



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

**NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL
SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

21st September 2023

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

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All Wards

**Housing and Communities Department – Mid-Year Progress
Report**

Purpose of the Report

The Housing and Communities Department was established in January 2023, this report sets out progress against key programmes of work over the first half of the department's establishment. In addition this report provides a response to questions raised by Scrutiny Committee.

Executive Summary

In January 2023, an Interim Head of Housing and Communities was appointed to oversee the newly established Housing and Communities Department ("the Department").

The Department brings together a number of Council functions including, Community Safety Team, Area Planning Board Team, Refugee & Asylum, Housing Strategy, Homelessness, Housing Support and Housing Adaptations & Renewals.

Each of the above areas have their own work streams and priorities, this report sets out some of the key achievements against the various programmes of work.

This report also answers questions that were posed by Scrutiny Committee in July 2023 and sets out key areas of work that is being progressed by the department.

Background

Following the presentation of the Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan (Background Paper One) to Scrutiny Committee on 13th July 2023, a number of questions were raised in relation to how the Department was working to resolve the identified challenges.

Whilst the Department has only been established since January 2023, significant work has already been progressed against a number of key Department priorities and clear plans of action are in place to work towards resolving some of the most challenging issues facing communities within Neath Port Talbot.

Since the Department is newly established and in light of questions raised in Scrutiny, Officers have developed a mid-year update report (Appendix One). This report covers some of the key projects undertaken across the whole Department, each team within the Department has its own extensive work plan and so this report does not include business as usual and is not meant to represent the Department's work plan in its entirety.

A response to the questions raised by Scrutiny Committee is provided below.

Question One - Private sector housing is more expensive than local housing allowance and Registered Social Landlords ("RSLs") cannot accommodate demand – what is being done to address this issue?

Answer One – The Rapid Rehousing Plan (Background paper Three) sets out an action plan to address these issues, a Rapid Rehousing Coordinator came into post in May 2023 and is responsible for supporting the Council to progress this five year Plan (2022-2027). The intention of this Plan is to transition from the current baseline homelessness position, to providing more suitable models of accommodation and support, including moving away from the use of temporary accommodation.

Alongside the Rapid Rehousing Plan, are a range of actions within the Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan (Background Paper One) to help stimulate the development of more affordable housing. This includes utilising Social Housing Grant (“SHG”) to develop more affordable housing.

The Department update at Appendix One sets out some of the work being undertaken in these areas.

Question Two: What are the waiting lists for RSL’s and what housing is being developed through SHG?

Answer Two: Officers use waiting list figures from our largest RSL, Tai Tairan, for the purposes of strategic planning. The reason for this is that a household may be on the waiting list for more than one RSL operating in Neath Port Talbot and so combining this information would not provide an accurate picture of demand. Tai Tairan’s waiting list as at 31.07.23 was:

Band	Number of Households
Urgent banding	203
Gold banding	286
Silver banding	569
Bronze meeting	2391
Total	3449

In relation to the use of SHG, we are currently projected to deliver a total of 661 homes in Neath Port Talbot via this capital scheme during the grant period 2022/23 to 2024/25.

Question Three: How many private houses are available in Neath Port Talbot.

Answer Three: This is not information that is collected by the Department. The development of the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) is led by the Planning & Public Protection Department and contains information on the local housing market. The LHMA has been submitted to Welsh Government for their approval.

The draft LHMA indicates the following tenure breakdown in Neath Port Talbot in 2020.

Tenure	%	Number of Households
Private rental	10.67	7,033
Social Housing	19.02	12,534
Owner Occupied	70.31	46,342

Question Four: How many people are homeless and what are the demographics and circumstances?

Answer Four: Please refer to Appendix Two, which provides a breakdown of this information.

It is clear from both July presentations to Housing Options and from cases open to Housing Options that the biggest reason for approaching the service is due to tenants of private sector properties needing advice or assistance. This may be due to a notice already having been served, or for advice if they are pre-empting a notice due to the changes brought in by the Renting Homes Wales Act in December 2022. Some changes to the Renting Homes Wales Act were not fully implemented until June 2023, which is likely to be the reason for high numbers in July.

Relationship breakdowns remain a consistent reason for becoming homeless, with 41% of all open cases being due to either a relationship breakdown or breakdown with family/friends which has impacted on their accommodation. There are mediation services available and when it is appropriate this service is offered to applicants.

Question Five: What emergency accommodation for those that become homeless are operated by the Council?

Answer Five: Please refer to Appendix Two, which provides a breakdown of all temporary accommodation (“TA”) operated by the Council.

Question Six: How can we make TA better/more available?

Answer Six: This is a key action within both the Rapid Rehousing Plan and Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan, currently there is an overreliance on Hotels/B&Bs, which is not an optimal environment for people and is very costly. The Department update at Appendix One sets out some of the key work to date in this area.

The leased stock of TA has increased almost 300% since 2020 and discussions with RSL’s continue to be had on availability of properties that can be leased by the Council. The current leased portfolio is a mix of short and long term leases. Short term leases are generally 12 months and currently several properties are leased in areas of further development e.g. county flats where properties are vacant pending redevelopment but are planned for a later phase of redevelopment so the void properties are then utilised for TA.

A considerable amount of work is currently ongoing to minimise the use of hotels for families. This includes a process to ensure that any families placed in hotels are moved to a self-contained unit when one becomes available to ensure that time spent in hotels is as short as possible. There is also a considerable amount of work underway to

source family sized accommodation with plans for RSL's to utilise a WG capital grant to purchase more family sized properties.

The current ratio of single people to families in TA is 4:1; however Officers recognise the significant impact on families and children that are living in hotels and therefore sourcing family accommodation is a high priority for the Department.

Financial Impacts

This report has no financial impacts as it for information purposes.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for monitoring / information purposes.

Valleys Communities Impacts

This report has no valleys communities' impacts as it for information purposes.

Workforce Impacts

This report has no workforce impacts as it for information purposes.

Legal Impacts

This report has no legal impacts as it for information purposes.

Risk Management Impacts

This report has no risk management impacts as it for information purposes.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item as the report is for information purpose.

Recommendations

To note the contents of the report.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To ensure oversight of the Housing and Communities Department work programme.

Implementation of Decision

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

Appendices

Appendix One: Update Report;

Appendix Two: Homelessness Data.

List of Background Papers

Background Paper One: [Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan](#)

Background Paper Two: [Draft Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities Strategy](#)

Background Paper Three: [Rapid Rehousing Plan](#)

Background Paper Four: [Housing Support Grant Strategy](#)

Officer Contact

Chelé Zandra Howard: Interim Head of Housing and Communities

Email: c.howard@npt.gov.uk