



Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

**Blaenau Gwent
Housing Support Programme (HSP)
Strategy
2022 - 2026**

**SOCIAL
SERVICES
DIRECTORATE**

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Purpose and context of the Strategy

This is the first Housing Support Programme Strategy for Blaenau Gwent. It sets out the single strategic direction of the local authority, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC) for the delivery of the statutory homelessness functions funded through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) as well as homelessness prevention and housing related support services (funded via the Housing Support Grant (HSG) for the next four years).

It evidences and sets out the key strategic priorities for the local authority and its partners over the coming four years (2022 – 2026) based on findings from the comprehensive needs assessment and stakeholder engagement, both of which are detailed in their respective sections.

To put this strategy into context, the Housing Support Programme (HSP) is an early intervention programme that funds a wide range of housing related support and homelessness services for vulnerable people across Blaenau Gwent. It is enabled by allocation of the Housing Support Grant (HSG) through the provision of strategically planned and commissioned housing related support services. It supports activity which prevents people from becoming homeless, stabilises their housing situation, or helps potentially homeless people to find and keep accommodation. The HSP also aims to address social exclusion, isolation and institutionalisation, and help reduce crime and disorder.

It supports vulnerable people to address the, sometimes multiple, problems they face, such as debt, employment, tenancy management, substance misuse, violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and mental health issues. Support is person-centred, aimed at supporting people to secure and maintain sustainable housing by addressing the mental health and substance misuse or other problems they face, helping to improve their health and well-being and/or helping them progress into, or nearer to, a job or training opportunity based on their specific circumstances.

As the HSP is an early intervention programme, it aims to reduce or prevent the need for often costlier interventions by other public services, including housing/homelessness, the NHS and/or social care for individuals and families and, in some cases, people who fall into the criminal justice system.

The preventative nature of the programme aims to address determinants of need and so works across strategic partners to support local, regional and national policy objectives that help people to live independently in the community. This reflects the cross-cutting nature of the programme, through housing, homelessness, social care, health and criminal justice. This strategy therefore lays out the Council's response to local needs; as well as addressing

regional objectives through multi-agency work across Gwent's Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group (RHSCG), as well as policy drivers operating at a national level.

This BGCBC HSP strategy satisfies the existing statutory requirements for a homelessness strategy under Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The Local Authority's Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2022 has recently been reviewed, updated and is now incorporated into this Strategy.

Vision and Principles

The strategic vision for the Housing Support Programme that drives our work in Blaenau Gwent is:

Everyone in Blaenau Gwent has a home to live in and the right to support if they need it, to lead a fulfilling life

To achieve our vision, we commit to upholding the following principles:

- We will work collaboratively with our partners to prevent homelessness, and where it cannot be prevented ensure its rare, brief and unrepeatable
- We will work to ensure everyone has fair and equal access to good quality housing and housing related support at the earliest possible opportunity in order to prevent homelessness and/or maintain independent living
- We will promote creativity and innovation in the commissioning and delivery of homelessness and housing related support services
- We will place people who use services at the heart of what we do
- Co-production and collaboration will be at the centre of service development, commissioning and delivery
- We will evidence and understand the housing and housing support needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent

Local/regional Context

Priorities and aspirations for Blaenau Gwent

The HSP vision fits within a wider set of local ambitions and priorities for Blaenau Gwent. In particular, we are half way through delivering the overarching community strategy: *Making A Difference – The Big 20 Year Plan For Blaenau Gwent 2010 – 2030*. The seven themes reflect this longer term vision, and informs the approach of the HSP:

1. Lively and Accessible Communities, creating communities that people enjoy and want to live in.
2. Thriving Communities, offering opportunities, support and resources in our communities for people to thrive.
3. Fair and Safe Communities, making people feel safe and included.
4. Learning Communities, giving people the skills to succeed.
5. Healthy Communities, helping people to be healthy and get the right care and support when they need it.
6. Green Sustainable Communities, improving our environment for tomorrow.
7. Leading Communities, working with and for our communities.

The Housing Support Programme in Blaenau Gwent contributes directly to these themes, with strategically planned and commissioned services aiming to bring to life the shared aspirations for our communities.

This includes an aspiration to make suitable affordable housing available to more people, ensuring people are less isolated and able to contribute to the community. We are growing the support and guidance available to people facing financial pressures, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, and aiming to reduce harm caused by substance misuse. Work across BGCBC aims to ensure extra support is made available for vulnerable people, that people have better life skills and are able to live happy, fulfilled and independent lives.

As a council we are committed to improving well-being in Blaenau Gwent, as well as meeting our duties under the Future Generations Act. *Blaenau Gwent's Well-being plan (2018-2023)* sets out our five local well-being objectives:

- The best start in life for everyone
- Safe and friendly communities
- To look after and protect the natural environment
- To forge new pathways to prosperity
- To encourage healthy lifestyles

These hold real power in bringing about change, are the most urgent, and the evidence tells us we need the combined force of the Public Service Board partners to deliver and improve well-being.

The HSP has a critical contribution to delivering these aspirations, not just directly in reducing and preventing homelessness and supporting people to live independently, but also working across council led services and with our strategic partners, in helping transform the area and have a positive impact on the well-being of current and future generations. *The Council's Corporate Plan (2018-2022)* highlights critical areas where the HSP is involved:

- Work with social services and partners in health, probation and registered social landlords (RSLs) to offer integrated support, and develop a multi-agency approach to reducing and alleviating the impacts of poverty
- Creating opportunities for training and employment for the most vulnerable in society, including working with schools and other educational settings
- Improving easy access to debt and money management services, as part of an efficient and responsive council to deliver community benefits.

These areas of strategic focus at a council level have also shaped the domains explored within the Needs Assessment.

Regional priorities across Gwent

Planning and commissioning are also undertaken at a regional level. This enables pooling expertise, making use of economies of scale, and in particular assessing the specific needs of small groups to which the development or commissioning of separate local services would not be justified or economical. The strong links that had been formed with strategic groups and partnerships across Gwent through the previous Supporting People governance arrangements have been further strengthened through the establishment during 2020/2021 of the Gwent Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group (RHSCG). Membership is listed in Appendix 1, indicating the breadth of inclusion and involvement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of collaboration and partnership working of HSP and Homelessness with wider partners across Gwent. It accelerated new ways of partnership working, to ensure that citizens were able to continue to access services to meet their needs during the disruption and uncertainty brought about by the pandemic.

The formalised strategic links the RHSCG has made with partners is provided below, indicated the rounded and holistic approach that is being taken to the commissioning and delivery of Housing Support services:

- Gwent Local Authority Public Service Board
- Children's & Communities Programme and associated Grant
- Gwent Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Board
- Gwent Area Planning Board for Substance Misuse
- Criminal Offending and Gwent Safer Communities Board
- Private Rented Sector with representation from the National Residential Landlords Association
- Strategic Housing Partnership and Mental Health & Learning Disabilities Partnership
- Gwent Regional Partnership Board

We have good links to the Gwent Regional Partnership Board, bringing together health, social services, the third sector and other partners to take forward the delivery of integrated services across regions.

The Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) introduced Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs). Through it we ensure “an integrated approach to the development of services, care and support, which focuses on opportunities for prevention and early intervention”. The RPB is responsible for undertaking a population needs assessment for their region (as defined by the Act) and the Local Well-being Assessments (the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015)).

These assessments are critical in underpinning the planning, commissioning and development of HSP services which can be further evidenced in the Needs Assessment section of this strategy.

Regional collaboration has given rise to the *Gwent Homelessness Strategy* (see Appendix 2 for a summary). The Housing Wales Act (2014) places an obligation on all Local Authorities in Wales to carry out a Review of their homelessness services and develop a Homeless Strategy.

The Local Authorities in Gwent decided to work together, pooling their energy and resources, to carry out a Review of their services across the region and developed a regional Homeless Strategy. Using the reviews and the Strategy, each Gwent Local Authority produced their own bespoke plans to deliver specific actions to address homelessness in their areas. The Local Authority's Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2022 has recently been reviewed, updated and is now incorporated into this Strategy.

The Supporting People Team will continue to work closely with colleagues in the Housing Solutions Team to assist in preventing homelessness within Blaenau Gwent and across the Gwent Region by developing and commissioning responsive, innovative and effective HSP services which meet the needs of our citizens across both Blaenau Gwent and the Gwent region.

National, Legislative and Policy Context

As a cross cutting policy framework, the Housing Support Programme is informed by a range of national policy and legislative initiatives, coupled with learning from the past twelve months. An overview of how national policy informs Blaenau Gwent's HSP is given in Appendix 3.

Notable national policy drivers alongside initiatives, services and support we have provided include:

| National policy or legislation | How it has informed service commissioning or provision |
|--|---|
| The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 | The planning, commissioning and delivery of HSP services are aligned to the principles of the Act. We work in collaboration with key partners and people who use our services to develop and deliver sustainable services which meet not only current needs but also future needs of our citizens of Blaenau Gwent. |
| Housing (Wales) Act 2014, particularly Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, which is focused on homelessness prevention | The Supporting People Team is working closely with the Housing Solutions Team to ensure preventative and responsive HSP services are being delivered in the borough which meets this strategic agenda. For example, our range of floating support Services provides support to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. We also fund a number of short term accommodation based services within the borough such as the homelessness hostel, refuge and young person's supported housing scheme. |
| Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 | We funded specialist support workers who are located in the Adults Social Care Information, Advice and Assistance Team (the 'front door' to Adult Services in Blaenau Gwent), including a mental health support worker, a VAWDASV (Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence) support worker and a housing support worker. The support workers ensure people receive timely, effective support which assists in preventing them having to access statutory services. |
| Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 | We ensure housing related support services are commissioned which supports people affected by gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence. We have continued to further develop our VAWDASV services in Blaenau Gwent. Our women's refuge provision now supports people who have experienced sexual violence. We have increased our floating support capacity, introduced a crisis worker, developed dispersed properties and have a dedicated VAWDASV support worker based within Adults Services Information, Advice and Assistance Team. |
| Substance misuse delivery plan: 2019 - 2022 | In response to the delivery plan and the COVID-19 pandemic we have worked in partnership with the Gwent APB to develop an assertive outreach service for people residing in temporary accommodation, our homelessness hostel and HSP funded supported accommodation schemes. The service ensures people can access timely support in relation to their substance misuse in order to meet their needs. |
| Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 | The Renting Homes (Amendment) (Wales) Bill only gained Royal Assent April 2021 and then went to public consultation. It holds particular significance both for tenants and landlords in relation to standardising tenancy agreements and occupation contracts. The outcomes are yet to be published, though will be tracked and actioned as part of the work of the Blaenau Gwent HSP Planning Group. |

| | |
|--|--|
| Housing Support Grant Practice Guidance (2020) | The introduction of the Practice Guidance has transformed the way in which we commission and deliver services in Blaenau Gwent. This includes further integrated approach between the Housing Solutions and Supporting People Team, the introduction of more responsive and flexible services that best meet people's need, and further emphasis on collaboration with partners, stakeholders and people who use our services. |
|--|--|

Needs Assessment

Needs Assessment process

The full needs assessment can be found on the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council website: <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/>.

HSP funded services are provided by both statutory and voluntary agencies and must be built around the needs and preferences of service users wherever possible. Consultation and partnership working has therefore been central to the development of the HSP Strategy, alongside an extensive review of available insights and evidence. We have taken a broad-ranging and inclusive approach to understanding needs and challenges experienced by local residents, communities, and the agencies that exist to support them.

Data sources used in the needs assessment included:

- Office of National Statistics (ONS)
- Food Bank usage and Free School Meals
- Blaenau Gwent Well-being assessment
- Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)
- Gwent Population Needs Assessment 2018
- Local Homelessness and Housing data
- Housing Support Gateway data
- Housing Support Programme Outcomes
- Gwent Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Needs Assessment
- Research and National Publications
- Key Local and Regional Strategies:
 - Local Well-being Plan
 - Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)
 - Strategy for Older People Phase 3: Blaenau Gwent Delivery Plan (2015 to 2023)
 - Gwent Homeless Strategy 2018
 - Phase II Homelessness Plans
- Plus feedback from Service Users and Stakeholders (see Stakeholder Engagement Section)

[Key findings](#)

Increased levels of demand, including complex and multiple needs

Demand for services is currently high and is likely to increase further in the short term, due to the pressures created as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, such as the level of homelessness, poor mental health and financial pressures.

Despite the success of some preventative approaches, levels of homelessness are still a concern, placing significant pressure on the housing service, whilst service users accessing support often have more complex needs, resulting in an increase of support extensions by 55%.

Regular reviews of existing provision will be required to ensure that services are fit for purpose, forward planning and meet both existing and emerging need. Preventative approaches and multi-agency working will be vital for effectively addressing some of the needs identified, as well as building on existing good practice and further enhancing and developing mechanisms and support services.

Widening inequalities and deprivation

Blaenau Gwent has become a place of mixed and diverse need, containing areas of relative affluence often near to areas of significant poverty and deprivation. The assessment helped to identify the location of the most deprived communities in Blaenau Gwent and confirmed existing knowledge that people in these areas will often experience multiple difficulties.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD, 2019) evidences Blaenau Gwent has having a high percentage of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the 20%, 30% and 50% most deprived in Wales. It has a claimant count rate (number of people claiming benefit principally for the reason of being unemployed) of 6.3% - the second highest in Wales.

The HSP programme will need to continue supporting these identified groups and focus on the delivery of those services that will best support and empower them to improve their situation. This includes addressing financial inclusion, food bank usage, delivering more affordable housing options, especially to young single households and who are particularly vulnerable.

Supply and a lack of suitable accommodation

Supply of housing remains one of the biggest challenges for addressing housing need and whilst Blaenau Gwent has had significant success at preventing homelessness, the ability to relieve it remains a much harder challenge, due to the limited amount of accommodation available.

This is particularly significant for single person households, as evidenced by the increased levels of single people who are sleeping rough, presenting as homeless to the local authority,

living in temporary accommodation or seeking housing via the common housing register. Unless more is done to address the lack of accommodation, this is an area of demand that is set to continue in the future.

House prices and rental values make access unaffordable in some parts of the borough. In addition, the effects of welfare benefit reform have further impacted on access to the social rented sector, especially for younger renters, making a previously affordable tenure more difficult to access and sustain.

Delivery of suitable accommodation can only be achieved through a concerted and collective approach with all key partners working together to explore and deliver new models of accommodation.

Multi agency approaches & limited resources

More service users are requiring support for longer and that some key support needs are in greater demand than others, placing increased pressure on available resources. Some of these needs can be addressed by the Housing and HSP service, but other more complex needs require a multiagency approach.

Responding to the needs of looked after children in Blaenau Gwent is still a priority. There is a commitment to work with partners across the youth justice system, social services, health and education.

Commissioning of specialist VAWDASV services in Gwent was identified as complex, provided by multiple parties, with risk of duplication, gaps in support and potentially not meeting the needs or ensuring the safety of those accessing support.

The importance of developing joined up service provision has been made clear throughout this assessment and via engagement with stakeholders and partners. There is consensus that partner agencies and services will need to work together seamlessly; not only improving people's outcomes, but leading to more efficient and effective provision.

Vulnerable groups and high demand areas

Data indicates certain types of service users have a higher or more complex level of need than others:

- Single person households, particularly impacted by sufficient supply of suitable and affordable accommodation options
- Those with mental health issues, requiring both skills and capacity across support services to address presenting needs

- Young people leaving care or other forms of institution is one the main reasons for youth homelessness, and young people are more likely to experience deprivation than other age groups
- VAWDASV related abuse remains high, not aided by variation in provision across local authorities, as well as a need to improve data capture and quality
- Common across many local authorities, an increasing proportion of older people impacts complexity and volume of need, coupled with a need for multi-agency co-ordination

Stakeholder Engagement

Blaenau Gwent, in partnership with its Gwent partners, undertakes regular consultation and engagement with stakeholders to continually review services and identify priorities.

MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT & FEEDBACK

Recognising that stakeholders and partners are likely to have a range of preferences in how they like to be engaged, we have used several methods for capturing perspectives, feedback and insights.

This includes:

- Gwent Service User Survey Feedback 2020 & 2021
- Gwent Stakeholder Feedback 2020 & 2021
- Blaenau Gwent local workshop with its HSP providers
- Regular service review feedback by the HSP Supporting People Commissioning Team
- Ongoing service monitoring feedback within Blaenau Gwent, to assess service user experience and outcomes achieved
- Ongoing work and consultation with members of Blaenau Gwent's HSP Planning Group, which includes representation from:
 - Housing
 - Children's and Social Services
 - Health
 - Probation services
 - Children and Community Grant
 - Landlords
 - Support Providers (accommodation based)
 - Support Providers (floating support)
- Active shared planning and commissioning across a broader range of partners within Gwent's Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group (RHSCG), listed in Appendix 1. This includes representation from:
 - Gwent Police
 - Substance Misuse Area Planning Board

- Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Board
- Long- and short-term support providers and social housing landlords
- Third sector
- Service user representation

Both our methods of engagement and lines of enquiry are consistent with the ambitions and expectations laid out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, including the Seven Well-being Goals, and Five Ways of Working. The Blaenau Gwent HSP Planning Group has committed to the following principles, very much aligned to the Act:

1. HSP services are efficient and effective and meet the diverse needs of vulnerable people of Blaenau Gwent
2. Co-production and collaboration are at the centre of service development and delivery
3. People who use services are place at the heart of the Housing Support Programme
4. The housing support needs of vulnerable people of Blaenau Gwent are understood and evidenced
5. An inclusive framework for planning and commissioning of HSP services is adopted
6. Creativity and innovation in the commissioning of HSP services is promoted

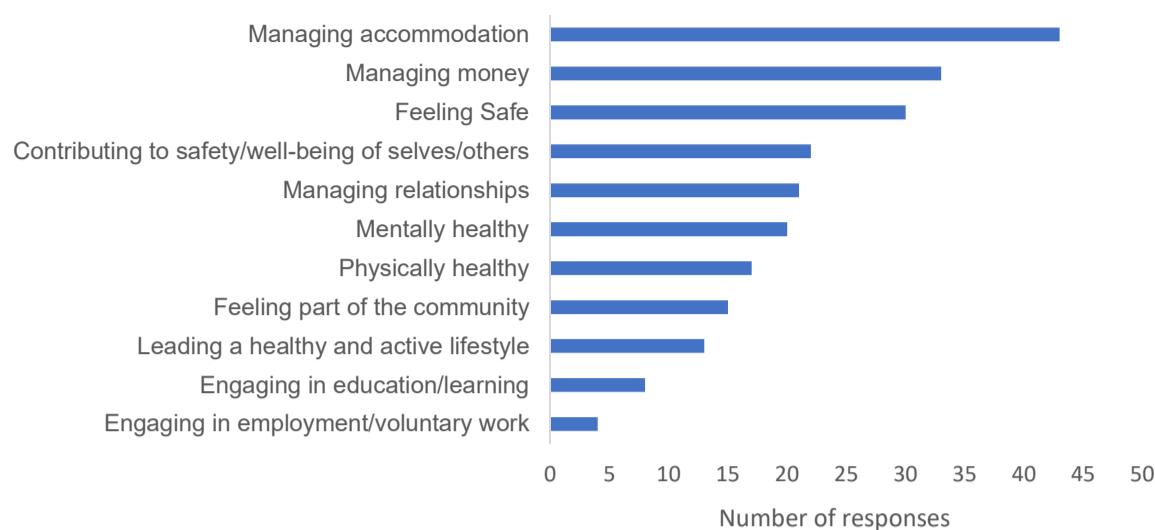
[Service User Feedback](#)

While every attempt is made to configure services to meet the needs of those who use them, it is the people themselves who receive services who bring first-hand insights to the experience of these services. They have lived and experienced them and are in the best position to know what works, what doesn't, how it supports them through challenges they face and what improvements need to be made.

Blaenau Gwent, in partnership with its Gwent partners, undertakes regular consultation and engagement with stakeholders to continually review services and identify priorities.

The following from the Service User Survey (2020) shows the key issues that people contend with.

Prioritised view of service user needs based on the Gwent Service User Survey



Due to COVID-19 restrictions the usual service user engagement event shifted online. A total of 352 questionnaires were completed in 2020 across Gwent, of which 52 lived in Blaenau Gwent, with 182 completing it in 2021. Managing accommodation, managing money and feeling safe were the main support areas identified.

Barriers to support, non-engagement & marginalised groups

Feedback has been positive about the new ways of virtual working and service users have commented that they would prefer to keep the virtual support with a combination of support via telephone, mobile apps (e.g. WhatsApp), video calls (e.g. FaceTime) and some face-to-face visits.

While many have appreciated improved means of accessing support, particularly digitally, some individuals remain marginalised and struggle to access or engage with services. Service user's engagement highlighted that whilst access had been straightforward, knowledge of the services available had been limited. Digital inclusion is an area of increasing need, particularly with more and more services being delivered online. Following the 2021 survey which focused on this area, seven priorities were agreed by the RHSCG to enhance digital inclusion and remove barriers to engaging in consultation.

Beyond consultation and engagement, when it comes to the provision and delivery of support services, face to face remains the preferred method and exploring more digital approaches was not something that many respondents were keen to embrace.

Mental health was identified as a barrier, confirmed by analysis of the data which supported reports that a relatively high number of homeless applicants disengage or could not be contacted before reaching a satisfactory outcome, resulting in referrals for support being rejected.

Access to support

The results from the 2021 service user survey highlighted that all respondents in Blaenau Gwent were either Happy or Very Happy with the services that they had received through the HSP programme. Equally, we have picked up a need to improve access to support – from identifying a need, to understanding the support available, and then tailoring the support to meet individual needs:

1. From a service user point of view there was a call for better marketing or awareness raising of the nature of support services available.
2. For service users, increasing capacity and reducing waiting times for support was a priority to emerge from the service user engagement.
3. The number of people who require more specialist levels of support has become an area of additional pressure on services and was clearly highlighted through the stakeholder engagement, with many providers struggling to assist service users to access the specialist support that they require.
4. Once support had been accessed, there is clearly not a one-size-fits-all need.

Providing low level support for longer was a suggested area for improvement, as was providing more intensive support and greater levels of contact. Evidently the nature of need, and therefore support will need to vary in duration and intensity – a tailored approach, beyond being prescribed by service thresholds or standardised protocols.

Widening the range of support

Picked up through service monitoring to understand the experience of service users, as well as service reviews to ensure services are being delivered effectively, some of the following themes emerged:

- People want flexible and responsive support that is available and accessible outside of traditional hours
- The need for additional emotional support, addressing isolation and managing mental health has been amplified during the pandemic, enhanced by continuity of support workers to establish relationships based on trust
- At the same time, the need for pragmatic insight and knowledge about benefits processes, and accessing more specialist services to address complex or multiple needs – including improved multiagency support.

This focus on access, provision of person-centred services and responsive, multi-agency support flows through to our strategic priorities and objectives.

Stakeholder Feedback

In addition to engaging with service users, we regularly consult with providers and other key stakeholders about the services which are being provided locally, to determine areas of pressure and demand, gaps in provision and emerging priorities. This is both within Blaenau Gwent and regionally.

Blaenau Gwent held a workshop with its HSP providers to explore their concerns and priorities, especially reflecting on the new challenges that had emerged, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, and how to create better resilience going forward.

Providers have seen an increase of new floating support clients and need, for example through:

- homeowners experiencing financial difficulties due to furlough ceasing
- accentuated needs in mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse
- enabling the younger people aged 16-30 years to access services.

A shift to digital means of support has enabled providers to support more people with less time spent travelling, though as found in the service user feedback, this was not suitable for all, with some vulnerable clients not engaging as well as not being able to undertake visual checks.

Needs particular to Blaenau Gwent providers included:

- A lack of housing options:
 - affordable homes
 - 1-3 bed accommodation
 - step down from supported accommodation for vulnerable people (e.g. mental health needs) to more independent living in the community with/without support
- Housing First priority for complex client groups
- Non-statutory support for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities

Providers themselves faced workforce challenges, for example recruitment, retention and training, impacted by high workloads and reducing their abilities to meet the needs of complex clients who need specialist services.

There was a need for enhanced cross-boundary working:

- more cooperation and collaboration with a wide range of partners, sharing information and data
- promoting and marketing services and their positive impact
- better accessibility and digitally inclusive approaches to identify options and secure support.

These local findings were consistent with Gwent stakeholder feedback, including the need to develop accommodation options, more collaborative multiagency approaches and the ability to address complex needs being highlighted. Specialist services were called for to respond to:

- Complex needs particularly rough sleepers and those with dual diagnosis
- Increasing accommodation and support options for prison leavers
- Developing and expanding the range of mental health services available
- Increasing accommodation and services for those affected by VAWDASV including male victims, the sexually exploited and victims of modern slavery
- Providing a wider range of services for those with disabilities.

Early intervention and preventative approaches were also emphasised, and respondents stressed the importance of services that are client-led, person-centred, and which prioritise the needs of the individual.

These findings flow through into the prioritisation of our strategic objectives.

Conclusions and summary of the statement of need

From the comprehensive needs assessments, service user and stakeholder engagement, there are some recurring and evident needs which will need to be addressed over the coming four years. These include a need to:

- Improve the range of affordable housing and suitable accommodation options
- Intervene early to avoid issues escalating to a point of crisis or more profound need, including reducing homelessness and rough sleeping
- Understand and respond to the needs of service users who have more complex needs or issues
- Reduce the gaps between service providers, enhancing joined-up services and support through multi-agency planning, provision and information exchange

- Enhance the means to develop more person-centred solutions, recognising that support is likely to be more effective when it boosts personal resilience and is targeted to address identified personal needs
- Capitalise on the innovations that have come about through the COVID-19 pandemic, being sure to develop digital inclusion, still provide a range of methods to receive support and ensure no one gets left behind

Through the implementation of its Phase II Homeless Plan and the HSP strategy, Blaenau Gwent will continue to work to meet the statutory needs of households requiring assistance from the local authority.

The plan initially seeks to increase intervention services to prevent homelessness from occurring. Where this is not possible, we will aim to deliver more arrangements to reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation, whilst linking to support services to address the needs of individuals, supporting the principles of rapid rehousing.

The strategy sets out some specific priorities which will support the provision of statutory needs, building on the preventative approaches already in place and encouraging: the development of more accommodation provision; development of a rapid rehousing plan; and increasing and developing the range of targeted homeless prevention services.

Blaenau Gwent has already developed a number of effective partnerships on both a local and regional basis that deliver bespoke services where a specific need has been identified. It will be important to continue with these collaborative approaches, and to continue linking with wider agencies. We will further develop our partnership working and make the best use of available resources when developing the Delivery Plan and working to meet current and future demands.

[Impact Assessments](#)

The full Housing Support Programme Strategy Impact Assessment is detailed within a separate document that also encompasses the Welsh Language assessment and Children's Rights Impact Assessment. The intention here is to provide a sufficient overview to provide assurance that the probable consequences of this strategy do not negatively impact certain groups or sections of the communities we serve.

[Impact Assessment Process](#)

This is a new strategy and has been developed locally unlike any previously published plans. The strategy is underpinned by an extensive review of services, stakeholders and providers and this research has directed the development of our local and regional actions for the forthcoming four years.

The extensive consultation exercise undertaken to develop the HSP Strategy has provided us with good information so that we can design and develop services and actions appropriate to meet the identified need and mitigate potential unintended negative consequences.

Consultation and engagement took place with service users, stakeholders, partner agencies and support providers through a range of consultation processes, including:

- Stakeholder Consultations
 - Stakeholder Survey (2020 & 2021)
 - Provider Forums
 - Quarterly Partnership Meetings
 - Service Evaluations and Contract Monitoring Visits
 - Housing Support Planning Group
- Service User Consultations
 - Service User Survey (2020 & 2021)
 - Service User Feedback/Questionnaires
 - Service Evaluations and Contract Monitoring Visits

The data collected from service users has been anonymised. Statutory and voluntary agencies who helped to carry out the surveys were all provided with a brief to help make sure service users' consent was fully informed and everyone participated consensually. All the information collected has been analysed with fundamental elements being drawn out, to structure the HSP Strategy.

We are satisfied that all the available information from service users, stakeholders, officers and staff has been considered in the preparation of the HSP Strategy. We are also aware that data capture limitations do exist, such as that for rough sleepers. We are working closely with colleagues in our Housing Solutions Team to determine how we can improve data collection and needs analysis for rough sleepers.

Key Findings

| Assessments undertaken | Potential impacts | Mitigating actions |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equality impact• Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment• Older People strategy & plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Risk of under-reporting and missed needs assessments by vulnerable groups• Needs of vulnerable groups are not fully understood and responded to sensitively by HSP partners through lack of awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain equalities data monitoring to ensure the HSP is relevant and has a positive impact for all current and future service users.• Improve awareness and promote cultural |

- Homelessness strategy & plan
- Younger People strategy & plan
- Housing Adaptation & Disabled Facility Grant policies & procedures
- Refugee and Asylum Seekers plan
- Offender Services Review
- VAWDASV needs assessment
- Emerging trends and changes in regional- and area-specific population demographics and needs are not captured or reflected in delivery plans
- Shortage of accommodation for people with specific requirements (e.g. disabilities, learning difficulties, children & young people)
- Unaffordability of rented accommodation or housing
- Challenge in preventing homelessness or accessing support for those who disengage or are reluctant to access council support (e.g. vulnerable young people; those with mental health or addictions)
- awareness training across strategic partners and providers
- Work with the Housing Solutions Team to improve data collection & needs analysis for rough sleepers and other hard-to-track groups
- Monitor HSP outcomes and the statutory WHO12 data sets
- Ensure all HSP partnership work includes confidential routes and pathways for diverse groups
- Continue to innovate service offers and improve routes to access tailored support

Strategic Priorities

Blaenau Gwent HSP Strategic Priorities

Our priorities for the delivery of HSP and Homelessness Prevention 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.

BLAENAU GWENT HSP STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

| | |
|------------|---|
| Priority 1 | Help improve access to timely, suitable and affordable housing |
| Priority 2 | Further enhance the delivery of high quality, innovative, effective and responsive housing related support services |
| Priority 3 | Minimise homelessness and prevent it through early intervention |
| Priority 4 | Ensure fair, equal and person-centred homelessness and housing related support services |
| Priority 5 | Further strengthen collaboration with our partners in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services |

Rationale for our priorities:**1. Help improve access to timely, suitable and affordable housing**

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. This priority reflects Blaenau Gwent's emphasis on rapid rehousing and the development of our Rapid Rehousing Plan. Our needs assessment has evidenced a need for affordable 1 – 3 bedroom properties, step down accommodation from supported housing, housing first properties for people with complex needs and bespoke accommodation and support for people with learning difficulties. We will continue to work with social and private rented sector landlords to sustain tenancies and increase access to affordable housing.

2. Further enhance the delivery of high quality, innovative, effective and responsive housing related 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 as new technologies unlock the ability to support people in new and responsive ways. Our needs assessment has evidenced for the first time a demand for floating support services for homeowners whose livelihoods have been affected by the Covid pandemic and the furlough scheme. There has been a further increase in demand for housing related support services for people with mental health issues, young people, people affected by VAWDASV and people with substance misuse issues. We will continue to maximise access to a range of support and raise awareness of the housing support grant services, encouraging self help and resilience

3. Minimise homelessness and prevent it through early intervention

Housing Support services exist to help prevent homelessness, social exclusion, isolation and institutionalisation. Early intervention aims to reduce undue escalation to avoid a crisis situation, with knock-on impact to health, inclusion and independence. We will continue to increase prevention work to maximise successful outcomes and help reduce the numbers of 'repeat presenters', people who are rough sleeping and reduce homelessness for younger people and support their wellbeing.

4. Ensure fair, equal and person-centred homelessness and housing related support services

Through our engagement and consultation, we have heard clearly how people's needs vary from one another, and the value of the support offered to the individual is

that it responds to their personal situation. Ensuring fairness and equality not only informs how limited resources are allocated, but also with an intent to address inequalities and deprivation.

5. Further strengthen collaboration with our partners in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services

This priority acknowledges that housing needs often straddle professional and organisational boundaries, with issues affecting health, debt, substance misuse, relationships, employment, domestic abuse and mental health issues. Effective responses often depend on a co-ordinated multi-agency response, and it is our commitment to ensure those in need do not risk falling down the gaps between services. To meet this priority we will further increase our joint planning, commissioning and delivery of services as well as ensuring recording and sharing of information between partners is appropriate to help service users.

The more granular local Action Plan that is delivering against each of these priorities is given in Annex A. The regional workplan, developed by Gwent Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group can be found on the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council website: <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/>.

The HSP programme will ensure that it continues to provide appropriate support, promote the availability of services and works to maximise outcomes for residents to address some of the overarching challenges that currently exist.

Population projections, employment, income, qualifications, deprivation and health will all influence the long-term housing and support needs of residents and will need to be taken into consideration when developing the HSP strategy. Some groups in Blaenau Gwent are more likely to live in areas of deprivation than others and are likely to require greater levels of support. The Housing Support Programme will need to continue supporting these groups and focus on the delivery of those services that will best support and empower them to improve their situation.

Demand for services is currently high and is likely to increase further in the short term, due to the pressures created as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, such as the level of homelessness, poor mental health and financial pressures. Regular reviews of existing provision will be required to ensure that services are fit for purpose, forward planning and meet both existing and emerging need. Preventative approaches and multi-agency working will be vital for effectively addressing some of the needs identified, as well as building on existing good practice and further enhancing and developing mechanisms and support services.

Implementing, Monitoring and Reviewing the Strategy

Working with Partners

As the Public Policy Institute for Wales summarises in its 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. Therefore the successful implementation of this strategy fundamentally depends on co-ordination, joint planning, commissioning and delivery of services (by both internal local authority departments, statutory partners and the housing sector).

The mechanism for collaborative partnership working are growing and maturing, and protected in law.

We have good links to the Gwent Regional Partnership Board. The Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) introduced Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) bringing together health, social services, the third sector and other partners to take forward the delivery of integrated services across regions. Thus ensuring "an integrated approach to the development of services, care and support, which focuses on opportunities for prevention and early intervention". The RPB is responsible for undertaking a population needs assessment for their region which provides an assessment of people's needs and what services are required to meet those needs.

The strong links that had been formed with strategic groups and partnerships across Gwent 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, as is demonstrated by its core membership (Appendix 1). 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 them, both now and in the future.

Members of the RHSCG connect the HSP with other bodies have been established, supporting more focused or specialised planning and delivery. These include:

- Gwent Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Partnership Board

- Gwent Local Authority Public Service Board
- Gwent Mental Health and Learning Disability Local Partnership Board
- Gwent Substance Misuse Area Planning Board
- Criminal Offending and Gwent Safer Communities Board
- Gwent, and South East Wales Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Partnership Boards
- Gwent Welfare Reform Partnership
- Gwent Adults Safeguarding Board
- Gwent Children's & Communities Grant
- South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board
- National Residential Landlords Association

[Funding Sources](#)

Phase 1 and 2 Funding

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 extra funding to ensure no one was left without access to accommodation. This meant that everyone could follow public health advice on basic hygiene, and hand washing, enabled them to follow social distancing guidelines and ensured they could self-isolate if they become ill.

As a result of the announcement, the Housing Options Team offered emergency accommodation to 35 households that have approached them as “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.

A number of Blaenau Gwent’s Phase 2 funding bids were successful including:

- Refurbishment of an existing building that has been empty since November 2017 within Tai Calon’s Community Housing stock, making it available as a Housing First Project to provide clients with settled accommodation first and then intense support immediately thereafter.

- Funding for a Support Worker to be based with our generic support provider Pobl, to support people who were previously sleeping rough. The role is to assist individuals to move on from temporary accommodation into suitable accommodation that meets their needs, building on the engagement and support these individuals have received during the pandemic. The dedicated Support Worker provides much needed resettlement support to ensure individuals have the support they need to maintain and sustain their home, so they don't have to return to a life on the streets.
- Funding to support the employment of an additional support worker within Cyfannol's Women's Aid's 'Safer Dispersed Accommodation' Scheme. The scheme is currently being developed to provide support to:
 - Women and families with low/medium/high needs
 - Women who are carers or have mobility/disability needs
 - Women with teenage sons
 - Large families
 - Women who have been exploited by the sex work industry
 - Women who have experienced sexual violence
 - Transgender women
 - Women, men and those with pets from the Gypsy Traveller community

The funding was very much welcomed in Blaenau Gwent. However, the funding was only available until 31st March 2021. These services will therefore continue to inform our HSP delivery priorities beyond 2020/21.

HSG Funding 2021/22

Welsh Government has recently announced the indicative HSG budget allocation for Blaenau Gwent for 2021/22 is £3,453,646: an increase of £828,401 per annum.

The additional funding is very much welcomed as it will enable us to continue to deliver on the Phase 2 services as well as enhancing and delivering new services to help meet the increasing demand for HSP 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 Blaenau Gwent, incorporating new and different ways of working.

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 Gwent Public Service Board, our Regional Partnership

Board, work with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, together with the agencies who we work closely with as part of the Blaenau Gwent's HSP Planning Group.

Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluation Arrangements

As indicated in our Action Plan (Annex A), under Priority 5 (Increase joint planning, commissioning and delivery of services), we will be monitoring, steering and reviewing progress against the HSP strategy in Blaenau Gwent's HSP Planning Group.

The group convenes on a quarterly basis.

The Group 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 this meeting 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.

The delivery of the areas identified within the Regional Workplan is 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 Co-ordinator.

The work to be taken forward through this statement will be detailed in a work plan overseen by the Regional Development Co-ordinator.

Annex A

Blaenau Gwent HSP Local Action Plan

| Priority 1 – Help improve access to timely, suitable and affordable housing | | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|--|--|
| Action Required | Outcome/Outputs | By when/timescale | Lead | |
| Develop and implement a Rapid Rehousing Plan | Develop and adopt a rapid rehousing approach | 2023 | Housing Solutions and Supporting People Managers | |
| Review and repurpose the current Move On Panel to improve access to move on accommodation for people living in supported accommodation | Timely move on from supported accommodation so people are able to live independently within their own home in the community | 2022/23 | Housing Solutions and Supporting People Managers | |
| Review the suitability of current temporary accommodation to ensure it meets demand needs | A reduction in the use of B&B accommodation by co-ordinating access to more temporary accommodation in the region | August 2022 | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Continue to develop a database of private rented landlords that assist with the local authority meeting its statutory duty Further develop a landlord offer tailored to Blaenau Gwent | An increase in the supply of good quality affordable private rented sector accommodation, increasing housing options for households faced with homelessness | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Continue to work with our social and private landlords to increase the supply of accommodation for our Housing First service | An increase in supply will increase the housing options for people with complex needs | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Consider new and innovative models of housing and support for people with learning difficulties by reviewing the current provision and access arrangements Consider the outcomes of the review and implement recommendations | A range of innovative housing and support models are available for people with learning disabilities, enabling them to live independently in their own home | 2022/2023 | Supporting People Team Manager | |

| Priority 2 – Further enhance the delivery of high quality, innovative, effective and responsive housing related support services | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------|---|--|
| Action Required | Outcome/Outputs | By when/timescale | Lead | |
| Further raise awareness of HSG services by developing an effective communication and marketing plan with partners. Consult with service users and former services users and partners over the information provided, to produce new revised information and to determine the most appropriate methods of communication | Effective communications and information for households seeking accommodation, with clear information on Housing Support services, HSP prevention initiatives, access to accommodation and access to services | Spring 2022 | HSP Planning Group | |
| Determine the impact Covid has had on current services and plan for how we can deliver housing related support services to meet the needs post Covid Monitor the change in needs of people accessing services and the demand for services (for example the economic impact of furlough ending is impacting on demand) | Effective housing related support services are commissioned and delivered which are meeting the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent | 2022/23 | Supporting People Manager | |
| Develop a greater understanding of all local services being delivered by forming links with the newly developed Community Locality Hubs Provide training to the staff within the Hubs to ensure they have an understanding and awareness of housing related support services and their referral pathways | Staff will be better informed regarding housing related support services and will have increased local knowledge. People contacting the hubs will have access to a greater range of services. | April 2022 | Supporting People Contract Officers | |
| Review and map current provision and access arrangements to support services for individuals experiencing: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• mental health issues• drug and alcohol issues | A suitable range of appropriate support is strengthened and expanded to vulnerable individuals and households with each of these issues. Clear pathways are in place for the services | August 2022 | Housing Solutions and Supporting People Teams | |

| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fleeing from domestic abuse/ VAWDASV (including male victims) • discharge from remand/custody • a risk of homelessness or sleeping rough • older people at risk of homelessness or in need of housing support • pregnancy and families in need of housing support <p>Agree and implement the recommendations from each of the above reviews</p> | <p>ensuring people access timely and effective support.</p> <p>A reduction in the risk or negative impact on these individuals' and families' health, wellbeing and social exclusion.</p> <p>A reduction in the level of need, complexity or frequency of presenting to HSP services or other statutory services from this group, which resulted from unmet housing needs.</p> | | | |
|---|--|-------------------|--|--|
| <p>Review, map, benchmark and compare crisis response work and housing related support services</p> <p>Identify good practice focusing on relationship breakdown, rent arrears and tied accommodation</p> | <p>The approach to crisis response meets the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent and prevents them from having to access statutory services</p> | December 2022 | Team Managers - Housing Solutions and Compliance and Supporting People | |
| <p>Review how we have embraced technology and provided services differently during the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>Learn from our new ways of working to modernise how we deliver services going forward to ensure they are more accessible responsive and inclusive</p> | <p>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</p> | Spring 2022 | Supporting People Contracts Officer | |
| Priority 3 – Minimise homelessness and prevent it through early intervention | | | | |
| Action Required | Outcome/Outputs | By when/timescale | Lead | |
| <p>Review, map, benchmark and compare prevention approach work by each local authority and housing related support services</p> | <p>The range of commissioned prevention services meet the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent and prevents them from having to access statutory services</p> | December 2022 | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|---|--|
| | | | | |
| Identify good practice focusing on relationship breakdown, rent arrears and tied accommodation | The range of commissioned prevention services meet the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent and prevents them from having to access statutory services | December 2022 | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Carry out a review of rough sleeping and demand for emergency accommodation and direct access hostels within Blaenau Gwent | Reduction in rough sleeping by improving the availability and access to emergency accommodation provision, to address rough sleeping within Blaenau Gwent | Annually | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Explore models of delivering Housing First project to meet the needs of rough sleepers and 'hard to house' clients | Reduction in rough sleeping by developing independent accommodation-based projects aimed at addressing the needs of rough sleepers and 'hard to house' clients | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Research repeat presentations and identify local trends and issues | Ensure equality of access to services and improve service quality and outcomes by enabling services to respond to the identified issues | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Review existing provision across each Local Authority area regarding education packages and information for young people around housing and homelessness Develop an education package and engage with education services to implement this within schools and other educational settings in each local authority area | Greater awareness in young people of contributing factors that lead to housing issues and homelessness, with awareness about their rights and responsibilities Reduction in youth homelessness through the Youth Pathway model by developing education packages and information for young people around housing and homelessness | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Review existing processes and procedures, considering guidance, best practice, service | Reduction in homelessness in young people leaving care, by developing clear pathways | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |

| | | | | |
|--|---|-----------|---|--|
| user input and relevant legislation in relation to young people | | | | |
| Develop a greater understanding of all local services provided for vulnerable households, what services are delivered and how they are funded, including the voluntary and third sector | To maximise the support and services available to vulnerable individuals and households in need by enhancing the work of voluntary groups and services across Blaenau Gwent and the region that is provided to vulnerable households | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Review current provision and access arrangements to debt and money management services; agree and implement the recommendations | A reduction in poverty, hardship and homelessness by improving access to debt and money management services | Annually | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Examine current provision in training, education and employment to reduce poverty and increase the financial capacity of households and establish the gaps in services alongside opportunities for further development Develop local partnerships to increase capacity and to increase opportunities | Enhanced opportunities for training and employment for the most vulnerable in society including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, resulting in decreased social exclusion and increased independent living | June 2022 | Supporting People Manager | |
| The demand for substance misuse services has seen a steep increase which appears to be a continuing trend. Services will be monitored to ensure they continue to take up training opportunities available which will enhance staff professional development, embed best practice and provide opportunities to collaborate with key partners and stakeholders to tackle all forms of substance misuse for citizens across Gwent and Blaenau Gwent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually 95% of staff complete the e-learning Level 1 substance misuse programme • Staff confidence increases and this is monitored through an evaluation survey • Staff confidence increased to engage and sign post individuals with substance misuse appropriately and this is monitored though an evaluation survey | Annually | Supporting People Manager | |

| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop specific communication materials to promote substance misuse training to the HSG and Homelessness workforce • Deliver on an annual basis via a digital platform; Level 1 Substance Misuse training and refresher programme to all HSG staff and commissioned services • HSG and GDAS teams will review the training needs of HSG commissioned services annually | <p><i>This is the proposal for generic level 1 training, consideration to be given to an additional action for frontline staff to be offered level 2 training- as sourced by providers based on local need but to include substances and drug trends, complex needs including dual diagnosis etc – to be discussed at Regional HSG Lead Officer meeting</i></p> <p><i>If agreed:</i></p> <p><i>Additional Outcomes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually 70% of staff engaged with Level 2 substance misuse training. • Staff confidence increased to engage and sign post individuals with substance misuse appropriately and this is monitored through an evaluation survey | | |
|---|---|-------------------|--|
| Priority 4 – Ensure fair, equal and person centred homelessness and housing related support services | | | |
| Action Required | Outcome/Outputs | By when/timescale | Lead |
| <p>Assess existing structure within Blaenau Gwent</p> <p>Review existing options and provide recommendations for implementation of changes with key services</p> <p>Implement agreed changes</p> | <p>Front line services are responsive and co-ordinated to meet the needs of service users, extending options for preventative activities</p> | | <p>Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance</p> |

| Identify and arrange training on wider Housing Support issues | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------|---|--|
| Review Blaenau Gwent C.B.C.'s adverse weather policy in partnership with key stakeholders and amend as needed | Reduction in rough sleeping in inclement weather by ensuring Extreme Weather Plans are reviewed and fit for purpose | Spring 2022 | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Review homelessness prevention and housing support procedures and processes to ensure legal compliance Implement revisions and provide appropriate training, with an annual review as required | Relevant legislation is fully integrated and applied in housing support and homelessness prevention assessment policies and procedures, ensuring services are legally compliant | July 2022/Annually | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Training, updates and briefings to staff and providers to keep abreast of service developments, good practice, innovation and new practices via joint training sessions, HSP Planning Group, and local, regional and national fora | Increased knowledge and awareness to ensure effective and innovative housing related support services are commissioned and delivered | On going | Supporting People Manager and Chair of the HSP Planning Group | |
| Develop and strengthen the support offered to Gypsy and Travellers residing in the borough, with particular focus on providing access to training and employment for young people of the Gypsy and Traveller community | A range of training, skills development and employment opportunities which are accepted and taken up by this group An improvement in financial independence and social inclusion | June 2022 | Supporting People Manager | |
| Develop digital inclusion skills across services as well as the people we are supporting – linking into to Digital Communities Wales and the Corporate Digital Transformation Team | Both staff and people in the community are able to engage digitally and actively get their needs met through these methods | On going | Supporting People Contracts Officer | |
| Priority 5 – Further strengthen collaboration with our partners in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services | | | | |
| Action Required | Outcome/Outputs | By when/timescale | Lead | |
| Continue to build upon the strategic relationships with Probation and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board through the | Increased partnership working and improved access to housing support and homelessness prevention services by | Ongoing | HSP Planning Group | |

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|---|---|------------|--|--|
| HSP Planning Group regarding homelessness prevention | 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 failure from Social Housing, reduced homelessness and reduced community risk | | | |
| Develop agreements with RSL (Registered Social Landlord) partners around homelessness prevention and associated activities linked to securing accommodation | | | | |
| Develop agreements with Probation around homelessness prevention, assessment and interventions for individuals leaving the secure estate in line with the National Offender Pathway | | | | |
| Establish regular meetings and reporting mechanisms and oversight/ scrutiny with Executive Members | Working relationships are established between Housing Solutions and Executive Members to raise the profile of Housing Support services politically within the local area | On-going | Team Managers - Housing Solutions and Compliance and Supporting People | |
| Deliver specific training throughout Blaenau Gwent on processes, service access and signposting to homelessness prevention services | More joined up, consistent and connected services that meet the needs of service users by deliver joint training around homelessness prevention and housing support services across a range of partner agencies | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance | |
| Consider securing dedicated resource to project manage, co-ordinate and oversee delivery against the HSP strategy | Project Manager in post | April 2022 | | |
| Increase joint planning, commissioning and delivery of services through Blaenau Gwent's HSP Planning Group. Mandate the Group to provide a strategic steer of the programme and ensure links are | Effective HSP services are commissioned and delivered meeting the needs of the people who access our services | On going | HSP Planning Group Chair | |

| | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------|--|--|
| sustained with key strategic groups across the locality and region | | | | |
| Promote career opportunities within the housing support sector with the Sector through the provision of a Regional virtual Open Day | Recruitment and retention of staff into the sector is increased | Feb 2022 and on going | Gwent Regional Development Co-ordinator | |
| Identify joint funding arrangements with partners for the commissioning and delivery of housing support services commencing with establishing funding opportunities for prescribing places in relation to the Substance Misuse Outreach Services | A holistic substance misuse service is commissioned which also provides access to prescribing places to better meet the needs of the people accessing the service | On going | Supporting People Manager | |
| Develop local information sharing arrangements in line with GDPR in order to aid greater joint working and integration of services and outcomes Examine models of co-working/co-funding to deliver services more effectively | To create greater connectivity and integration between the range of support and preventative interventions, increasing the effectiveness of services overall | On going | Team Managers – Housing Solutions and Compliance and Supporting People | |
| Review the case recording system, database information and reporting systems Consider outcomes of review and implement recommendations Work with partners to ensure HSP statistics are recorded in as uniform a way as possible | The data provided, case recording systems and subsequent performance information are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • robust and accurate • fulfils regulatory obligations • gives an accurate assessment of demand for services • can be used to inform service delivery and shape policy | On going | Team Managers – Housing Solutions and Compliance and Supporting People | |

In addition to the Blaenau Gwent Action Plan given above, there is the workplan (2021-22) for the Gwent Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group. This is provided as a stand-alone document, with actions ordered by the following categories:

- Category 1: Development of specialist services for which there is not a critical mass locally

- Category 2: Development of regional services where justified by economies of scale
 - Category 3: Delivery of improvements to be achieved by collaboration
 - Category 4: Collaboration with other public services
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Annex B

Rapid Rehousing Plan

Our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan will be available in July 2022. Until that point, please refer to the action plan in Annex A.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Gwent's Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group (RHSCG) membership

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Local Authorities – Strategic Lead Officer representatives | Blaenau Gwent | Alyson Hoskins (Social Services) |
| | Caerphilly | Viv Daye (Social Services) |
| | Monmouthshire | Sharran Lloyd (Partnerships) |
| | Newport | Chris Humphrey (Social Services) |
| | Torfaen | Simon Rose (Housing) |
| Local Authorities – HSP Lead Officers | Blaenau Gwent | Michelle Church |
| | Caerphilly | Shelly Jones |
| | Monmouthshire | Lyn Webber |
| | Newport | Nigel Stannard |
| | Torfaen | Rachael Lewis |
| LA Homelessness Coordination Cell Leads | Blaenau Gwent | Mark Congreve |
| | Caerphilly | Kerry Denman |
| | Monmouthshire | Jane Oates |
| | Newport | Natalie Thompson |
| | Torfaen | Sheryl Thomas |
| Regional Partners | RPB Strategic Housing Representatives RPB | Simon Rose Sam Lewis David Williams |
| | Public Service Boards (PSB) | Sharran Lloyd |
| | Substance Misuse Area Planning Board (APB) | Chris Humphries/ Lisa Meredith |
| | VAWDASV Partnership Board Representative | Janice Dent |
| | Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Mental Health Public Health | Joanne Lewis-Jones Arif Mahmood (PH contact- no capacity to attend meetings at the moment) |
| | Probation Representative | Amanda Lewis Karen Turner |
| | Gwent Police | Kathryn Wall/Hannah Lawton |
| | OPCC | Johanna Robinson / Emma Lionel |
| | Tai Pawb | Rob Milligan |
| | Youth Offending Team | Geraint Spacey |
| | Children and Communities Grant (CCG) representative | Lyn Webber |
| Third Sector | Support providers Social Housing Landlords | <i>Short Term:</i> Sam Lewis <i>Long Term:</i> Kath Deakin <i>Support Provider Rep:</i> Vacant <i>Landlord Rep:</i> Mark Doubler <i>Landlord Rep:</i> Vacant <i>Landlord Deputy Rep:</i> Vacant |
| Private Sector | Private Rented Sector (PRS) representation | Gillian Owens Deputy: Tim Thomas |
| Others Partners | Service User | Specific groups/forums to be arranged |



Appendix 3: Overview of national policy drivers informing Blaenau Gwent's HSP

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Act seeks to strengthen existing governance arrangements for improving the social, economic and cultural well-being 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.

For the first time public bodies listed in the Act must do what they do in a sustainable way. Public bodies need to make sure that when making decisions they take into account the impact they could have on people living their lives in Wales in the future.

It will expect them to:

- Work together better
- Involve people reflecting the diversity of our communities
- Look to the long term as well as focusing on now
- Take action to try and stop problems getting worse – or even stop them happening in the first place

This strategy is underpinned by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The planning, commissioning and delivery of HSP services are aligned to the principles of the Act. We work in collaboration with key partners and people who use our services to develop and deliver sustainable services which meet not only current needs but also future needs of our citizens of Blaenau Gwent.

Housing (Wales) Act – Homes for Wales

The first Housing (Wales) Act focuses on three priorities:

1. Increasing the supply of housing and improving the private rented sector.
2. Preventing homelessness and improving help for those who become homeless.
3. Ending family homelessness by 2019

The Act links housing with national strategies such as community safety, children and young people, health and social care, older people and business and economy. The Act prioritises that essential support should be provided to people to assist in finding and keeping a home and identifies Supporting People (now HSP) services as being key to providing this support. The Housing Act acknowledges that the Housing Support Programme plays a big part in

helping people overcome very difficult circumstances to maintain, find or even keep their home. It also recognises the significant contribution that the HSP makes to people's health and well-being.

The Act legislates for Local Authorities to take 'all reasonable steps to achieve a suitable housing solution for all households which are homeless or threatened with homelessness'; and a duty to provide interim accommodation to households while a housing solution is being sought. This has led to a significant increase in demand for HSG funded services and even more so during the Covid pandemic.

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

The Act provides the power to create a coherent legal framework for Social Services in Wales. It intends to reform and integrate social services law for people and make provision for:

- Improving the well-being outcomes for people who need care and support, and carers who need support
- Co-ordination and partnership by public authorities with a view to improving the well-being of people

There are 6 strategic priorities outlined in the Act:

1. Maintaining and enhancing the well-being of people in need
2. A stronger voice and real control for citizens
3. Strong Direction and Local Accountability
4. Safeguarding and Protection
5. Regulation and Inspection
6. Services (Adoption and Transition)

The Act recognises the increase in the number of people accessing social services. In order to help meet and reduce the demand, it outlines the need for increased comprehensive early intervention and intensive support services. There is a duty for local authorities to maintain and enhance the well-being of people in need in areas such as education, training and recreation, social and economic well-being as well as physical, mental health and emotional well-being. HSP services play a vital role in providing support to vulnerable people in order to meet this strategic agenda.

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

The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act aims to:

- Improve the public sector response in Wales to such abuse and violence.
- Improve arrangements to promote awareness of, and prevent, protect and support victims of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence
- Introduce a needs-based approach to developing strategies which will ensure strong strategic direction and strengthened accountability
- Ensure strategic level ownership, through appointment of a Ministerial Advisor who will have a role in advising Welsh Ministers and improving joint working amongst agencies across this sector
- Improve consistency, quality and join up of service provision in Wales

The HSP plays a vital role in meeting this strategic agenda by ensuring housing related support services are commissioned which effectively supports people affected by gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Substance misuse delivery plan: 2019 to 2022 (Wales)

The Delivery Plan was published in October 2019 and sets out the Welsh Government's key policy and operational priorities for the coming years in relation to substance misuse. The Plan has since been reviewed to consider where it needs to be updated in light of COVID-19 - particularly to meet the new challenges ahead.

The review considered the evidence highlighted by Area Planning Boards (APBs) and wider partners. It proposed that the original priority areas for the next three years remain relevant, and have been reinforced during the pandemic. These priority areas are:

- Responding to co-occurring mental health problems which are common in substance misuse
- Ensuring strong partnership working with housing and homelessness services to further develop the multi-disciplinary approach needed to support those with substance misuse issues who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Ensuring that all prisons in Wales (and HMP Eastwood Park, women's prison) have a coordinated, transparent and consistent service for those with substance misuse problems in prison
- Providing further support for families and carers of people who misuse substances

- Improving access to services and ensuring people get the support and treatment when they need it
- Strengthening our multiagency working and care planning to meet people's needs
- Tackling dependence on prescription only medicines (POM) and over the counter medicines (OTC)
- Ensuring that appropriate and responsive alcohol misuse services are in place following the implementation of the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 on 2 March 2020

Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016

The Act seeks to simplify the letting process, provide more transparency and flexibility and to give residential tenants in Wales greater security. When the Act comes into force, it will simplify and standardise tenancy agreements to make them easier to understand and reduce legal costs.

The Renting Homes (Amendment) (Wales) Bill only gained Royal Assent April 2021 and then went to public consultation, and the outcomes are yet to be shared. It holds particular significance both for tenants and landlords in relation to standardising tenancy agreements and occupation contracts.

Housing Support Grant Practice Guidance (2020)

The HSG was introduced in April 2019 and is an amalgamation of three existing grants:

- Supporting People Programme
- Homelessness Prevention Grant
- Rent Smart Wales Enforcement

The HSP does not fund the statutory duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness, instead HSP funded services augment, complement and support the statutory service to ensure that the overall offer authorities provide helps people into the right homes with the right support to succeed.