

**NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Cabinet Board**

**9<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**Report of the Interim Head of Housing and Communities –  
Chelé Zandra Howard**

**Matter for Decision**

**Wards Affected:** All Wards

**Participation in Welsh Governments Empty Homes Scheme**

**Purpose of the Report:**

To seek authority from Members to:

- Allocate £240,000 of funding to participate in the Welsh Government (“WG”) Empty Homes Scheme.
- To request delegated authority for the Interim Head of Housing and Communities to enter into a Service Level Agreement (“SLA”) with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (“RCT CBC”) to allow the authority to deliver the WGs Empty Homes Scheme and to implement any minor changes to the Scheme.

**Executive Summary:**

The WG Empty Homes Scheme (“the Scheme”) is designed to further reduce the number of long-term empty properties in Wales and

increase housing supply by offering grants to owners of long term empty properties.

WG will fund £2.4 million towards the implementation of the Scheme, each participating Local Authority is also required to contribute funds towards the scheme. The Councils contribution would be a maximum of £240,000 for the 2023/24- 2024/25 financial period.

This Scheme is managed by RCT CBC on behalf of the participating authorities and as such, participation in this scheme will require the Council to enter into a SLA with RCT CBC.

### **Background:**

In response to the number of long term empty properties across Wales, a the Empty Homes Scheme was developed by WG to provide grant aid to owners of long term empty properties for them to undertake the required works to bring them back into use.

The Scheme follows the success of the previous Valleys Task Force Empty Property Scheme, which provided grants to renovate empty properties and had very similar criteria to this Scheme. The Council participated in year one of the Valleys Task Force Empty Property Scheme as it was 100% funded by WG, but a decision was made for the Council not participate in year two, as a 35% Local Authority contribution was required.

WG have made an allocation of £50 million across Wales to fund the Scheme for a period of two years. Each participating Local Authority has been allocated a percentage of the funding based on the number of empty properties registered in the Authority area.

RCT CBC will be the delivery lead authority administering the Scheme. Which means that all applications and payments will be dealt with by RCT CBC. The Council will be responsible for carrying out surveys and inspections of properties under the Scheme and

providing this survey information to RCT CBC, so that they are able to administer the scheme.

The Council has been awarded 4.8% of the available £50 million, this equates to £2.4 million over the two years of the Scheme with a required contribution from the authority of 10%. This means that the Council will be required to fund up to a maximum of £240,000 over the two years, if they wish to participate.

This Scheme could potentially result in over 100 empty properties being brought back into use across Neath Port Talbot over the period of the Scheme.

Applicants who meet the Schemes criteria will be considered for grant aid towards the cost of repairs to the empty home, subject to the following conditions:

- Grant limit is set at £25,000 cost of works (ancillary fees added on top).
- Energy efficiency improvements will be a requirement as part of the works undertaken on the property.
- Homeowner applicants are required to make a mandatory contribution of 15% of the total cost of eligible works up to £25,000 (capped at £3,750). The mandatory contribution will be waived for applicants in financial hardship.
- Grant aid will only be awarded for eligible work identified by the Local Authority's surveyor. All works identified by the surveyor will need to be completed to ensure all hazards are removed from the property. Only essential repair works required to make the home safe, secure and free from any category 1 hazards will be considered.

- Not all applicants will receive the maximum grant award. No grant assistance will be awarded where the total assessed work is under £1,000.
- The completion of all eligible work is a requirement to grant payment being released. If the cost of eligible works exceeds the £25,000 grant maximum, the applicant will be responsible to finance the excess cost. The applicant must evidence that they have the finance available to complete the eligible works.
- Any work completed prior to the survey and grant approval will not be eligible for grant aid.
- Repayment of the grant aid awarded is required if the home is sold, or not occupied as intended during the 5-year grant condition period.
- It is a requirement that a full Legal Charge be registered against the property title at the Land Registry in favour of RCT.
- Grant payment will only be released on certification of works to the satisfaction of the Local Authority and once the Legal Charge is placed.

### **Financial Impacts:**

The authority will need to contribute 10% of the allocation, this equates to a maximum of £240,000 over the two years of the scheme.

There is sufficient funding available from capital grants received previously which remain unspent (unapplied capital grants) to meet this commitment of a maximum of £240,000.

## **Integrated Impact Assessment:**

A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The first stage assessment has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required. A summary is included below:

- No negative impacts identified as a persons protected characteristic will not impact on their ability to apply for the grant and the application process will be in the person's first language of choice.
- There are a number of benefits in bringing empty properties back into use and ensuring these homes are energy efficient. These benefits may have more of a positive impact on some groups of people due to their protected characteristic.
- This proposal positively supports biodiversity and the five ways of working.

The Welsh Government impact assessment can be found at Background Paper 1 for information.

## **Valleys Communities Impacts:**

The Scheme would be available for all eligible properties across the Neath Port Talbot area, including the Valley areas. As such there is no specific impact on the Valley communities in contrast to other areas of Neath Port Talbot, but the proposal will have a positive impact on all areas, including the Valleys.

### **Workforce Impacts:**

There are no direct impacts on Council staff.

Fees are claimable from the Councils allocation of funding for costs such as surveys and mileage, etc.

### **Legal Impacts:**

The Scheme is in line with Local Authority powers to provide assistance, contained in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002.

### **Risk Management Impacts:**

This is a low-risk project, as the match funding from the Council does not need to be paid upfront but will need to be in place once the works have been approved.

Not participating in the Scheme would have a negative impact on the Council's approach to bringing empty homes back into use.

### **Crime and Disorder Impacts:**

The Scheme will help tackle empty homes along with the associated risks of anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and other environmental impacts that attract crime and disorder activity.

### **Consultation:**

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

### **Recommendations:**

It is recommended that Members approve:

- The allocation of £240,000 from the Councils Capital Spending Programme in order to participate in the Welsh Government Empty Homes Scheme.

and that the Interim Head of Housing and Communities is given delegated authority to:

- Enter into a Service Level Agreement with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council for the delivery of the Welsh Government Empty Homes Scheme for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025;
- Approve any minor changes to the Scheme in the future.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To enable the authority to offer the Scheme and to draw down the funding of up to £2.4 million into the Council to increase and improve the housing stock within Neath Port Talbot.

### **Implementation of Decision:**

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1: First Stage Impact Assessment

### **List of Background Papers:**

Background Paper 1: Welsh Government Impact Assessment.

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