

CABINET

20TH FEBRUARY 2023

SUBJECT

HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME (HSP) STRATEGY 2022-2026

Purpose:

It is a requirement of Welsh Government to produce a Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy (2022 – 26) for Carmarthenshire.

Recommendations / key decisions required:

A decision is sought for the approval of the Strategy and delivery plan, which will be published on the Council's website, as required by Welsh Government.

Reasons:

This strategy sets out the strategic priorities of Carmarthenshire County Council and its partner agencies for homelessness prevention and housing related support services over the coming 4 years (2022-26). It refreshes earlier priorities that were included in the Local Authority's former homelessness strategy, and the Housing Support Grant (HSG) Delivery Plan for 2021-22. Development of the priorities was informed by a comprehensive need assessment exercise which included direct engagement with stakeholders within the Local Authority, providers of support services and service users.

Cabinet Decision Required YES – 20th February, 2023

Council Decision Required NO

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:-

Cllr Linda Davies Evans (Deputy Leader and Homes Portfolio Holder)

Directorate:

Communities

Name of Head of Service:

Chris Harrison

Designations:

Head of Strategic Joint
Commissioning

Tel: 07554 332946

Email addresses:

chris.harrison@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
CABINET
20TH FEBRUARY 2023

HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME (HSP) STRATEGY 2022-2026

The Housing Support Grant (HSG) is an early intervention grant programme to support activity, which prevents people from becoming homeless, stabilises their housing situation, or helps potentially homeless people to find and keep accommodation. The HSG does not fund the statutory duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness, instead HSG funded services augment, complement and support the statutory service to ensure that the overall offer Authorities provide helps people into the right homes with the right support to succeed. It supports vulnerable people to address the, sometimes multiple, problems they face, such as debt, employment, tenancy management, substance misuse, violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and mental health issues. Support is person centred, aimed at supporting people to secure and maintain sustainable housing by addressing the mental health and substance misuse or other problems they face, helping to improve their health and well-being and/or helping them progress into, or nearer to, a job or training opportunity based on their specific circumstances.

The HSG is a grant mechanism which funds part of an overall 'Housing Support Programme' that encompasses both the statutory homelessness duty funded through the revenue settlement and the non-statutory housing support preventative services funded through the HSG. Viewing both as a whole allows local authorities to take a systematic approach to reducing homelessness and the impact of homelessness and unstable housing; directing resources and activity to those areas which will have the greatest impact, in turn reducing demand on public services and improving health and well-being outcomes.

We are experiencing, along with all Local Authorities in Wales, an unprecedented demand for housing where demand is exceeding supply and with the position significantly worsening in the last few weeks as a result of external factors.

The current challenges in the housing market come soon after the market was already placed under severe pressure during the pandemic. Over this period all authorities saw an increase in demand for homes as the impact of the pandemic made some households vulnerable and the impact of the increased eligibility for housing support being passed to local authorities from Government.

We responded exceptionally well to Welsh Governments (WG) 'everyone-in' and recently 'no-one left out' approaches ensuring that we fully met the widening of our responsibilities effectively. The profile of eligible individuals meant that there was also unprecedented demand for single person accommodation. Inevitably, this resulted in growing numbers of people in temporary accommodation (TA) and, because of challenges for them to move on and growing numbers of people to whom we owe a full housing duty to, there has simply not been the supply to meet demand.

As an Authority we have also made some rapid changes and restructured services to enable us to move from the reactive stage to prevention and bring together the main elements of the prevention programme under one umbrella. This will ensure that the transition to Rapid Rehousing is made effectively and will ensure that early intervention and prevention is our key priority moving forward. We want to make sure that homelessness is rare, brief, and unrepeatable.

In developing this 4-year Strategy, we were required to undertake a comprehensive needs assessment which will be reviewed in 2 years. The assessment is a statement of what the Authority knows about the needs and future demand for homelessness prevention and housing support services. The delivery plan sets out how the Local Authority will deliver the priorities identified in the assessment.

The Needs Assessment shows that there has been a significant increase in the pressure for the Local Authority to temporarily accommodate people due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this is reflected in 25% increase of people accommodated in emergency accommodation between 2019 and 2021. Many of the individuals that typically end up in emergency accommodation have multiple needs and need a wide range of services to assist them.

The Needs Assessment shows that demand for suitably located, fit for purpose housing outstrips supply, particularly in relation to one bedroom accommodation, despite the best efforts of the Council to create new options for temporary accommodation, supported accommodation and permanent housing. This makes the role of prevention even more urgent and the need to support people to be able to maintain their existing accommodation.

The Housing Support Grant funds a range of floating support, supported accommodation refuge and alarm services. Early intervention services can reduce undue escalation and avoid a crisis, with knock-on impacts to health, inclusion and independence.

The Needs Assessment shows that the highest number of referrals for support were received for:

- Generic / floating support / peripatetic (tenancy support services which cover a range of users' needs)
- People with mental health issues
- Women experiencing domestic abuse
- Young people with support needs (16-24)

In addition, a relatively high number of people refer to HSG funded services with alcohol or substance misuse issues as the lead need. However, stakeholders state a far higher proportion have this as a secondary need along with mental health where the two co-occur.

The creation of the Housing Support Programme strategy is an opportunity to produce a rationalised and coherent planning mechanism to align the prevention of homelessness with providing the support necessary to ensure people are supported into and able to maintain settled accommodation. The strategy incorporates the local authority's previous duty to produce a homelessness strategy. Therefore, this single strategy for homelessness prevention and support and the mechanisms to develop the strategy, will be used to inform the authority's approach towards rapid rehousing.

As a result, Carmarthenshire has planned their HSG services as part of an overall 'Housing Support Programme' encompassing both the statutory homelessness duty funded through the revenue settlement and non-statutory preventative services funded through the HSG. It is important that our plan recognises the dependencies within the whole housing system as well as interactions with other public service delivery in order to develop a comprehensive and holistic response.

The HSP Strategy is framed over a 4-year period and implementation will be subject to ongoing review, including a formal mid-point review, as required by Welsh Government, after 2 years. Implementation will be overseen by a reconstituted Housing Support Planning Group, which has responsibility for delivery of the HSP Strategy and associated resources within the wider housing and homelessness context. The Board will monitor delivery of the priorities and receive reports on outcomes and impact. It will meet quarterly and will be chaired by the Head of Strategic Joint Commissioning. This will report to the CCG/HSG Board who will receive reports on outcomes.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?	No – Attached – Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022-2026
----------------------------------	---

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report:

Signed: Chris Harrison Head of Strategic Joint Commissioning

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
YES	NONE	YES	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE

1. Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

The impact assessment considered the 3 strategic priority areas of the HSP strategy against each of the protected characters contained in the Equality Act. In each case, the assessment identified that the priorities would bring positive impacts to individuals with these characteristics, especially individuals who are considered vulnerable due to their age or sexual orientation, where specific services are currently being provided to address their needs.

An area where implementation of the strategy may also bring some significant improvements is in relation to the availability of suitable accommodation. The needs assessment has highlighted that accommodation in general remains a priority in Carmarthenshire and the delivery of more accommodation has been identified as a strategic priority. Through positive partnership working, Carmarthenshire will work to provide more housing solutions, which will include options for individuals with a disability, bringing a number of positive impacts. The impact assessment did consider whether residents may be indirectly affected due to race, with some residents of different races also having different cultural or language requirements, which may pose a barrier to accessing services. However, the Housing service continues to make provision to address these issues wherever possible, through the use of translation services and the availability of information in alternative languages or formats. This will continue to be monitored through the life of the strategy, to ensure that services adapt to any changes in provision that may impact on a particular group.

The assessment considered whether the strategic priorities and delivery of the HSP strategy would impact on a person's ability to access and use services through the medium of Welsh. The assessment concluded that there is currently sufficient provision in place across the local authority and its partners to enable service users to access services in their preferred language and the implementation of this strategy will not negatively impact on the Welsh Language Measure.

The HSP strategy will bring several positive impacts for children:

- Reduced time in temporary accommodation
- Improved accommodation options for households
- Raising awareness of the support available for households that are struggling
- Improved support provision for households

Whilst the HSP programme does not directly support children, the priorities identified in this strategy will result in a number of positive impacts for households, which will improve the experiences of children contained within them.

3.Finance

Implementation of this Strategy and delivery against the identified strategic priorities will require significant investment. This comes from a variety of sources, including:

- The HSG allocation to Carmarthenshire totalled £8.7m in 2021-22. The same amount has been confirmed for the following financial years ending 31st March 2025. The Welsh Government approach in providing a static grant position will mean that provision may have to reduce as 'cost of living' increases will need to be accounted for.
- From the Council's General Fund for homelessness
- Welsh Government Grants, including Social Housing Grant of for social housing development.

Our view is that Carmarthenshire requires more investment in HSG funding than what is currently provided to help us meet need in as comprehensive and timely way as possible and we will continue to discuss this with Welsh Government – particularly as the proposed redistribution of HSG funds across Wales was suspended due to the pandemic.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Signed: Chris Harrison

Head of Strategic Joint Commissioning

1. Scrutiny Committee request for pre-determination

YES

If yes include the following information: -

Scrutiny Committee

Communities, Homes & Regeneration

Date the report was considered:-

26th January, 2023

Scrutiny Committee Outcome/Recommendations:-

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy 2022-2026 be endorsed.

2.Local Member(s) - N/A

3.Community / Town Council - N/A

4.Relevant Partners

A range of local stakeholders were involved in developing this needs assessment. Stakeholders included council departments, statutory partners such as the Hywel Dda University Health Board and the Probation Service, along with representatives from Registered Social Landlords and Housing Support Grant providers. Stakeholders were engaged via online workshops, one to one interviews and via questionnaire. A number of themes were identified:

- Maintaining accommodation and homelessness prevention
- The right accommodation
- The right support
- Partnership working
- Mental health
- Complex needs
- Young people
- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

Feedback was also sought from vulnerable people who were using, or had used, services. This provided valuable information and intelligence that contributed to the formulation of the strategy. A summary of the feedback revealed that:

- The majority of people were happy with their service. They valued the help provided and that the support workers were knowledgeable and reliable.
- Services were generally very responsive, starting within two weeks of referral.
- Housing and finances were the main areas people received support with.
- There was a comment on the complexity of different providers being involved with a service user, and another who raised the need for training to be a larger part of the support offered.
- Service users were concerned about a lack of move on opportunities and the capacity of refuges to work with very young children and support parents to enable to be with their children.

5. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations - N/A

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S) AWARE/CONSULTED YES	Include any observations here
--	--------------------------------------

Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information
List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:
THERE ARE NONE