

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 9 th February 2022
Report Subject	Temporary Accommodation Homelessness Audit 2021 Findings Report
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing
Report Author	Chief Executive
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report confirms the outcome of a recent Audit of the management of temporary accommodation within Flintshire. The audit has highlighted a number of areas for improvement and is categorised as a Red Audit Report.

The Audit Report is due to be presented to Governance & Audit Committee on the 14th March 2022 and it is necessary for Informal Cabinet and the Community Housing & Assets Scrutiny Committee to be aware of this in advance. The Report provides background to the request for the audit, the audit key findings and the process of service improvement required to address the risks identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Community Housing & Assets Scrutiny Committee note the report and provide their comments and observations ahead of the report being presented to Governance and Audit Committee on the 14 th March 2022.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION HOMELESSNESS AUDIT 2021 FINDINGS REPORT
1.01	Background to Temporary Accommodation Temporary Accommodation is “interim housing” provided to people who are homeless (singles/couples/families) and are owed duties under the

	<p>Housing Wales Act (2014) by Flintshire County Council. The service is delivered through the Homeless Team within the Housing & Prevention Service and has a small core team of a Temporary Accommodation Officer and a Support Worker. The Team is supervised by the Homeless Prevention Team Leader.</p> <p>The current portfolio of properties is a mixture of houses of multiple occupation (HMO), self-contained flats and houses which are leased from private landlords, along with a small number Council HRA properties.</p> <p>These properties are secured through a Lease or Management Agreement and then licenses for occupation are issued to those people who reside in the properties. Properties are dispersed across the county and often located within or close to larger towns in Flintshire to enable access to local public services and community infrastructure for homeless households.</p> <p>The demand for Temporary Accommodation and Emergency Accommodation has grown significantly on the back of the covid pandemic with Welsh Government requiring all homeless people to be accommodated through the “everyone in” directive. Pre-covid the portfolio had a high number of vacancies with properties empty, but since covid and the additional duties to house more people, extra properties via HRA have been secured to meet the increased demand. The service also relies on hotel and B&B accommodation, as is the case across all parts of Wales in the current climate.</p> <p>Demand is likely to continue to grow as we exit the pandemic and enter recovery. There are also legislative changes and a move to “Rapid Rehousing” within the homeless sector which will, in the short to medium term, continue to place significant demands on the homeless service requiring effective temporary housing solutions with appropriate management controls and infrastructure.</p>
1.02	<p>Requesting the Audit</p> <p>A number of areas for improvement and operational challenges associated with the management of the Temporary Accommodation portfolio (limited portfolio – increased demand for homeless accommodation – lack of policy, performance and IT infrastructure) were identified by the Service Manager who requested an audit of the Temporary Accommodation function to test the service before focussing on service growth plans.</p> <p>Opportunities for detailed analysis and assessment of service performance and function has not been as easy as hoped during the pandemic on the back of significant increases in demand for homeless services and specifically temporary accommodation, due to staff and management capacity whilst working within the response phase of the pandemic and under sustained work pressures.</p> <p>The Service Manager is also exploring opportunity to engage in the roll out of the Welsh Government Private Sector Leasing Scheme where private landlords and property owners are encouraged to lease their properties to local authorities in return for a rent guarantee and additional funding to</p>

	<p>improve the condition of their property. These homes are then allocated to residents on a long term basis, helping them to exit homelessness.</p> <p>The audit presented an invaluable opportunity for an independent assessment of service and an opportunity to identify areas of focus for service improvement. It is key that any growth or future service development opportunities for a larger and more diverse portfolio of leased properties are built upon solid foundations.</p>
1.03	<p>The Audit Findings</p> <p>The Audit Report is attached along with Management response and this needs to be reviewed by Scrutiny Committee on the 9th February 2022 before going to Governance & Audit Committee on the 14th March 2022.</p> <p>Summary of key findings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service embraced the change in legislation in response to the COVID 19 pandemic to ensure no individual was homeless and sleeping on the street. • A Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation Policy is not in place to provide guidance on how the service objectives stipulated in the North Wales Regional Homelessness Strategy will be achieved. • Temporary Accommodation processes and contract agreements - A process is not in place to provide guidance on how to deal with refused offers for permanent accommodation, to oversee rent income, arrears and write off, or to monitor contract agreements • Management Information is limited and does not demonstrate effective monitoring of service delivery performance. • The Open Housing System is not being utilised to manage stock, tenancies, repair work or rental income to be able to effectively deliver on service objectives. • Lack of evidence of management information being used to inform decision making and service planning. • Quality of data underpinning risk indicators may not be reliable. • Decision making controls are not documented or evidenced as operating consistently.
1.04	<p>Responding to the Audit Findings</p> <p>A detailed Service Improvement Plan to compliment the Audit Response and pick up on all the actions required to deliver on the Audit recommendations will see a stronger focus placed on the core principles of housing management that are needed to turn the service round and offer assurance that it is run effectively.</p> <p>Processes to underpin the effective management of a temporary accommodation portfolio will be developed and systems and infrastructure will be put in place to enable the service to better monitor performance, manage risk, improve service delivery and enable planned growth and service expansion.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>The following issues have been considered as part of the audit response and service improvement planning process and have a clear resource implication:</p> <p>Human Resources Dedicated Service Improvement (Project Management) – with current staffing capacity issues there will be a need to dedicate officer time to delivering some of the change in relation to policy, procedures and process. Funding for Project Management has been identified to bring in additional capacity through Grant Funding linked to housing support and homelessness services.</p> <p>Capital IT Infrastructure – The Open Housing System is the Councils core housing management IT System and has a specific Private Sector Module that the Council already has access to but has yet to enable. Officer time from IT Services and IT consultancy will be required to enable, test and implement this system functionality</p> <p>Revenue Existing Budgets - A more efficient temporary accommodation portfolio will collect more rent, have shorter void periods, operate cost effective repairs and maintenance activities, offering efficiencies in revenue expenditure for the service.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p>Risk: The audit has clearly identified a number of risks associated with the current ways of working and operating practices</p> <p>Mitigation: Successful delivery of the service improvement plan will address significant areas of risk and strengthen service delivery providing opportunity for the temporary accommodation portfolio to grow in response to growing demand.</p> <p>Risk: Poor management practices and controls measures relating to the temporary accommodation portfolio will mean opportunities such as joining the Welsh Government Private Sector Leasing Scheme will be too high risk and potentially missed.</p> <p>Mitigation: Successful delivery of the service improvement plan will address significant areas of risk and strengthen service delivery providing opportunity for Flintshire to have confidence to engage in the roll out of the Welsh Government Private Sector Leasing Scheme.</p>

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
4.01	None

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Temporary Accommodation (Homelessness) Audit Findings Report December 2021
5.02	Appendix 2 – Temporary Accommodation Service Improvement Plan including Audit response

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Evaluation of the Welsh Government Private Sector Leasing Scheme https://gov.wales/evaluation-private-rented-sector-leasing-scheme-pilot-summary-html

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Martin Cooil – Housing & Prevention Service Manager Telephone: 07880 423234 E-mail: martin.cooil@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Housing Wales Act (2014) Legislation that underpins the homelessness system within Wales including peoples statutory rights and Local Authorities duties and responsibilities.</p> <p>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.</p>