

## COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Wednesday 4 <sup>th</sup> November 2020
<b>Report Subject</b>	Phase 2 Homelessness - Covid 19 Response
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cabinet Member for Housing
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness is a significant challenge for all areas of Wales and the pandemic has led to increased pressures within this service area. In the response phase there was a directive from Welsh Government for local authorities to accommodate rough sleepers as part of the public health and infection control response. Under normal circumstances, not all rough sleepers would be offered accommodation by Local Authorities.

We have experienced a significant increase in households in need of emergency accommodation. There has been a 345% increase in household's accommodated in emergency/temporary housing since 23rd March when the emergency response phase was announced with restrictions on movement and physical distancing requirements. Between 23rd March and 1<sup>st</sup> May households in emergency/temporary accommodation increased from 11 to 38.

Single people have been disproportionately affected during the pandemic and they form the majority of this increase in emergency/temporary housing.

Welsh Government later issued further guidance on Phase 2 Planning on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June and have confirmed that any households provided with emergency accommodation during the pandemic (excluding those who have "no recourse to public funding) will be owed a full duty for permanent re-housing and there is a clear expectation that nobody should be allowed to return to homelessness.

Phase 2 Planning Guidance issued in June 2020 (Appendix 1), complemented by additional funding for both revenue and capital investment, demonstrates Welsh Government's expectations for councils to support people into accommodation and adopt rapid rehousing approaches, focussed on ensuring people have appropriate accommodation and support to sustain their tenancies.

Our Phase 2 Plan (Appendix 2) has been approved by Welsh Government and additional funding has been secured to assist with the delivery of this plan. A breakdown of funding to support Phase 2 is summarised below:

Revenue Funding @ £186,000  
 Capital Funding @ £1,051,816

A detailed breakdown of how these funds support delivery of our Phase 2 Plan can be found attached to this report (Appendix 3). In year underspend from our Housing Support Grant will also be used to compliment delivery of the Phase 2 Plan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Members note and support the approach for the taken to date through Phase 1 “Crisis Management” and support the Phase 2 “Response”. This includes a temporary variation to the Common Allocations Policy, in favour of a 50% nominations process for homeless households directly affected by the Covid 19 health crisis and currently accommodated under homelessness duties.
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## REPORT DETAILS

<b>1.00</b>	<b>EXPLAINING THE COVID 19 HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE</b>													
1.01	When considering the timeframes for the Homelessness Response, Welsh government have outlined the following Phases of the Covid 19 homelessness Crisis.													
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Phase</th> <th>Timeline</th> <th>Purpose</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Phase 1</td> <td>March 2020 – August 2020</td> <td>Crisis Management</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Phase 2</td> <td>July 2020 – March 2021</td> <td>Response</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Phase 3</td> <td>January 2021 – March 2022</td> <td>Move to ‘New Normal’</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Phase	Timeline	Purpose	Phase 1	March 2020 – August 2020	Crisis Management	Phase 2	July 2020 – March 2021	Response	Phase 3	January 2021 – March 2022	Move to ‘New Normal’
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1.02	<p><b><u>Phase 1</u></b>          Guidance was issued to all Local Authorities by Welsh Government on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 in regards to co-ordinating a response to homelessness and ensuring all rough sleepers and people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness during the pandemic were assisted with accommodation.</p>													

1.03	<p>Sourcing suitable accommodation in order to house people who may otherwise face the prospect of rough sleeping was the focus of the emergency response. This guidance suggested sourcing additional units of self-contained accommodation through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Block booking hotels and bed &amp; breakfast</li> <li>• Securing holiday lets</li> <li>• Securing vacant student accommodation</li> <li>• Securing additional self-contained accommodation</li> </ul>
1.04	<p>Whilst many Local Authorities have been able to secure high numbers of bed spaces within their local hospitality sectors, Flintshire does not have a vast array of hotels, B&amp;Bs or holiday lets and all efforts to source such accommodation was unsuccessful. So too were efforts to access vacant student accommodation through local colleges. Again some Local Authorities within university towns have been able to secured vacant Student Accommodation (Wrexham for example).</p>
1.05	<p>In response to limitations of our accommodation locally, our response necessitated the need to focus on creating alternative interim housing options. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximising the existing Temporary Accommodation Portfolio. Some units of accommodation have limitations of shared facilities through communal bathrooms and kitchens. Enhanced cleaning arrangements were implemented to offer additional hygiene and infection control practices.</li> <li>• 7x self-contained Portakabins being located within the grounds of the Glanrafon Night Shelter in Queensferry and support for the occupants is being delivered by staff from The Wallich who run the Glanrafon Night Shelter.</li> <li>• The Night Shelter model was turned into a 24/7 provision of a Homeless Hub with restricted numbers of guests being accepted into the main Glanrafon Building to enable social distancing. Staff from The Wallich and some partner agencies deliver support services within this building.</li> <li>• It was also necessary to utilise some existing vacant social housing 1 bed flats within the Council Stock and our Housing Management Team were able to make available a 8x 1 bed flats within a few weeks of lockdown. These properties were managed by the Homeless Team and used as temporary Accommodation.</li> <li>• “The Lodge” adjacent to Mold County Hall was refurbished and is now used as a 1 bed property again managed within our Temporary Accommodation Portfolio.</li> <li>• Funding from Welsh Government Phase 1 Grant (a £10million fund for Wales) enabled the above enhancements to our existing homeless accommodation offer.</li> </ul>

1.06	<p><b><u>Phase 2</u></b></p> <p>On 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020, WG released a document “Phase 2 – Planning Guidance for Homelessness and Housing Related Support Services” to support the recovery from the pandemic lockdown. Flintshire’s Phase 2 Plan was approved by COT and Informal Cabinet on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020 ahead of submission to Welsh government on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020.</p>
1.07	<p>Part D of the Phase 2 Guidance from Welsh government refers to <i>“Increase the availability of social housing for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness”</i>. This states that the <i>“allocation of existing accommodation must be aligned with local authority transition planning. It is essential that all social landlords including RSL’s and LA’s play their part in increasing the availability of housing for people accommodated during Phase 1”</i>.</p>
1.08	<p>In response to the need to align social housing allocations with local emergency and transition planning for homelessness pressures, discussions have taken place with Local Authority and Housing Associations within the SARTH (Single Access Route to Housing) Partnership areas of Conwy Denbighshire and Flintshire. These discussions have sought to explore avenues for increasing the supply of social housing for those households currently accommodated in emergency and temporary housing.</p>
1.09	<p>There is a clear expectation that the scarce resource of social housing, is key to supporting all Local Authorities responses to the homelessness crisis as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. There is however only a limited number of social housing properties available each year. Any use of social housing must be proportionate to the scale of the current challenge and it is acknowledged that there are a variety of housing needs in addition to homelessness that must still be met through the allocation of social housing.</p>
1.10	<p>When looking at all lettings across social housing within Flintshire during 2019 there were a total of 740 Lettings. This is across all property types and sizes and for all housing providers in Flintshire. Approx. 66% of these lettings were through Flintshire Councils social housing stock. The Council is the largest provider of social housing in Flintshire with the remaining stock owned and managed by local Housing Associations.</p>
1.11	<p>The “rapid rehousing” response requires people to be quickly moved into self-contained accommodation. Many of our homeless households will experience significant barriers to accessing the private rented sector locally due to affordability and limited availability across Flintshire. Social housing and supported housing, will therefore be the default housing option for a large number of our “covid cohort” and a variation to the usual approach to allocations of social housing will be necessary to meet Welsh Governments expectations and reduce longer term risks associated with increased homelessness and a potential 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of Coronavirus.</p>
1.12	<p>Local Authority and Housing Association partners have adopted an interim arrangement that will make available up to 50% of all social housing</p>

vacancies for rapid rehousing. This will see an increased number of homeless households rehoused into social housing over an initial 3 month period from July 2020. This will greatly assist in creating capacity within Flintshire’s limited emergency and temporary housing portfolio and reducing the risk of Flintshire running out of housing for homeless people.

Detailed below is the breakdown of social housing lettings within Flintshire for July 2020, August 2020 and September 2020.

Month	July 2020	August 2020	September 2020
All Social Housing Relets	69	66	46
Relets to “covid cohort”	8	14	6
% of Lettings – “covid cohort”	11.6%	21.1%	13%

Detailed below is a breakdown of relets to the “covid cohort” under this interim arrangement for July 2020, August 2020 and September 2020 by Housing Provider.

Month	July 2020	August 2020	September 2020
Flintshire County Council	3	4	4
Clwyd Alyn	3	2	1
Grwp Cynefin	0	0	0
Wales & West Housing	2	8	1

All housing partners are committed to providing accommodation through this interim arrangement. Numbers of successful offers are not a reflection of housing provider’s commitment to the interim arrangement, more a reflection of the limitations of their stock in terms of availability, location and types of vacant properties.

1.13 There are high levels of demand for 1 bed accommodation as many of our “covid cohort” are single people. There is significant limitations on the supply of 1 bed social housing properties within Flintshire. Of the 740 available homes in 2019, approx. 10% of these were 1 bed properties for general needs lettings (excluding properties designated for older people which would not be appropriate for many of our “covid cohort”– Sheltered Housing etc.).

1.14 Local Authorities will be required to evidence the impact of their Phase 2 Plan when submitting returns to Welsh Government as part of the financial claims process. This will include reporting the housing outcomes for those people identified as part of the homeless “covid cohort”.

1.15 **Phase 3**  
This is the period of January 2021 onwards and is identified by Welsh Government as “Moving to the new Normal”. We await further guidance on Phase 3.

<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
2.01	Lettings functions are “business as usual” so there are no additional resource implication when adopting this approach within either Housing Management or Asset Management functions.
2.02	Phase 2 funding will enable the “rapid rehousing” approach. This funding will be used for additional staff and support services which will help people to prepare for move; complete move; and offer support to sustain a tenancy.
2.03	Not moving people on from temporary housing will “bed block” Flintshire’s limited temporary accommodation portfolio. Failing to move people on would lead to increased financial pressures with significant expenditure on hotel and bed & breakfast accommodation. Increased expenditure through homeless placements and longer term cost implications is captured within the Councils Risk Recovery Plan under Risk Measure HA09.

<b>3.00</b>	<b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
3.01	<p>The following risks have been identified when considering pressures on the homelessness function. Phase 2 activity and a temporary variation to normal social housing lettings is part of our risk mitigations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to increased access to social housing for the current “covid cohort” would not be in keeping with the Ministers aspirations for Phase 2. This may cause reputational damage.</li> <li>• A lack of available temporary accommodation meet future demand for homeless accommodation in the coming months.</li> <li>• Failure to move people onto long term settled housing, increases the likelihood of a return to the streets. Safe, settled housing is an important foundation for people to rebuild their lives following homelessness.</li> </ul>
3.02	<p>The temporary 50% nominations process is a positive intervention. There are risks associated with implementing such changes to the allocation of social housing however.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a significant need for 1 bed accommodation for single homeless people. A 3 month 50% nominations period may not provide the number of available 1 bed properties required, due to the limited supply of 1 bed general needs housing.</li> <li>• A further extension of the 3 month lettings variation may be necessary. This would be in keeping with the approach adopted by Regional Partners across Conwy and Denbighshire who are also adopting a temporary variation to the Common Allocations Policy.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing the supply of 1 bed accommodation through new build, empty homes refurbishments and the private rented sector are also being explored in order to support Phase 2.</li> </ul>
3.03	<p>Increasing the supply of accommodation and rapid access to housing is key to preventing and relieving homelessness. Robust packages of support are also necessary to ensure tenancy sustainment and avoiding repeat homelessness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risks relating to tenancy failure can be mitigated through enhanced support packages for people moving into accommodation.</li> <li>A mapping exercise for the “covid cohort” has identified the support needs of those who require rehousing. Support Plans will complement the Rapid Rehousing approach.</li> <li>Additional capacity for tenancy support services will ensure everyone rehoused has a dedicated Support Worker to assist with the logistics of a move and ongoing support.</li> <li>Nobody will be rehoused without an appropriate Tenancy Support Plan.</li> </ul>
3.04	<p>There are significant housing pressures across the county in addition to the current challenges around homelessness. Adopting a 50% nominations and rapid rehousing approach will restrict access to social housing for other people with genuine housing need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is an expectation that Local Authorities prioritise the pressures of the current “covid cohort”, who have been disproportionately affected during the Covid 19 pandemic.</li> <li>Numbers of homeless people accommodated during the pandemic, requiring rapid rehousing is less in Flintshire than in neighbouring Authorities (Conwy and Denbighshire) who adopt the Common Allocations Policy.</li> </ul>
3.05	<p>It will be important to ensure that letting accommodation to the current “covid cohort” does not create additional tensions within existing communities and create challenges for social housing providers or other residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A “sensitive” approach to all lettings focussing on sustainable tenancies will be adopted. Careful consideration will be given to each “allocation” and appropriate support plans and will be in place for everyone assisted through the rapid rehousing approach.</li> <li>Where historic challenges such as community tensions, anti-social behaviour, high levels of crime are present within a community and a Local Lettings Policy is in place to help manage these issues, the Local Lettings Policy will still stand. Only people meeting the conditions of the Local Lettings Policy will be rehoused in these areas.</li> </ul>

<b>4.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT</b>
4.01	The SARTH Partnership covers the 3 counties of Flintshire, Denbighshire and Conwy. Consultation with Housing Association and Local Authority partners, via the SARTH Steering Group, ensures there is a consistent approach being adopted across all 3 counties.
4.02	Informal Cabinet received a report outlining the Phase 2 Plan for Flintshire on the 29th June 2020. The principle of 50% nominations was outlined in the Phase 2 Plan. This plan has received positive feedback and has been endorsed by Welsh Government.
4.03	Welsh Government Officers have been engaging with Local Authorities throughout the pandemic through designated Relationship Managers. Our designated Relationship Manager is fully supportive of the 50% nominations to social housing approach.
4.04	Feedback from across Wales, suggests that some Local Authorities are considering the adoption of 100% social housing nominations as part of their homelessness response.

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	Appendix 1 - Guidance issued by Welsh Government to inform Phase 2 activities across Wales.
5.02	Appendix 2 - Flintshire's Phase 2 Plan – approved by Informal Cabinet on the 29 <sup>th</sup> June 2020 and subsequently submitted to and supported by Welsh Government.
5.03	Appendix 3 - Projects to support Phase 2 of Flintshire's response to the homelessness crisis, with a breakdown of those activities 1) funded through Phase 2 Grant, 2) Housing Support Grant and 3) not to progress.

<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	<p><a href="#">North Wales Homelessness Strategy - "People, homes and services" A regional approach to tackling homelessness in North Wales</a></p> <p>Regional Strategy for Homelessness. Adopted by all 6 North Wales Authorities in December 2018</p>



<b>7.00</b>	<b>CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS</b>
7.01	<p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Martin Cooil, Housing &amp; Prevention Service Manager  <b>Telephone:</b> 07880 423234  <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:martin.cooil@flintshire.gov.uk">martin.cooil@flintshire.gov.uk</a></p>

<b>8.00</b>	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
8.01	<p><b>Phase 1</b>  “Crisis management” phase for Local Authorities when managing homelessness as a result of the pandemic. Welsh Government timeframes suggest Phase 1 runs from 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 when lockdown was announced to August 2020.</p> <p>£10million additional funding was made available to cover additional expenditure which saw rough sleepers and people at risk of sleeping rough offered accommodation and support.</p> <p><b>Phase 2</b>  Welsh Government timeframes suggest this is the period of July 2020 to March 2021 and is the “response” phase. Local Authorities have developed Phase 2 Plans to respond to current homelessness pressures.</p> <p>An initial £20million was made available for the Phase 2 response. A Further £40million has been made available across Wales to increase the supply and standards of accommodation for homeless people.</p> <p><b>Phase 3</b>  This is the period of January 2021 onwards and is identified by Welsh Government as “Moving to the new Normal”. We await further guidance on Phase 3.</p> <p><b>Covid Cohort</b>  Those people affected during the pandemic period by homelessness and presently accommodated by Flintshire’s Homeless Team and requiring rehousing to resolve their homelessness.</p> <p><b>Common Allocation Policy</b>  The Common Allocations Policy outlines the approach to managing applications for social housing and awarding priority for different housing needs when people apply for social housing. This Policy also outlines how social housing is to be allocated. The Common Allocations Policy has been adopted by all social housing providers within the counties of Conwy, Denbighshire and Flintshire.</p> <p><b>Common Housing Register</b>  The Common Housing Register is the register of demand and need for social housing in Flintshire. Applicants who are verified as have a housing need as per the Common Allocations Policy will be accepted onto the Common Housing Register. All social housing is allocated via the Common Housing Register.</p>

**Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH)**

A Single Access Route to Housing, operates in Flintshire and ensures that people are offered a wide range of housing options. Those people with a clearly evidenced housing need, will be accepted onto Flintshire's Common Housing Register.

**Rapid Rehousing**

Rapid rehousing is an approach for people whose first and most important need is to access housing; with a lack of it often the main reason why they are homeless. Rapid rehousing helps people settle quickly back with family or friends, into private rented, social housing or other affordable and safe long-term housing options.