

CONSULTATION REPORT: NEATH PORT TALBOT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2018-22

1.0 Background

- 1.1 On 2 August 2018, the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (Council) Social Care Health and Wellbeing Cabinet Board (Board) approved a 60 day public consultation period in respect of the Neath Port Talbot (NPT) Consultative Draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-22 (The Strategy) attached at Annexe 1. As explained in more detail at that time, this draft was produced by a housing consultant following his comprehensive review of the current and recent historical performance of the Council and its partners in preventing and relieving homelessness. During this process, many partners and stakeholders, including those who provide and use homelessness services, were interviewed by the consultant and so had the chance to influence the content of The Strategy, at that early stage. An abridged and anonymised version of the consultant's review report will be published at the same time as The Strategy.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 During this period, 5 August to 30 September 2018, a number of consultation and engagement activities took place. The outcome of this activity has helped inform the final draft of The Strategy which will be the subject of a report to Board on 6 December 2018.

This activity included:

- An overarching public consultation exercise;
- a specific consultation event for multi-agency stakeholders;
- a specific event for current and former users of homelessness services;
- ad-hoc attendance at partners' pre-existing fora;
- inviting social media response; and
- inviting formal written response.

3.0 Consultation objectives

- To provide a mechanism for people to contribute their views on current and recent historical, local, multi-agency effort to prevent and relieve homelessness;
- to find out if people agree or disagree with the action proposed by the housing consultant who undertook the review of this effort and the reasons;
- to provide a mechanism for people to make supplementary comments and suggestions in respect of any of this action;
- to provide a mechanism for people to suggest alternative action to that already proposed; and
- to ensure that the consultation and engagement exercise reaches as many residents and organisations as possible, including those who use or have previously used homelessness services.

4.0 **Overarching public consultation - methodology**

4.1 To help ensure that the consultation was as widely available as possible, there were 4 mechanisms by which people could submit their views:

- **Online** - a self-completion questionnaire was published on the Council's website. Respondents were not asked to identify themselves, but were asked to indicate why they were interested in The Strategy and their postcode. The questionnaire was live from Tuesday 5 August until Sunday 30 September 2018.
- **Paper Questionnaires in public buildings** - The questionnaire was a replica of the online version and responses were entered into 'SNAP' (our online consultation software package) for analysis. Consultation packs were made available in all Council and participating multi-agency buildings across the county borough. The consultation packs included a supply of self-completion questionnaires; a post box for completed questionnaires; a poster; and, as well as copies of the Strategy itself:
 - An easy-read version of the Strategy (copy attached at Annexe 2); and
 - a "Plan on a Page" summary of the Strategy (copy attached at Annexe 3).

All of these documents were also made available in Welsh.

- **E-mail** - The Social Services Health & Housing Common Commissioning Unit's (CCU) generic e-mail address ccu@npt.gov.uk was promoted for people who wanted to respond via this mechanism.
- **Corporate social media accounts** - the Council's corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts were also monitored for feedback on The Strategy.

4.2 The consultation was promoted via:

- The Council website homepage - via the 'top tasks' and 'top visited' areas and a dedicated web page - Have your say <https://www.npt.gov.uk/1615>;
- adverts/posters on TV screens in the Quays, Neath Civic Centre, Port Talbot Civic Centre, Neath and Port Talbot Bus Stations;
- the Council's corporate social media accounts:
 - The consultation was promoted 5 times on Facebook; and
 - The consultation was promoted 4 times on Twitter;
- the Council's corporate staff newsletter 'In the Loop'. The purpose of this was to encourage staff to give their views and as an additional way to raise awareness of the consultation amongst residents as a significant number of staff live in the county borough;
- press coverage generated by cabinet reports and press releases:
 - The consultation generated 1 SWEP article; and
- details of the consultation were also promoted via Community Voluntary Service and Carers Service Newsletters, Social Media and Webpages.

5.0 Overarching Public Consultation - Responses

A total of 23 completed questionnaires were received during the consultation period (a copy of the questionnaire is attached at Annexe 4) all of which were completed online and in English.

The following provides a summary of the feedback from the questionnaire responses. All percentages shown in this section are relative to the total number of completed questionnaires (i.e. 23).

5.1 About the respondents

Of the 23 responses:

- 14 (61%) stated that they are a resident of Neath Port Talbot;
- 9 (39%) stated that they work for Neath Port Talbot Council;
- 5 (22%) stated that they work in Neath Port Talbot;
- 4 (17%) stated that they use services provided by Neath Port Talbot Council;
- 4 (17%) stated other reasons for being interested in The Strategy;
- 3 (13%) stated that they work for a third sector or voluntary organisation in Neath Port Talbot;
- 1 (4%) stated that they are a volunteer in Neath Port Talbot;
- 1 (4%) stated that they run a business in Neath Port Talbot; and
- 1 (4%) stated that they are a carer.

Of the 4 (17%) “others”, 1 stated that they were a Health professional, one the CEO of a Welsh homelessness charity, 1 an interested young mother and the other a homeless person.

(NB - for this question respondents were asked to select all of the categories that applied to them, some selected more than one answer, therefore the percentages in brackets total more than 100%).

Geographically, the highest number of responses - 11 (48%) - were from the Neath/Neath Valley areas, followed by 5 (22%) from the Port Talbot/Port Talbot Valley areas and 2 (9%) from the Pontardawe/upper Swansea Valley areas. 4 (17%) respondents indicated that they were from outside of the county borough and 1 (4%) respondent did not provide a postcode.

The highest number of respondents - 6 (26%) - were in both the 40-49 and 50-59 years age groups - i.e. 6 (26%) in each, 5 (22%) were aged 30-39 years, 2 (9%) aged both 60-74 years and 25-29 years, and 1 (4%) aged 17-24. In addition, 1 (4%) indicated that they would prefer not to say their age.

15 (65%) respondents were female, 6 (26%) male and 2 (9%) preferred not to say.

20 (87%) respondents described their ethnicity as White British and 3 (13%) as other; the others being:

- “Welsh”;
- “WELSH white”; and
- “white Welsh”.

19 (83%) respondents described themselves as heterosexual, 1 (4%) as bisexual and 3 (13%) preferred not to say.

3 (13%) respondents reported having a disability.

17 (74%) respondents reported having little or no knowledge of the Welsh language, 4 (18%) as being fluent or fairly fluent and 2 (9%) as being learners.

12 (55%) respondents reported having no religion/belief, 7 (32%) as being Christian and 3 (14%) preferred not to say.

5.2 How respondents feel about the proposals

When asked whether they felt more informed having read The Strategy, 12 (53%) respondents said they did partly, 8 (35%) said yes, 2 (9%) said no and 1 (4%) said they didn't know.

14 (61%) respondents indicated that they agree with the proposals in general, 9 (39%) neither agreed nor disagreed with them and 2 (9%) disagreed with them.

(n.b. for this question some respondents chose to select more than one answer therefore the percentages in brackets total more than 100%).

5.3 Reasons given for disagreeing, or neither agreeing nor disagreeing, with the proposals were varied but a common theme running through many was that they were insufficiently detailed and/or aspirational, rather than practical.

5.5 The detail of supplementary narrative comments included in all survey responses can be made available to Members if required. It has not however been included in this report; both because of cumulative volume and for potential data protection reasons, in certain instances.

6.0 Social Media and E-mail Responses

6.1 3 social media and 2 e-mail responses were received which highlighted the following:

- The need to recognise the preventative role that alternative health and wellbeing services can play;
- work more closely with faith-based accommodation and outreach service providers;
- be mindful of how homelessness impacts on families; and
- remember the “human face” of street homelessness.

6.2 The detail of all such responses can be made available to Members if required. It has not however been included in this report for potential data protection reasons, in certain instances.

7.0 Specific Events

Multi-agency event

On 14 September 2018, over 40 staff from a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector partner agencies attended an engagement event. Presentations on best practice were given by Welsh Government, Council and a leading homelessness charity staff, followed by thematic workshops to explore the priority areas suggested in The Strategy.

Notes of these workshops were taken by various participants and so are not consistent in their format or necessarily fit for publication. They were however clearly, generally supportive of all proposed action and do allow for extrapolation of a number of common themes, such as:

- The earliest possible preventative intervention is always preferable;
- there is an existing baseline of productive, local, cross-sectoral endeavour in this area; but
- multi-agency collaboration could be improved;
- optimal use of existing resources is not always made; and
- there is a good deal of relevant, national and international, best practice that is currently untried locally.

Service user event

On 25 September 2018 an engagement event was held for current and former users of homelessness services, at the office of a local homelessness support service provider. 4 current tenants of younger persons supported housing attended. The comments they and the support staff who accompanied them made included:

- There is not enough suitable accommodation for young people generally;
- the Supported Housing Move-on Panel is time-consuming, and the whole process lengthy, with applications often being deferred by the panel;
- benefit rate short-falls result in the use of food banks and other charitable interventions;
- housing association single-person accommodation needs to be more evenly spread around the county borough so that the properties being offered to homeless young people are less often in hard-to-let areas (e.g. at the top end of the valleys with no facilities); and
- there is a particular need for self-contained one-bedroom flats in urban centres.

The more detailed notes of both events can be made available to Members, if required. They have not however been Annexed to this report for potential data protection reasons, in certain instances.

8.0 Ad-hoc attendance at pre-existing fora

- 8.1 CCU staff attended the following multi-agency fora to provide an overview of The Strategy, further disseminate consultation documentation, and encourage individual and collective attendee response:

- 2 July 2018 NPTCVS Strategic Forum (22 attendees);
- 11 September 2018 - NPTCVS CYP Forum (16 attendees);
- 10 September - NPTCVS Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Forum (11 attendees);
- 13 September - Health Social Care & Wellbeing Forum (12 attendees);
- 3 October - ABMU/Western Bay Health & Housing Group (12 attendees);
- 27 September 2018 - Older Persons Council (8 attendees); and
- 17 September 2018 - Supporting People Planning Group (10 attendees).

Notes of these meetings are taken by those who organise them, and disseminated to routine attendees only, but the main issues raised were:

- How third sector organisations can get involved;
- funding concerns in respect of the implementation of the plan;
- how the principles will be achieved in practice;
- the challenge of joining up of organisation and departments to promote early intervention with restricted funds;
- links with other plans e.g. the CYP Partnership Plan;
- links with NPT Public Service Board's Wellbeing Plan; and
- links with Social Services and Well-being Act/Western Bay Area Plan.

9.0 Formal/written Responses

9.1 Letters were received from:

- The Royal British Legion (copy attached at Annexe 5).

The Legion expressed its disappointment that The Strategy fails to make specific reference to, or include specific provision for, veterans of the UK Armed Forces.

- NPT Armed Forces Covenant Forum (copy attached at Annexe 6).

The Forum expressed similar concerns to the Legion.

- Crisis (copy attached at Annexe 7).

Crisis felt that we not compliant with the applicable Welsh Government Code of Guidance because The Strategy did not include an action plan.

- ABMU Local Health Board (copy attached at Annexe 8).

ABMU felt it isn't clear from The Strategy and given the current context, whether there is enough housing availability to deliver the priorities.

They noted that much of the prevention agenda was focussed on services for tenants that were at risk of crisis (i.e. pre-crisis prevention) and suggest also considering prevention further upstream to try to prevent tenants moving into the pre-crisis phase in the first instance.

The proposed vertical equity approach to target more resource at areas of greater need was welcomed as part of a proportionate universalism approach to prevention.

They highlighted the key role for Education and Youth Services in identifying and supporting young people who may be at risk of homelessness and recommended that consideration be given to opportunities to raise awareness of youth homelessness and support services with young people themselves and those working with them (such as in schools and the youth service).

10.0 Council Response to the Consultation

10.1 The Council response is summarised overleaf in a “you said - we did” format.

Only one small change needs to be made to The Strategy that will be taken to Social Services Health & Wellbeing Cabinet Board in December, as a result of the consultation.

This is because all other constructive comments, observations, and suggestions received, that it is actually within our gift to act upon, can now be acknowledged and appropriately implemented at the action plan developmental stage, without doing so.

YOU SAID:	WE DID:
The Strategy is not compliant with the applicable Welsh Government Code of Guidance because it does not include an action plan.	We checked with the Welsh Government (WG) that the document we are required to produce and publish by the end of 2018 does not necessarily have to include an action plan, as long as it details the action we propose to take. The WG confirmed that The Strategy does this at a high level and so is compliant with the relevant legislation. It was therefore considered worthwhile taking time beyond the publication deadline to produce a meaningful plan based on the finally approved, proposed action. We have therefore already started making arrangements to develop a detailed and practical action plan, to implement the strategy, with all our partners, including the organisation that made this observation, over the next four years.
The strategy only says where we want to be, not how we will get there, and it lacks practical detail.	
We need to recognise the preventative role that alternative health and wellbeing service providers can play.	We have agreed with them that the service providers who made these observations will be involved in developing the action plan.
We need to work more closely with faith-based accommodation and outreach service providers.	
We need to be mindful of how homelessness impacts on families.	Colleagues and voluntary sector partners who commission and deliver services to children & families were engaged in the review, consulted on the content of The Strategy, and will be further involved in developing the action plan.
We need to remember the “human face” of street homelessness.	People who use or who have used homelessness services were engaged in the review, consulted on the content of The Strategy, and will be further involved in developing the action plan.
The earliest possible preventative intervention is always preferable.	We will ensure that these themes run through the action plan in implementing all the priorities in The Strategy.
Education and Youth Services have a key role to play in early intervention and prevention.	
Multi-agency collaboration could be improved.	
Optimal use of existing resources is not always made.	
There is a good deal of relevant, national and international, best practice that is currently untried locally.	The action proposed in the Strategy makes specific mention of “Housing First”, “Temp to Perm”, and the digitalisation of application for housing and support as best practice that could be replicated locally. We will ensure that any further innovation brought to the table by partners engaged in developing the action plan will be seriously considered.

YOU SAID:	WE DID:
<p>There is not enough suitable accommodation for young people generally and there is a particular need for self-contained one-bedroom flats in urban centres.</p>	<p>There is a specific action proposed in The Strategy around mapping the availability of single/younger person accommodation, in both the social and private rented sectors, and taking the action necessary to meet any deficits identified. This will be further detailed and tasked to specific people in the action plan.</p>
<p>It isn't clear from The Strategy whether there is enough housing availability to deliver the priorities</p>	
<p>Arrangements for move-on to permanent from temporary accommodation are complex and oftentimes protracted.</p>	<p>There is a more general action proposed in The Strategy around ensuring that the administrative burden placed on service providers by those who commission the services they deliver is necessary, appropriate, and proportionate. This will be further detailed and tasked to specific people in the action plan.</p>
<p>Benefit rate short-falls result in the use of food banks and other charitable interventions.</p>	<p>There is a specific action proposed in The Strategy around further developing positive and productive joint working relationships with key local DWP personnel. This will be further detailed and tasked to specific people in the action plan.</p>
<p>The Strategy fails to make specific reference to or include specific provision for veterans of the UK Armed Forces.</p>	<p>We deliberately wrote The Strategy with a view to improving the homelessness prevention and relief services delivered to all citizens of the county borough and targeting those most in need. This universal approach is not intended to any way detract from the legislative priority need status of a number of groups of people, including veterans at the point of discharge from service, or at any point if they in any case have such status, e.g. because of illness or disability. However we could not include any one specific priority need group without giving all the others equal mention. Nevertheless, there is already a proposed action in The Strategy around developing specific housing plans/strategies focusing on helping people most at risk of experiencing homelessness. This acknowledges the need to review the range of accommodation options for our most at risk client groups; albeit that it only includes single people under the age of 35 by way of example. This list will be extended to include veterans and other vulnerable groups.</p>