-going basis through the Homesearch Partnership in relation to homeless demand.
- Increasing the development and availability of social housing is a priority for the Council. This is facilitated through the annual development programme, the core focus of which is Social Housing Grant funded accommodation. Typically, the programme provides additional General Need's accommodation which in benefits all Housing Register applicants including homeless applicants.

Due to the numbers of households currently in temporary accommodation, increasing the availability of social housing for homeless people will be achieved by:

- Continuing with working with the Homesearch Housing Register Partnership in respect of flexible quotas in respect of homeless applicants. This will continue to be monitored on a weekly basis.
- A recent review of the Homesearch Allocation Policy factored higher thresholds will apply for exclusion triggers meaning that there is expected to be a reduction in clients excluded from the Housing Register. The review was approved by Cabinet in December 2020 and will be implemented in the Spring of 2021. The changes are currently being facilitated.

- There is a need to specifically factor homeless accommodation into the development programme on an on-going basis. This will be reviewed annually in liaison with the Housing Options Team and will be subject to need.
- Consider designating specific pending social housing development schemes as ring-fenced move on, permanent accommodation.

Recommendation

- For the Housing Options Team to liaise closely with the Homeseach Partnership in respect of all social housing vacancies and where appropriate, ring-fence to homeless applicants, particularly in the short-term.
- Implement the review changes agreed by the Council's Cabinet in December 2020 relating to the Homeseach Allocation Policy Homeseach for implementation during Spring 2021.
- Homelessness needs and requirements to be routinely considered in the annual development programme
- Liaise with RSL partners about potentially designating new social housing grant schemes as homeless move-on accommodation.

5. Increase the availability of private rented housing for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Current Situation

Access to the private rented sector in Monmouthshire is challenging for both housing applicants and the Council due to:

- The level of market rents in relation to the local housing allowance is high and that the percentage of properties let at local housing allowance levels is low. This is estimated at about 6%
- Recent research has identified that the rental market in Monmouthshire has contracted by approximately 50%
- Landlords and estate agents can be reluctant to take low income households and reliant on benefit. Homeless people are regarded as a risk.
- Landlords are able to easily find professional tenants. Monmouthshire is a commuter area to employment hubs such as Bristol (increasingly because of the Bridge tolls going), Cardiff and Birmingham.

To mitigate against the challenges, the Council has established Monmouthshire Lettings Service as arms-length branding under which to encourage private landlords to make available properties to the Housing Options Team. This is a 'no fee' service, which seeks to offer a range of flexible options for landlords such as property leasing; room leasing and a management service and bespoke solutions for individual landlords.

It is considered that this approach has been extremely successful and it is appropriate to continue to build upon this success. The Council's portfolio of accommodation is currently:

- 33 managed properties
- 49 leased self-contained properties (the number of leased properties has previously been higher but has needed to be reduced due to the loss of the temporary accommodation management subsidy.
- 70 leased rooms in shared houses
- 1 supported lodgings host

To continue to develop Monmouthshire Lettings it is considered that the timing is appropriate to refresh the approach to promoting/marketing and seek to develop further options to encourage landlords to engage with the service.

In recognition that the rental market in Monmouthshire is not only small but has also contracted, in developing Monmouthshire Lettings it is also considered that in addition to recruiting vacant private sector properties there should also be a focus on recruiting

landlords who are already have tenants, but those tenants who may be starting to experience problems maintaining their tenancy. The approach, therefore, would also be recruiting landlords whose tenants may already be on the road to potential homelessness. This is very much a preventative and early intervention approach that it is hoped, would reduce the need for the Council to provide accommodation.

Due to the importance of maximising private sector housing provision it is considered that the Council needs to dedicate staffing to this function. This provides an opportunity to recruit someone who with private lettings and marketing experience.

Recommendations

- To recruit a Monmouthshire Lettings Co-Ordinator x 0.5. There is a cost of £22,653 for this post. It is proposed that this will be funded through the Council's Budget Pressures Mandate process for 2021/22.
- To implement the following:
 - Survey all landlords and establish annual satisfaction and exit surveys to identify opportunities for service improvement.
 - Consider new incentive options e.g. 'buying' rent arrears of households at risk of homelessness in return for use of accommodation; finder's fee etc.
 - Explore private sector good practice
 - Make greater use of social media and the Council's Communications Team
 - Improving Google search provision
 - Consider how MLS can work in collaboration with the Bond Scheme
 - To develop a dual approach and target existing landlords whose tenants may be starting to experience tenancy difficulties.

6. Bring empty properties back into use to house people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Current Situation

Bi annual letters are sent to positively encourage all empty property owners to contact the Council and discuss their property and options available to bring properties back into use and sign posting them accordingly, particularly in relation to promoting Monmouthshire Letting Service.

In addition the Council adopts a 'targeted approach', i.e., long term empties (over two years) within in or around the town centres. This approach will then involve a yearly 2nd stage letter, property visits and photographs. This would build up a representation of a property which would document it's deterioration over time. This would then provide evidence should further enforcement action be needed.

Housing & Community Services liaise with other services within the Council in respect of known empty homes and complaints about properties or those that require their involvement and the possible use of their enforcement powers where there is sufficient evidence to warrant their intervention.

A survey of empty space above shops was undertaken in Abergavenny last year. Although this did identify a small number of shops where the space above was not being used, due to the current availability of resources, there was limited opportunity to convert and utilise such space as homes. However, it is considered appropriate to undertake similar surveys in the other main towns and a survey of Monmouth town centre is to be undertaken during February and March 2021.

It is considered that there are benefits of undertaking officer training for all services who may be involved in seeking to bring empty homes back into use to ensure there is knowledge and awareness about potential options available.

Recommendation:

- Continue with the regular engagement with empty homes owners

- Subject to being safe to do so, undertake High Street surveys of space above shops for Monmouth, Usk, Caldicot and Chepstow with a view to identifying potential accommodation opportunities.
- Undertake Empty Homes Training.

7. Provide Support for Young People experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Current Situation

It is a priority of the Council to strengthen both the homeless prevention and support roles of available staffing as well as increasing accommodation and support resources. The current dedicated support available is:

- **MCC Young Persons Accommodation Officer x 1:** To prevent homelessness and where not possible, find alternative accommodation. Housing Support Grant funded. This service has been decommissioned from the Housing Support Grant Programme but it is proposed to absorb the responsibility into a new Homeless Prevention Officer post.
- **Pobl Young Persons Supported Hostel Accommodation – 21 units in Chepstow & Abergavenny and Hostel Move On Accommodation – 3 units in Chepstow.** To meet low level need. Housing Support Grant funded. This is currently the only dedicated provision in Monmouthshire.

The project in Chepstow is currently being re-modelled and reconfigured in partnership with Housing & Communities, Housing Support Grant Commissioning, Children's Services and Pobl. Revenue costs are being funded from the Housing Support Grant and Children's Services 2021/22 and capital costs are being funded from Welsh Government Phase 2 capital grant. The project is expected to be implemented around June 2021.

- **Llamau Family Mediation Service** – This service seeks to prevent homeless for young people aged 16-24 who are at risk of having leave home or to support young people to return home. The service is co-located within the Housing Options Team and is Welsh Government funded.
- **Llamau – EMPHASIS Housing Support** – To support 'non-engaging' young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) / homeless or at risk of becoming NEET / homeless. Target group are young people aged 16 – 21. Housing Support Grant funded.

This is currently being reviewed in order to provide dedicated housing support to young people in temporary accommodation other than Pobl accommodation

- **Supported Lodgings Hosts x 1:** Accommodation for a young person in someone's home.

At present is expected that the young person benefiting from this accommodation is looking to move. This has placed uncertainty as to whether the one current host will continue or not.

- **MCC Compass x 1.5:** Provides the link between accommodation and homelessness with education, training, employment, physical and mental health, positive relationships, outside interests etc. Youth Enterprise funded

This is an extremely valuable additional resource. There is a need to ensure that the project is fully integrated with both the Housing Options Team and other homeless services, such as housing support, to ensure that it fully aligns with the Council's statutory homeless responsibilities and there is effective partnership working and no duplication.

- **Pobl 'Steps to Independence' Young Persons Shared Accommodation:** This is a Gwent project. It is Welsh Government funded.

Pobl have secured two, two bedroom properties and are accommodating 4 young people.

A further gap identified is the level of support for young people with health needs, including mental health issues. The Council, therefore, has started to engage with Health to identify additional support opportunities that can possibly be facilitated for young people. Some provisional opportunities have been identified for 16/17 year olds and care leavers, which need to be worked up further.

Recommendation

- Liaise with the Compass Youth Homeless project to ensure that the service is fully integrated into homelessness. The aim is to maximise the staffing resource available to support homeless young people.
- Liaise with the 'Pobl Steps to Independence' project to identify homeless young people that can be accommodated.
- Young Persons needs to be monitored and an on-going consideration for Housing Support Grant Commissioning.
- Housing & Communities, Housing Support Grant Commissioning, Children's Services and Pobl to remodel Young Persons Accommodation to meet low, medium and high needs. To include move on accommodation for those whose support needs reduce.
- Llamau Emphasis housing support to be re-modelled to provide support to young people in temporary accommodation
- Establish bespoke homeless information for young people
- Engage with Health to identify and facilitate opportunities for the provision of health related support for young people that will operate alongside housing support.

8. Multi-agency involvement at a strategic level and in the delivery of support.

This will be facilitated by the existing and emerging partnership arrangements.

9. The full adoption of a psychologically-informed (PIE) and trauma-informed approach to commissioning and service delivery within local authorities, housing and support providers.

Current Situation

Although some PIE or trauma informed practice is currently delivered by the Council's homeless service, such an approach isn't being delivered in a structured way. Nor has it been formally adopted within a policy framework. Although work started on this during the partly part of 2020, this was unfortunately was disrupted by Covid-19.

The Council has started working to develop a PIE and trauma informed service. An external agency has been commissioned to provide a two-stage programme of training and service planning over five sessions to Housing staff. This started on 16th March 20 but remains incomplete due to Covid-19 restrictions. This will hopefully be resumed in the spring 2021.

The Council is keen that the delivery approach of homeless service is one that is good at listening, is sensitive, is sympathetic and offers empathy. Essentially, it is a priority that the service is regarded as kind and caring.

In addition, the findings of a Shelter Take Notice project and the pending link with the Gwent Community Psychology Team are further opportunities to identify changes.

It was proposed to second an expert in PIE into the team to identify opportunities to change the way the service is delivered and to support staff implement changes. The proposal was to utilise Welsh Government homeless grant funding, but unfortunately this request wasn't successful.

Recommendations

- Resume PIE training as soon as safe to do, aiming to complete by June 21.
- On completion of training, use the training to inform service planning, giving particular attention to temporary accommodation and engaging with residents.
- Utilise Shelter 'Take Notice' recommendations to inform future service planning

10. The appropriate combination and safe delivery of remote and face to face support.

Current Situation

As part of working towards adopting a Psychologically and Trauma service, face to face contact and support with homeless applicants is considered fundamental.

Prior to the Covid-19 crisis the Council had started working towards a model of an area/community based approach to managing temporary accommodation. The Council recognises the importance of engaging positively and proactively with residents to achieve the best outcomes for both the Council and residents.

Each Accommodation Assistant has a 'patch' of accommodation that they are directly responsible for. The expectation is that staff will have a regular and sustained presence on their area 'patches.' As close as possible to daily. The Council is keen that staff get to know both residents and any support workers together will having a good all round understanding of their support need together with a good knowledge of their patch as a whole. This helps the Council to be more responsive to situations e.g. ASB and intervene early. It also helps the Council to liaise closely with other agencies, particularly support providers, Social Services and the Police. Being familiar with and having good relationships with neighbours is also a priority.

The Council already uses CCTV to support the management of accommodation and will be increasingly engaging with residents using mobile phone technology. The Council is keen to develop this further to maximise networking with residents.

The current access arrangements to the Housing Options Team and homeless assessments is through a centralised telephone arrangement. The Council is keen to review this to achieve more face to face contact. Possible options being considered are a return to using surgeries, home visits, joint meetings with other agencies and the use of video technology, including equipment being available in the Council's four area Hubs.

Recommendations:

- Implement an area/ patch based approach to managing accommodation in order to foster close and pro-active relationships with clients, the local community and local agencies.
- Identify opportunities to maximise face to face contact with a particular focus on persons needing homeless advice or making homeless applications.

11. Up-skill and empower local volunteers and community assets to help deliver a strategic, coordinated response to ending homelessness.

Current Situation

The use of volunteers and community assets currently isn't part of the Council's homeless service, although the Council has previously used Monmouth Churches to provide a winter night-shelter.

This Transition Plan currently doesn't include any proposals in relation to links with local volunteers or community assets.

However, the Council has close and established links with a number of voluntary agencies with whom the Council is currently working with.

Recommendation

- To liaise with the Council's Community & Partnerships Team to identify potential opportunities that will secure additional support for homeless households in Monmouthshire.

12. A collaborative approach to planning and delivery.

The Council is committed to the collaborative development of homeless services in Monmouthshire. A particular priority is to work in partnership with other agencies to particularly identify and maximise opportunities that strengthen prevention, facilitate additional accommodation and increase support to applicants. Some of the existing and emerging partnership arrangements include:

Current and emerging partnerships include:

- MCC Partnerships – e.g. Housing Support Grant Commissioning; Social Care; Estates etc.
- Housing Associations – permanent and temporary accommodation
- Gwent Community Psychology – mental health services for young people (16 & 17 year olds)
- Skills for Living – mental health services for Care Leavers
- Gwent Substance Misuse & Alcohol – Assertive Outreach
- Pobl – Steps to Independence shared living service. Pobl are due to acquire a property in Abergavenny which it is hoped can be used for homeless young people
- Cyfannol – Crisis support and the acquisition of two additional units of dispersed accommodation in the South. It is hoped that through closer links with Cyfannol this will benefit victims of domestic abuse.

13. Solutions for people with No Recourse to Public Funds.

Presentations from this group are extremely rare in Monmouthshire. Only one presentation has been received in the last few years. It is, therefore, anticipated that this is likely to be the case going forward. However, in the unlikely event of such a presentation, the Council would receive any approach sensitively.

14. Housing Options Team

Current Situation

In order to meet Welsh Government policy themes, there is a need to give consideration to Housing Options Team staffing. There is a need to ensure staffing levels and the team structure are both fit for purpose, in order to fulfil the requirements of Welsh Government policy guidance and to ensure that the Council is able to both adequately and proactively assess and manage the needs of homeless people presenting to the Council. There is also a need to make sure existing staff are supported, in the context of a change in the nature of the demand.

The change in Welsh Government policy and the change in demand is resulting in:

- The need to continuing to identify opportunities for strengthening homeless prevention
- The need to ensure case management and co-ordination is robust and close working with partner agencies
- Greater numbers of vulnerable people with higher needs are being placed in temporary accommodation. This has created additional management and support demands
- The need for additional temporary accommodation and of a higher quality
- Introducing a psychologically and informed approach.
- Multiple initiatives
- Making sure staff are fully supported in the context of an increasingly reactive and challenging working environment that is increasingly reactive and challenging.
- Training needs being identified. There is a need to ensure that staff are being supported proactively in this regard.

Recommendation

- Review the staffing needs and structure of the Housing Options Team. Potential funding has been identified through the Housing & Communities 2021/22 Budget Mandate.
- Review the homeless related training needs of all staff and establish a programme of training.

