

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
SOCIAL CARE HEALTH & WELL-BEING CABINET BOARD
7 February 2019

Report of the Head of Adult Services – A. Thomas

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All

Housing Options Service

Purpose of the Report

To provide Members with an overview of the Housing Options Service.

Service specific information

Housing Options is a statutory service that assists and supports applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Prevention work will be carried out to save tenancies where possible and temporary accommodation will be made available for anyone becoming homeless and meeting the Priority Need criteria, while permanent accommodation is sourced. The front line duty team are based in Neath Civic Centre and have a 24 hour telephone duty service. Anyone presenting to the team that is homeless on the day will be assessed on that day to establish the needs of that applicant and the level of assistance that can be provided. Anyone not homeless on the day will be assessed within 48 hours.

The service has a team of 9 Housing Options Officers (HOO). 7 are based in Neath Civic Centre and they are the first point of contact for the initial assessments. 2 officers are based within the temporary accommodation units providing support to the residents of the 39 units of temporary accommodation managed by the service. They also provide support and assistance to applicants in B&B.

A team of 7 Support and Resettlement Assistants (SRA) provide assistance to the HOO's to deliver the support identified via the needs assessment for each individual.

The service also has a Gateway officer coordinating referrals to Supporting People (SP) funded services, Private Sector Access Officer (temporary to end of March), a Finance Officer responsible for DHP applications and recovery of bonds, an Accommodation Officer responsible for nominations from RSL's and rent collection along with administrative support assistants. The service also has a mediation worker funded via Welsh Government S180 funding, employed by Llamau and providing a mediation service to young people and their families.

Housing Wales Act duties

The Housing Wales Act 2014 was implemented on 27th April 2015. The changes were reflective of the need to focus on early intervention and prevention, partnership working and using all resources available such as the private rented sector.

The duties owed to applicants is categorised in various sections of the legislation which are detailed below:

Section 60 – advice and assistance – if it is clear from the initial presentation that the client is not homeless nor threatened with homelessness within 56 days then advice is given under this duty.

Section 62 – Duty to assess – if there is information provided that suggests someone will be homeless or is threatened with homelessness within 56 days, an assessment will be carried out to determine what duty is owed.

Section 66 – Duty to help prevent homelessness (prevention duty) – When eligible and threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Reasonable steps to be taken to prevent homelessness. Reasonable steps may include mediation, additional support to manage the tenancy, financial assistance.

Section 73 – duty to help secure accommodation (relief duty) – when eligible and homeless, reasonable steps need to be taken to relieve the homelessness. A standard reasonable step could be assistance with sourcing a property in the private sector or with an Registered Social Landlord (RSL).

Section 75 – duty to secure accommodation (final duty) – this applies when above duties have been unsuccessful and is to help applicants who are in priority need and unintentionally homeless.

Section 68 – Interim duty to secure accommodation for homeless applicants in priority need – the authority must secure suitable temporary accommodation is available to an applicant who meets the priority need criteria. Examples of this are dependent children, pregnant, domestic violence, mental health issues

Any accommodation sourced to discharge a S66, S73 or S75 duty as above has to be available for a minimum period of 6 months and has to be reasonable and affordable.

Provision of temporary accommodation

Housing Options has units of temporary accommodation across Neath. These are used to temporarily house applicants who are owed a S68 duty. The accommodation is a mix of hostels and self-contained, LA owned and leased from RSL's.

Beaufort House – 14 bed hostel, shared facilities (LA owned)

Brombill House – 8 bed hostel, self contained units (Leased from Tai Tarian)

Golwg Y Dre – 4 x 1 bed self contained units (management agreement with Gwalia)

Lewis Rd – 5 self contained units currently utilised for young people (leased from Gwalia)

8 x self contained flats (leased from Tai Tarian)

Current situation

Statistics:

Year end figures - 2017/18

2159 presentations were made to the service between 1/4/17 to 31/3/18

1772 resulted in a S62 assessment

Of those 1772 assessed, 375 were not homeless or threatened with homelessness in 56 days

1072 cases were accepted under duties S66/73/75 with 534 successfully discharged.

The cases that were unsuccessfully discharged under a S66 would subsequently have been accepted under a Section 73 relief duty which

is open for 56 days, and subject to priority need anyone unsuccessful on a Section 73 would proceed to a Section 75. Ultimately the only cases open as a Section 75 final duty will be the ones in most need i.e. applicants in temporary accommodation

2018/19

1826 presentations have been received between 1/4/18 and 21/1/19, based on averages for the year there is an expectation of 2200 presentations by the end of 2018/19.

Based on the above prediction, the numbers of presentations to the service have not increased, however the complexity of cases has increased and therefore intensity of work relating to individuals.

Due to the complexity of the cases it is more difficult to source suitable and affordable housing for individuals as the support needs linked to vulnerabilities such as mental health issues are high. There is limited provision locally for applicants who have complex needs and some are deemed unable to manage an independent tenancy and are therefore being excluded by RSL's. Cases such as these are often within our temporary accommodation and it is difficult to source move on accommodation increasing the time an individual spends in temporary accommodation and as a result increasing use of B&B

As of 21/1/19 the service had 18 applicants in B&B who are owed a duty to provide temporary accommodation, with an additional 8 who would otherwise be rough sleeping and are placed under winter provision funding. Early January saw the numbers in B&B rise to 28, with all the units of interim accommodation also full.

Rough sleeper provision

NPTCBC is in the process of opening a night shelter for the first time. Housing Justice Cymru have been allocated funding received by NPTCBC from WG specifically to improve services for rough sleepers. The shelter will open late January and will be open 7 nights a week until the end of March. The outcomes will be regularly monitored to establish a need for the coming winters and whether the need is being met in the right way.

NPTCBC have an outreach service, also funded by WG. This service is provided by Caerlas. This scheme has 2 full time outreach workers who engage with all rough sleepers daily. That contact enables them to build up relationships with the rough sleepers and identify their needs which

ensures that appropriate housing is found along with suitable ongoing support.

During winter months the service can also provide “winter provision” for rough sleepers. This could be in the form of B&B for a period of time, or for those who do not want to access any form of accommodation this could be a provision of sleeping bags, hats, gloves. There are also outreach services provide by third sector organisations such as hot evening meals and a breakfast run once a week

Future plans

The service is continuing to prioritise prevention work to achieve as many successful prevention outcomes as we are able to. Partnership working is crucial for this to work, the service is involved in many multi agency forums to take this work forward, including the development of community hubs, involvement in initiatives and also co-location with agencies who can assist with discharging the duties. Close work is also being carried out with RSL’s in order to maximise all possibilities of preventing tenancies when action is due to be pursued by the RSL

The services own Social Lettings Agency is continually looking to expand property numbers by bringing new landlords into the scheme. The SLA sits within the wider Housing Options service so is a crucial provision for accessing accommodation for applicants who may not ordinarily access RSL’s or the high street letting agents.

We are in the process of carrying out work on 3 units of additional temporary accommodation in Port Talbot. Despite currently having 39 units they are full with B&B numbers at an unprecedented high. This is linked to the increased complexity of cases where a S68 duty is relevant.

Homelessness Strategy

The Homelessness Strategy 2018 to 2022 is now in place. An action plan has been created to carry out the work identified in the strategy. There is a strong focus on prevention and the LA utilising all local resources such as other Supporting People funded services to assist with prevention. Multi agency working is also a priority which is something Housing Options actively encourages in both case work and service planning. Moving forward it is likely this will be on a locality basis with community hubs being discussed and improving access to services for applicants

Case studies:

Mr S/Ms C – a couple that presented to the service following an eviction from a private rent property. Mr S had been known to Housing Options for several years having made 6 homeless presentations to the service in 9 years. He had a history of drug misuse having been a heroin addict for many years and losing his older brother following an overdose. He was also a persistent offender having served prison sentences. At the time of presentation the couple had a 6 month old baby and Mr S had been clean of substances for a year.

The couple were placed in temporary accommodation as a temporary stay with a family member broke down. Support was in place from the Housing Options support staff and social services. Work was carried out with the couple in terms of benefit and financial advice in preparation for a tenancy.

The couple worked with the services' private sector officer to source a property. Financial assistance was given to provide a bond and rent in advance. Support was also given to request a direct payment for the Universal Credit housing element. This may only be for a short time (possibly 3 months) but it would enable them to settle into the property and get their finances arranged prior to having the rent paid directly to themselves.

Mr M

Mr M is 78 years old and presented to Housing Options following the breakdown of his marriage. He is a Spanish citizen, had lived in Southern Ireland for a considerable time, moved to the UK to live with his wife and son and was in receipt of a British pension. Eligibility for the service is one of the first things considered when an applicant presents. Due to his vulnerability and age a decision was made to place him in temporary accommodation pending further investigations on his eligibility and homelessness.

We were made aware that Mr M owns a house which is in disrepair and currently being refurbished. We were also made aware of a significant amount of money that he and his wife had available to them, however his wife was refusing to give him access. Discussions were held with Protection of Vulnerable Adults coordinator (POVA) due to the withholding of finances, however it could not be addressed via POVA. He is not eligible for housing benefit due to the assets but as he cannot access any of it he is unable to pay for his own accommodation and only has access to his pension.

Mr M is still in temporary accommodation which is being funded by the service as the alternative would be him sleeping in his car. His property will be available to move into some time in February so support staff will be working towards that and preparing him for the move.

Ms J

Ms J presented to the service having recently moved to the area to be nearer family but family could not accommodate. From the initial contact she presented as having mental health issues and very chaotic behaviour. Ms J was placed in several temporary accommodation options such as B&B's and hotels but lost each one due to her behaviour.

Concerns were raised at the level of resources relating to Ms J as she was regularly being dealt with by police, regularly taken to Ward F and being dealt with intensively by Housing Options with no results due to her behaviour. A multi agency meeting was held to discuss a way forward. This involved representatives from SW Police, Mental Health services, ASB officer and Housing Options. A strategy was put in place for the foreseeable future. She was also referred to and discussed in SV Marac for all partners to be aware that she could potentially be rough sleeping. Unfortunately her behaviour did not change and she was imprisoned.

Ms J is due to be released from prison shortly and despite all efforts to assist her previously, the legislation is such that a new application has to be taken and temporary accommodation offered again. Every effort will be made to engage Ms J with support and suitable services and to continue with the progress we are informed she has made in prison. However, the complexity of this case makes it difficult to assist her with intensive support and rehousing options. The resources locally for complex cases such as this are low and very often the options are so limited that general needs housing with support is the only option when the applicant clearly needs to be in supported housing.

Financial Impact

Not Applicable

Equality Impact Assessment

Not Applicable

Workforce Impacts

There are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

Legal Impacts

There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

Risk Management

There are no known risks associated with this item.

Consultation Outcome

Not applicable.

Sustainability Appraisal

Not applicable.

Recommendation

This report is for information only.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

Not applicable.

Implementation of Decision

Not applicable.

Appendices

Not applicable.

List of Background Papers

Not applicable.

Officer Contact

Angela Thomas, Head of Adult Services

Email: a.j.thomas@npt.gov.uk

Tel: 01639 763794