



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy 2022-26



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The scale of the challenge is considerable, but together with our partners **we are committed to helping the most vulnerable in our community.**

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Councillor Geraint Thomas

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Foreword

I am delighted to present Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022-2026.

The Strategy builds upon the existing efforts and progress being made by not only the Local Authority, but also its key stakeholders and partners to look forward and develop homes and solutions to meet the current and future demand and prevent future homelessness.

There is also a clear recognition of the 'everyone in and no one left out' approach and much consideration into ensuring the solutions meet the needs of our communities, which are often multifaceted and diverse by nature, by broadening the range of accommodation to give people brighter and sustainable futures, and where homelessness cannot be prevented, ensure that it is brief and non-recurrent.

We welcome the rapid rehousing approach to homelessness and the additional financial support and guidance from Welsh Government to support us in accelerating much of our development programme to increase the creation of quality affordable, low carbon homes at pace and scale to work to better meet the needs of our community going forward.

Whilst this paves the way for innovative solutions, better prevention and rapid responses to homelessness, we also recognise the significant challenge ahead.

With already high levels of deprivation locally, pressure from rising living costs, market rents and the significant challenge in exit planning from the excessive use of temporary accommodation, the scale of the challenge is considerable, but together with our partners we are committed to helping the most vulnerable in our community.

**Councillor
Geraint Thomas**
Cabinet Member
for Regeneration
and Housing



Purpose of the Strategy

This strategy sets out the strategic priorities of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and its partner agencies for homelessness prevention and alleviation and housing related support services over the coming 4 years (2022-26).

It refreshes earlier priorities that were included in the Council's former Homelessness Strategy, and the Housing Support Grant (HSG) Delivery Plan for 2021-22. Development of the priorities was informed by a comprehensive needs assessment exercise which included direct engagement with stakeholders within the Council, providers of support services, other stakeholders such as Probation and the NHS and of course service users.

HSG is an early intervention grant to support activity that prevents people from becoming homeless, stabilises their housing situation or helps potentially homeless people to find and keep accommodation. The grant is designed to augment, complement and support statutory services, thus ensuring that the overall local offer helps people into the right homes, with the right support to succeed. It makes a significant contribution to the implementation of Part 2 of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 which focuses on homelessness prevention.

Services supported through the HSG should be person centred and address multiple problems vulnerable people who are homeless or likely to become homeless often face (for example debt, employment, substance misuse, violence against women, domestic and sexual abuse and mental health problems). The services should ultimately reduce the need for costly interventions in these areas by other public services.

Strategic planning is key to the effective commissioning of HSG services. This will help ensure that homelessness is prevented and that people requiring services are supported appropriately.

This will also help ensure value for money is achieved in deploying the grant. Welsh Government requires a single strategy incorporating the Council's statutory homelessness duties funded through the revenue settlement and non-statutory, preventative services funded through the HSG. The strategy recognises the inter-dependency between these elements and more widely with other public services providing support to vulnerable people.

Legislative and Policy Context

This strategy incorporates the wider vision of the Council and is aligned with the Council's wider corporate plans, and the national legislative and policy framework to ensure the Housing Support Programme supports the Council to meet its ambitions for the people of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough.

Local Context

The Strategy makes critical steps on meeting ambitions that are central to the **Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Economic Vision 2020-2035** that sets out the vision for modern homes and great places. Through this strategy the Council will diversify housing supply by providing modern energy efficient homes and will ensure that everyone has a safe place to call home. The Council will create places for people that are green, attractive and have a character that is distinctive to Merthyr Tydfil. In addition, this strategy will contribute to the Council's **Placemaking Plan** that creates a series of projects and specific interventions that form a blueprint for a successful Merthyr town centre as the tourism capital of the Valleys & Beacons.

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The **MTCBC Housing Support Grant Local Delivery Plan 2021-2022** set out priorities for the HSG that will be built on through this strategy.

- Continue to support service providers to pay wages which reflect the demands, skill and dedication required of housing support workers by increasing contract prices for established projects;
- Increasing the amount of supported accommodation for those who require it;
- Improve the offering of specialist support to the growing cohort of service users with two or more complex needs; particularly mental health and substance dependence;
- Support housing and housing support staff to fulfil their roles through a range of training opportunities.

Housing Support Grant services also contribute to the aims of the **Council's Focus on the Future, Wellbeing in our Community Action Plan** that has a focus on tackling the poverty that many people in Merthyr Tydfil face. The plan sets out two important objectives:

- People feel supported to develop the skills required to meet the needs of businesses, with a developing, safe infrastructure making Merthyr Tydfil an attractive destination;
- People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health.

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National Context

Welsh Government has maintained a consistent focus on tackling homelessness in the context of the long-term impact of UK Government policy, in relation to austerity and welfare support, and also other non-devolved policy areas that have an impact on homelessness such as the work of the Police and Prisons. Under Part 2 of the **Housing (Wales) Act 2014**, the local authority has a new and strengthened duty to prevent and relieve homelessness which has led to a strengthening of local partnership arrangements.

Housing and homelessness policy and practice has continued to evolve in the period since the Housing Act came into force. Among most recent developments, the current **Programme for Government 2021** includes key commitments to legislate in line with the key recommendations in the documents below in relation to homelessness and care experienced young people. Specifically Welsh Government has committed to:

- Explore radical reform of current services for looked after children and care leavers;
- Fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention, rapid rehousing and;
- Support innovative housing developments to meet care needs;
- Improve joint working across housing and social services, utilising corporate parenting responsibilities.

Further commitments are set out in the **Labour / Plaid Cymru Co-operation Agreement** which was published in November 2021. These include:

- Taking immediate and radical action to address the proliferation of second homes and unaffordable housing, using the planning, property and taxation systems;
- Establishing Unnos, a national construction company, to support councils and social landlords to improve the supply of social and affordable housing;
- Reforming housing law and implement the Welsh Government's Homelessness Action Group's recommendation to fundamentally reform homelessness services;
- Publication of a White Paper to include proposals for a right to adequate housing including fair rents and new approaches to making homes affordable.

Further significant changes will be introduced in July 2022 when the Welsh Government enacts the provisions of its [Renting Homes \(Wales\) Act 2016](#). Key changes, which strengthen the rights and protections of tenants include:

- Replacement of current tenancies and licences, including assured shorthold, assured and secure tenancies with secure occupation contracts (generally issued by community landlords – local authorities and housing associations) and standard occupation contracts (generally issued by private landlords).
- Increased duties on landlords to set out respective duties of the landlord and contract holder (tenant).
- Minimum notice period for termination of a contract where there is no fault to 6 months and requirement for at least 6 months to have elapsed since the start of a contract before any such notice is issued.
- Increased protection for contract holders from break clauses, which can only be issued by landlords where certain conditions are met.
- Requirement that all rented properties are fit for human habitation and that landlords keep the structure and exterior of the property in good repair.
- Protection for remaining tenants subject to a joint contract where one contract-holder leaves the property.
- Enhanced contract succession rights for certain groups, including some carers.

These changes will have obvious implications for local authorities and other agencies with duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, in terms of existing tenants or contract holders having enhanced protection from the risk of becoming homeless. However, they may also potentially impact the availability of suitable properties in an area and private landlords willing to rent.

A full schedule of national policy developments that have influenced this Strategy are included in [Appendix B](#).

The guiding principle remains one of preventing homelessness, but where this is not possible, ensuring it is brief and non-repeated. There is a renewed commitment to fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing. Understanding what works, what is promising, and what isn't effective will be crucial to Welsh Government in delivering its policy goals.

In turn, several key principles underpin the Welsh Government approach to homelessness prevention, and these should be enshrined across public and commissioned services. They are as follows:

- The earliest preventions are most effective and most cost effective and should always be the interventions of first choice.
- Tackling and preventing homelessness is a public services matter – rather than a ‘housing matter’.
- All services should place the individual at the centre and work together in a trauma informed way.
- The duties in Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 should be the last line of defence – not the first - and all services should work to the spirit not simply the letter of the law.
- Policy, service delivery and practice should be informed and shaped in a co-productive manner and by those with lived experience.

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A person-centred, multi-agency approach to homelessness requires a contribution from, and alignment with, other services. These service areas are themselves subject to specific legislation and policy, all broadly coalescing around the principles of prevention/ early intervention, person-centred support, promoting independence and providing sustainable solutions. Important areas of relevant legislation and policy are set out below.

Decarbonisation Agenda

Welsh Government have an ambition for the public sector to be Carbon Neutral by 2030 in response to climate change. The programme outlines the Government's to decarbonisation in general and specific related commitments in respect of housing and homelessness.

These include:

- Building 20,000 new low carbon social homes for rent
- Support for cooperative housing, community-led initiatives, and community land trusts

Each of these actions will provide an evolving context for the delivery of this Strategy, particularly in relation to supporting the growth in housing that is required in Merthyr Tydfil to meet the gap in available affordable housing, but also ensure that we are aligned to longer decarbonisation goals for Wales. The Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 (2021 – 2025) from Welsh Government sets out an ambition that by 2025 all new affordable homes in Wales will be built to net zero carbon, and that net zero standards are adopted by developers of all new homes regardless of tenure by this date.

As Greenhouse gases have increased, Merthyr Tydfil has experienced all of the key symptoms of man-made climate change including erratic weather patterns, air pollution, heatwaves and changes in biodiversity. This has also come with associated economic and social costs as businesses and residents have struggled with issues like flood damage and interruption to their daily lives. Merthyr Tydfil Council will be supporting this ambition by carrying out a number of Decarbonisation initiatives and projects that reduce the Carbon Emissions of its operations and impacts on Climate Change. **We've already started the journey.** Many Decarbonisation initiatives are already underway such as the implementation of large-scale energy efficiency measures in buildings. We are also working with an Energy specialist to help prepare a Council plan and road map that will enable us to play our role.



The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Act seeks to strengthen existing governance arrangements for improving the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of Wales to ensure that present needs are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Public bodies listed in the Act need to think about the long term, work better with people and communities, and each other and look to prevent problems and take a more joined up approach.

Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014

The Act makes provision for improving the wellbeing outcomes for people who need care and support, and carers who need support and supported by better co-ordination and partnership by public authorities. The Act recognises the need for increased comprehensive early intervention and intensive support services. There is a duty for local authorities to maintain and enhance the wellbeing of people in need in areas such as education, training and recreation, social and economic wellbeing and physical, mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Welsh Government Affordable Housing Review 2019

This review was commissioned with the aim of examining whether more can be done to increase the supply of affordable housing in Wales and recommendations for change, which will shape the Welsh Government Housing Policy over the coming years. There are a number of themes including affordability, the need for greater certainty by moving towards longer term decision making on issues such as rent and grant, the need to drive collaboration between housing associations and local authorities, and the need for a system to enable social landlords to use greater flexibility.

Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

This Act aims to improve the public sector response in Wales to abuse and violence through improving arrangements to promote awareness of, and prevent, protect and support victims of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Victims of such abuse and violence are a significant client group for housing services. The Act emphasises the focus on prevention and partnership approaches to working in relation to VAWDASV.

Substance Misuse Delivery Plan: 2019 to 2022 (Wales)

This sets out the Welsh Government's key policy and operational priorities and has been reviewed to consider where it needs to be updated in light of COVID-19. The review sets out priority areas that include responding to co-occurring mental health problems which are common in substance misuse, ensuring strong partnership working with housing and homelessness services to further support those with substance misuse issues who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and improving access to services and ensuring people access the support and treatment when they need it.

Preventing youth homelessness

Welsh Government, in its Programme for Government, outlines key commitments to legislate in relation to homelessness and care experienced young people. Our HSP Strategy takes account of key recommendations which include improving joint working across housing and social services, and strengthening corporate parenting responsibilities.



Equality Act 2010

This Act covers the whole of the UK and provides protection for people discriminated against because they are perceived to have, or are associated with someone who has, a protected characteristic. Protection applies to the provision of services and public functions. In addition, a new Socio-Economic Duty was introduced in Wales in 2020 which requires public bodies, when making strategic decisions such as deciding priorities and setting objectives, to consider how their decisions might help reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage.

Vision and Principles

Our vision for homelessness prevention and housing related support services is directly aligned to the Council's long-term plans for the County set out in its Economic Vision 2020-2035. While Merthyr Tydfil may be the smallest County Borough in Wales, it has great potential and the vision identifies the Council's ambitions for the local economy and work with partners, communities, residents and businesses to create an economy that is resilient and provides opportunity for all to prosper.



The corporate vision as set out is:

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To create an environment that supports the growth of our businesses and attracts new businesses to invest;
to equip all of our people with the skills and knowledge to have a job or start a business; to support our community organisations to thrive; and, to attract more visitors to enjoy our remarkable Borough.

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The Core Ambition



The 4 year strategy seeks to contribute to positive change which will be multi-faceted and in line with our overall ambitions. The Housing Support sector will be more stable and attractive to employees resulting in a buoyant workforce with low staff turnover. Salaries will reflect the skills and dedication required to work in the sector and rewards will be appealing to those considering a career in housing support.

Our HSP Strategy is founded on a complementary vision which aligns with the national objective set out in the HSG Guidance of securing 'A Wales where nobody is homeless and everyone has a safe home where they can flourish and live a fulfilled, active and independent life'. **The vision is as follows:**

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Statutory, third and private sector partners work effectively together to make sure that people in Merthyr Tydfil have access to suitable housing and can stay within their local communities. The right support is available within local communities, to prevent those at risk of becoming homeless from losing their homes. **We strive to secure appropriate accommodation as swiftly as possible for those that have become homeless, along with the right kind of personalised support, helping them to a secure future and optimising their wellbeing. Merthyr Tydfil is a place where homelessness is prevented or rare, brief and unrepeated.'**

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Staff across services will have a foundation of knowledge and the tools to support people to address their barriers and build capacity and resilience to cope with future crises. There will be sufficient expertise amongst providers of housing support in Merthyr Tydfil that service users will be able to access the support which is right for them at the earliest possible moment to prevent homelessness. Where homelessness cannot be avoided, people will be swiftly offered suitable accommodation where they can be supported towards independent living.

The most vulnerable people at risk of homelessness will have access to appropriate and intensively supported accommodation which meets their needs, addresses root-causes of behaviours and circumstances through a trauma-informed approach and does not perpetuate cyclical homelessness.

In recognition of the rapidly changing support needs of the population, HSG investment will be able to rapidly respond to changing trends and support needs. Services will be flexible in nature and able to adapt, expand and contract in response to demand, delivering appropriate support that is value for money, primarily preventative in nature, and minimises the use of more expensive front-line services.

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Overview of Merthyr Tydfil

The total population of Merthyr Tydfil is expected to grow modestly between today and 2040, mainly due to migration, but the proportion of people over 65 years and 80 years is expected to grow significantly.

We have some of the most deprived areas in Wales. Austerity measures and welfare reforms have had a greater negative impact in Merthyr Tydfil than in many other areas in Wales. There is a greater concentration of deprivation in the north of the local authority particularly in the areas surrounding Merthyr Tydfil such as Penydarren, Gurnos and Gellideg in Cyfarthfa.

Although levels of deprivation are lower in the south of the local authority, there is a significant concentration of deprivation in Merthyr Vale which is one of two areas of “deep-rooted deprivation” in Merthyr Tydfil. Along with Penydarren, Merthyr Vale and Gurnos have been specifically identified as having significant levels of housing deprivation.



Statement of Need

The **Statement of Need**, available as a separate document, summarises the findings from a comprehensive **Needs Assessment**, which is also available separately. It identifies the key issues for the Housing Support Programme Strategy, Merthyr Tydfil's statutory duties to prevent and alleviate homelessness and in the context of its wider strategic objectives. A summary of the key issues is provided below.

Homelessness, Housing Support and impact of Covid-19

Changes made to homelessness legislation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic removed 'priority need' and adopted an 'all in' approach. This has resulted in a significant increase in the amount of homelessness presentations since March 2020.

Welsh Government legislation and policy summarised in the Needs Assessment sets out clearly the importance of preventing homelessness wherever possible.

This is particularly important in Merthyr Tydfil where there are unique challenges in terms of the aforementioned high levels of deprivation, and disproportionate quantum and complexity of needs of individuals presenting at frontline services. This is coupled with challenging sites and land when considering developing and building new homes.

The Needs Assessment shows that demand for accommodation is significantly higher than the supply available through home ownership, private renting and social housing.

The Housing Solutions Team reluctantly rely heavily on local bed & breakfast and guest houses, to provide temporary accommodation (TA).

Homelessness and Housing Support Grant (HSG) services have a focus on prevention, however feedback from stakeholders described the recent surge in need has meant they have had to focus support on crisis management. Stakeholders identified the need to re-focus on prevention, offering support sooner to prevent homelessness.

Mental Health, Substance Misuse and Co-occurrence

Merthyr Tydfil and Cwm Taf Morgannwg more widely have the highest rates of mental illness and poor well-being in Wales. Housing problems are frequently given as a reason for a person being admitted or re-admitted to inpatient mental health care. People with mental illness are far more likely to live in rented accommodation and their mental ill-health is often given as a major reason for tenancy breakdown.

Mental health was the second highest primary need and was also the highest incidence in secondary needs on referral to HSG services. Further year on year rises are expected post Covid-19.

There are challenges with accessing mental health services both for those with high needs and those whose needs do not meet eligibility criteria of specialist mental health services.

Substance misuse commonly co-occurs with mental health issues in people who are referred to HSG services. Stakeholder feedback suggests that substance misuse emerges as a need for a significant number of HSG referrals once support commences.

A new specialist regional service is now in place. It is too early to fully evaluate the service; however there are early indications of the positive outcomes attributable to the collaboration of Housing and Health.

“Mental health was the second highest primary need and was also the highest incidence in secondary needs on referral to HSG services.”

Young People

Young people aged between 16 and 25 make up a significant proportion of the people presenting to the councils as homelessness, often leaving home due to family breakdown and are amongst the highest groups represented in referrals for HSG funded support.

All councils have recently been tasked by Welsh Government to examine their corporate parenting response in relation to care experienced children and young people (CYP) and their future accommodation needs.

Our future corporate joint working and commissioning will reflect a more joined up corporate parenting approach to preventing future homelessness.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

The number of women presenting as homeless due to violence at home account for on average 8% of our section 66 and section 73 presentations each year.

Stakeholder feedback indicates that refuge provision receives referrals for women with increasingly higher and more complex needs and thus present with higher levels of risk.

There is a need for service development that responds to an increase in women presenting with much more complex, co-occurring substance misuse and mental health challenges.

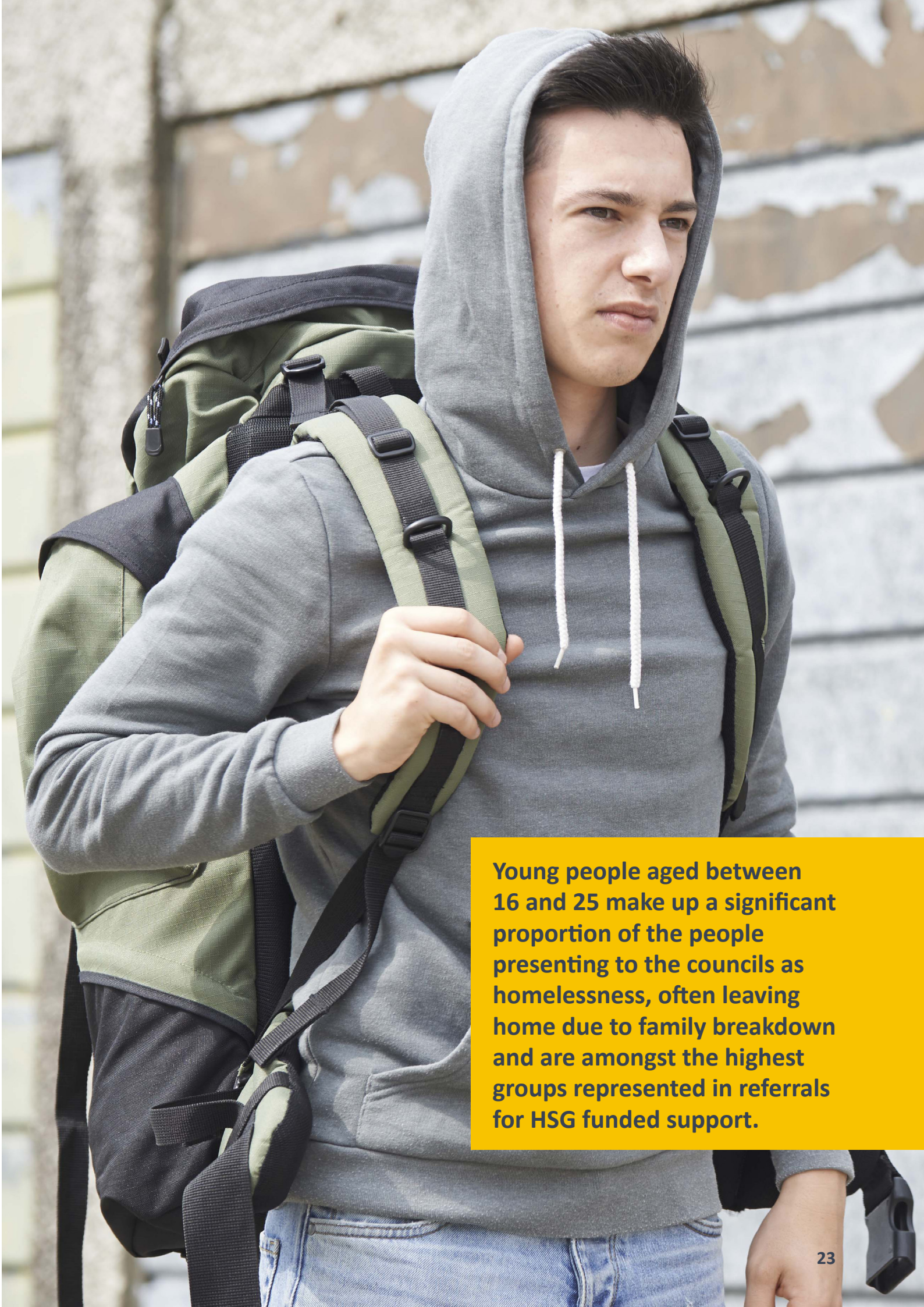
There is a regional Strategy and Delivery Plan with key aims that need to be considered when developing services.

Older people

The number of people aged 65 and over who will struggle to care for themselves safely or to perform routine domestic tasks will increase by 34% in Merthyr by 2040. It is often the lack of ability or perception of a lack of ability to do these tasks that prompts contact with social services.

There will also be a 61% increase in people over 65 who have dementia in Merthyr by 2040 as well as a 46% increase in falls of those over 75 years in the same period. One in three people end up leaving their own home and moving to long term care following a fall.

We will continue to give due consideration to the future housing and wellbeing needs of older people and will need to consider how older people in Merthyr can be better assisted to keep them well and safe at home for longer through good access to information, advice, adaptations, assistive technology, reablement and housing related support. It will also need to include many more flexible accommodation options for people to consider as they age. The Housing Support Programme will continue to play an integral part in the delivery of services to older people.



Young people aged between 16 and 25 make up a significant proportion of the people presenting to the councils as homelessness, often leaving home due to family breakdown and are amongst the highest groups represented in referrals for HSG funded support.

Accommodation

Merthyr Tydfil has a significantly higher proportion of older housing stock than elsewhere in Wales, which manifests itself in a high rate of unfitness, particularly amongst terraced housing. We will work with partners to achieve zero carbon/low carbon homes, through new developments under the new Welsh Development Quality Requirements (WDQR 2021).

There is a substantial need for one and two bed properties in the Borough. The highest need for these is in the Town, Dowlais, Gurnos, Cyfarthfa and Penydarren wards.

Forty per-cent of the demand for one bed accommodation comes from applicants under 35. This is putting pressure on the provision of one bed accommodation, as there is a significant shortfall of one bedroom accommodation in the borough.

Temporary accommodation

Changes made to homelessness legislation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, places a statutory duty on the Council to provide temporary accommodation for all individuals /households disregarding the prior 'priority need' test.

Due to a lack of affordable single person accommodation and limited Supported Accommodation provision in the Borough, move on accommodation is extremely limited and there is insufficient RSL stock available to meet the current demand. It is envisaged that many people will remain in B&B and other TA for quite some time until more suitable and permanent accommodation can be made available.

Private Rented Sector

The use of accommodation provided by private landlords has been a vital part of providing accommodation to prevent homelessness or to provide move on from temporary accommodation.

However, there is a significant shortfall on the statutory Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for accommodation and the top up is often unaffordable for single people and families on benefits or low incomes.

Fewer private landlords are willing to accept people via the Council and are tending to favour people using private income rather than LHA.

Housing First and Rapid Rehousing

The Council has commissioned a small number of units of rapid rehousing via the Housing First model. This commission will be reviewed to help us learn how to scale up our rapid rehousing and housing first approach going forward.

Building new homes

There is currently an affordable housing crisis in Merthyr and it is affecting all parts of the system from the availability of temporary accommodation and supported accommodation through to how quickly people can move on to more permanent options.

We have set an ambitious target to deliver a minimum 160 units of accommodation via our Social Housing Grant programme, of which 104 will be one bedroom accommodation – these units consist of developments that are currently ‘live on-site’ and those that are yet to start but are scheduled to be completed by March 2024.

We will also need to consider how we plan for the development of more cross-tenure age-designated housing, extra care accommodation and nursing beds as our current provision is significantly less than what projections tell us we need for the future.

HSG funded Support Services

There are some groups of people that feature significantly within those presenting as homeless or being referred for HSG funded support services. Two key groups are single people aged 25 and over and ex-offenders being released from prison. Within these groups there are a wide range of needs - many that prior to changes made to homelessness legislation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, may not have been eligible for a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation. However, many of those same people presenting have a range of complex needs such mental health, substance misuse and the two co-occurring.

Supported accommodation and floating support services have seen an increase in the complexity of needs and level of risk in the people that are being referred since March 2020.

The key themes that emerged from the needs assessment process were:

- Future support requires a greater focus on prevention of homelessness and early intervention.
- There is a need to enhance support options for mental health and substance misuse and wider system joint working on co-occurring issues.
- There is a need to enhance support options for single homeless and young people – particularly those who are ‘care experienced’.
- There is a need for more tailored housing related support for prison leavers
- There is a need to increase access to the Private Rented Sector.
- There is a need to align plans for developing future new temporary and permanent housing options with current and future projected demand.
- There is a need to ensure HSG systems enable flexible, responsive and innovative services.
- Where several agencies are involved with service users, information sharing arrangements between partners are essential to optimise the care and support required for individuals. It is clear therefore, that data collection across agencies should be improved, and aligned with agreed national frameworks to better inform future service planning.

Outcomes

HSG providers use the Welsh Government Outcomes Framework.

Stakeholders and providers raised concerns that the outcomes they currently record do not fully reflect the impact of their support, particularly people with high and/or complex needs. Work is on-going at Welsh Government on introducing a Single Outcomes Framework which has been delayed because of the pandemic.

Understanding unmet needs is challenging given the limitations of understanding outcomes as described above.

There was limited information for 2020/21 on needs that could not be met, and only one referral to supported accommodation not being accepted. However, following needs mapping of individuals placed in temporary accommodation, in order to offer positive and appropriate move on opportunities, there needs to be a broader range of accommodation to meet the need including further units of supported accommodation and delivery of more one bedroom affordable homes.

Stakeholder views on the future of the housing related support sector

Our stakeholders want to see:

- **More continuity** from longer term contracts rather than year-on-year funding agreements. They also want to see less unnecessary bureaucracy in monitoring activity that is time consuming and reduces opportunities for innovation and flexibility.
- **More prevention** but currently feel they are in crisis management mode most of the time. Developing a one stop shop for early advice and support would assist this. Providers are seeing more people who have recently lost their jobs and homes.
- **More robust cross sector working** in relation to people with complex, co-occurring challenges.
- **More accommodation for people leaving prison.** Temporary accommodation is not always the right environment to prevent re-offending, even with HSG floating support.
- **More appropriate move on accommodation** from temporary and supported accommodation.
- **More single person accommodation**
- **Better data and intelligence sharing** between all parts of the system.

Multi-agency working

The Needs Assessment confirms that where several agencies are involved, information sharing arrangements between partners are essential to optimise the support for individuals.

There is a well-documented evidence base and long-standing challenge around homeless people's equitable access to NHS services such as mental health and substance misuse services.

With large numbers of ex-offenders referred into housing and support, closer partnership working with Probation is required.

Agencies were frequently complimentary about the support the Council provides to people that are presenting as homeless. However, RSLs and support providers felt that more partnership working between the NHS, Probation, Social Care and Education was required and a renewed focus on improving coordinated, multiagency responses for individuals and strategically across the borough and region.

There was also a strong desire to improve the amount and quality of information shared between agencies thus reducing the need for people having to repeat their story multiple times.

Data collection across agencies needs to be improved and aligned with agreed national frameworks to better inform future service planning.

The range of findings within the Needs Assessment provide clear messages for the future direction of our Housing Strategy and HSG funded services. The following Strategic priorities reflect these messages and indicate how the Council and partners will work together to deliver our collective vision.

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Our priorities also
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2021/22.

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Strategic Priorities

The priorities for the delivery of HSP and Homelessness Prevention and Alleviation services have been informed by both the local and regional needs assessment and the stakeholder engagement that have been undertaken. It has also been informed by national, regional and local wider policy requirements such as the move to rapid rehousing and our learning from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our priorities also take account of progress we have made through our most recent HSG delivery plan 2021/22. The Health Needs Assessment that was undertaken by Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB in 2020 is also an important influence on our plans, specifically our partnership approach to extending access to healthcare and mental health and substance misuse services that are a high priority for this strategy.

The work to analyse local data on homelessness, performance of current services and engagement with stakeholders has enabled us to establish our strategic priorities for this Strategy as well as a series of areas where we wish to take action over the next four years to strengthen our approach to preventing and alleviating homelessness.



Strategic Priority 1

Strengthen early intervention and prevention services and specialised support to prevent homelessness

Housing Support services exist to help prevent homelessness, social exclusion, isolation and institutionalisation. Prevention is core business in Merthyr Tydfil's homelessness services and fundamental to our approach is to return to business as usual with a focus on homeless prevention and a return to, and improvement on pre-pandemic performance levels.

We have a strong track record in prevention of homelessness. Our in house Housing Solutions Team is critical to homelessness prevention and alleviation – by seeking out accommodation and support options that meet individual needs.

Early intervention aims to reduce undue escalation to avoid a crisis situation, with knock-on impact to health, inclusion and independence. The Council will focus on the following areas to strengthen its approach to prevention:

- **Action 1** – Developing Homelessness Early Intervention & Prevention work.
- **Action 2** – Support for mental health and substance misuse – developing wider system joint working on co-occurring issues.
- **Action 3** – Support for young people including an enhanced corporate parenting approach in relation to future accommodation needs.
- **Action 4** – Support for tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.



Strategic priority 2

Ensuring people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness access the right home at the right time and in the right place, as part of our Rapid Rehousing approach

Fundamental to the HSP is to help people live independently in the community. This includes not just access but assessing and influencing supply and suitable accommodation. Housing supply, particularly single bedroom units and additional supported accommodation is required to meet the need in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough particularly in light of the competitive private rented market. The Council will aim to build on the successes of its Housing First model towards Rapid Rehousing and a refreshed approach to supporting people find the right accommodation with the right support from the outset.

We will do this by:

- **Action 5** – Providing suitable accommodation towards rapid re-housing and responding to the ‘new normal’. In line with Welsh Government policy direction, we will implement our Rapid Rehousing transition plan.
 - Increasing the supply of affordable housing for single people over the next 4 years.
 - Better incentivise our offer to the Private Rented Sector.
 - Work closer with Environmental Health and private property owners to bring empty properties back into use.
- **Action 6** – Review of Covid impact on use of temporary accommodation, in particular bed and breakfast.
- **Action 7** – Increase access to the Private Rented Sector.
- **Action 8** – Ensure new homes are built to improve move on from temporary accommodation.
- **Action 9** – Ensure the range of accommodation is broadened to meet the current and future need (including general supported accommodation, Extra Care and Young Persons Supported accommodation).

Strategic Priority 3

Further strengthen Housing Support services

We know that timeliness and suitability of support is something that our service users depend upon. We will continue to innovate our offer as more becomes known of user needs and ensure that service users have security and consistency of support through our contracting arrangements with providers.

We will build on the platform of the current model of support that provides assistance to people with high, medium and low support needs through working with our partners to improve the whole system of support.


- **Action 10** - Supported accommodation and floating support– security and consistency for providers, encouraging flexibility and innovation, reducing admin.

Strategic Priority 4

Work collaboratively to provide holistic, person-centred support with effective specialist interventions where necessary

- **Action 11** - Improve multi-agency responses and system working.

Annex A provides more detailed commitments under each of the identified actions.



We will build on the platform of the current model of support that provides assistance to people with high, medium and low support.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders have been engaged in the development of the priorities for this strategy through a series of on-line workshops, one to one interviews and via a questionnaire including a questionnaire to service users.

Stakeholders engaged included:

- Estate MTCBC
- Planning MTCBC
- Homelessness Team MTCBC
- Strategic Housing Team MTCBC
- HSG Team MTCBC
- Environmental Health MTCBC
- Care & repair
- Merthyr Housing Association
- Plattform
- Wales and West Housing
- Cwm Taf Mind
- Womens Services
- Citizens Advice
- Hafod
- Cornerstone
- Gurnos Neighbourhood Learning Centre
- Pobl
- Health
- Probation

The feedback from stakeholders has been summarised below and has directly influenced our strategic priorities and provides important insight into the development and delivery of the Plan that has been prepared at Annex A.

Work to prevent and end homelessness

- The homelessness support from the Merthyr Tydfil CBC team was praised. Support happens whilst people are on the waiting list looking at budgeting and tenancy management. Stakeholders who worked across various Local Authorities felt Merthyr was better than many neighbouring boroughs in this respect.
- Additional capacity is needed for people leaving school, prison or hospital about budgeting and benefits advice.
- HSG services were felt to be in constant firefighting mode, focussing on crisis intervention with little time to focus on prevention.
- Early access to mental health support was agreed as a significant preventative need that could be better addressed.
- Stakeholders were keen to explore place-based engagement in the community to capture people in need at an earlier stage.
- A 'one stop shop' where people can access support from a range of organisations that reflected the complexity of a person's presenting issues would be helpful.

- The increase in online provision has been helpful, in particular people accessing confidential domestic abuse groups and support.
- Lockdown meant services lost track of people's engagement with services such as mental health and there is some need that has been postponed. Service design needs to be ready for a possible surge of unmet need across the system.
- There are some people in hostel accommodation with mental health needs higher than the level of support that can be offered, including refugees who are increasingly receiving referrals for people with higher risks – associated often with co-occurring substance misuse and mental health challenges.
- There are challenges with accessing mental health and substance misuse services both for those with high needs and those whose needs do not meet current eligibility criteria.

The right home at the right time in the right place

- There is insufficient move-on accommodation resulting in people staying in temporary/supported accommodation for longer than is required schemes and becoming institutionalised.
- Merthyr is a tight-knit semi-rural community where there is a high likelihood people will know people being moved into the community and the challenges they face.
- There are limited options for emergency accommodation such as day centres or night shelters that offer emergency accommodation.

The right support at the right time

- Yearly funding agreements mean lack of security for services, staff and service users. This has an impact on staff appetite to remain in existing or applying for new roles within the sector.
- Accounting for every hour of support is challenging and time consuming, and other more flexible approaches that reflect a fuller range of activities but remain outcome focussed should be considered.
- Covid funding enabled stakeholders to be more flexible and innovative in how they worked with clients. More time should be given to reflective learning from the Covid arrangements to update service models to give providers flexibility.
- Services are seeing more people who have recently lost jobs and homes and have not accessed services before. They generally have large debts and /or finding it challenging to pay for both fuel and food. A more flexible approach to how HSG is used would help organisations assist these people.

Service User Engagement

38 service users provided feedback through interviews with their support worker regarding how they feel about how they were previously or currently helped or how they feel they could be helped differently in the future.

A range of services, including supported accommodation and floating support, were represented, including: BAWSO, Citizens Advice, Pobl, Llamau Tenancy Support, Cwm Taf Care and Repair, and the Housing First Project.

The feedback from service users has been summarised below and has directly influenced our strategic priorities and provides important insight into the development and delivery of the Plan that has been prepared at Annex A.

Work to end homelessness

- Accessing services for co-occurring mental health and substance misuse services is difficult without the right advocacy and support.
- Being near and having access to healthy long-term normal relationships such as family and friends.
- Having access to help that will help people reduce or eliminate a dependency on substance misuse.
- Having access to the right information, advice and support so that people can avoid homelessness occurring in the first place.

The right home at the right time in the right place

- People having access to suitable, more permanent accommodation when they need it.
- People emphasise the importance of achieving stability around their housing and building confidence during support to allow them to become more independent. The Council Housing and Adult Services department are exploring options for a delivery partner to develop an additional extra care facility for adults, including those with disabilities, to support people to remain independent for longer and prevent or delay admission into residential care.

The right support at the right time

- People value the range of support available to address issues such as benefits, accommodation, debt, domestic violence, mental health support, substance misuse support and equipment to remain at home.
- People value consistency and dependability, emotional support as well as knowledge on rights and entitlements.
- People need help with advocating for themselves and building their confidence.
- Support staff are praised for engaging effectively with service users where other services had not been relationship-based or person centred.
- Some people highlighted language barriers when working with other agencies.



A range of services, including supported accommodation and floating support, were represented, including:

BAWSO, Citizens Advice, Pobl, Llamau Tenancy Support, Cwm Taf Care and Repair, and the Housing First Project.

Impact Assessments

We have carried out an impact assessment on the priorities and actions we have outlined in this Strategy.

Our impact assessment encompasses the following:



Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)



Welsh Language Impact Assessment



Children's Rights Impact Assessment

EIA – Protected Characteristics

The EIA identified that our strategic priorities will have a positive impact on people identified as having protected characteristics. The Local Authority commissions services specifically for **older people** whose housing support needs are related to getting older, as well as services for **young people** who are at risk of homelessness or who are experiencing homelessness. Similarly, it commissions services for people with **disabilities and / or long-term conditions**, all with the aim of the primary aim of maintaining tenancies and avoiding homelessness.

There are specific categories such as **pregnancy and maternity** that the Local Authority does not currently commission which are specifically aimed at this protected characteristic, however the Council's housing team and accommodation offer provides universal support to **any individual** in need of housing advice and support, regardless of their protected characteristics.

Welsh Language

The Council provides opportunities for people to use and promote the Welsh language, treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, compliance with Welsh Language Standards, links with internal and external Welsh Language strategies. The Housing and HSG service does not currently commission services which are specifically aimed at this protected characteristic; however, advice, assistance and support are available through the medium of Welsh as an active offer.

Children's Rights Impact Assessment

The Council's Housing and Housing Support services address the support needs of the most **vulnerable children and adults** within the borough. The strategic priorities will contribute to the Council's overarching objective which is that all **children and young people get the best start to life and are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals**. The strategic priorities are geared up to ensure that all services are equipped to support those who are at risk or already experiencing homelessness.

Our commitment in this Strategy to strengthening our approach in relation to the future accommodation needs of 'care experienced' young people further protects the rights of children and young people we are responsible for.



Implementing, Monitoring and Reviewing the Strategy

The Public Policy Institute for Wales sets out in the Tackling Homelessness, A Rapid Evidence Review 2015 report:

“

The evidence shows that homelessness is a complex problem. It often has multiple causes that interact with one another in ways that vary at the individual level and require engagement with multiple policy areas.

”

The root causes that lead to homelessness and/or evident housing support needs among vulnerable individuals and households are profoundly interconnected. The successful implementation of this strategy fundamentally depends not only on what the Council can do, but on our efforts of service co-ordination, joint planning, commissioning and delivery of services by both internal local authority departments, statutory partners, the housing sector and third sector.

We will be monitoring, steering and reviewing progress against the HSP strategy through the Merthyr Tydfil HSG Planning Group and the Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP). These groups both convene on a quarterly basis. The chair of the SHP is ultimately accountable for delivery of the strategy and responsibility for delivery is delegated to the HSP Lead Officer.

Delivery against the strategy will be a standing agenda item at these meetings every quarter. A formal review of progress and an evaluation of impact will take place every two years as a minimum but may be reviewed more frequently should it be deemed necessary. A key area of focus for the group will be to improve the information that is collected on outcomes across all strands of our investment using Housing Support Grant.

The strong links that have been formed with strategic groups and partnerships across Cwm Taf Morgannwg through the previous Supporting People governance arrangements have been further strengthened through the establishment of the Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group (RHSCG), which provides a key forum for collaborative working.

The RHSCG has broad representation across agencies. A third sector representative who holds the role of representing service users, providers, wider stakeholders and commissioners work together as equal partners to ensure that services remain fit for purpose, sustainable, resilient and able to meet the demand from those that need to access to them, both now and in the future.

Through these mechanisms we are able to escalate the challenges in homeless prevention that sit within the responsibility of other public sector bodies. In particular we are able to point to the work we have undertaken with Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board on a detailed health needs assessment of our homeless population and to begin to invest in an improved response to those health needs, particularly in relation to mental health and substance misuse.

Members of the RHSCG also connect the HSP through other bodies that have been established, supporting more focused or specialised planning and delivery.

These include:

- Cwm Taf Public Service Board
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board
- South Wales Substance Misuse Area Planning Board
- Criminal Offending and South Wales Safer Communities Board
- South East Wales Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Partnership Board
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board
- South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board
- National Residential Landlords Association

The delivery of the areas identified within the Regional Workplan is also the collective responsibility of the Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group (RHSCG). The regional statement will be a standing agenda item at the RHSCG meetings and regular updates will be provided by members of the group at each meeting. Oversight of this statement is

the responsibility of the RHSCG Chair and the Regional Development Coordinator. The work to be taken forward through this statement will be detailed in a work plan overseen by the Regional Development Coordinator. Regional working provides a forum for us to deliver those things which are best done regionally.

These can be categorised as:

- Development of specialist services for which there is not a critical mass locally. New regional projects (2021-2022) include:
 - Creation and launch of a Specialist Housing, Mental Health, Substance Misuse Team to support our most vulnerable rough sleepers to provide intensive support for people experiencing co-occurring homelessness, poor mental health and substance dependency.
 - Development of a Research/Scoping project to determine the need for a CTM Regional LGBTQ+ project.
 - Development of a Research/scoping project to determine the need for a BME project, specifically for those experiencing harmful cultural practices, alongside Housing related support needs.
 - An application via Public Health for funding programme - Communities for change Wales funding programme to aid developing mechanisms to share, interpret and use data for action across partners.
 - We plan to make the alignment of our target hardening service with RCT's service a priority for 2021/22.
- Development of regional services where justified by economies of scale and mutual evidence of need, as part of this we are currently exploring the potential of a domestic violence perpetrator programme regionally, as well as floating support for survivors of sexual abuse regional service.
- Collaborative approaches to monitoring and shared documents such as the monitoring officers group and regional documents such as 'allowable activities'.
- Collaboration with other public services including strengthening information and data collection and sharing, such as the Communities for Change work to look at data sharing in the regional Specialist Health Outreach project.

Funding sources

Alongside core funding for the Council through the RSG, the Housing Support Grant provides a key element of the resources needed to deliver this strategy. Welsh Government has recently announced the indicative HSG budget allocation of £2,873,282.13 which is set over the next 3 financial years 2022/23 through to 2024/25.

The 3 yearly indicative allocation is very much welcomed to allow for better strategic planning and assist us in enhancing and delivering new services to help meet the increasing demand for HSG services in the borough. It will also provide the opportunity to consider the demand and needs post the COVID-19 pandemic and enable us to continue to transform services to meet the needs of the citizens of Merthyr, incorporating new and different ways of working.

The Council has in place a three year development programme which funded by Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant Programme. In 2021, Welsh Government announced the indicative budget allocation of £4,386,945, which is set over the next 3 financial years. The Council is on course to deliver in excess of 150 units of affordable housing accommodation over the next three years, of which 104 are one bedroom accommodation. In addition, we expect to start developments towards the end of 2022-23 and during 2023-24, which will deliver a further 100+ units of affordable housing that will be ready for occupancy after 2023-24.

At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, as the stay-at-home regulations came into force in Wales, the Minister for Housing and Local Government announced £10m of

'Phase 2' funding to ensure no one was left without access to accommodation. In separate partnerships with Merthyr Valleys Homes and a local private landlord the Council were successful in securing just shy of £1 million for 9 units of 1 bed accommodation.

As a result of the announcement, the Housing Options Team offered emergency accommodation to households that have approached them due to experience of rough sleeping who at the time were not owed any homelessness duty or there was no reason to believe a priority need existed.

A further £20m of extra funding was announced later in the year for Local Authorities to set out how they will ensure that no one need return to the street, focusing on innovation, building and remodelling to transform the accommodation offer across Wales. The Council have accessed this hardship fund and will continue to do so to provide temporary accommodation to ensure that nobody is left out.

Other funding streams such as the **Children and Communities Grant** will be deployed to facilitate the right support for target groups and optimisation of available resources.

We will continue our collaborative work with our partners in looking for joint commissioning opportunities and to maximise those opportunities, on both a local and regional basis. This includes the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Service Board, our Regional Partnership Board, and work with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, together with the agencies who we work closely with as part of the Merthyr Tydfil's HSG Planning Group.

Annex A: Action Plan

Strategic Priority 1

Strengthen early intervention and prevention services and specialised support to prevent homelessness

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 1 Developing Homelessness Early Intervention & Prevention work	Develop the Prevention & Early Intervention role. Basic workshops with schools & colleges to prepare CYP for future tenancies	31st March 2026	Housing Solutions Team Leader	The range of commissioned prevention services meet the needs of the citizens of Merthyr Tydfil and prevents them from having to access statutory services
	Explore potential for an exclusive Housing Advice Hub, possibly within new Supported Accommodation setting	31st March 2024	Strategic Housing Manager & Operational Housing Services Manager	Reduction in youth homelessness by developing education packages and more information for young people around housing and homelessness
	Improve marketing / promotion of Prevention and Early Intervention assistance. Make this more visible and accessible	31st March 2026	Housing Solutions Team Leader	Greater demonstrable awareness in young people of contributing factors that lead to housing issues and homelessness, with awareness about their rights and responsibilities
	Explore opportunities for a one stop shop in the Town Centre to target early intervention opportunities	1st June 2022	Housing Solutions Team Leader & Operational Housing Service Manager	
	Develop relationships with established community groups and provide regular drop- in sessions to offer IIA	31st March 2026	Housing Solutions Team Leader	

Annex A: Action Plan

Strengthen early intervention and prevention services and specialised support to prevent homelessness

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 1 Developing Homelessness Early Intervention & Prevention work	Further examine and if necessary, strengthen our corporate parenting approach in relation to the future accommodation needs of 'care experienced' children and young people in response to a recent letter from WG to all Welsh LAs	31st March 2026	Housing Solutions Team Leader	The range of commissioned prevention services meet the needs of the citizens of Merthyr Tydfil and prevents them from having to access statutory services Reduction in youth homelessness by developing education packages and more information for young people around housing and homelessness
	Continue to provide Tenancy Ready Courses to support tenancy sustainability	31st March 2026	Housing Solutions Team Leader & Housing Support Services Team Leader	Greater demonstrable awareness in young people of contributing factors that lead to housing issues and homelessness, with awareness about their rights and responsibilities

Annex A: Action Plan

Strengthen early intervention and prevention services and specialised support to prevent homelessness

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 2 Support for mental health and substance misuse - developing wider system joint working on co-occurring issues	Continue to develop and expand the specialist mental health and substance misuse outreach team. Likely to open the programme up further as it develops (currently limited to hostels and TA	31st March 2026	Housing Support Services Team Leader	Increased partnership working and improved access to housing support and homelessness prevention services by building relationships with health, probation, social services and RSLs and jointly reviewing and developing working practices and processes with key partner agencies. Outcomes will be evident through reduced tenancy failures or evictions from Social Housing or supported accommodation/ hostel providers, reduced homelessness and reduced community risk
	Continue to commission additional services dependant on need	31st March 2026	Housing Support Services Team Leader	
	Continue to provide drop-in service at local drug/alcohol services e.g. Barod and Probation	31st March 2026	Housing Solutions Team Leader	
	Work with CTMUHB leads on mental health and substance misuse to take forward all the recommendations relating to co-occurring mental health and substance misuse challenges from recent Homelessness Health Review	31st March 2026	Operational Housing Service Manager & Housing Support Services Team Leader	

Annex A: Action Plan

Strengthen early intervention and prevention services and specialised support to prevent homelessness

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 3 Support for young people including an enhanced corporate parenting approach in relation to future accommodation needs	Renovate the Neighbourhood Learning Centre to increase units of accommodation for young people	30th September 2023	Strategic Housing Manager & Operational Housing Service Manager	Rapid response to incidents or individual risks of youth homelessness
	Continue to provide Housing First for Youth Project at Hillfort Court	31st March 2026	Operational Housing Service Manager & Housing Support Services Team Leader	Reduction in representations of youth homelessness
	Continue to commission supported accommodation for YP at Garth Newydd Court	31st March 2026	Operational Housing Service Manager & Housing Support Services Team Leader	
	Continue provision of general Floating Support for Young People – responsive to local need	31st March 2026	Operational Housing Service Manager & Housing Support Services Team Leader	
	Develop links with MVH – Youth Engagement Officer - to embed improved joint working practices when supporting young people	31st March 2024	Housing Solutions Team Leader	

Annex A: Action Plan

Strategic Priority 1

Strengthen early intervention and prevention services and specialised support to prevent homelessness

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 4 Support for tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence	Continue to commission floating support service for victims of DA	31st March 2026	Operational Housing Service Manager & Housing Support Services Team Leader	Services are more responsive to the diverse needs of people experiencing VAWDASV
	Ensure newly commissioned services are competent in dealing with co-occurring mental health and substance misuse challenges	31st March 2026	Operational Housing Service Manager & Housing Support Services Team Leader	
	Ensure commissioning considers the needs of LGBTQ+ community	1st April 2022	Operational Housing Service Manager & Housing Support Services Team Leader	
	Increase women's refuge provision – additional 1-2 dispersed units	31st March 2023	Operational Housing Service Manager, Housing Support Services Team Leader, Strategic Housing Manager	
	Hold regional discussions on perpetrator services and training with aim of developing new CTM DA perpetrator Programme	1st April 2022	Operational Housing Service Manager, Housing Support Services Team Leader	

Annex A: Action Plan

Strengthen early intervention and prevention services and specialised support to prevent homelessness

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 4 Support for tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence	Complete research project on housing related support needs of women experiencing harmful cultural practices e.g. from BME communities with aim of developing regional support project based on recommendations of report	30th September 2022	Housing Support Services Team Leader	Services are more responsive to the diverse needs of people experiencing VAWDASV
	Fund target hardening scheme to enable people to remain at their home	31st March 2026	Housing Support Services Team Leader	

Annex A: Action Plan

Strategic priority 2

Ensuring people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness access the right home at the right time and in the right place, as part of our Rapid Rehousing approach

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 5 Providing suitable accommodation towards rapid re-housing and the 'new normal'	Utilise WG policy guidance to undertake review of Rapid Rehousing Implementation	31st March 2026	Strategic Housing Manager & Strategy Dev Officer	An increase in the supply of good quality affordable rented sector accommodation, increasing housing options for households faced with homelessness
	Develop professional relationships with private landlords to increase tenancy opportunities in PRS	31st March 2024	Housing Solutions Team Leader	
	Work with PRS to establish level of interest in WG PRS Leasing Scheme in order to consider whether LA implements scheme	31st March 2022	Housing Solutions Team Leader	
	Review current allocations policy. Agree and implement policy changes with RSL partners to support transition to RR model	1st September 2022	Housing Solutions Team Leader Strategic Housing Officer Operational Housing Manager	

Annex A: Action Plan

Ensuring people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness access the right home at the right time and in the right place, as part of our Rapid Rehousing approach

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 6 Review of Covid impact on temporary accommodation	Continual review of utilisation of temporary accommodation	31st March 2026	Housing Solutions Team Leader	A plan for reducing the use of B&B accommodation and unsuitable temporary accommodation
	Continue to map support needs of those in B&B/SA to be able to plan appropriate permanent move on options	31st March 2026	Housing Solutions Team Leader	
	Increase supported accommodation provision to reduce use of B&B, particularly for service users with multiple complex needs – with flexible expectations around move on	31st March 2024	Strategic Housing Officer Operational Housing Manager	
	Reduce numbers of people in B&B	31st March 2023	Housing Solutions Team Leader	

Annex A: Action Plan

Ensuring people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness access the right home at the right time and in the right place, as part of our Rapid Rehousing approach.

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 7 Increase access to the Private Rented Sector	Re-establishment of the Landlord Forum to facilitate closer working relationships with local private landlords and letting agencies	31st March 2022	Housing Solutions Team Leader	An increase in the number of homeless households who have their homelessness prevented or relieved through the provision of a private rent tenancy.
	Investigate whether there is more appetite to convert 3 bed properties to 1 bed flats – in a similar mould to 29 Trevethick St	31st March 2022	Housing Solutions Team Leader	
	Utilise the WG PRS leasing scheme subject to resources / when rolled out.	31st March 2023	Housing Solutions Team Leader	
	Tenancy Ready training to prospective tenants to maximise chances of maintaining tenancies	31st March 2022	Housing Solutions Team Leader	
	Discussions with Environmental Health to bring empty properties back into use with a view to using them for social housing, either through PRS or RSLs	31st March 2022	Strategic Housing Manager	
	Request LA core capital funding to be able to provide an alternative PRS incentive scheme to the WG leasing Scheme	31st March 2022	Head of Housing & Regeneration	

Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy 2022-26

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 8 Ensure new homes are built to improve move on from temporary accommodation	Ensure new developments meet the assessed housing need	31st March 2022	Housing Strategy Officer / Strategic Housing Manager	Increased supply of general needs affordable accommodation to be let through Living Merthyr Tydfil via our common allocation policy. The number of completed affordable housing units by our partner RSLs will show an annual increase for the lifespan of this Strategy with 35% of all medium-large developments having 1-bed accommodation
	Establish a healthy development 'main' and 'reserve' programme to avoid SHG underspend and meet housing need	31st March 2023	Housing Strategy Officer / Strategic Housing Manager	
	Ensure s.106 arrangements for private developers as outlined in the LDP contribute to the aims of this Strategy	31st March 2023	Housing Strategy Officer / Strategic Housing Manager	
Action 9 Ensure the range of accommodation is broadened to meet the current and future need (including general supported accommodation, Learning Disability, Extra Care and Young Persons Supported accommodation)	Ensure that access to adaptations, assistive technology, targeted advice and assistance is timely – helping to keep people at home and independent for as long as possible	31st March 2026	Housing Strategy Officer / Strategic Housing Manager	Increased number of flexible housing options for target groups
	Ensure that the future development programme takes account of the Housing LIN toolkit for projecting housing need of older people in Merthyr	31st March 2024	Housing Strategy Officer / Strategic Housing Manager	

Annex A: Action Plan

Further strengthen Housing Support services.

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 10 Supported accommodation and floating support—improve security and consistency for providers, encouraging flexibility and innovation, reducing admin	Provide longer term funding commitment in line with WG 3-year HSG funding allocation to allow better planning and retention of staff	31st March 2024	Housing support services team leader & Operational housing manager	A clear reported reduction in unnecessary bureaucracy and non-support facing tasks by providers
	Partnership discussions on aligning contract management to neighbouring LAs to reduce additional admin burden where possible	31st March 2022	Housing support services team leader & Operational housing manager	Support is delivered in a variety of ways and methods (e.g. face-to-face, virtual and remote), ensuring support is more accessible, engaging and timely, meeting the needs of the people using services
	Hostels/SA given priority for move on from TA where appropriate - operating step up/ step down policy to support tenancy sustainability.	31st March 2022	Housing support services team leader & Operational housing manager	Both staff and people in the community are able to engage digitally and actively have their needs met through these methods
	Continue regular Cell Coordination meetings to discuss emerging issues and move on strategies	31st March 2022	Housing support services team leader & Operational housing manager	

Annex A: Action Plan

Further strengthen Housing Support services.

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 10 Supported accommodation and floating support– improve security and consistency for providers, encouraging flexibility and innovation, reducing admin	Provide additional training for all HSG funded staff; suicide awareness, mental health training, housing legislation training – delivered by MIND & Shelter Cymru	31st March 2022	Housing support services team leader & Operational housing manager	A clear reported reduction in unnecessary bureaucracy and non-support facing tasks by providers
	Develop digital inclusion skills across services as well as the people we are supporting – linking into to Digital Communities Wales	31st March 2026	Housing support services team leader & Operational housing manager	Support is delivered in a variety of ways and methods (e.g. face-to-face, virtual and remote), ensuring support is more accessible, engaging and timely, meeting the needs of the people using services
	Review how we have embraced technology and provided services differently during the COVID-19 pandemic	31st March 2026	Housing support services team leader & Operational housing manager	Both staff and people in the community are able to engage digitally and actively have their needs met through these methods
	Learn from our new ways of working to modernise how we deliver services going forward to ensure they are more accessible responsive and inclusive	31st March 2026	Housing support services team leader & Operational housing manager	

Annex A: Action Plan

Work collaboratively to provide holistic, person-centred support with effective specialist interventions where necessary

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 11 Improve multi-agency responses and system working	Ensure the Strategic Housing Partnership steer and provide multi-agency oversight for the HSP Strategy and actions, ensuring that monitoring mechanism are in place and that links are sustained with key strategic groups and forums	31st March 2026	Housing Strategy Officer/ Strategic Housing Manager	Diversified accommodation to meet the range of presenting need as well as increasing affordable units Continued regular meetings to encourage all agencies to support in issues affecting / affected by homelessness
	Set up and maintain sub groups of the strategic housing partnership to continue to explore all opportunities to maximise affordable housing units to meet local need	31st March 2022	Operational Housing Manager	Increased knowledge and awareness to ensure effective and innovative housing related support services are commissioned and delivered
	Continue partnership meetings such as 'Cell Coordination meetings to ensure efficient multiagency responses to multi-faceted issues being faced	31st March 2026	Housing support services team leader	New multi-agency innovative approach to planning and commissioning in place
	Regional Housing Support Grant Collaborative Group to support and facilitate regional joint working	31st March 2026	Housing support services team leader	

Annex A: Action Plan

Work collaboratively to provide holistic, person-centred support with effective specialist interventions where necessary

Action	Activities required to deliver the priority	Timescales / By when	Responsible Officer	Intended Outcomes
Action 11 Improve multi-agency responses and system working	Continuation of HSG Provider Forums to share best practice across all multi-agencies and to keep updated on HSG/Housing policies and procedures	31st March 2026	Housing support services team leader & housing solutions team leader	Diversified accommodation to meet the range of presenting need as well as increasing affordable units
	Develop training, updates and briefings to staff and providers to keep abreast of service developments, good practice, innovation and new practices via joint training sessions, HSG Planning Group, and local, regional and national fora	31st March 2026	Housing Strategy Officer/ Strategic Housing Manager	Continued regular meetings to encourage all agencies to support in issues affecting / affected by homelessness Increased knowledge and awareness to ensure effective and innovative housing related support services are commissioned and delivered
	Identify joint funding arrangements with partners for the commissioning and delivery of services that require input from NHS, Social Care and Probation	31st March 2026	Housing Strategy Officer/ Strategic Housing Manager	New multi-agency innovative approach to planning and commissioning in place

Annex B: National Policy Landscape

The evolving homelessness policy landscape has included:

- Publication in 2016 of 'Preventing Homelessness and Promoting Independence' – essentially a pathway to economic independence for young people through housing advice, options and homelessness prevention
- Introduction in 2016 of the 'When I'm Ready' arrangements under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (see below), which enabled young people in foster care to remain with their carers beyond the age of 18
- Publication in 2016 by Barnardos of the Care Leaver Accommodation and Support Framework aimed at supporting effective planning and provision of housing and support for young people and care leavers
- Introduction by Welsh Government of the 'Housing First' recovery-orientated approach to ending homelessness that centres on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional support and services as needed.
- A renewed emphasis, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic on reducing street homelessness by providing temporary accommodation solutions, leading to publication by Welsh Government of Phase 2 planning guidance requiring local authorities and their partners to plan to ensure that all those brought into temporary accommodation are supported into long term accommodation, that the emphasis remains on prevention and keeping homelessness a rare, brief and non-repeated experience.
- Phase 3 planning guidance (2020) supporting the design and development of resilient, sustainable services for the future
- A series of focused campaigns including the End Youth Homelessness Cymru Campaign 2018, focusing on the needs of the LGBT+ community, supporting those with mental health issues and reducing links between homelessness and educational disengagement and the care system
- Significant additional investment by Welsh Government, notably £10m in 2019-20 to tackle youth homelessness through enhancing current provision and developing new services; and launch of a £4.8m innovation fund in 2019-20 supporting 26 projects across Wales to new and innovative approaches to housing support

- A report to Welsh Government from the Homelessness Action Group in 2020 providing a holistic policy perspective to ending homelessness and the Government's response in the form of a consultation document entitled '**Ending homelessness: A high-level action plan: 2021-2026**', building on Phase 2 planning guidance.
- A requirement on Local Authorities to finalise a **Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan** by the end of September 2022.
 - Specific strategic commitments within Welsh Labour's **Programme for Government (2021)**, as follows:
 - Fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing.
 - Building 20,000 new low carbon social homes for rent over the period 2021 to 2026.
 - Support co-operative housing, community-led initiatives, and community land trusts.
 - Develop a national scheme restricting rent to local housing allowance levels for families and young people who are homeless or are at risk homelessness.
 - Ensure Rent Smart Wales landlords respond quickly to complaints of racism and hate crime and offer anything appropriate support.

Further commitments within the Labour/ Plaid Cymru Cooperation Agreement (November 2021), as follows:

- Take immediate and radical action to address the proliferation of second homes and unaffordable housing, using the planning, property and taxation systems.
- Establish Unnos, a national construction company, to support councils and social landlords to improve the supply of social and affordable housing.
- Publish a White Paper to include proposals for a right to adequate housing, the role a system of fair rents (rent control) could have in making the private rental market affordable for local people on local incomes and new approaches to making homes affordable.
- End homelessness through reform of housing law, enacting the Renting Homes Act to give renters greater security and implementing the Homeless Action Group recommendations.



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