



a better place to live and work

Housing Support Programme

Needs Assessment



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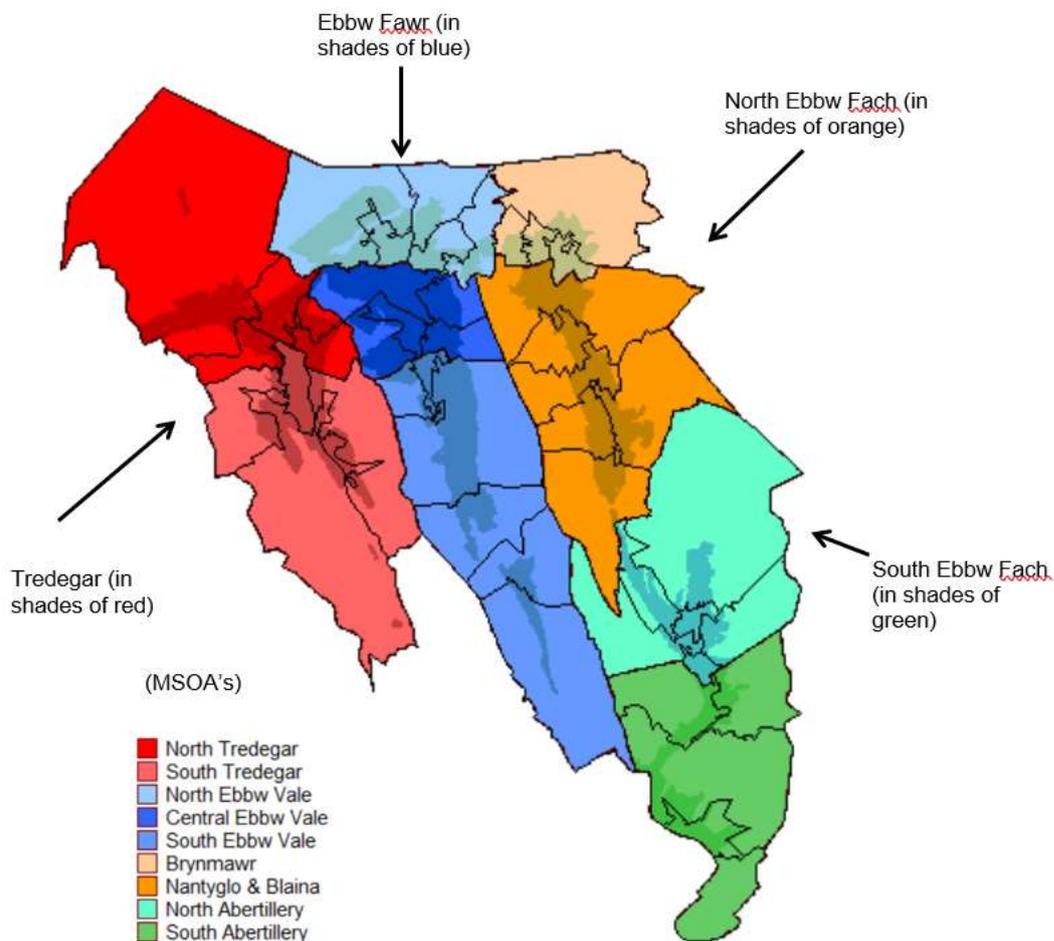
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The County of Blaenau Gwent

Blaenau Gwent is a place of heritage and dramatic change, with a sense of its past but its eyes firmly on the future. It is relatively small geographically, being at most 15 miles north to south, and 8 miles east to west. It is defined physically by high hillsides dividing the three main valleys. These valleys are home to towns and villages which seem to merge together into one. However, each community proudly maintains its own character and traditions.

Although the towns give the county borough a busy, urban feel, Blaenau Gwent is actually a largely rural area. Wherever you are, beautiful countryside is never far away.

FIGURE 1 MAP OF BLAENAU GWENT



A Short History

Before the early 1800's, the area that is now Blaenau Gwent was a quiet, rural area dominated by tiny villages and farmland. Welsh was the only language, and English was little understood.

The start of the industrial revolution sparked transformational change as people looked to take advantage of the plentiful supply of resources that could be found. In the first instance this took the form of the ironworks, quickly followed by coal mining and steel making.

As the industries grew, so did the demand for labour and the population of Blaenau Gwent grew remarkably. Between the early 19th and the early 20th Century the population rose from around 1,200 to well over 120,000.

As our communities thrived, so did the need for services required to deal with the social and cultural explosion, examples being education, health, shops and leisure opportunities. This led to growth of the network of communities and neighbourhoods, which make up the towns and neighbourhoods that we know today.

The strong commitment to social justice and solid work ethic in Blaenau Gwent is demonstrated by campaigns for improvement in standards of living. Examples of this include the first ever board of health which marks Blaenau Gwent as the birthplace of the NHS, campaigns for electoral reform, abolition of company-run shops, and reductions in working hours, many of which still influence the way people live their lives today. The community spirit which is lasting legacy of these achievements is alive and well today and is a recurring theme in this plan, as you will see.

FIGURE 2 EBBW VALE STEEL WORKS



Present day Blaenau Gwent

The period from the late 1980's saw the formation of Blaenau Gwent as it is known today. In 1996 it changed from a district of Gwent County to a county borough council, following local government reorganisation.

In the last 20 years the people of Blaenau Gwent have faced challenges including the closure of the coal mines in the 1980's and the closure of Ebbw Vale Steelworks in 2002, leading to huge job losses.

This is highlighted by a 5% reduction in the population between 1991 and 2011. This is in contrast to Wales overall which has seen a 4% increase. Currently, 49% of Blaenau Gwent working residents commute outside the borough to work and commuting distances have increased.

We cannot underestimate the effect of these issues. Even so, in the last 20 years the area has seen significant structural and environment improvement, following major levels of capital investment, and the greening of our valleys as nature recovers from the long-term scarring caused through our historical industries. In an attempt to reduce the effect of pit and steelwork closures, significant effort has been grand to re-focusing towards the manufacturing and services industry, which now makes up a significant part of the local community.

FIGURE 3 AERIAL VIEW OF SOUTH BLAENAU GWENT



Data Sources

To inform this needs assessment, data from a wide range of sources was analysed, to better understand the demands and pressures that are currently being faced by local residents and communities.

Data sources used in the 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
- Feedback from Service Users and Stakeholders
- Research and National Publications
- Key Local and Regional Strategies
 - Local Wellbeing 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

Office of National Statistics

The population of Blaenau Gwent is diverse and the social and economic circumstances of its residents wide ranging.

With good transport links to the cities of Newport, Cardiff and Bristol, especially in the south of the borough, Blaenau Gwent has become a popular place to live and the local economy has benefitted. However, as previously noted, the decline of some heavy industries, especially further north is still being felt, resulting in areas of poverty and deprivation.

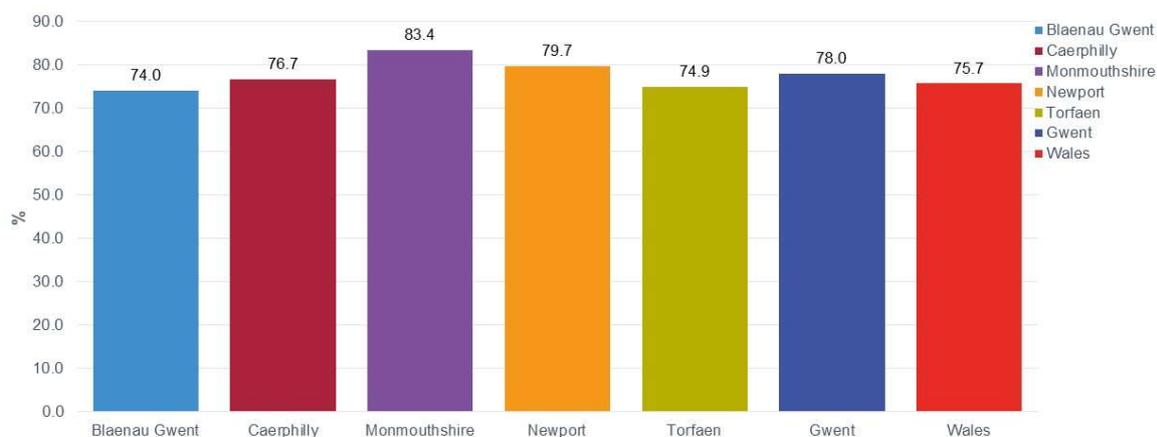
The following data obtained from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Official Labour Market Statistics website; Nomis, provides an overview of the current Labour Market in Blaenau Gwent and helps to identify some of the needs that currently exist.

FIGURE 4 WORKING AGE POPULATION OF BLAENAU GWENT - TOTAL POPULATION (2020)

	Blaenau Gwent (numbers)	Wales (numbers)
All people	70,000	3,169,600
Males	34,600	1,563,500
Females	35,500	1,606,100

Economic activity for an area is made up of two fundamental components, those in the area that are economically active and those that are economically inactive. The economically active are either in employment or unemployed but able to work.

FIGURE 5 EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF WORKING AGE RESIDENTS



Source: ONS annual population survey

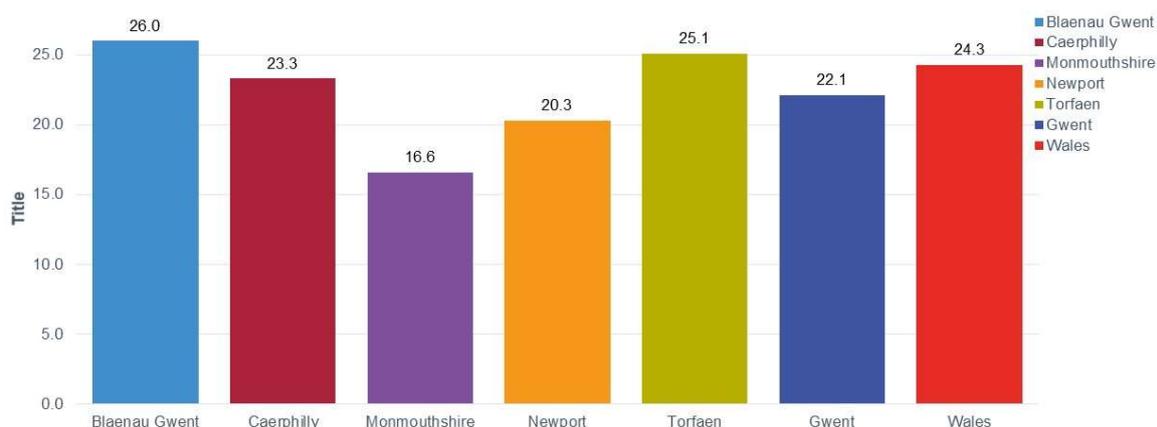
Sample size too small for reliable estimate (see definitions)

† - numbers are for those aged 16 and over, % are for those aged 16-64

§ - numbers and % are for those aged 16 and over. % is a proportion of economically active

The percentage of those aged 16-64 economically active across Gwent at 78.0% is slightly higher than the Welsh average of 75.7%. This ranges between 74.0% in Blaenau Gwent and 83.4% in Monmouthshire.

FIGURE 6 ECONOMIC INACTIVITY IN BLAENAU GWENT



The percentage of those aged 16-64 economically inactive is lower at 22.1% in Gwent compared to 24.3% for Wales. This ranges between 16.6% in Monmouthshire and 26.0% in Blaenau Gwent.

FIGURE 7 FOOD BANK USAGE ACROSS GWENT

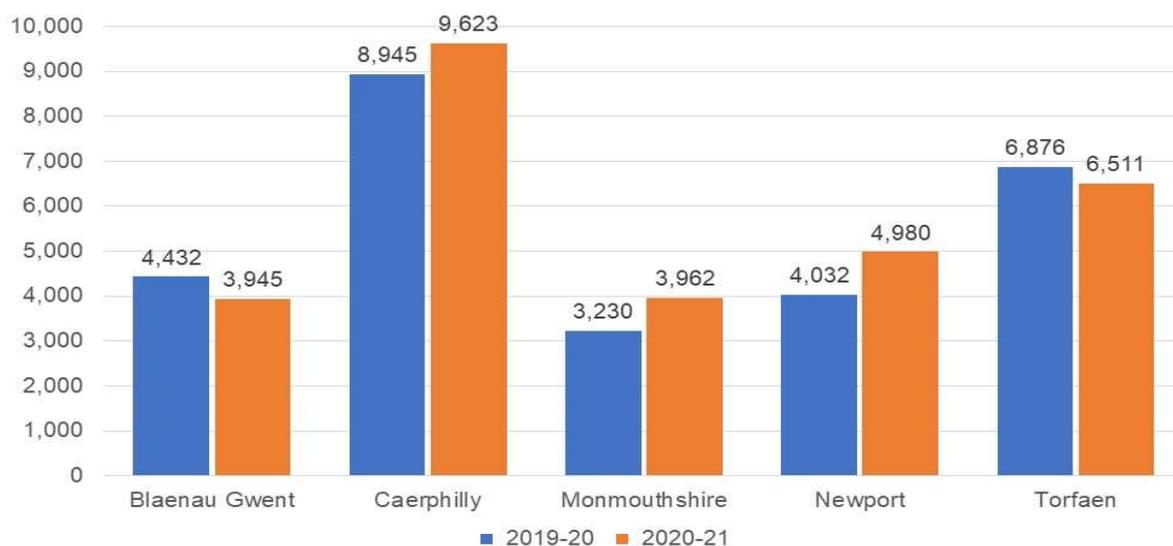
Number of People Assisted	Blaenau Gwent	Caerphilly	Monmouthshire	Newport	Torfaen
2017-18	4275	5626	2509	3041	6320
2016-17	4405	5895	2358	2896	6527

Source: Trussell Trust Foodbank End of Year Figures

In 2019-20 Wales distributed a total of 134,892 food parcels. There were 27,515 parcels distributed in the Gwent between the five local authorities. Blaenau Gwent dispatched 4,432, Caerphilly 8,945, Monmouthshire 3,230, Newport 4,032 and Torfaen 6,876.

Then in 2020-21 an increased amount of 145,828 (up 8%) was distributed around Wales and, the amount of parcels distributed around Gwent also increased by 1,506 (up 5%) meaning 29,021 were given out. For Blaenau Gwent the number of food parcels distributed decreased to 3,945 but, all the other local authority's distribution amounts increased. Caerphilly distributed 9,623, Monmouthshire 962, Newport 4,980 and Torfaen 6,511.

FIGURE 8 FOOD BANK USAGE 2019 (ALL RECIPIENTS)



Source: Local Blaenau Gwent Foodbanks

At the beginning of the pandemic the Trussell Trust reported that there was a 21% increase in the demand for food parcels in Wales, this is due to the reduction of household incomes as most people are unable to work during the pandemic therefore, more members of the public had to use their local food bank. In Wales accessible schemes was developed during the pandemic for those who were experiencing crisis such as the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF).

Comparisons in the growth in food parcel distribution between areas should be made with caution. There are many different factors that may influence the number of parcels distributed within a local area, such as prevalence of other food banks. For example, in Blaenau Gwent the reduction is probably due to an increase from donations elsewhere such as Cymru Creations, TK's Community Centre and the Brynmawr Rotary Club etc. increasing their capacity during the pandemic and providing more of an independent food bank service, which won't be taken into account in the Trussells figures.

Food Security

The Food Foundations report "The Impact of Covid-19 on Household Food Security" is based on data collected from seven rounds of nationally representative UK-wide surveys to monitor levels of food insecurity impacted by Covid-19 undertaken between March 2020 and January 2021.

Key findings from the report state that despite vital emergency measures in place, more people are food insecure now than before the pandemic. Community and voluntary sector groups

helped millions of vulnerable people but evidence shows too many food insecure households have struggled to access support. Reliance on overstretched food banks and food aid charities is not a sustainable safety net for individuals and families who can't afford a decent diet.

Households with children have consistently found it harder to put food on the table, particularly lone parents, large families, and low-income families.

Covid-19 has deepened the financial hardship faced by low income households and has also created a newly vulnerable group who were financially stable pre-Covid.

The current picture (as of January 21) of food insecurity is also reported, stating that:

- 22% of households have lost income since before the pandemic
- 9% of adults have experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months
- 12% of households with children live in households that have experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months
- 41% of households with children on Free School Meals have experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months.

Some groups with higher levels of food insecurity

- 'Limited a lot by health problems/disability' are 5 times greater than those with no health problems/disability
- 'Severely clinically vulnerable' are twice as high as the average
- Food sector workers are 50% higher than compared to non-food sector workers
- BAME are twice as high as white British.

Survey responses indicate that drivers of food insecurity are 55% not enough money, 31% isolation, 23% lack of supply and 8% 'other'

There are 3 main recommendations to address food poverty:

1. **Review free school meals:** to ensure Free School Meals are delivering maximum nutritional and educational impact and promoting children's learning and well-being throughout the school day. It should review the current eligibility threshold to make sure no disadvantaged children are missing out on the benefits of a Free School Meal.
2. **Pay fair and keep the uplift:** Businesses need to pay their employees the Real Living Wage. Combating the dire economic impact of the pandemic will require a broader set of policies to boost incomes for poorer households including the permanent retention of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit (and its extension to those on legacy benefits), and the removal of the 5-week wait for Universal Credit, the two-child limit and the benefit cap.

3. **leadership and action on food insecurity:** As we move out of crisis mode, we need a designated authority in Government who has oversight on food insecurity tracking or responsibility to tackle it, with powers to inform and drive action at the national and local authority level in response to the data.

Further work has been undertaken using the 'current data' from the Food Foundation survey mentioned above, of 4,231 adults across the UK conducted in late Jan/early Feb 2021, by academics from Manchester Metropolitan and Sheffield Universities

Their 'local' estimates use a technique that includes a multilevel logistic regression-based small area estimation approach. This includes an estimate of the key relationships between predictor variables and the food insecurity outcome variables. The Local authority codes are included in the survey to enable the small area estimation.

Food banks have been set up in communities where people have recognised this problem of hunger with the intention of meeting immediate food needs. **Hunger** is understood as having been hungry at least once in the previous month but were unable to get food.

The study identifies two further measures. Those who **struggle** include people who have cut back on food or skipped meals and those who **worry** about being able to adequately supply the food they need for themselves and their families. This latter group are typically considered marginally food secure because they have enough food. However, they may have traded down on the nutritional quality of the food they purchase.

Working households are those where all residents aged 16 – 64 are working, mixed are those with at least one of the residents aged 16 -64 working and workless households are where all people aged 16 - 64 are unemployed or economically inactive

Gwent has the same level of workless households as Wales at 18.4% but has a slightly higher level of mixed households than Wales (27.3% and 26.0% respectively). Therefore, Gwent has a marginally smaller level of working households, 54.3% compared to 55.6% in Wales.

At a local authority level workless households' range between 13.2% in Monmouthshire to 21.5% in Blaenau Gwent. Subsequently, Monmouthshire has the highest level of working households at 62.3% compared to the lowest level at 50.0% in Torfaen.

FIGURE 9 WORKLESS HOUSEHOLDS IN BLAENAU GWENT

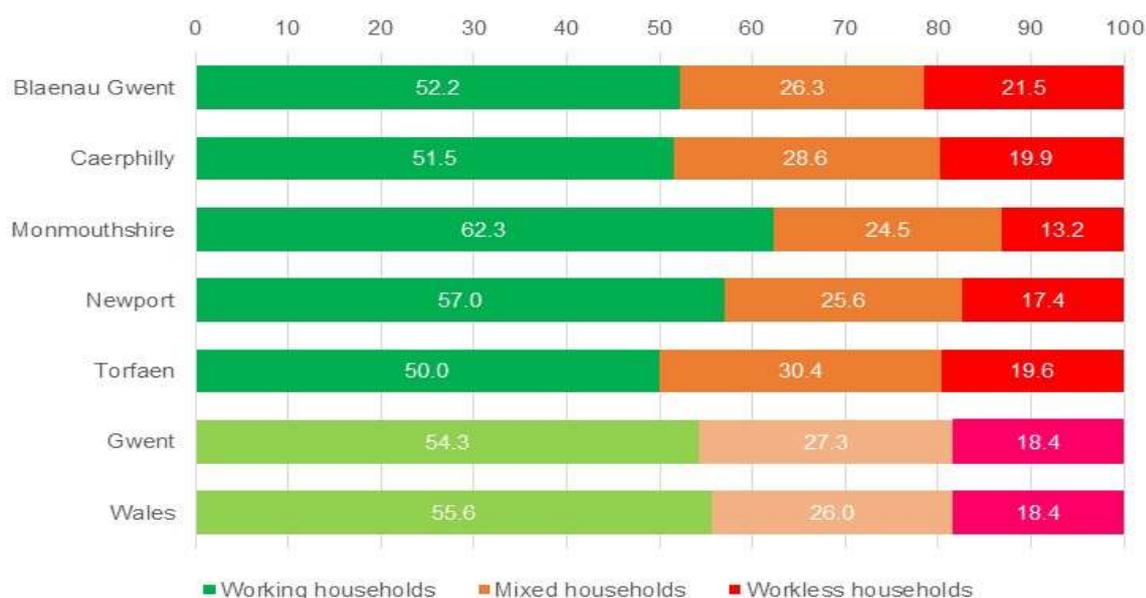
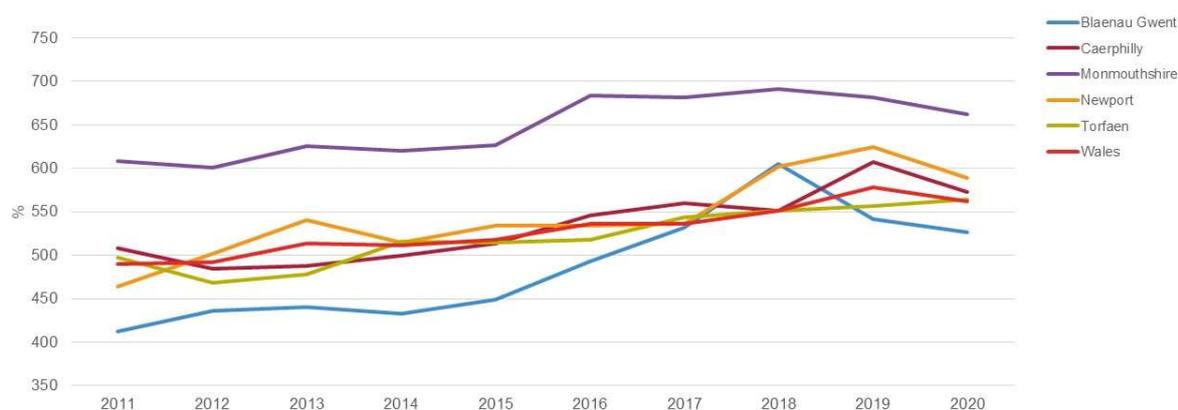


FIGURE 10 GROSS WEEKLY AVERAGE PAY (£) BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE GWENT LOCAL AUTHORITIES, 2011 – 2020



The upward trend for gross weekly average (median) pay for Caerphilly, Newport and Torfaen full time workers has closely matched that of Wales over the last 10 years. Blaenau Gwent has been notably lower and Monmouthshire significantly higher over the period. Newport local authority has shown the largest increase, of 30% over the period, followed by a 24% increase in Torfaen. This compares with a 19% increase for Wales. Although there has been an upward trend over the 10 years in Blaenau Gwent, there has been a year on year decrease over the latest 2 years.

The general pattern described for full time workers is similar for males and females. However, female workers are paid less, with the pay difference compared to males in 2020 ranging between 12% less in Newport and 25% less in Blaenau Gwent.

Key Points:

- Unemployment and economic inactivity places additional pressures on statutory and voluntary services supporting the most vulnerable and deprived residents of Blaenau Gwent.
- Low skills and long-term health problems limit opportunities for residents to access training and work, causing many households to experience poverty.
- Fuel poverty can lead to poor housing and associated health risks, placing greater pressure on Health, Social Care and Housing services.
- Food poverty remains an area of need within Blaenau Gwent

Blaenau Gwent Well-being assessment

The Blaenau Gwent well-being assessment identified that no two communities in Blaenau Gwent are the same, but that the communities are complex and dynamic places, which have their own set of social, economic, environmental and cultural experiences.

The assessment identified that there is a widening inequality across Blaenau Gwent, which impacts on every aspect of wellbeing. Alongside pockets of deprivation, there are areas where well-being is good, but some households within these areas will still experience challenges.

Some key themes emerged from the well – being assessment which will help to inform this assessment:

- The number of young people aged 0 -25 is expected to fall over the next 20 years, whilst during the same period, the number of residents aged over 65 is expected to rise and the number of 85 year olds expected to double.¹ This is likely to lead to an increased demand on public services related to an ageing population, which will need to be considered in service planning.
- Average weekly pay in Blaenau Gwent is lower than Wales², 1 in 5 households are in material deprivation³ and Blaenau Gwent is an area increasingly affected by the welfare reform programme, due to the number of low paid, low hour contracts, which is leading to more people moving into poverty.

¹ Population based projections (2014), Welsh Government

² Gross weekly pay of males v females. Source: ONS annual survey of hours and earnings - workplace analysis, 2015, via NOMIS.

³ Data Unit Wales (2016). Understanding Local Well-being Summary Data, October 2016

- People living in Blaenau Gwent have lower levels of qualifications and skills (Office for National Statistics) compared to the Welsh average⁴ and Blaenau Gwent has a high proportion of residents who are employed in the public sector and manufacturing⁵.
- The percentage of children living in workless households in Blaenau Gwent was higher than the Welsh average between 2010 and 2014⁶. There are a higher percentage of children living in low income families in Blaenau Gwent and 17.4% of Blaenau Gwent school pupils are eligible for free school meals⁷.
- The house price to earnings ratio in Blaenau Gwent is 5:1⁸, the private rented sector in Blaenau Gwent is relatively small (8.6%)⁹ and social housing demand significantly outstrips supply¹⁰.
- Life Expectancy is not equally distributed across Blaenau Gwent, with approximately a 7 year difference between the life expectancy of people living in the most and least deprived areas in Blaenau Gwent.¹¹ According to the Welsh Health Survey (2014/15), over half of the Blaenau Gwent adult population report being treated for a mental or physical chronic illness, the majority of which is likely to be in our most deprived communities.

A key message to emerge from the well-being assessment was one of widening inequality. 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. However, even in less deprived areas, families and individuals are struggling with poor health, limited or no qualifications and unemployment or low-income levels, which has meant that their well-being is of a lower quality than that of others around them.

To effectively address the issues identified in the well-being assessment, the following 7 objectives were developed:

⁴ Data Unit Wales (2016). Understanding Local Well-being Summary Data, October 2016

⁵ Workforce employment by Industry Source KS605EW, Census 2011

⁶ Data Unit Wales (2016). Understanding Local Well-being Summary Data, October 2016

⁷ Stats Wales 2016, Pupil Level Annual Census (PLASC)

⁸ Hometrack Nov 2016

⁹ Census 2011

¹⁰ Blaenau Gwent Common Housing Register and Affordable Housing Provision WG Data Return

¹¹ PHW Observatory, using PHM & MYE (ONS), WHS & WIMD 2014 (Welsh Government)

FIGURE 11 WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Develop a functional, connected network of natural areas that support the current and future well-being needs of local populations.	Develop mitigation and adaptation responses to the impacts of climate change.	Provide children and young people with the best possible start in life.	Support healthy lifestyles and enable people to age well.	Tackle the inter-generational patterns of poverty and develop economic resilience.	Improve local skills through work-force planning, training, apprenticeships, and volunteering opportunities.	Create safe, confident communities and promote community cohesion.

Key Points:

- Inequality in Blaenau Gwent is widening.
- Some key issues emerge from the assessment which will impact on the well-being of residents. These include population projections, employment levels, income, qualifications, deprivation and health.
- Levels of well-being amongst residents in Blaenau Gwent is not determined by particular geographic locations, but vary across the borough. As a result, some residents living in less deprived areas will still have a lower quality of wellbeing than those living around them.

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (WIMD)

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is the Welsh Government’s official measure of relative deprivation for small areas, including LSOA’s (lower super output areas) in Wales. It identifies areas with the highest concentrations of several different types of deprivation, including income and employment deprivation. WIMD ranks all LSOA’s in Wales from 1 (most deprived) to 1,909 (least deprived).

Figure 17 and 18 shows the location and percentage of LSOA’s each local authority in Gwent has in the 10%, 20%, 30% and 50% most deprived LSOA’s in Wales for overall deprivation.

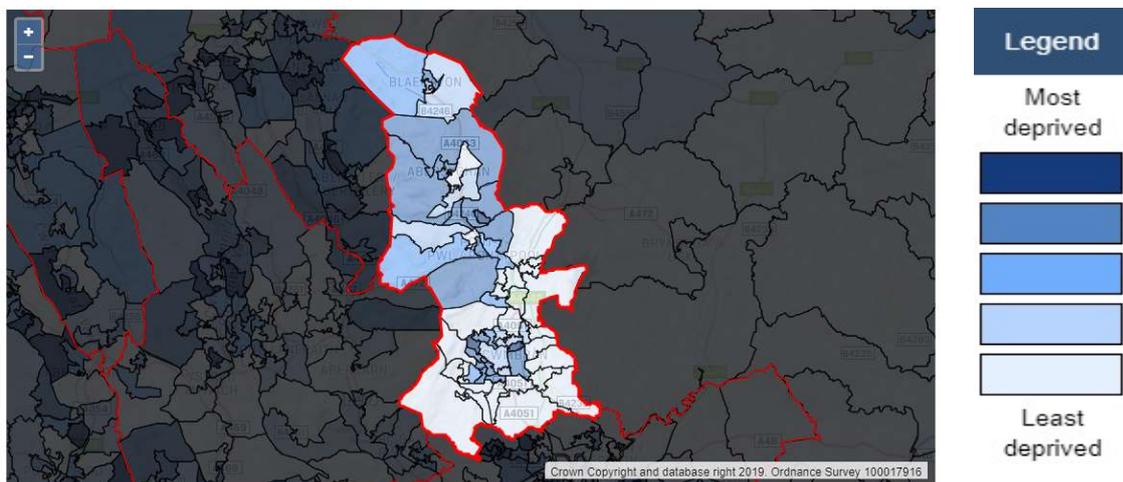
Newport has the highest percentage of its LSOA’s (24%) in the 10% most deprived in Wales. Monmouthshire is the only local authority in Wales with none of its LSOA’s in the 10% most deprived. Blaenau Gwent has the highest percentage of its LSOA’s in the 20%, 30% and 50% most deprived in Wales.

Employment deprivation is calculated from:

- Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants
- Incapacity Benefit (and Severe Disablement Allowance) claimants
- Universal Credit (UC) claimants who are not in employment

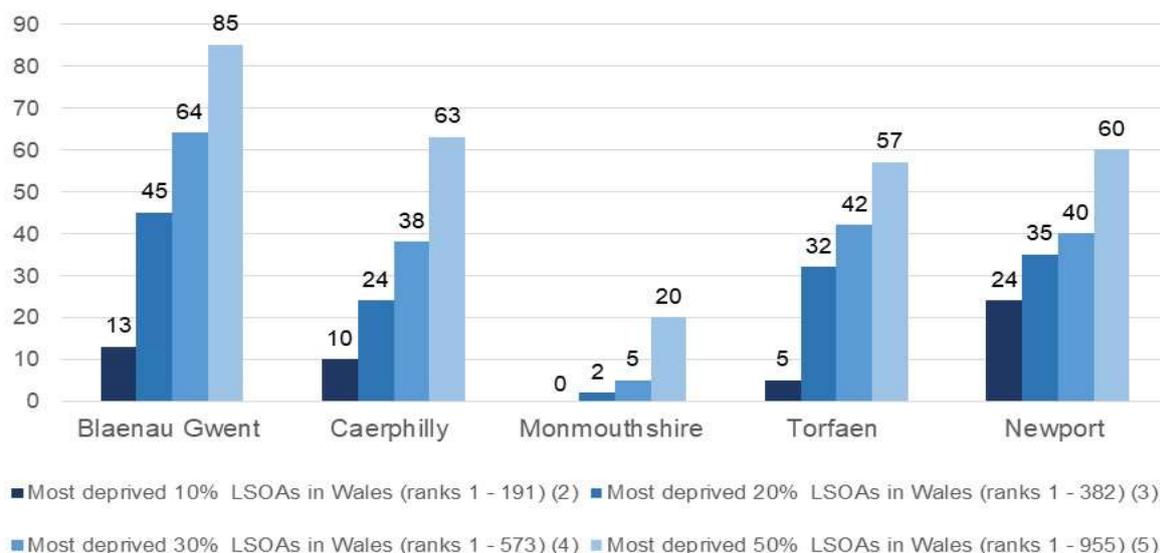
Blaenau Gwent has the highest percentage of its LSOA's (23%) in the 10% most employment deprived in Wales. Both Caerphilly and Newport have the 7th highest rate in Wales while Monmouthshire is the only local authority in Wales with none of its LSOA's in the 10% most employment deprived. Blaenau Gwent also has the highest percentage of its LSOA's in the 20%, 30% and 50% most employment deprived in Wales:

FIGURE 12 MAP OF DEPRIVATION LEVELS IN BLAENAU GWENT



Source: Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019

FIGURE 13 PERCENTAGE OF LSOA'S PER GWENT LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN HIGHEST OVERALL WIMD DEPRIVATION RANKING



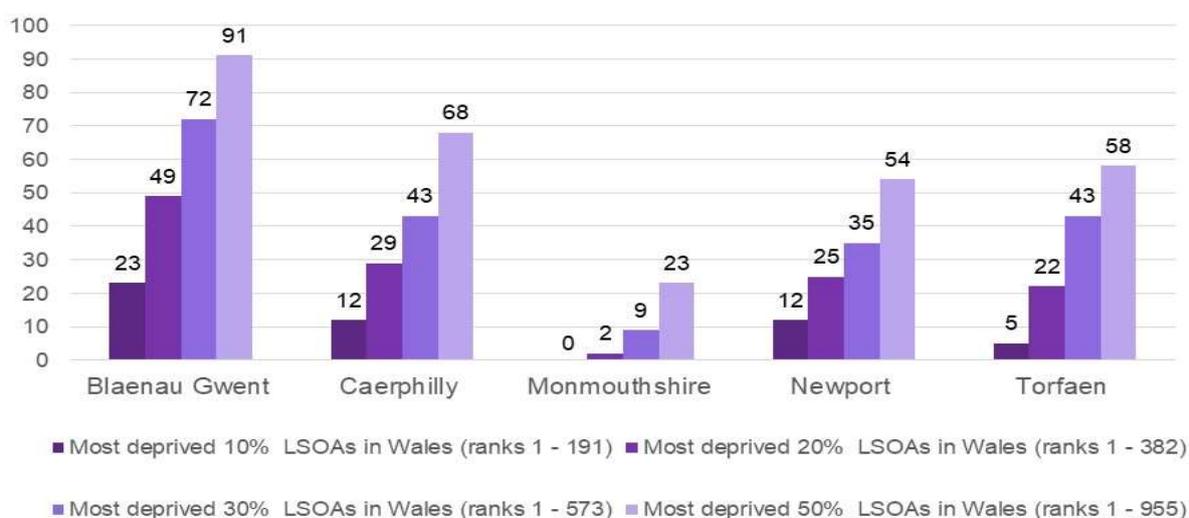
Source: Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019

Further analysis of the domains also showed that in many cases, the same LSOAs were appearing on more than one occasion.

19 LSOAs were ranked as being in the 20% most deprived within the overall domain, but many appeared again in the income, employment, health and education domains, indicating that areas of deprivation often face multiple challenges and are not limited to one or two issues.

The following table lists 6 LSOAs that are ranked in the 20% most deprived overall, but which appear again in 5 or 6 other domains.

FIGURE 14 MOST DEPRIVED LSOAs IN BLAENAU GWENT



Source: Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019

More detailed analysis has recently been carried out on protected characteristics and WIMD. This found that across Wales, individuals with certain characteristics were more likely to live in deprived areas than others.¹²

- Females from all age groups are more likely to live in deprived areas than males; 52.1% of those living in the 10% most deprived LSOAs are female.
- Younger people are more likely than older people to live in the 10% most deprived LSOAs; circa 21% of people aged 24 or under live in the most deprived 20% of LSOAs in Wales compared with around 14% of those aged 65 or over.
- People who are disabled are more likely to live in the 10% most deprived areas than people who are not disabled (13.8% compared to 8.1% respectively). Disabled people make up 1 in 3 of all people living in these areas.
- Single people are more than twice as likely to live in the 10% most deprived LSOAs compared with those who are married or in a civil partnership (12.1% and 5.8% respectively). Nearly half of all people living in the most deprived 10% of LSOAs are single.

Whilst these figures relate to Wales as a whole, they help to highlight some key areas of concern when analysing levels of need and deprivation in Blaenau Gwent.

Key Points:

- Deprivation often incorporates a range of issues, leading to multiple or complex needs.
- Deprivation affects people in different parts of Blaenau Gwent and is not limited to specific geographies. However, there are some areas that experience multiple signs of deprivation.
- Some groups in society are more likely to live in areas of deprivation than others, including young people, single households, people with a disability and women.

Gwent Population Needs Assessment

The Gwent Health Social Care and Well-being Partnership published the region's first Social Services and Well-being Act Population Needs Assessment, which set out the level of need across the region, the region's response to the identified need and the steps that were required to meet those needs.

The assessment focused on the needs of a wide range of the population to establish a better understanding of current and future demands and where further work was required.

¹² Statswales, https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation/analysis-of-protected-characteristics-by-area-deprivation?_ga=2.217283670.1719134972.1607342499-444583793.1568619322, [Accessed 07.12.2020]

The assessment considered the following key groups:

- Children and Young People
- Older People
- Health & Physical Disabled People
- People with Learning Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Mental Health
- Sensory Impairment
- Carers who need support
- Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Wales has an ageing population, which will inevitably present challenges and bring additional pressures. Population projections between 2011 and 2036 within the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board area are set to increase by 4.1%.¹³ Whilst the population aged under 16 decreased by 2,700 (1%) between 2005 and 2014, from 114,100 to 108,300.

When population projections are analysed on a local level, it is expected that the number of people aged over 65 in Blaenau Gwent will have increased 1,401 by 2028, whilst the number of 16 – 64 years olds is projected to decrease significantly.

FIGURE 15 POPULATION PROJECTIONS IN BLAENAU GWENT

Blaenau Gwent	2018	2028	Change
Aged 16 to 64	43,592	42,279	-1,313
Aged 65 and over	13,932	15,333	1,401

Source: 2018-based projections for local authorities in Wales, Welsh Government¹³

Age is not the only factor that needs to be taken into consideration when considering levels of need across a population, with a range of factors impacting on a person's general health and wellbeing.

As part of the population needs assessment, extensive consultation was carried out with individuals who have a protected characteristic and with those groups who can sometimes become marginalised, to identify their needs and some of the core issues that they face.

¹³ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Projections/Local-Authority/2018-based/populationprojections-by-localauthority-year> [Accessed 02.12.2020]

Veterans	Gypsy Traveller (GT)	Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups	Asylum Seekers, Refugees & Migrants	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) community	Children and young people in contact with the Youth Justice System	People in secure estates and their families
Accessing suitable housing and preventing homelessness.	Infant mortality rates are up to 5 times higher among this minority group when compared to the national rate.	Certain ethnic groups have higher rates of some health conditions.	The numbers of asylum seekers and refugees increased when Wales became a dispersal area.	Illicit drug use amongst LGBT people is at least 8 times higher than in the general population	Can have more health and well-being needs than other children of their age.	Ex-offenders often require additional support to prevent needs arising.
Supporting veterans into employment.	Immunisation rates among GT children are low compared with the rest of the population. Use of health services much lower than the rest of the population.	More likely to come from low income families, suffer poorer living conditions and gain lower levels of educational qualifications.	The number of asylum applications in 2016 has seen an increase of 8% compared to the year before.	Around 25% of LGBT people indicate a level of alcohol dependency.	Often face entrenched, difficulties e.g. school exclusion, fragmented relationships, poor or harmful parenting.	Access to healthcare facilities
Accessing appropriate financial advice and information about relevant benefits.	High accident rate, directly related to the hazardous conditions on many sites, with poor safety standards and unhealthy conditions.		Service provision by has decreased significantly in recent years, adversely impacting on people's health and Well-being.	Nearly half of LGBT individuals smoke, compared with a quarter of their heterosexual peers	Many are often known to social care and are not in education, employment or training.	Access to mental health and healthcare
Accessing health and support services.	Travellers have lower levels of breastfeeding.		No recourse to funds and safeguarding issues e.g. honour based violence and trafficking are key emerging themes.	At higher risk of mental disorder, suicidal ideation, substance misuse and deliberate self-harm.	Well-being is also about children feeling secure about their personal identity and culture.	Substance Misuse including smoking
Supporting veterans who have been in the criminal justice system.	Higher prevalence of medical conditions compared to the general population, e.g. miscarriage,		Lack of, or limited access to information and tenancy support appear to be the key emerging themes.	41% of trans people reported attempting suicide compared to 1.6% of the general population.	Well-being is about strengthening protective factors and improving their resilience to factors that have an adverse	Oral health

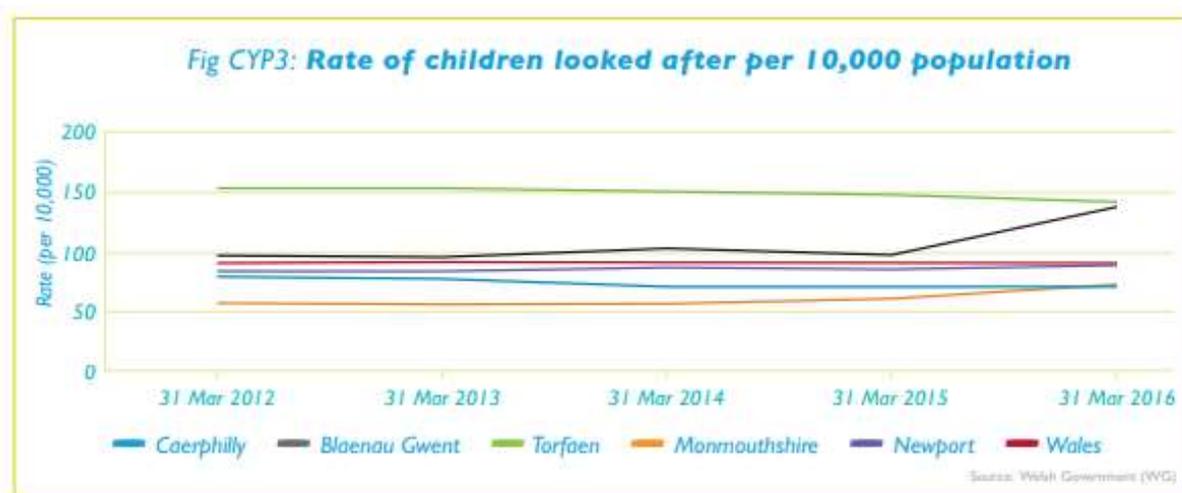
	cardiovascular disease, depression.				impact on their long-term development.	
Loneliness and isolation.	Alcohol consumption often used as a coping strategy, and drug use among GT young people is widely reported.		Good communication is essential and determining the language and support available,		Attention to their health and well-being needs should help reduce inequalities and the risk of re-offending by young people.	Infections disease
Ready access to services to ensure early identification and treatment (physical & mental health).	Cultural beliefs, e.g. health problems should be kept within the extended family unit.		Need for more advocacy and floating support for migrants.			Support following release
Supporting a veteran's wider family.	Face challenges in accessing services due to site location, access to transport, not understanding what they are entitled to use or how to access them.		Lack of a strategic approach to information and service provision. Lack of coordination between services.			
	Low expectations regarding their health and life expectancy.					

The following section looks at some of the core themes that were covered by the population needs assessment and some of the key areas of need.

Children and Young People

The following chart details the rate of looked after children per 10,000 population aged under 18, across the Gwent region over the period 2012 to 2016 and how Blaenau Gwent compares to its neighbouring local authority areas.

FIGURE 16 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN



Source: Population Needs Assessment Gwent Region Report 2018

Blaenau Gwent saw the highest increase over the period, while the biggest decreases were in Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent.

The assessment identified that there is a need for more joint working when planning and commissioning services for children with varying needs and that a multi-agency response would produce better outcomes. It is anticipated that this way of working will help deliver:

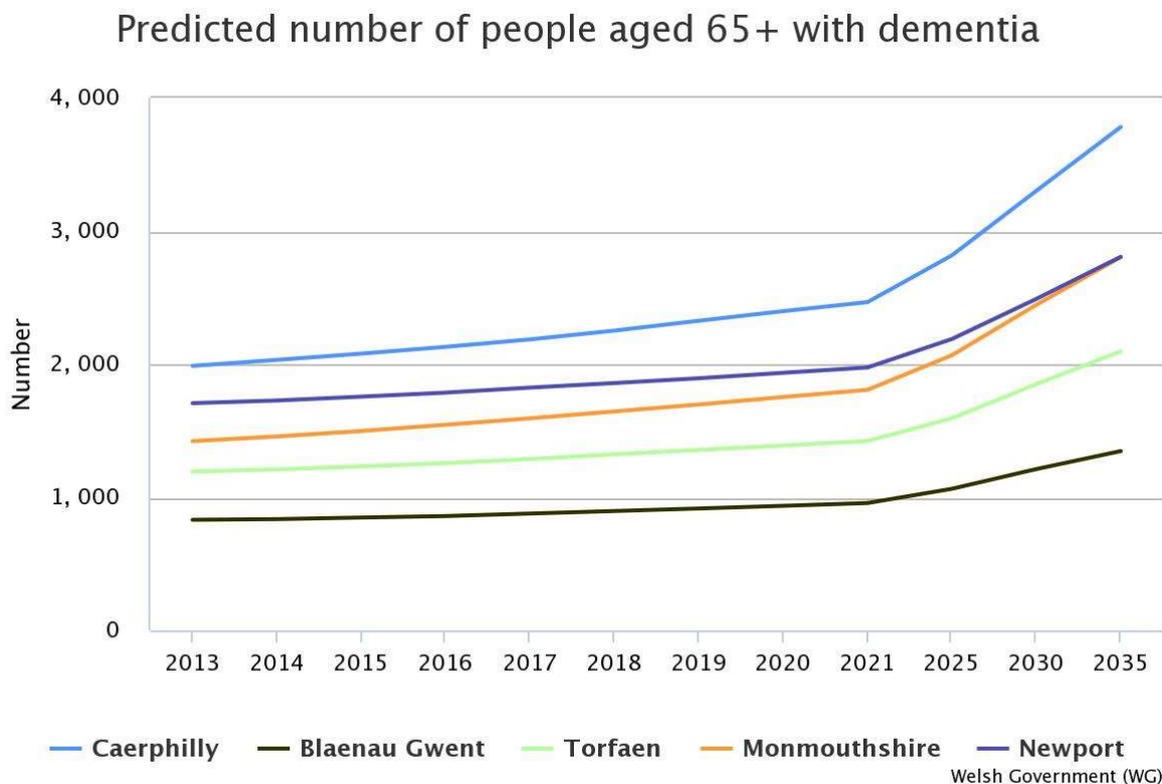
- A focus on prevention of crises and support at an earlier point in their development.
- Support nearer to their own community
- A focus on meeting children's needs in a more integrated way and jointly commissioned across health and social care

Older People

An ageing population is an area of concern, because it will bring age-related challenges; increased prevalence of chronic conditions, dementia and mobility issues, all of which put pressure on the local authority and other statutory services.

The number of Blaenau Gwent residents who will experience dementia is estimated to rise in the future from circa 1400 residents over 65, to around 2100 by 2035;¹⁴ an increase of 50%. Such a dramatic growth will inevitably put pressure on existing budgets, with more dementia related support services and health care services required to meet demand.

FIGURE 17 PREDICTED NUMBER OF PEOPLE AGED 65+ WITH DEMENTIA

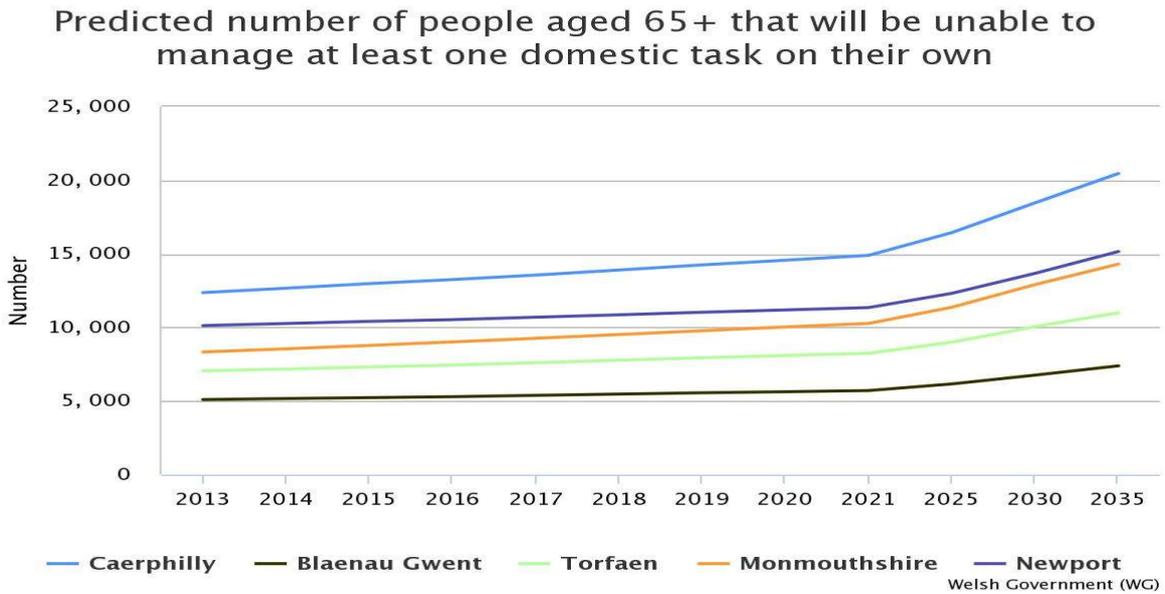


A further area of growth is the number of over 65s who will no longer be able to manage at least one domestic task on their own. This is set to increase from 8000 people to circa 11,000 people by 2035.¹⁵

¹⁴ <http://www.gwentrpb.wales/older-people> [Accessed 03.12.2020]

¹⁵ <http://www.gwentrpb.wales/older-people> [Accessed 03.12.2020]

FIGURE 18 PREDICTED NUMBER OF PEOPLE OVER 65 WHO ARE UNABLE TO DO A DOMESTIC TASK

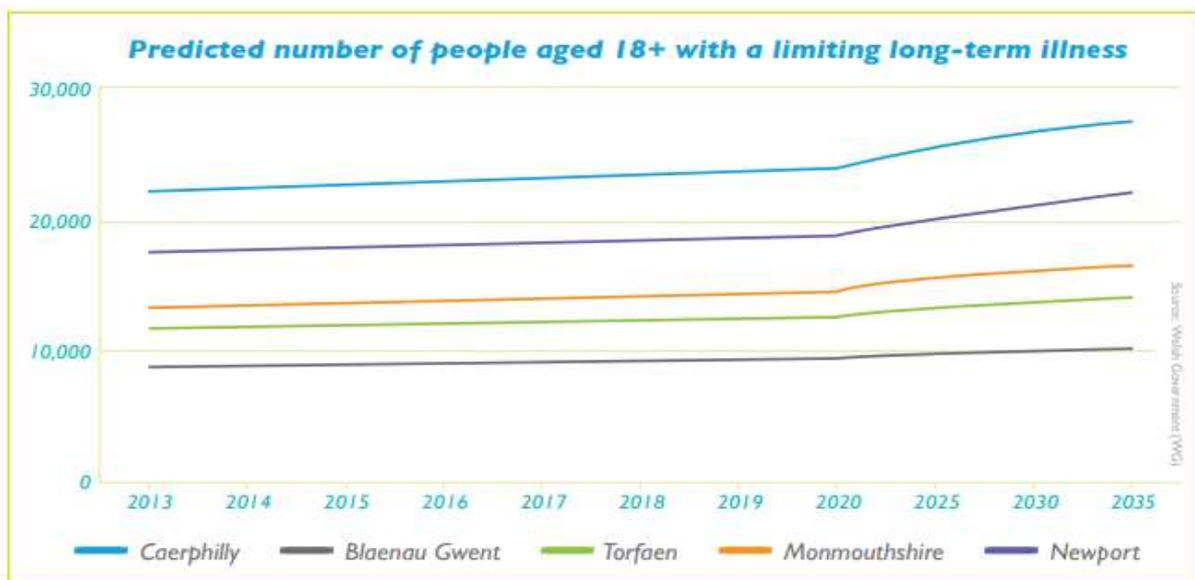


As the population continues to age, demand is likely to diversify as well as increase, placing more pressure on the local authority to deliver suitable accommodation and support solutions, to complement the work of other services seeking to meet the needs of older residents.

Health and Physical Disabled People

The number of people predicted to have a limiting long-term illness in Blaenau Gwent is estimated to rise by 2035, but compared to other local authorities in Gwent, this rise is set to be more gradual. However, ensuring that services remain available and accessible to support independent living is essential.

FIGURE 19 LIMITING LONG-TERM ILLNESS

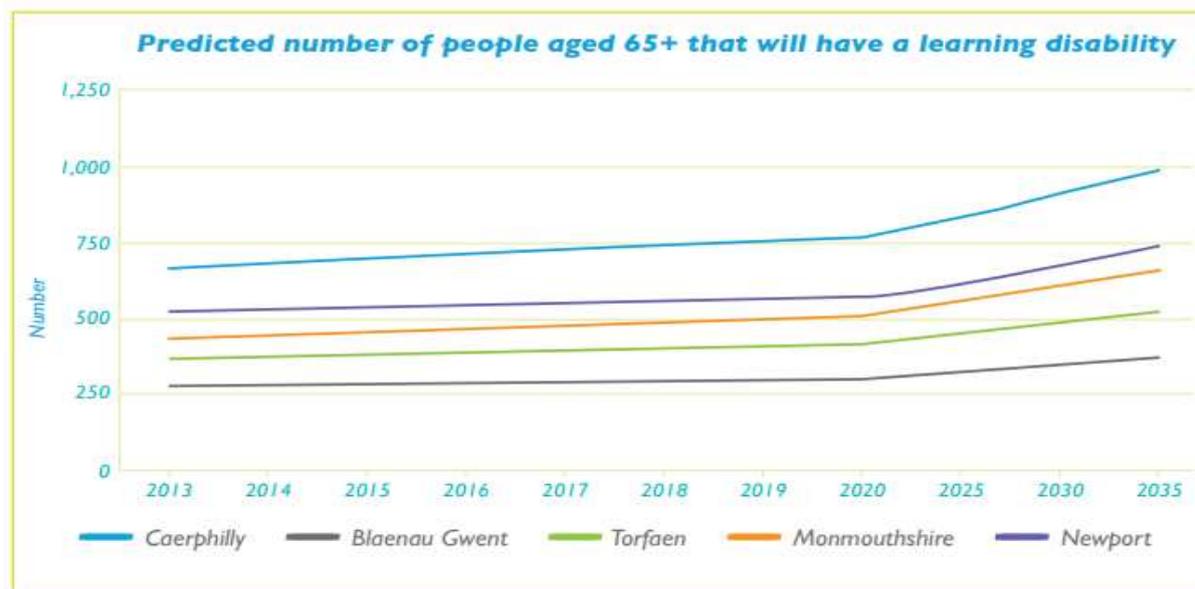


Source: Population Needs Assessment Gwent Region Report 2018

People with Learning Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders

Each local authority is predicted to see an increase in the number of people with a learning disability and, with the exception of Blaenau Gwent, each local authority is predicted to see an increase in the number of people aged 18+ that will have an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

FIGURE 20 LEARNING DISABILITIES AMONGST OVER 65S



Source: Population Needs Assessment Gwent Region Report 2018

Mental Health

The following Welsh Government figures provide a snapshot of Mental Health across Wales¹⁶:

- 1 in 4 adults experiences mental health problems at some point during their lifetime.
- 2 in 100 people will have a severe mental illness e.g. schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.
- 1 in 10 children between the ages of 5 and 16 has a mental health problem and many more have behavioural issues.
- Approximately 50% of people who go on to have serious mental health problems will have symptoms by the time they are 14 and many at a much younger age.
- 1 in 14 people over 65 and 1 in 6 over the age of 80 will be affected by dementia.
- 9 in 10 prisoners have a diagnosable mental health and/or substance misuse problem.

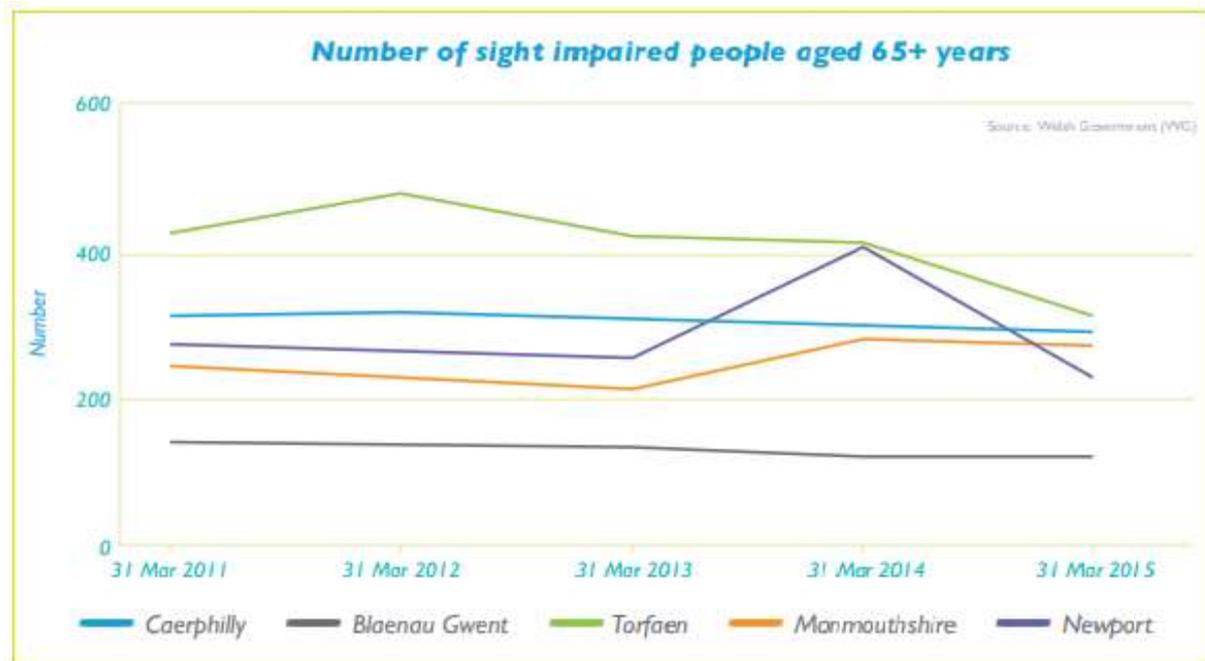
In Blaenau Gwent, as in other areas, demand for mental health services remains high and meeting people's needs cannot be achieved by one organisation alone, but through a concerted, multi-agency approach.

¹⁶ Welsh Government

Sensory Impairment

The number of people aged over 65 in Blaenau Gwent with sight impairment decreased between 2011 and 2015 by 27%.

FIGURE 21 SIGHT IMPAIRMENTS AMONGST THE OVER 65S



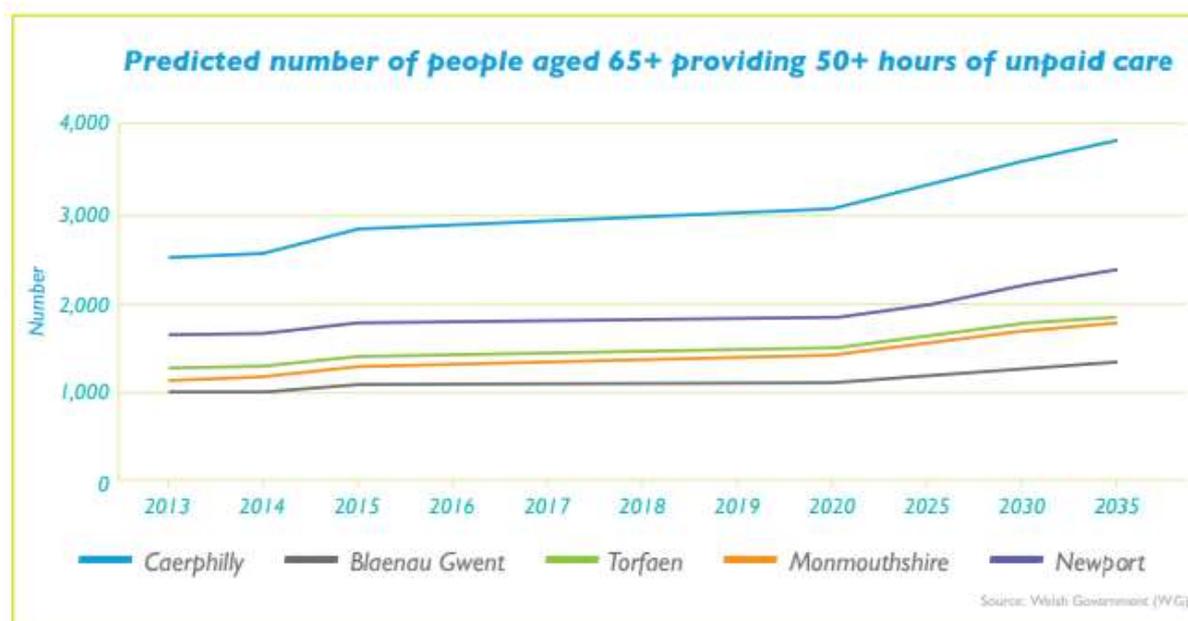
Source: Population Needs Assessment Gwent Region Report 2018

Carers who need support

The chart shows the predicted number of people aged 65 years or older providing 50 hours or more of unpaid care over the period 2013 to 2035. All local authority areas across the Gwent region are predicted to see an increase in the number.

One of the early intervention actions recommended by the population needs assessment includes engaging with informal community networks via the 'community connector' roles, in order to identify carers at the earliest opportunity and signpost to support services and peer to peer groups.

FIGURE 22 UNPAID CARE

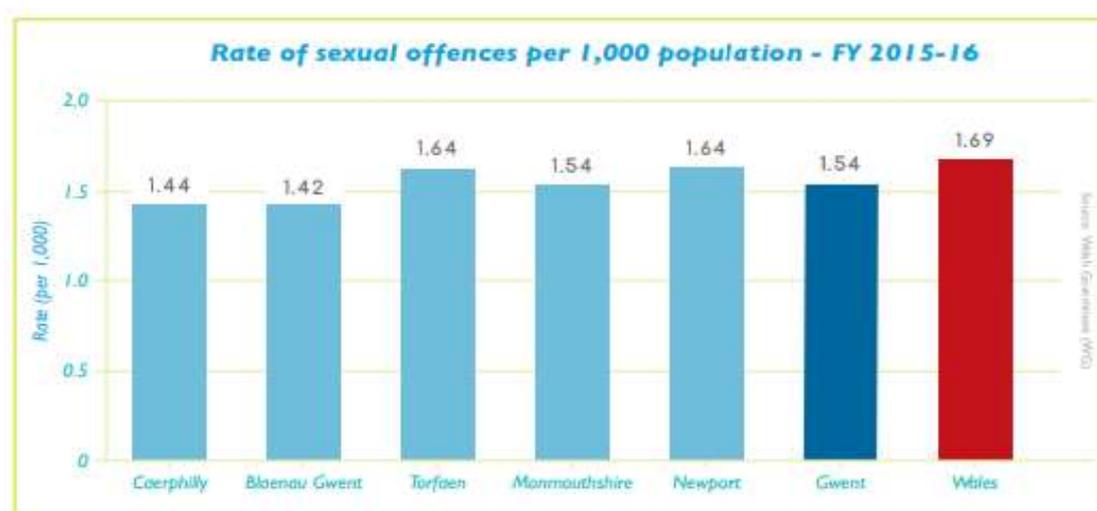


Source: Population Needs Assessment Gwent Region Report 2018

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence

The following charts and tables provide a snapshot of incidents across Gwent in 2015/16. Figure 24 records the rate of sexual offences per 1,000 population in 2015-16 across Gwent, with Blaenau Gwent and Newport experiencing the highest levels; 1.64 per 1,000 compared to a Gwent average of 1.54 per 1,000 population. However, this remains below the Welsh average of 1.69 per 1,000 population.

FIGURE 23 RATE OF SEXUAL OFFENCES



Source: Population Needs Assessment Gwent Region Report 2018

The following chart shows the number of recorded incidents of domestic abuse and discussions between Gwent Police, ABUHB and local authorities [(Domestic Abuse Conference Call (DACC))] over the period 2014-15 to 2015-16. Blaenau Gwent saw a small increase over the period of 0.1% and 1.4% respectively.

FIGURE 24 NUMBER OF RECORDED INCIDENTS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

	Caerphilly	Blaenau Gwent	Torfaen	Monmouthshire	Newport
FY 2014-15	3,805	1,778	2,192	1,059	3,882
FY 2015-16	3,782	1,595	2,223	973	3,920

Source: Population Needs Assessment Gwent Region Report 2018

Key Points:

- Demand for services across most service areas is set to increase bringing new and additional challenges.
- Vulnerable or marginalised groups often struggle more than others to access services, leading to poorer levels of health
- Vulnerable groups often experience increased levels of poverty and are more at risk of substance misuse and mental health.
- Blaenau Gwent had high levels of looked after children which will continue to place increased pressure on the local authority.
- Blaenau Gwent has one of the highest cases of sexual offences and recorded incidents of domestic abuse across Gwent
- Preventative approaches should be further explored, and existing practices reviewed, to ensure that all available options are considered.
- The importance of joined up working and multi-agency approaches to addressing need was highlighted.
- Building on existing good practice and further enhancing and developing existing mechanisms and support services remains crucial.

Local Homelessness and Housing data

Homelessness

Homelessness is one of the most serious and damaging problems facing society today and the impacts it has on a household can be severe. Each year Blaenau Gwent continues to support a significant number of households who are either at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, as well as a growing number of rough sleepers who have been identified as sleeping out in the borough.

Many of the households who contact the Housing Solutions Service contain children, who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of homelessness and can often suffer adversely from the experience. Therefore, working to alleviate their situation as quickly as possible and ensure that adequate support and assistance is available, remains a priority.

Levels of Homelessness

Figure 26 shows the number of households that contacted the local authority for assistance over the last 4 years. They either contacted due to being at risk of homelessness (Section 66), or because they were already homeless (Section 73) and seeking help to relieve their situation.

FIGURE 25 WELSH GOVERNMENT HOMELESS RETURN

Section 66 - Prevention	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Total Households	289	373	268	156
Single Person Households	176	233	158	77
Single Person Households (%)	61%	62%	59%	49%
Households with dependent children	74	93	77	62
Section 73 – Homeless Relief	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Total Households	263	133	183	230
Single Person Households	171	85	110	163
Single Person Households (%)	65%	64%	60%	71%
Households with dependent children	49	48	44	27

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

The figures show that in 17/18 the presentations to the local authority were evenly split between threatened with homelessness (s.66) and homeless (s.73). Due to a more vigorous early intervention approach, the following two years saw a higher percentage of clients being accepted as s.66 and a drop in the number of s.73 presentations. Since the beginning of the

Covid pandemic and subsequent legislation, s66 presentations have dropped considerably whilst s.73 presentations have increased.

The most common reasons why households sought assistance via the Housing Solutions Service and some of the main factors that contributed towards households being at risk of homelessness were:

- Families no longer being willing to accommodate,
- Relationship breakdown
- Loss of accommodation
- Rent arrears

Household Demographics

Ethnicity

The ethnicity of Blaenau Gwent residents is predominantly white, which is reflected in the homeless households who contacted the local authority for assistance in the last 4 years.

FIGURE 26 ETHNICITY OF APPLICANTS

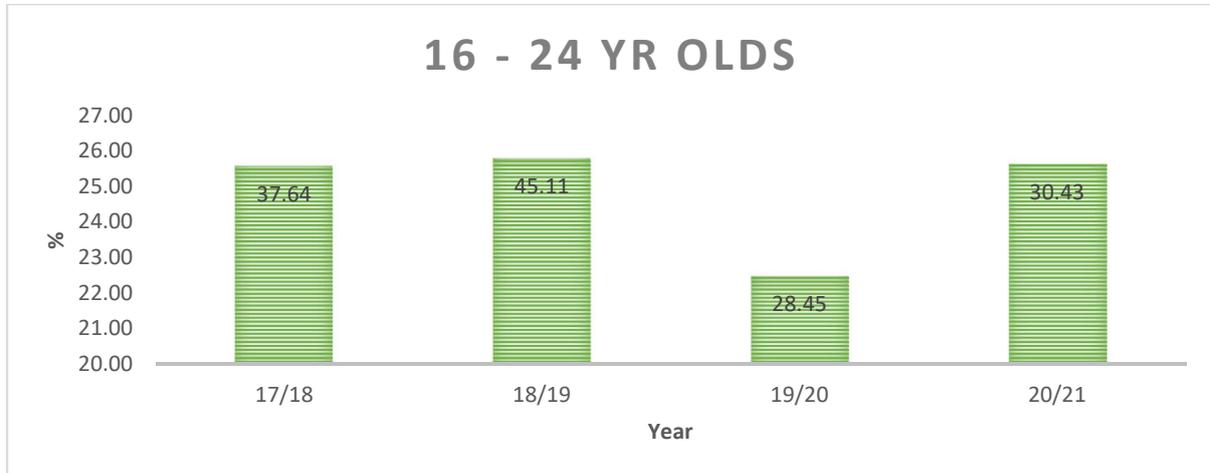
	White	Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups	Asian or Asian British	Black/ Caribbean/ Black British	African/ Black British	Other ethnic group	Unknown
2017/18	99.7	0	0.15	0.15	0	0	
2018/19	99.82	0	0.18	0	0	0	
2019/20	99.61	0	0.39	0	0	0	
2020/21	99.03	0	0.39	0.58	0	0	

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

Age

Each year between 28 and 45% of all homeless applicants are aged between 16 and 24, indicating that youth homelessness remains an area of concern within Blaenau Gwent.

FIGURE 27 HOMELESS APPLICANTS AGED 16 – 24



Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

The main reasons why young households were experiencing homelessness included;

- Parents or other relatives no longer able to accommodate,
- Breakdown of a relationship
- Loss of rented accommodation
- Young people leaving care or another form of institution

When household type was analysed, the results mirror those in Figure 26; with single person households' accounting for the highest proportion of applications received. The high levels of young single homeless applicant's is a concern due to the limited availability of suitable and affordable accommodation; a situation that has been further exacerbated by the spare room subsidy, a small private rented sector and a limited number of shared housing options.

FIGURE 28 HOMELESS OUTCOMES BY AGE

	2017/18			2018/19			2019/20			2020/21		
	16 - 17	18 - 24	25+	16 - 17	18 - 24	25+	16 - 17	18 - 24	25+	16 - 17	18 - 24	25+
Ineligible households	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eligible, but not homeless or threatened with homelessness	6	16	26	3	8	18	5	13	25	1	18	27
Eligible, threatened with homelessness, prevention assistance provided (Section 66)	3	85	201	3	81	289	0	73	195	0	47	108
Eligible, homeless, subject to duty to help to secure (Section 73)	5	94	164	12	40	70	15	39	129	8	62	160
Eligible, homeless but not in priority need	0	0	21	0	7	8	0	8	13	0	0	0
Eligible, homeless and in a priority need but intentionally so	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	3	0
Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need (Section 75)	3	5	16	1	5	16	2	4	16	2	3	19
Total	17	211	428	19	142	403	22	138	380	11	133	314
Percentage (%)	2.60	32.16	65.24	3.37	25.18	71.45	4.07	25.56	70.37	2.4	29.04	68.56

Source: StatsWales & Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

Household Type

Single person households accounted for between 49% - 62% of all applications received at Section 66 and between 60% - 71% of all applications at Section 73. This is significant and highlights why the local authority has difficulties in sourcing long term housing solutions for single person households.

Allocations data from the last 3 years showed that approximately 33% of all social housing properties allocated each year are 1 bed properties (excluding retirement housing), but that circa 60% of applicants currently on the register require a 1 bed property.

Torfaen has a relatively large social housing sector, but 1 bed properties only account for 25% of it, which is currently insufficient to meet existing levels of demand.

FIGURE 29 SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK IN BLAENAU GWENT

	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	Total
North	244	787	640	21		1692
Mid	648	1028	1203	52	1	2932
South	1689	1601	2124	218	12	5644
Total	2581	3416	3967	291	13	10268
%	25.14%	33.27%	38.63%	2.83%	0.13%	

Source: Registered Social Landlords in Blaeanu Gwent

Blaenau Gwent has a relatively small private rented stock, so is limited in its ability to secure suitable accommodation for single person households within this sector. A situation which has been further exacerbated by welfare benefit reforms.

Homeless Prevention and Relief

The following table identifies how many households (at risk of homelessness) were prevented from becoming homeless each year.

FIGURE 30 ELIGIBLE, THREATENED WITH HOMELESSNESS, PREVENTION ASSISTANCE PROVIDED (SECTION 66)

Section 66 Prevention Cases	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total Number of Cases	289	373	268	156
Successful prevention (No.)	145	221	193	92
Successful prevention (%)	50%	59%	72%	59%

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

50% – 72% of households each year were successfully prevented from becoming homeless. The most common forms of intervention included;

- Resolving rent or service charge arrears
- Debt and Financial Advice
- Mediation and conciliation
- Financial payments

If homelessness could not be prevented, it was still possible (in some circumstances) to relieve the applicant’s situation.

FIGURE 31 ELIGIBLE, HOMELESS, SUBJECT TO DUTY TO HELP TO SECURE (SECTION 73)

Section 73 Relief Cases	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total Number of Cases	263	133	110	230
Successful relief (No.)	126	80	58	108
Successful relief (%)	48%	60%	53%	47%

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

47% - 60% of households had their homelessness relieved and the most common forms of relief included:

- Accessing a social housing tenancy
- Accessing the private rented sector, sometimes with the use of a landlord incentive
- Accessing accommodation arranged with friends or relatives
- Accessing supported housing

If homelessness could be neither prevented or relieved, and the applicant had a qualifying priority need, then a Section 75 duty to provide secure accommodation was owed. Each year over 66% of applicants who were owed a Section 75 duty were successfully discharged.

FIGURE 32 SECTION 75 SUCCESSFUL DISCHARGE REASON

Section 75 Discharge Reason	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Accepted a private sector offer	22.22%	18.18%	36.36%	16.67%
Accepted an offer of accommodation through the allocation scheme	44.44%	45.45%	59.09%	54.16%
Total	66.66%	63.63%	95.45%	70.83%

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

However, a significant proportion of cases were not successfully discharged. This was for several reasons, including the applicant refusing an offer of suitable accommodation, refusing to cooperate with the Housing Solutions Service, or withdrawing their application.

FIGURE 33 LOSS OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Section 75 Discharge Reason	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Refusing an offer of suitable accommodation	16.66%	22.72%	4.55%	29.16%
Refusing to cooperate with the Housing Solutions Service	16.66%	4.55%	0%	0%
Total	33.32%	27.27%	4.55%	29.16%

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

Rough Sleeping

Since the outbreak of Covid pandemic, Blaenau Gwent has seen an increased number of rough sleepers in the borough. Outreach work is currently being undertaken through a HSG scheme, to provide support to these households and many have been accommodated in temporary accommodation during the coronavirus pandemic. Most of the rough sleepers that the local authority worked with, were single person households.

A snapshot of rough sleepers taken at the end of each month showed that over the last 6 months the Housing Solutions Service were accommodating between 2 and 7 rough sleepers or households at risk of rough sleeping every month (due to coronavirus legislation), whilst the outreach team had between 3 and 9 cases open at any one time.

FIGURE 34 ROUGH SLEEPER FIGURES

Rough Sleepers	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Apr 2021
Accommodated in temporary housing	2	4	4	3	4	5
Sleeping Rough	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: WG Homeless Temporary Accommodation Return

The additional funding from Welsh Government and the guidance clarifying the Priority Need status of people sleeping rough during the pandemic, has helped to address the levels of rough sleeping in Blaenau Gwent and assist households who previously would not have been entitled to the same level of housing support.

However, some of the underlying issues that have led to the rise of rough sleeping in recent years, such as a significant lack of suitable and affordable housing, remain prevalent. Greater levels of investment, more support provision and continued cohesive planning of housing provision and housing delivery is required, if some of the root causes of rough sleeping and homelessness are to be eradicated.

Future levels of Homelessness

Levels of homelessness over the last 4 years have remained consistent and whilst there has been a reduction in presentations at Section 66, (possibly as a result of some of the preventative measures implemented by the HSG programme and Housing Solutions Service), homelessness remains an area of significant demand.

With the impact of the coronavirus still to be felt, it is anticipated that future levels of homelessness in Blaenau Gwent are likely to remain similar or continue to rise in the foreseeable future. However, Blaenau Gwent have been making extensive use of available resources and exploring new and innovative approaches for further addressing homelessness within the borough.

Resources

There are a wide range of resources available in Blaenau Gwent to assist with the prevention and alleviation of homelessness:

Housing Solutions Service

A dedicated team consisting of Housing Solutions Officers, a specialist Mental Health Support Worker and a dedicated Young Persons Housing Officer deal with most of the households who require statutory assistance to meet their housing need.

The team will work with individuals to assess their needs and identify the most suitable options for them, making use of all available tools and resources e.g. homeless prevention grant, landlord incentives, housing related support referrals (including financial inclusion).

Housing Support Grant Gateway

A good referral process already exists between the Housing Solutions Service and the HSG Gateway, to ensure that any household who requires additional support can quickly and easily be referred for support. In 2020/21, 1421 referrals were made to the Gateway.

Drop in Services

The HSG programme has implemented drop - in services as a first point of contact for residents experiencing housing difficulties. These have been extremely effective in ensuring that households receive the information and support they require, before their situation escalates.

Since their introduction in 2019, the number of Section 66 cases has increased whilst there has been some reduction in the number of Section 73 cases, although presentations did increase again during 2020/21, possibly as a result of the pressure from the coronavirus pandemic, when it was not possible to provide face to face services.

Reductions in homeless presentations cannot be attributed solely to the drop-in services, but they do form part of a wider preventative approach that seeks to address some of the root causes of homelessness at the earliest possible stage.

In 2020/21, the drop-in service was used over 912 times by residents. Some of the main reasons for accessing drop-in surgeries were;

- Housing Advice,
- Help with Housing
- Having nowhere to live

Housing First Pilots

The HSG programme already funds a wide range of services to support young people and they have been working with partners across the region to explore and develop housing first pilots and other suitable accommodation schemes that assist the rapid re-housing transition.

Utilising phase 2 funding, a partnership between Blaenau Gwent and Tai Calon Community Housing was set up to deliver 8 units of accommodation for Housing First. Four support workers have been appointed to the Housing Solutions team through the HSG programme to deliver and coordinate support to clients identified for the Housing First scheme and within temporary accommodation.

Temporary Accommodation

With continued pressure on the Housing Solutions Service, there is inevitably a demand for more temporary accommodation.

FIGURE 35 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION IN BLAENAU GWENT

Location	1 Bed	2 Bed	Total
Tredegar	20	2*	22
Ebbw Vale	15	0	15
Abertillery	3	0	3
Total	38	2	40

*Two bed flats can be extended into 3 bed if need arises

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

Blaenau Gwent has a good supply of accommodation to assist households experiencing homelessness, however, data collected through the Welsh Housing Quarterly Return has shown that at any given time, demand remains high.

The following table records how many households were in temporary accommodation on the last day of each financial year.

FIGURE 36 HOUSEHOLDS IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION AT END OF FINANCIAL YEAR

Time Frame	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of Households	23	22	28	43

Source: StatWales & Blaenau Gwent Housing Service¹⁷

There has been a consistent demand for temporary accommodation over the last few years, but a sharp rise occurred during 2020/21, due in part to the requirements placed on local authorities during the coronavirus pandemic.

This increase can also be seen when comparing the number of individual households placed into temporary accommodation over the year; with significantly more placements in 2020/21.

¹⁷ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/Temporary-Accommodation/householdsaccommodatedtemporarily-by-accommodationtype-householdtype> [Accessed 05.05.2021]

FIGURE 37 HOUSEHOLDS PLACED IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Time Frame	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Number of households	117	95	151

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service¹⁸

When these figures are broken down by household type, it is evident that single person households have also risen significantly in recent years and now account for the most placements received.

FIGURE 38 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PLACEMENTS BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE

Household Type	18/19	19/20	20/21
1. Couple with dependent child(ren)	19	18	7
2. Single parent household with dependent children - male applicant	2	0	1
3. Single parent household with dependent children - female applicant	16	12	14
4. Single person household - male applicant	56	49	97
5. Single person household - female applicant	17	11	25
6. All other household groups	7	5	7
Grand Total	117	95	151

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

FIGURE 39 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PLACEMENTS BY MULTIPLE AND SINGLE HOUSEHOLD TYPE

Household Type	18/19		19/20		20/21	
Multiple Person Households	44	38%	35	37%	29	19%
Single Person Households	73	62%	60	63%	122	81%
Total	117		85		151	

Source: Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

In 2018/19 the number of single person households was approximately half, but this increased in 2019/20 and by 2020/21 single person households accounted for over 75% of all temporary accommodation placements during the year, highlighting a need for more single person accommodation. The local authority continues to work with landlords to source suitable housing options when necessary to ensure that an adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available.

¹⁸ The total number of placements each year will be slightly higher as some households were placed on more than one occasion

Non-Engagement

Despite the demand for temporary accommodation, there are a significant number of households who are losing their temporary accommodation, which is a concern and raises questions about the suitability of the accommodation, the level of support available, and the specific needs of the individual.

Torfaen has in place a range of resources and services that are available to assist households who are at risk of homelessness, experiencing homelessness, or those who may be living in temporary accommodation.

The Housing Solutions Service and the HSG Gateway work together effectively to ensure that households requiring additional help can access the support they require. However, for a small proportion, non-engagement appears to be an issue, which makes their ability to ultimately secure long-term accommodation difficult.

Over the last 4 years, a significant number of applicants who contacted the local authority for assistance either refused assistance, failed to co-operate with the local authority, withdrew their application or had their application withdrawn due to a loss of contact.

The following table shows the overall proportion of non-engagement at Section 66, Section 73 and Section 75:

FIGURE 40 HOMELESS SERVICE LEVELS OF NON-ENGAGEMENT

Non - Engagement (%)	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Section 66	32.87%	27.34%	14.93%	21.15%
Section 73	19.77%	15.04%	19.13%	23.48%
Section 75	16.67%	15.15%	9.09%	0%

Source: StatWales & Blaenau Gwent Housing Service

Approximately a quarter of applicants disengaged at Section 66 and nearly 15% disengaged at Section 75.

At Section 66 the most common reason for non-engagement was a loss of contact, but at Section 75, the main reason was the refusal of suitable accommodation.

Key Points:

- Prevention of homelessness remains crucial for ensuring a long-term reduction in the number of people requiring assistance.
- Young single households account for a significant proportion of homeless cases.
- Maintaining services to support young homeless households in Torfaen is vital
- Mediation services, tenancy support and financial inclusion services appear to be working and remain essential for ensuring that people have the skills and support to manage and maintain their accommodation.
- Relationship breakdown and families unwilling to accommodate households is one of the main reasons for homelessness
- Levels of housing need remain high but drop-in services are making a positive impact.
- Rough sleeping has increased across the borough
- Demand for temporary accommodation rose during 2020/21, especially for single person households
- Non engagement of applicants remains a concern and an area for greater exploration

Housing Demand and Affordability

Despite the support and assistance that is available in Blaenau Gwent, one of the underlying reasons for homelessness and housing need, is a lack of suitable and affordable accommodation options, making access to long term housing unattainable for many households.

Average house prices in Blaenau Gwent are now beyond the financial capabilities of many residents, especially first-time buyers. The average cost of a home in Blaenau Gwent during 2020 was **£101890**, whilst the average annual income for a full-time worker is currently **£28.400**¹⁹ making the average house price to income ratio for a single income household, 5.5:1.

FIGURE 41 AVERAGE HOUSE PRICES IN BLAENAU GWENT (2020)

Blaenau Gwent²⁰	Detached	Semi-detached	Terraced	Flat /maisonette	Average
2020	£ 172,462	£ 114,303	£92362	£57,895	£96,835

Source: HM Land Registry

¹⁹ Source: ONS annual survey of hours and earnings - resident analysis Nomis:

<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157402/report.aspx?town=Blaenau Gwent#tabearn> [Accessed 20.04.2021]

²⁰ HM Land Registry <https://landregistry.data.gov.uk/app/standard-reports/download-report?utf8=%E2%9C%93&report=avgPrice&areaType=county&area=BLAENAU GWENT&aggregate=none&period%5B%5D=2020&period%5B%5D=2019&age=any> [Accessed 20.04.2021]

Even an average priced terraced property, the largest property type in Blaenau Gwent, would have a house price to income ratio of 4:1 for a single income household. Flats and Maisonettes are a more affordable option, but they only account for 10% of the housing stock in Blaenau Gwent and a high proportion of them are in the social sector, so are not available to purchase.

Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) has been able to assist some households that are currently priced out of the open market and demand for this service has grown, with over 500 applicants currently on register. However, this is not suitable for all households, which inevitably places greater pressure on the rental markets.

Blaenau Gwent has a relatively small private rented sector (circa 10%) and despite efforts to make it more accessible and develop intermediate rental products, it has not grown significantly and remains an expensive option for many households, especially those under 35 years old and in receipt of benefits.

In 2019, the average cost of a 1 bed property in Blaenau Gwent was £415.48 per month:

FIGURE 42 PRIVATE SECTOR RENTS (2019)

	Sample size	Average Rent	Rent (Median)	Rent (Lower Quartile)	Rent (Upper Quartile)
Room	17	£348.34	£346.67	£346.67	£346.67
1 Bedroom	80	£415.48	£400.00	£376.50	£450.00
2 Bedroom	333	£495.98	£495.00	£450.00	£550.00
3 Bedroom	355	£571.97	£560.00	£522.50	£600.00
4 Bedroom	48	£754.11	£750.00	£650.00	£850.00

Source: Rent Officers Wales - Lettings Information Database

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is currently £66.39pw (£54pw for single households under 35), so tenants in receipt of benefits would struggle, making social housing their only viable option. However, even in the social sector, rents have continued to rise, with an average rent of £83.22 per week in 2019/20; an increase of circa 15% since 2015/16.

FIGURE 43 AVERAGE WEEKLY RENTS IN STOCK AT SOCIAL RENTS BY AREA, ACCOMMODATION AND PROVIDER TYPE

	General needs stock	Sheltered stock	Other supported stock	Extra care stock	Total stock at social rent
2015/16	£72.20	£68.12	£80.81	£122.82	7855
2019/20	£83.22	£75.47	£106.17	£139.37	7651

Source: Social landlord stock and rents data collection, Welsh Government

Welfare benefit reforms have also meant that single person households under 35 and in receipt of benefits are only entitled to a shared room rate of housing benefit, further hindering their ability to access affordable accommodation.

Yet despite these issues, social housing remains the only viable option for many households, as evidenced by the high number of people applying each year.

Waiting times for social housing will inevitably vary depending on the individual circumstances of the applicant and the type of property they require.

The applicant’s individual needs will also impact on the length of time that they will wait for accommodation, with applicants in Gold band having a lower average waiting time than those in Bronze or Silver band.

FIGURE 44 AVERAGE WAITING TIME FOR SOCIAL HOUSING BY PRIORITY BAND

	Bronze	Silver	Gold	Emergency	Total
Days	249	359	356	397	336

Source: Blaenau Gwent Common Housing Register

Key Points:

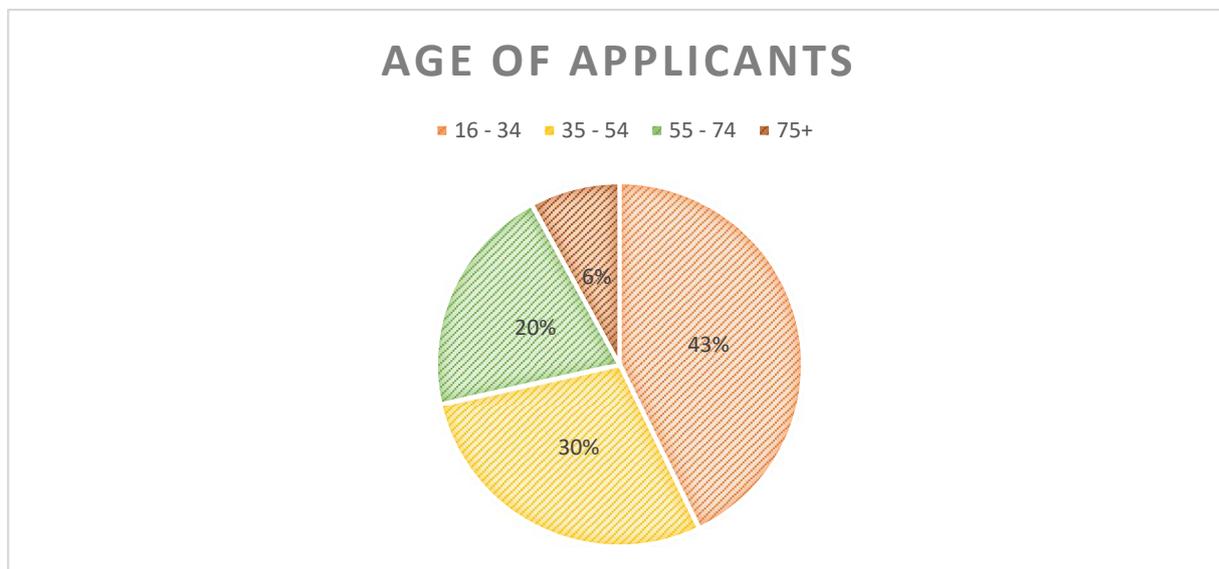
- Demand for housing is very high, especially in the social housing sector
- Home ownership is not viable for many young working households
- The private rented sector in Blaenau Gwent remains small and often unaffordable
- Despite remaining the most affordable option, social housing rents have increased quite significantly in recent years

Social Housing Register and Affordable Housing Provision

There are over 3500 households on the common housing register in Blaenau Gwent.

The age of applicants ranges from 16 through to 98, but the greatest proportion of applicants are those under the age of 35:

FIGURE 45 AGE OF HOMESEAKER APPLICANTS



Source: Blaenau Gwent Common Housing Register

Over 53% of applicants on the housing register are currently single, (20% are single and under 35 years of age), which inevitably increases demand for smaller units of accommodation. The following table shows the proportion of social housing properties in Blaenau Gwent by the number of bedrooms:

FIGURE 46 SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK

Bedsit	48	0.62
1	1490	18.92
2	2861	36.33
3	3362	42.69
4+	112	1.42
5	1	0.01
6	1	0.01
Total	7875	

Source: Blaenau Gwent RSL partners

With 1 bed and studio properties making up only a quarter of all social housing stock, providing an adequate supply of smaller accommodation remains a challenge. Joint tenancies and shared housing options have been encouraged locally, especially amongst young people, whilst work with local Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners has also taken place to promote and develop suitable shared options. But despite these efforts, demand remains high. Blaenau Gwent continues to develop new affordable housing options across different tenures and works closely with its partners to ensure that access to these schemes remains equitable and fair. Even so, demand continues to outstrip supply and each year over 1550 new applicants successfully apply to join the social housing register, whilst circa 100 applicants apply to join the LCHO scheme; Help2Own Plus.

The following table details the number of new affordable homes built each year in Blaenau Gwent (inclusive of social rent, intermediate rent and low cost home ownership), the number of applicants housed each year via the social housing register, the number of new applications received each year to join the social housing register and the number of applicants on the housing register at the start of each year.

FIGURE 47 ANNUAL SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING 2016 – 2021

	16-17	17-18	18-19	19 - 20	20 - 21
Affordable Housing Delivery²¹	97	132	121	141	---
Number assisted by Help to Buy²²	33	96	131	137	62
Number housed via Homeseeker	805	749	730	791	611
New Homeseeker Applications	1637	1492	1709	1590	1611
Homeseeker Register (1st April)	2626	2513	2684	2881	2894

Source: Blaenau Gwent Common Housing Register

The table illustrates that each year supply of affordable housing (new and existing) is insufficient to offset the demand from new social housing applicants, let alone address the backlog on the housing register. In addition, welfare reforms have meant that even when someone accesses social housing, there is no longer the same level of security that once existed, with benefit caps, spare room subsidies and housing benefit reductions (for the under 35s) having significant consequences.

²¹ Additional affordable housing provision by location and year, <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Affordable-Housing/Provision/additionalaffordablehousingprovision-by-location-year> [Accessed 26.11.21]

²² Help to Buy - Wales completed purchases by local authority and date <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Help-To-Buy/completedpurchases-by-la-date> [Accessed 26.11.2021]

A further pressure is that many households seeking housing now experience additional pressures and, in some cases, have more complex needs. The housing register currently contains:

- 773 single applicants under 35 (impacted by spare room subsidy)
- 359 applicants requiring an adapted property
- 233 applicants who need help and support due to mental health
- 1009 applicants who need to move because of a medical need
- 18 applicants who need help and support due to high risk domestic abuse
- 198 applicants who are lacking a bedroom
- 14% of applicants currently requiring social housing are over the age of 65;
- 7% of applicants waiting for an adapted property are over 55.

Pressures have been further exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic and are predicted to increase further due to unemployment, worsening financial circumstances and a deterioration in mental health and wellbeing amongst the population.

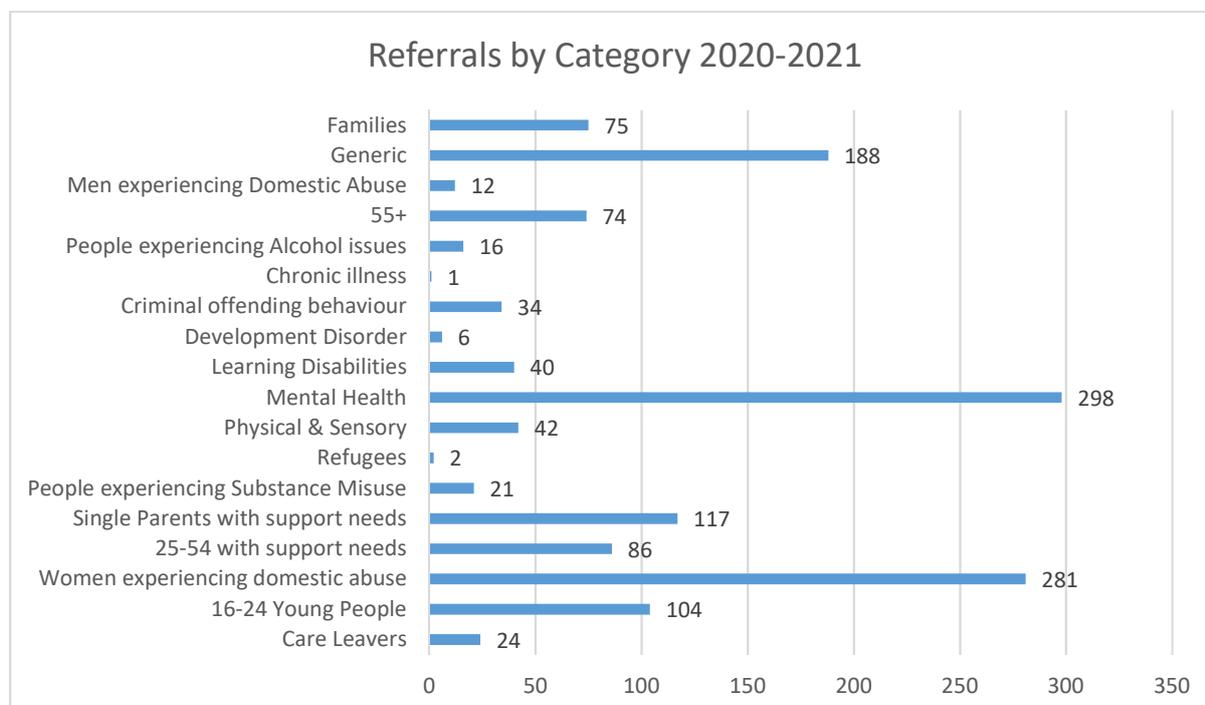
Key Points:

- Access to housing is unaffordable and unattainable for many young households
- Affordable housing provision is not keeping pace with demand
- Social housing no longer provides the same security for young people
- Housing applicants often have more complex needs, which can increase the time it takes for suitable housing to become available
- Alternative solutions need to be considered to increase the availability of suitable housing options

Housing Support Gateway

During 2020/21, the Housing Support Gateway in Blaenau Gwent received 1421 referrals for support. These were broken down into the following categories:

FIGURE 48 HOUSING SUPPORT GRANT SERVICE PROVISION



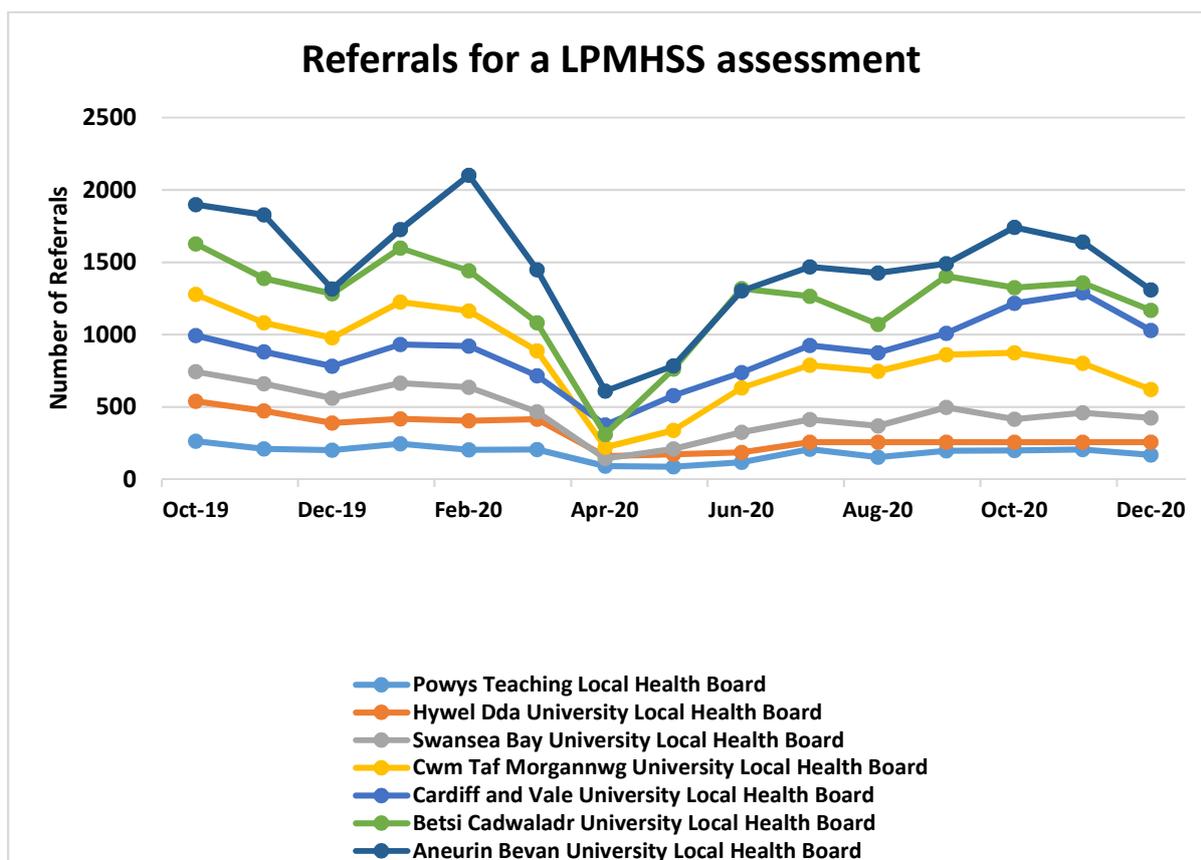
Demand for services has remained high, particularly for mental health, domestic abuse, over 55s and generic support, which includes financial inclusion, homelessness and rough sleeping.

FIGURE 49 HIGHEST SUPPORT REFERRALS

Category	Total
Over 55s	74
Domestic Abuse (Women)	282
Mental health	291
Generic Support	194

The demand for mental health services in Blaenau Gwent is also reflected in monthly data from Local Primary Mental Health Support Services (LPMHSS), which showed that Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) had the highest level of referrals for LPMHSS assessments in Wales. However, it is important to note that ABUHB also has the second highest number of residents, after Betsi Cadwaladr, so this will inevitably have some impact on the number of referrals received.

FIGURE 50 REFERRALS FOR A LPMHSS ASSESSMENT



Source: Mental Health (Wales) Measure data collection, Welsh Government

It is worth noting that during 2019/20, the Gateway received 1754 referrals, but in 2020/21, this had dropped to 1421; a reduction. There were also voids for crisis and financial inclusion, which received lower numbers of referrals during the pandemic compared to other years.

The reason for this drop in referrals is thought to be attributable to the coronavirus pandemic, which led to a reduction in face to face services and drop-in sessions. In addition, temporary government policies, which gave tenants and those experiencing housing difficulties greater protections, have meant that service users may not have engaged with support, because the threat of them losing their accommodation was not imminent. However, discussions with local registered social landlords have indicated that rent arrears are rising and when these temporary government protections are removed, there is likely to be a significant surge in demand for assistance, especially for crisis services and financial inclusion.

Yet, even with the reduction in referrals during 2020/21, the table clearly shows that other services; particularly Cyfannol Women’s Aid, have utilised a significant number of units and that demand for services remains high.

Waiting times

Despite high levels of demand in some areas, the Gateway has managed to keep pace with referrals and in 2020/21, it has an average waiting time of approximately 14 days. However, this varies depending on the support service required, with domestic abuse and generic higher than some of the other services:

FIGURE 51 REFERRAL WAITING TIMES 2020/21

Service	Time
Generic	14 days
Domestic Abuse	14 days
Mental Health	7-14 days
Learning Disability/Physical Sensory	14 days

It should be noted that mental health services are also in very high demand, but this is not reflected in the waiting times. The reason for this is that support workers have been taking on additional capacity and the HSG programme has increased the provision of support in this area to help manage the demand. In some instances, the inability to carry out home visits which are more time consuming, meant that that support workers were able to pick up additional clients but support them remotely. Despite these efforts, mental health remains an area of significant need and this looks set to continue rising in the future.

The Gateway has also worked proactively with service providers to best address the needs of clients. This has included referring clients for immediate support with a service provider who could address some of their low-level needs first, whilst they waited for more dedicated support to become available. By utilising this approach, the Gateway has ensured that all clients were receiving some level of help and were not being left on the waiting list for long periods of time without any contact or assistance.

Support Extensions

During 2020/21, the Gateway had more requests for support extensions.

- In 2019/20, 69 support extensions were processed
- In 2020/21 151 support extensions were processed

Demographics

Referrals for the Gateway came from applicants of all ages, but there were significantly more requests for those age 16 – 54 than those over the age of 55.

FIGURE 52 REFERRALS BY AGE

Age	Count
16 - 34	657
35 - 54	528
55 - 74	202
75+	34
Total	1421

FIGURE 53 REFERRALS BY GENDER

Gender	Count
Female	884
Male	530
Total	1421

Rejected Referrals

634 of the 1421 referrals received during 2020/21 were rejected. The reasons for rejection varied, but the most common cause was not being able to make contact.

FIGURE 54 REFERRAL REJECTION REASONS

Rejection Reason	Total
Circumstances changed	126
Temporarily excluded from project	3
Gone to prison	2
Didn't understand service criteria	22
Not in a suitable geographic area	5
Support needs too high / low	85
Accepted at assessment but wouldn't engage for support	129
Moved / moving out of the area	16
Already being supported by another agency	22
Deceased	2
One off piece of work completed	35
Signposted to a more appropriate service	181
Demand too high for the service	6
Total	634

Closer analysis of the rejected referrals has shown that applicants in certain client groups had a higher rejection rate than others. This may be relative to the number of referrals for this client groups; with generic support and mental health having both the highest number of referrals and the highest number of rejections. Even so, the number of rejections for mental health remains a concern, because it accounts for approximately 1/3 of all rejections.

FIGURE 55 REJECTED REFERRALS BY CLIENT GROUP

Client Group	Number
Young people aged 16-24 with support needs	38
People with criminal offending history	21
People aged 55+ with support needs	31
Women experiencing domestic abuse	79
Generic (range of support needs)	115
People with mental health problems	184
Families with support needs	34
Men experiencing domestic abuse	6
People with Substance misuse	9
People with Alcohol misuse	6
Single parent families with support needs	34
Single people 25-54 with support needs	36
Young people who are Care Leavers	1
People with chronic illness including HIV/AIDS	4
Learning disabilities	14
People with development disorders (ie Austism)	7
People with physical and/or sensory disabilities	14
People with refugee status	1
Total	634

When rejections were analysed by age range it showed that approximately half of the rejections were from younger clients (16 – 34 year olds).

FIGURE 56 REJECTED REFERRALS BY AGE

Client Group	16 - 24	25-54	55+	Total
Accepted at assessment but wouldn't engage for support	31	93	5	129
Already being supported by another agency	5	14	3	22
Circumstances changed	38	72	16	126
Deceased	0	2	0	2
Demand too high for the service	0	3	3	6
Didn't understand service criteria	10	11	1	22
Gone to prison	0	2	0	2
Moved / moving out of the area	6	7	3	16
Not in a suitable geographic area	1	4	0	5
One of piece of work completed	12	17	6	35
Signposted to a more appropriate service	45	113	23	181
Support needs too high/low	16	55	14	85
Temporarily excluded from project	0	2	1	3
Total	164	395	75	634

Gap Matrix Analysis

The HSG programme in Blaenau Gwent aims to provide a wide range of support services to meet the different needs of the population and the different levels of support required.

An analysis of available support services was conducted, as detailed in the chart below:

FIGURE 57 SERVICE MATRIX

	12+ Long Term	3- 12 Months	3 Months
Very High	Hostel (24/7) Accommodation	Hostel Accommodation	Hostel Accommodation
High	Refuge Mental Health (supported accommodation) Homelessness Housing First Young Person (supported accommodation) Probation / Ex - Offending	Refuge Mental Health Homelessness Rough Sleeping (semi supported accommodation) Probation / Ex - Offending	Refuge Mental Health Homelessness Rough Sleeping (semi supported accommodation) Assertive Outreach – Rough Sleeper Crisis Drop In Domestic Abuse Drop In Substance Misuse Prisoner Release
Medium	Domestic Abuse Vulnerable Families Substance Misuse Young Person Complex Need Gypsy & Traveller Mental Health Housing First	Probation / Ex - Offending Housing Intervention Financial Inclusion Domestic Abuse Vulnerable Families Substance Misuse Young Person Complex Need Gypsy & Traveller Financial Inclusion LGBTQ+ Families First Vulnerable Adults Young Person Mental Health Generic	Prisoner Release Housing Intervention Domestic Abuse Drop In Financial Inclusion Mental Health Young Person Mental Health Drop In Hospital Discharge
Low	Alarms	Generic Temporary Accommodation Support	Mental Health Financial Support
Very Low/Don't Know	Alarms	Housing Related Support Activity	Housing Related Support Activity

The chart clearly shows that Blaenau Gwent has a wide range of support provision available at all levels and covering a range of timescales.

Key Points:

- Housing Related Support remains vital for assisting households.
- Generic support was required most in 2020/21, which included financial inclusion, homelessness and rough sleeper services. It is likely that these will continue to be in high demand in the next 12 months, as the aftermath of the Covid Pandemic are felt.
- Demand for Mental Health and Domestic Abuse services also remains high, a trend that has been mirrored across the UK during the Covid 19 Pandemic
- Rejection rates are high, raising concerns about engagement and the ability of clients to access services, especially those with complex needs and chaotic lifestyles.
- More referrals came from younger clients than those aged over 55, but there were also more rejections from this age group
- The number of referrals requesting an extension has increased.
- It is anticipated that there may be an increase in support referrals once the protection protections implemented for renters during the coronavirus pandemic are removed.

Housing Support Programme Outcomes

The HSG programme in Blaenau Gwent aims to provide a wide range of support services to meet the different needs of the population and the different levels of support required.

An analysis of available support services was conducted, as detailed in the chart below:

FIGURE 58 SERVICE MATRIX

<i>Support Provision Available</i>			
Demand	12+ Long Term	3 - 12 Months	3 Months
<i>Very High</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hostel (24/7)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hostel Accommodation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hostel Accommodation</i>
<i>Very High</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refuge</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refuge</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refuge</i>

High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mental Health (Supported Accommodation)</i> • <i>Homelessness</i> • <i>Housing First</i> • <i>Young Persons Accommodation</i> • <i>Domestic Abuse Disperse Accommodation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mental Health Floating Support</i> • <i>Housing Mental Health Support Worker</i> • <i>Housing - Sustainability Officer</i> • <i>Family Intervention Project</i> • <i>Housing First Support Worker</i> • <i>Domestic Abuse Floating Support</i> • <i>IAA Domestic Abuse Project</i> • <i>Vulnerable Adults Floating Support</i> • <i>Generic Floating Support</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Domestic Abuse Crisis Floating Support</i> • <i>Assertive Outreach</i> • <i>Prisoner Release</i>
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Housing First</i> • <i>Vulnerable Families</i> • <i>Domestic Abuse Disperse Accommodation</i> • <i>Young Persons</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Supported Lodgings</i> • <i>Housing - Early Intervention Officer</i> • <i>Housing - G&T Support Worker</i> • <i>Domestic Abuse Floating Support Men</i> • <i>Childrens Services Floating Support</i> • <i>Children Services Mediation Officer</i> • <i>Gwent Pathway Services – Probation</i> • <i>Health</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Generic Floating Support</i> • <i>Low Level Floating Support</i> • <i>Vulnerable Adults with Learning Difficulties</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Generic Floating Support</i> • <i>Vulnerable Adults</i> 	
<i>Low</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>CRT/Housing Support Worker</i> • <i>BGCBC Adult Services IAA</i> • <i>Low Level Floating Support Services</i> 	

The above chart shows Blaenau Gwent has a wide range of support provision available at all levels and covering a range of timescales.

Key Points

- Housing related Services remain vital for assisting households
- Generic support was required most in 2020/21, which included financial inclusion, homelessness. It is likely that these will continue to be in high demand in the next 12 months, as the aftermath of the Covid pandemic.
- Demand for Mental Health and Domestic Abuse Services also remains high, a trend that has been mirrored across the UK during the Covid 19 pandemic.
- There has been an increase for the Vulnerable Adults with a Learning disabilities with regards to finding suitable accommodation.
- There has been an increase of referrals requesting an extension to extend support.
- It is anticipated that there will be an increase in support referrals once the protections implemented for renters during in the coronavirus pandemic are removed.

Lead Needs

Gateway data has highlighted that the following “lead needs” were most prevalent amongst service users in Blaenau Gwent during 2020/2021.

- Generic
- Domestic Abuse
- Mental Health
- Age 16 - 55
- Families & Single Parents

The following section now looks in more details at the benefits that service users have gained from support and the outcomes that have been achieved.

Outcomes

The following table highlights the following “lead needs” amongst service users in Blaenau Gwent 2020/2021.

FIGURE 59 LEADS NEEDS AMONGST SERVICE USERS

	<i>Jan- June</i>	<i>July- March</i>
Generic	475	1207
Domestic Abuse	723	1016
Mental Health	636	925
Age 16 - 55	697	547
Families & Single Parents	237	132

The recording period for Jan 2020 to June 2020 demonstrates the demand of some outcomes are more relevant to the specific lead needs e.g. Mental health, domestic abuse. However, managing accommodation, managing money and mentally healthy were consistently high outcomes across all 5 lead needs.

FIGURE 60 BLAENAU GWENT OUTCOMES

Outcomes	Mental Health	Domestic Abuse	Families & Single Parents	Generic	Age group 16-55	Total
1) Feeling Safe	58	129	26	18	43	274
2) Contributing to safety/well-being of selves/others	40	91	28	9	52	220
3) Managing accommodation	107	132	19	220	131	609
4) Managing relationships	33	96	29	2	49	209
5) Feeling part of the community	28	38	15	3	42	126
6) Managing money	104	79	15	167	131	496
7) Engaging in education/learning	12	32	24	0	17	85
8) Engaging in employment/voluntary work	19	9	10	4	12	54
9) Physically healthy	61	28	17	8	64	178
10) Mentally healthy	109	82	30	37	122	380
11) Leading a healthy and active lifestyle	65	7	24	7	34	137

Key Outcomes

The following table looks at these 5 lead needs and then compares them by the 11 outcomes to see which were relevant.

FIGURE 61 - 5 LEAD NEEDS COMPARED BY OUTCOMES

	Outcomes (Total)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Mental Health	687	109	40	107	33	28	104	12	19	61	109	65
Domestic Abuse	676	82	91	132	96	38	79	32	9	28	82	7
Families & Single Parents	241	30	28	19	29	15	15	24	10	17	30	24
Generic	494	37	9	220	2	3	167	0	4	8	37	7
Age group 16 - 55	776	122	52	131	49	42	131	17	12	64	122	34

There were clearly some outcomes that were more relevant to service users than others. For example, within Age group 16-55, (776), 506 service users specified outcomes 1,3,6 and 10 was a relevant outcome, whilst only 29 service users specified outcomes 7 & 8 was a relevant outcome.

July to December 2020

The first 3 lead needs seen a significant increase in outcomes, with a decrease for 16-55 and Families & Single Parents. Domestic Abuse had a further increase of 293, Mental Health had an increase of 289. Whilst the biggest increase was Generic with 732.

FIGURE 62 LEADS NEEDS AMONGST SERVICE USERS

<i>Client Group</i>	<i>July-March</i>
Generic	1207
Domestic Abuse	1016
Mental Health	925
Age 16 - 55	547
Families & Single Parents	132

During July to December 2020 the service user outcomes increased significantly as the main needs against the top 5. Managing accommodation increased by 268, managing money increased by 186.

FIGURE 63 SERVICE USER OUTCOMES, MAIN NEEDS AGAINST TOP 5

Outcomes	Mental Health	Domestic Abuse	Families & Single Parents	Generic	Age group 16 - 55	Total
1) Feeling Safe	78	188	12	46	104	428
2) Contributing to safety/well-being of selves/others	58	146	13	46	58	321
3) Managing accommodation	146	184	14	436	97	877
6) Managing money	140	103	13	356	70	682
10) Mentally healthy	147	97	12	146	52	454

1) feeling safe, 2) contributing to safety/well-being of selves/others, 3) managing accommodation, 4) managing relationships, 5) feeling part of the community, 6) managing money, 7) engaging in education/learning, 8) engaging in employment/voluntary work, 9) physical healthy, 10) mentally healthy, 11) leading a healthy and active lifestyle

Key outcomes

The following table looks at these 5 lead needs and then compares them by the 11 outcomes.

The findings are very similar to those in January to June, with managing accommodation and managing money being important outcomes for most of the service user's other outcomes remaining more relevant to certain lead need groups. For instance, feeling safe, safety of others is more relevant to women experiencing domestic abuse than those service users within the Generic group.

FIGURE 64 5 LEAD NEEDS COMPARED BY THE 11 OUTCOMES

	Outcomes (Total)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Mental Health	925	78	58	146	56	40	140	22	38	103	147	97
Domestic Abuse	1016	188	146	184	126	49	103	50	16	38	97	19
Generic	1207	46	46	436	31	40	356	6	17	57	146	26
Age group 16 - 55	547	104	58	97	50	17	70	38	12	23	52	26

Key Points:

- The 4 most common areas of need are representative of findings in other areas of research within this assessment.
- Outcomes achieved are often reflective of the lead need of the applicant
- Managing accommodation and managing money remain consistently high across the 4 main lead need groups.

Gwent Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Needs Assessment

The needs assessment analysed information from different partner agencies, as well as consulting with survivors and support staff to;

- better understand the needs of those affected by VAWDASV,
- to help identify any gaps in provision,
- to inform decisions relating to the commissioning of services and
- measure the impact of the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015

The assessment identified areas of concern and gaps in provision:

- Limited provision of supported emergency accommodation in all local authority areas, except Blaenau Gwent
- Consideration for service support which extends across local authority boundaries
- Evidence based perpetrator interventions across Gwent
- The Gwent Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser (IDVA) Service was highlighted as an area of concern in relation to commissioning and funding
- Waiting times and limited availability of specialised sexual violence counselling
- Lack of VAWDASV information on offer for those affected by VAWDASV
- Extending Ask and Act training to all public facing staff, particularly those in Housing and services providing substance misuse and mental health support.

Funding

The funding and commissioning of specialist services in Gwent is complex and provided by various agencies. Most funding is provided by HSG as detailed in the table below:

FIGURE 65 HSG FUNDING

Local Authority Area	Services funded	Annual budget
Blaenau Gwent	Temporary Supported Housing	£375,650.35
	Floating Support & Target Hardening	
Caerphilly	Floating Support	£477,437.00
	Temporary Supported Housing	
Monmouthshire	Floating Support	£229,095.00
	Direct Access	
Newport	Floating Support	£430,291.03
	Direct Access	
Torfaen	Floating Support	£410,771.28
	Direct Access	
Total		£1,923,244.66

Families First, Welsh Government direct revenue and capital funding and the Gwent Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner also contribute and agencies bid and receive funding from other sources such as National Lottery, donations, training revenue, spot purchased interventions and other fund raising activities.

The funding complexities can make it difficult for practitioners in partnership organisations to understand who provides services in each local authority area and there is also a risk that services can be missed or duplicated causing confusion and gaps in support, which increases the risk of services not effectively meeting the needs and safety of those accessing support.

Demands

According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) 2019, 24,533 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes were recorded in Gwent. This equates to 41 incidents and crimes for every 1,000 of the population.

In 2019/20, Blaenau Gwent had a rate of 1.64 sexual offences per 1,000 people, making it one of the highest levels in Gwent and higher than the Gwent average of 1.54 per 1000.²³ Blaenau Gwent has had a consistently high rate of sexual offences in recent years, as evidenced in the table below:

²³ <http://www.gwentrbp.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence> [Accessed 03.12.2020]

FIGURE 66 RATE OF SEXUAL OFFENCES PER 1000 PEOPLE

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Caerphilly	1.3	1.44	1.31	2.21
Torfaen	1.25	1.42	1.55	2.23
Blaenau Gwent	1.65	1.64	1.45	2.58
Monmouthshire	1.31	1.54	1.11	1.67
Newport	1.29	1.64	1.92	2.48

The population growth across Gwent is likely to increase the levels of demand for VAWDASV services, however, the ability to obtain a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the extent of VAWDASV in Gwent remains challenging. Some of the reasons for this are that a large proportion of VAWDASV is not being reported, or where data is recorded, significant differences occur making direct analysis impossible. For example, some agencies report on different timescales, or there are inconsistencies and gaps in the information.

Recommendations

The needs assessment identified 32 recommendations, which can be broadly categorised into the following areas:

- More robust data collection to improve the commissioning of services
- Conduct further research to better understand demands
- Increased partnership working, greater alignment and joint service provision
- Data sharing across partners and organisations
- Improved communication and publicity of services
- Greater focus on some key areas of concern e.g. sexual health services, housing for those with complex needs

Key Points

- Blaenau Gwent has one of the highest rates of sexual offences in Gwent per 1000 people
- Early intervention and prevention, increased awareness and access to services are important.
- There is a lack of robust data about the extent of VAWDASV in Gwent
- Some forms of service provision are less adequate in some areas than others
- Funding complexities can create barriers to service delivery

Other areas where respondents identified gaps or suggested improvements included:

- Better marketing / awareness raising of available support services
- Increasing capacity and reducing waiting times for accessing support
- Providing support for longer (low level)
- Providing more intensive support (greater levels contact)
- Psychological Support
- Shopping (possibly linked to Digital Inclusion)

In 2021, building on the feedback received in the previous consultation, service users were again asked about their experiences of accessing and receiving support, but with a particular emphasis on Digital Inclusion.

The results highlighted that all respondents in Blaenau Gwent were either Happy or Very Happy with the services that they had received through the HSG programme and there were no specific improvements or priorities identified. However, when asked about their experiences of using online services, the results showed that there were mixed reactions.

Nearly 50% of respondents stated that there were no barriers to them accessing services online and many used online services to access basic services such as shopping, banking, benefits and housing services. However, others identified a lack of knowledge or understanding and limited or no access to technology, which presented a problem. There was also a small but significant cohort who did not want to get online or improve their digital skills.

The final question asked service users to identify whether, with suitable training and access to IT equipment, they would use online services to access support; some indicated that they would but over 80% replied that they still preferred face to face support.

The findings suggest that for some service users, improving their digital skills is something from which they would benefit, and this may be something that support providers can assist them to achieve. However, 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.

Gwent Stakeholder Feedback 2020 & 2021

In addition to engaging with service users, the Gwent HSG services 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.

Responses are invited from a wide range of partners including support providers, local authority departments (including those working in Children's services, Adult services and Housing), as well as wider partners including Probation, Health, Police and the third sector.

In 2020, the key themes that were identified from the engagement included:

- Expanding and developing accommodation options
- More collaborative partnerships and multiagency approaches, promoting better use of resources and reducing duplication
- Improved partnership working with health and the development of specific health posts that work in each local authority area
- Focussing resources towards more specialist services, especially:
 - 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.
- Increasing access to specialist welfare benefits and money advice services
- Increasing digital skills
- Increase and develop communication to keep stakeholders up to date and to provide opportunities to share information and good practice
- Mandatory training in key areas for all providers

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

In 2021, further consultation was carried with stakeholders to identify any further gaps or themes that had emerged over the last 12 months. The responses received were very similar, with accommodation, complex needs, especially mental health, being identified again as priority areas.

The importance of partnership working and better collaboration was also highlighted again in the consultation, but over half of the respondents stated that in the last 12 months this had improved. Some of the reasons for this improvement included better communication and more multiagency meetings, improved links between some public health services and housing, as well as better joint commissioning. However, other respondents felt that these were still areas for further improvement and better collaboration is still needed and remain a priority.

Local Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to the online survey, Blaenau Gwent also held a local workshop with its HSG providers to further explore some of their concerns and priorities, especially reflecting on the

new challenges that had emerged as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and how to create better resilience going forward.

Housing Support Planning Group

Blaenau Gwent's HSG Planning Group was established in 2019 following the introduction of the new HSG Guidance. The Group is committed to improve the quality of life of vulnerable adults through the provision of effective HSG services.

Membership of the group include representatives from:

- Housing
- Social Services
- Health
- Probation
- Children and Community Grant
- Landlord
- Support Provider (accommodation based)
- Support Provider (floating support)

A set of high level principles underpins the operation of the Planning Group:

- HSG services are efficient and effective and meet the diverse needs of vulnerable people of Blaenau Gwent
- Co-production and collaboration is at the centre of service development and delivery
- People who use services are placed at the heart of the HSG Programme
- The housing support needs of vulnerable people of Blaenau Gwent are understood and evidenced
- An inclusive framework for planning and commissioning of HSG services is adopted
- Creativity and innovation in the commissioning of HSG services is promoted

The Planning Group meets on a quarterly basis and drives forward the commissioning and delivery of HSG services in Blaenau Gwent.

The common themes between the HSG Providers state they have seen an increase of new floating support clients, e.g homeowners experiencing financial implication due to furlough ceasing. The need to increase floating support services for mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse and generic enabling the younger people aged 16-30 years to access services.

Some of the key themes to emerge from this workshop were that where clients were able to access support digitally during the pandemic, this enabled providers to support more people and saved on travel time. However, this only worked for some clients and it meant that more

vulnerable clients did not engage and were not receiving visual checks. There were also differencing levels of digital proficiency amongst support staff and service users, or a lack of suitable IT equipment, which also created some issues for the providers.

Providers identified further challenges around demands for

- seeking affordable homes for their service users.
- 1 – 3 bed accommodation for all client groups
- A lack of housing options (one bedroom) for vulnerable people with a Mental Health to move onto from supported accommodation – step down to living more independently in the community with/without support.
- Housing First priority for complex client groups
- Specific support (Non-Statutory) for young people with Learning Difficulties/Disabilities for 1 bed accommodation

The situation has exacerbated during the pandemic with demand in mental health, financial hardship, loneliness and isolation, coupled with higher waiting times as more people sought to access support.

Providers were also facing additional pressures around recruitment, training and retention of staff, which was hindering their abilities to deliver services and was further exacerbated by some of the uncertainty around funding. In addition, the lack of availability within other services, whose workloads had increased during the pandemic, made it hard to meet the needs of complex clients, who needed access to more specialist services.

Some of the key priorities that they identified as providers included more cooperation and collaboration with a wide range of partners, sharing information & data, promoting and marketing services and their positive impact, better accessibility and digitally inclusive approaches to support and securing a range of options to meet the needs of individuals

Service Review Feedback

The HSG Supporting People Commissioning Team regularly undertaken reviews of the services they commission, to ensure that they are being delivered effectively. As part of the review, questionnaires are issued to service users and several focused interviews take place, exploring in more detail the experiences of service users.

Some key themes to emerge from the reviews were:

- Consistency and reliability of support workers was important to people in engaging with services to build a relationship and trust.
- People want flexible and responsive support that is available and accessible outside of traditional hours.

- Support workers that are knowledgeable in homelessness and benefits processes.
- Isolation and challenges with managing mental health throughout the pandemic emerging through the feedback alongside increased need emotional support.
- Frustrations over the lack of alternative options and move on, particularly during the pandemic.
- Increased emotional support offered and welcomed throughout the pandemic

Service Monitoring Feedback

In addition to the service reviews, ongoing feedback is collected and collated to better understand the experience of service users and the outcomes achieved.

The results highlighted that all respondents in Blaenau Gwent were either Happy or Very Happy with the services that they had received through the HSG programme and there were no specific improvements or priorities identified. However, when asked about their experiences of using online services, the results showed that there were mixed reactions.

Of the 80 respondents 47 stated that there were no barriers to them accessing services online and many used online services to access basic services such as shopping, banking, benefits and housing services. However, others identified a lack of knowledge or understanding and limited or no access to technology, which presented a problem. There was also a small but significant cohort who did not want to get online or improve their digital skills.

The final question asked service users to identify whether, with suitable training and access to IT equipment, they would use online services to access support; 52 indicated that they would be happy to have a combination of the above and 17 replied that they still preferred face to face support.

The findings suggest that for some service users, improving their digital skills is something from which they would benefit, and this may be something that support providers can assist them to achieve. However, when it comes to the provision and delivery of support services, face to face remains low as others are open to exploring more digital approaches.

Key Points

- Services appear to be accessible and service users are generally very happy with the assistance they received
- Support workers go above and beyond, especially in times of crisis
- More specialist services needed to address complex / multiple needs
- Better collaboration and multiagency working will further improve service delivery
- More accommodation options remain a key priority for addressing existing needs

- More resources to increase capacity, reduce waiting times and offer different levels of support provision e.g. low-level longer-term support and more intensive support
- Increased training opportunities for all providers in key areas e.g. homelessness, substance misuse
- Increased promotion / marketing of service available
- Increased flexibility around support provision e.g. consideration for service users who cannot access support during 'Office Hours'
- Increased links to health and more joined up approaches to service delivery
- Some barriers to accessing support still exist, especially due to mental health and learning disabilities.

Research and National Publications

Preventing rough sleeping in Wales and reducing it in the short-term October 2019

This report is the first published by the Homelessness Action Group and addresses the question; what immediate actions can we take to reduce rough sleeping between now and the winter of 2019/20, and to end rough sleeping altogether?

Some key recommendations to emerge from the report included:

- Organisations that communicate about homelessness should agree a common approach that provides clear information about what can be done in the short term to help people who are rough sleeping or homeless, and in the longer term what they can do to help end homelessness.
- People who are at risk of homelessness need a 'no wrong door' approach
- Services need to remove the barriers and misunderstandings that prevent people from accessing the help they require, including the commissioning of outreach services and support to promote sustained solutions that support people out of homelessness for good.

Report from the Homelessness Action Group for the Welsh Government March 2020

This report sets out the overall framework of policies, plans and approaches that should be implemented to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and not repeated, followed by a series of recommendations to achieve this.

Recommendations in the report included:

- A shared sense of ownership for ending homelessness and making sure everyone has a home.
- An agreed outcomes framework and reporting via Welsh Budget processes to the Senedd
- Mutual accountability and support between public services.
- More support and recognition for workforces, including funding and supporting psychologically informed approaches across public services; and enabling volunteers and communities to play a role.
- A focus on dignity and respect for people experiencing homelessness and national structures for stakeholders, including people with lived experience, to feed into the planning, delivery and evaluation of all work.

One of the recommendations identified by the group was that public services, housing providers and support providers should ensure that people with lived experience of homelessness have opportunities to influence decisions and the delivery and evaluation of services to end homelessness.

By regularly engaging with service users and seeking their views of the services they have received and how these can be improved, Blaenau Gwent has developed a wealth of knowledge to assist it in delivering person centred and effective housing and housing related support services.

Report to Welsh Ministers from the Homelessness Action Group July 2020

This report provides more detail on scaling-up rapid rehousing approaches and joined-up partnerships and plans, as identified in the March report and also considers the impact of the coronavirus outbreak and the response.

As part of the recommendation of the report, the Welsh Government, local authorities and their partners are encouraged to continue working with social and private landlords to reduce and end evictions into homelessness, provide tenancy support, and ensure there are tenancy relations services in place.

Rough Sleeping Action Plan February 2018

The Two Year Action Plan reflected the concern of the Welsh Government and its partners following the recent rise in rough sleeping across Wales.

The Plan contains 24 points which the Welsh Government wanted to see implemented to effectively address rough sleeping and covered the following areas:

- Prevention
- Support
- Outreach
- Emergency Accommodation
- Housing First
- Legislation and statutory guidance
- Measuring and Monitoring
- Funding
- Joint Working
- Promoting Good Practice

Key Points:

- Early intervention and prevention are still considered the most effective ways of addressing homelessness, reducing rough sleeping and ensuring people get the help and support they require to live independently.
- Consistent and clear communication, coupled with a no wrong door approach is important for helping the most vulnerable to access the help they require
- Partnership working, pooling skill and joined up approaches can be beneficial in meeting needs
- Service users with first-hand experience of homelessness or housing need should be actively involved in shaping service delivery.

Key Local and Regional Strategies

Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

One of the key messages to emerge from the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Assessment is that there is widening inequality across Blaenau Gwent. Some of the information gathered in the assessment confirmed what was already known; where the most deprived communities are located and how people in these areas often experience multiple, complex needs which affect their well-being.²⁴

²⁴ Well-being Plan for Blaenau Gwent 2018 – 2023, Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board

However, even in less deprived areas, households were struggling with poor health, limited or no educational qualifications and unemployment or low-income levels.

During the assessment, the local authority talked to people across the borough and heard how most of them value green spaces, safe and clean streets, affordable housing and good health. They also highlighted the importance of affordable and timely transport to access education, employment and social activities. Based on the information gathered during the assessment, 7 wellbeing objectives were developed:

FIGURE 68 PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Develop a functional, connected network of natural areas that support the current and future well-being needs of local populations.	Develop mitigation and adaptation responses to the impacts of climate change.	Provide children and young people with the best possible start in life.	Support healthy lifestyles and enable people to age well.	Tackle the inter-generational patterns of poverty and develop economic resilience.	Improve local skills through work-force planning, training, apprenticeships, and volunteering opportunities.	Create safe, confident communities and promote community cohesion.

Gwent Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy 2018 – 2023

The effects of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence are serious and can have a significant impact not only for the victims, but for their immediate family.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out an integrated approach for stopping violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, which will improve the health and well-being of individuals and families affected by abuse whilst holding to account those who perpetrate the abuse.

The strategy aims to build on existing partnerships, further increase public awareness and deliver a robust response that ultimately creates a society where everybody can be free from violence, abuse and fear.

The Strategy organises the work that needs to be done along the three key strands of the national strategy:

- Prevention
- Protection
- Support

During its development, the strategy took into consideration current service provision, the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being Act and Welsh Government Policy, the

result of the needs assessment, a strategic analysis of needs and sought the views and opinions of victims and survivors. The evidence and data that was gathered led to the creation of 6 strategic priorities:

1. Increase awareness and challenge attitudes of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across Gwent.
2. Increase awareness in children and young people of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong
3. Increase focus on holding perpetrators to account and provide opportunities to change their behaviour based around victim safety
4. Make early intervention and prevention a priority
5. Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors
6. Provide victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs led, strength based, gender responsive services throughout the region.

These priorities and the accompanying Strategic Delivery plan will be used to work towards the prevention of violence and abuse, the protection of victims and the support of all those affected.

Strategy for Older People Phase 3: Blaenau Gwent Delivery Plan (2015 to 2023)

This local strategy is aimed at public services and how their actions can help people in Blaenau Gwent consider the issues of older age, to make plans and act wherever possible to foster well-being.

The strategy identified several key issues that will affect Blaenau Gwent and the provision of services.

- The number of older people in Blaenau Gwent is rising
- The number of single households amongst older people are increasing
- Population projections indicate there will be an 80% increase in the number of over 75s by 2031
- Depression and social isolation can affect as much as 1 in 7 people over the age of 65

The strategy set out the following areas of action which it seeks to address:

- Social Resources
- Environmental Resources
- Financial Resources
- Ageing well in Wales

The Gwent Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2022

The vision presented through the Gwent Homelessness strategy is that everyone in Gwent has a home to live in and the right support if they need it, to lead a fulfilling life. Through working together to overcome homelessness, the strategy establishes the following priorities:

- Priority 1: Help improve access to suitable and affordable housing
- Priority 2: Offer fast and effective advice and support, working with partners to help vulnerable people
- Priority 3: Minimise homelessness and prevent it through early intervention
- Priority 4: Ensure fair, equal and person-centred homeless services

The Homeless Review identified a number of areas of need across Gwent which informed the development of the strategy:

Phase II homelessness plan

The agreed Phase II homelessness plan supports the objectives presented through the Gwent Homelessness Strategy, by delivering a transformational plan to build capacity in support and accommodation options to meet the needs of our communities.

The Council's approach is to follow the core requirements of the guidance issued by Welsh Government which is outlined below:

- Support
- Plan
- Build
- Transform

The plan highlights that demand for accommodation across Blaenau Gwent remains high, especially for single person accommodation, which has been highlighted in recent years with the increase in the level of rough sleeping and further emphasised through the demand on services throughout the COVID 19 pandemic. Available data shows a decline in the use of temporary accommodation for families with an increase in placements for single people.

There is a need to provide more options for single people over the age of 21 and to ensure there are effective move on and support services in place to avoid protracted periods of time in temporary accommodation. This can only be done through a refocusing of resources and approach as demand for social housing is showing no signs of decreasing and approximately 60% of the common housing register comprising single people.

Additionally, waiting time for supported housing schemes is increasing with this currently being approximately 250 days, leaving options limited. Floating support services are much more

readily accessible, but individuals have been forced at times into more independent units of accommodation that do not necessarily meet their needs and requirements.

Service transformation is critical in addressing the needs of individuals seeking assistance. The Council has numerous services and systems in place that can be built upon and are critical to how services will transform to meet the needs of residents.

The pivotal part of the plan is focused upon the re-alignment of provision, creating a central HUB that will focus upon how single people will access accommodation and support services when they become homeless. This provides an opportunity to re-align services, bring in new services and review existing provision to meet the needs of residents. Collaboration is key to making this change and all agencies need to be fully committed to this change in order to ensure that the core principles of the plan are delivered as the Council cannot deliver this change alone. However, it is accepted that the Council is the lead agency in transforming services and in providing the strategic direction.

Summary

This needs assessment has identified several areas of concern that should be considered and addressed when developing the HSG Programme Delivery plan. The HSG programme must ensure that it continues to provide appropriate support, promotes 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 HSG strategy. Some groups in society are more likely to live in areas of deprivation than others and are likely to require greater levels of support. The HSG 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.

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.

Statement of Need

Current and Future Demands

A number of needs have been identified through this assessment which are set to continue to be an issue in the next few years:

Lack of suitable accommodation

One of the biggest pressures facing housing and HSG service delivery in Blaenau Gwent is the lack of suitable accommodation options, especially supported and semi supported accommodation. 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.

Accommodation has been an area of concern for some time, and it was frequently identified as a significant gap during stakeholder engagement. House prices are now beyond the means of many first-time buyers and rental values in the private sector, which is already a small sector in Blaenau Gwent, remain buoyant, making 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.

Existing schemes to deliver more affordable housing options are helping to address some of this need, but they cannot keep pace with the ever-increasing levels of demand. 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. Increasing accommodation options, especially for young people, will be given considerable focus over the next few years, aligning to the aims of the Phase II Homeless Plan and linking to the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA), to ensure that the needs identified within this assessment are reflected in the planning and delivery of future housing.

Increased levels of demand, including complex and multiple needs

The needs assessment has shown that demand for services remains high. 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%.

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.

For service users, increasing capacity and reducing waiting times for support was a priority to emerge from the service user engagement,

It is anticipated that the effects of the coronavirus pandemic are likely to lead to continued high levels of demand for services in the next few years, with more households requiring assistance as the economic and emotional effects of the pandemic begin to be felt. Mental health has already been identified as an area where demand increased significantly, whilst intelligence from housing association partners has identified a number of tenants who are currently in debt and will require more support once the existing protection around evictions are relaxed.

To meet this anticipated need, the Housing service will continue to explore new and better ways to deliver services, maximise existing capacity and seek to implement specialist provision where specific needs arise.

Multi agency approaches & limited resources

The Gateway identified that 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 HSG service, but other more complex needs require a multiagency approach.

The population needs assessment highlighted that the number of looked after children in Blaenau Gwent is high. It also noted that many children and young people in contact with the youth justice system are likely to be known to children's social care and are among those children and young people who are not in education, employment or training. Many of these young people will also be contacting the housing service for their accommodation needs.

Funding and commissioning of specialist VAWDASV services in Gwent was identified as complex and is provided by various agencies, which makes it difficult for practitioners in partnership organisations to understand who provides services in each local authority area. This creates a potential for services to be missed or duplicated, causing confusion and gaps in support, which increases the risk of services not effectively meeting the needs and safety of those accessing support.

The importance of partnership approaches and multiagency working have been made clear throughout this assessment and via engagement with stakeholders and partners. The importance of developing joined up service provision, where different agencies and services work together seamlessly, will not only improve people's outcomes, but will lead to more efficient and effective provision, through the pooling of resources and expertise, which will help to ensure the best use of resources, generate economies of scale and enable the local authority to deliver more services for the community.

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 to further develop partnership working and make the best use of available resources when developing the Delivery Plan and working to meet current and future demands.

Barriers to support, non-engagement & marginalised groups

There are still some individuals who struggling 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, so better awareness raising, and increased publicity is still needed. This will help to ensure that marginalised groups or those who may struggle to access services are aware of the assistance available to them.

Service user engagement also identified that mental health was a barrier, whilst the needs assessment highlighted a relatively high number of homeless applicants who disengage before reaching a satisfactory outcome. The Gateway also had a number of referrals for support that were rejected, often for disengagement or an inability to contact the service user.

Continuing to promote services and offer more flexibility will be vital for helping people to access the assistance they require at the earliest possible opportunity and prevent situations from escalating in the future.

High Demand Areas

This assessment has shown that some service users are more represented than others and there are some clear areas of demand which need to be monitored.

Single person households seeking assistance with their housing remains a challenge and will continue to be so until more suitable and affordable accommodation options are delivered.

Mental health has been an area demand for some time, which was further exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Existing provision is robust, but continued monitoring and regular reviews of services remains a priority, to ensure that they have the skills and capacity they need to address client needs.

Young people accessing services remains a concern and although the overall number of young people is expected to reduce in Blaenau Gwent over the next 20 years, current demand on services remains high. Young people leaving care or another form of institution is one the main reasons for youth homelessness and whilst a joined up approach to addressing the needs of young people exists via Blaenau Gwent Young Persons Support Service, the high numbers of looked after children in the borough indicate meeting the needs of young people will continue to be an area of pressure for some time. In addition, WIMD research suggests that young people are more likely to experience deprivation than other age groups, which can

result in a number of additional needs, which will further impact on service delivery, if not addressed at an early stage.

VAWDASV related abuse remains high, and it will be important to ensure that local service delivery aligns with the aims Gwent VAWDASV Commissioning Group. The assessment identified a lack of clarity and consistency across different local authorities, creating potential barriers, whilst existing data about VAWDASV incidents not sufficiently robust. Better collaboration and more coordinated approaches will be important for meeting current and future demand and enabling the delivery of more preventative measures.

The needs assessment also highlighted that Blaenau Gwent has an ageing population, which may have an effect on future levels of demand and service provision, as residents require more specific support and assistance.

Deprivation

Economic inactivity is an area of concern in Blaenau Gwent and commissioning HSG services that help to address the underlying causes will be essential. Inequality is widening and Blaenau Gwent has clear pockets of deprivation, so working to address financial inclusion, food bank usage, delivering more affordable housing options and offering tangible solutions, especially to young single households and who are particularly vulnerable remains vital, in supporting the wider poverty agenda. Blaenau Gwent has already expanded its financial inclusion service provision and will continue to review and adapt its services to meet emerging needs.

Digital Inclusion

The service user consultation looked specifically at the importance of digital inclusion, as an area of emerging need. Service users have indicated that access to online resources is often difficult and more support and assistance is needed to increase skills and improve access amongst service users. With more and more services being delivered online, the need for increased levels of digital inclusion is likely to be an area of demand both now and in the future.

Statutory Needs

Blaenau Gwent will continue to meet the statutory needs of the community through the provision of its existing Homeless services.

The assessment has shown that despite the positive work that already takes place in Blaenau Gwent to prevent and minimise homelessness, demand for services remains high and the ability to move households into settled accommodation is challenging, due to the limited amount of available or affordable housing.

Through the implementation of its Phase II Homeless Plan and the HSG 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 and, where this is not possible, to deliver more move on 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 also 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.
