

Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol
Blanaau Gwent
County Borough Council

**SOCIAL
SERVICES
DIRECTORATE**

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

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

Planning and commissioning are also undertaken at a regional level. This enables pooling expertise, making use of economies of scale, and in particular assessing the specific needs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

National policy or legislation	How it has informed service commissioning or provision
The Well being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015	The planning, commissioning and delivery of HSP services are aligned to the principles of the Act. We work in collaboration with key partners and people who use our services to develop and deliver sustainable services which meet not only current needs but also future needs of our citizens of Blaenau Gwent.
Housing (Wales) Act 2014, particularly Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, which is focused on homelessness prevention	The Supporting People Team is working closely with the Housing Solutions Team to ensure preventative and responsive HSP services are being delivered in the borough which meets this strategic agenda. For example, our range of floating support services provides support to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. We also fund a number of short term accommodation based services within the borough such as the homelessness hostel, refuge and young persons supported housing scheme.
Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act 2014	We funded specialist support workers who are located in the Adults Social Care Information, Advice and Assistance Team (the 'front door' to Adult Services in Blaenau Gwent), including a mental health support worker, a VAWDASV (Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence) support worker and a housing support worker. The support workers ensure people receive timely, effective support which assists in preventing them having to access statutory services.
Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015	We ensure housing related support services are commissioned which supports people affected by gender based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence. We have continued to further develop our VAWDASV services in Blaenau Gwent. Our women's refuge provision now

Key findings

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

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

Regular reviews of existing provision will be required to ensure that services are fit for purpose, forward planning and meet both existing and emerging need. Preventative approaches and multi-agency working will be vital for effectively addressing some of the

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

House prices and rental values make access unaffordable in some parts of the borough. In

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

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

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

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

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

There was a need for enhanced cross-boundary working

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

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

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

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

- **Stakeholder Consultations**
 - **Stakeholder Survey (2020 & 2021)**
 - **Provider Forums**
 - **Quarterly Partnership Meetings**
 -

- Homelessness
strategy & plan
- Younger People
strategy & plan
- Housing
Adaptation &
Disabled Facility

Fundamental to the HSP is to help people live independently in the community. This includes not just access but assessing and influencing supply and suitable accommodation. This priority reflects Blaenau Gwent's emphasis on rapid rehousing and the development of our Rapid Rehousing Plan. Our needs assessment has evidenced a need for affordable 1-3 bedroom properties, step down accommodation from supported housing, housing first properties for people with complex needs and bespoke accommodation and support for people with learning difficulties. We will continue to work with social and private rented sector landlords to sustain tenancies and increase access to affordable housing.

We know that timeliness and suitability of support is something that our service users depend upon. We will continue to innovate our offer as more becomes known of user needs, and as new technologies unlock the ability to support people in new and responsive ways. Our needs assessment has evidenced for the first time a demand for floating support services for homeowners whose livelihoods have been affected by the Covid pandemic and the furlough scheme. There has been a further increase in demand for housing related support services for people with mental health issues, young people, people affected by VAWDASV and people with substance misuse issues. We will continue to maximise access to a range of support and raise awareness of the housing support grant services, encouraging self help and resilience.

Housing Support services exist to help prevent homelessness, social exclusion, isolation and institutionalisation. Early intervention aims to reduce undue escalation to avoid a crisis situation, with knock on impact to health, inclusion and

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

Working with Partners

As the Public Policy Institute for Wales summarises in its Tackling Homelessness, A Rapid Evidence Review 2015 report

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

The root causes that lead to homelessness and/or evident housing support needs among vulnerable individuals and households are profoundly interconnected. Therefore the successful implementation of this strategy fundamentally depends on coordination, joint planning, commissioning and delivery of services (by both internal local authority departments, statutory partners and the housing sector).

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

We have good links to the Gwent Regional Partnership Board. The Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) introduced Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) bringing together health, social services, the third sector and other partners to take forward the delivery of integrated services across regions. This is a key objective of the Act.

Source: Gwent Council

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

Funding Sources

At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, as the stay at home regulations came into force in Wales, the Minister for Housing and Local Government announced £10m of extra funding to ensure no one was left without access to accommodation. This meant that everyone could follow public health advice on basic hygiene, and hand washing enabled them to follow social distancing guidelines and ensured they could self-isolate if they become ill.

As a result of the announcement, the Housing Options Team offered emergency accommodation to 35 households that have approached them as 'rough sleeping' who at the time were not owed any homelessness duty or there was no reason to believe a priority need existed.

A further £20m of extra funding was announced later in the year for Local Authorities to set out how they will ensure that no one needs to return to the street, focusing on innovation, building and remodelling to transform the accommodation offer across Wales.

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

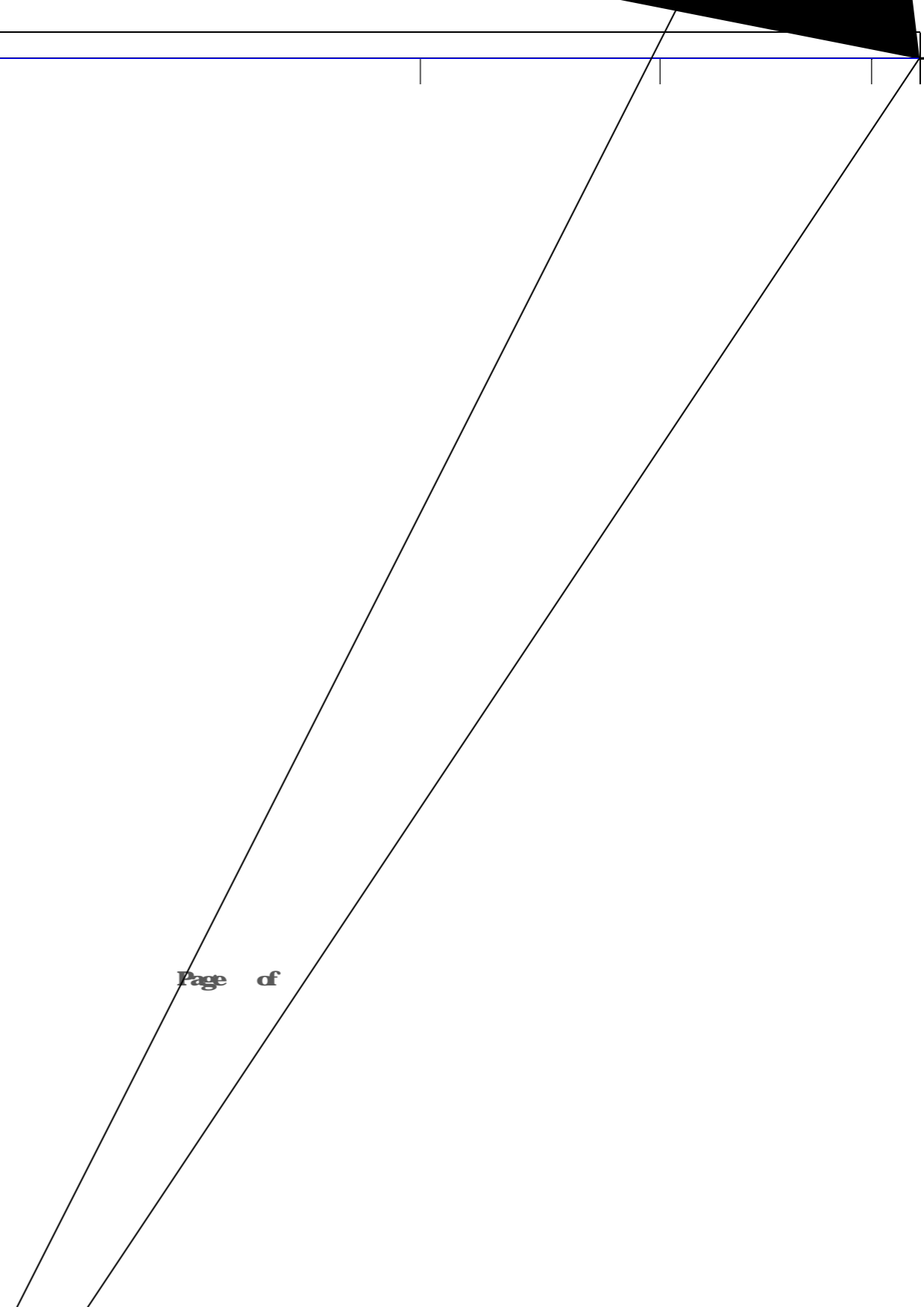
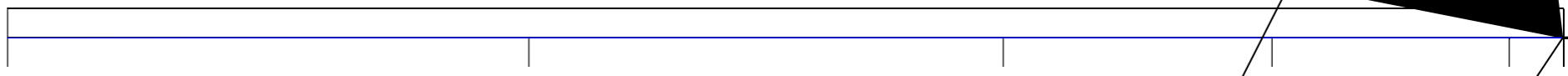
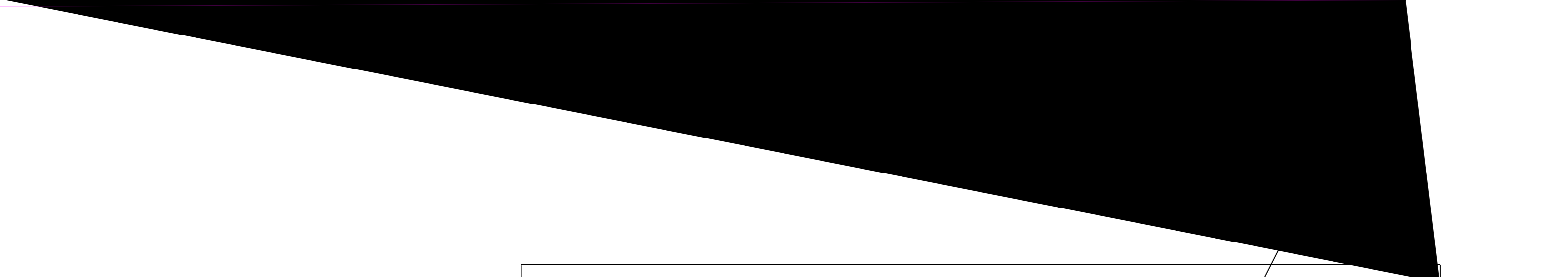
- **Refurbishment of an existing building that has been empty since November 2017 within Tai Calon Community Housing stock, making it available as a Housing First Project to provide clients with settled accommodation first and then intense support immediately thereafter.**

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

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

The group convenes on a quarterly basis.

<p>Develop and implement a Rapid Rehousing Plan</p>	<p>Develop and adopt a rapid rehousing approach</p>	<p>2023</p>	<p>Housing Solutions and Supporting People Managers</p>
<p>Review and repurpose the current Move On Panel to improve access to move on accommodation for people living in supported accommodation</p>	<p>Timely move on from support</p>		



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- fleeing from domestic abuse/VAWDASV (including male victims)
- discharge from remand/custody
- a risk of homelessness or sleeping rough
- older people at risk of homelessness or in need of housing support
- pregnancy and families in need of housing support

Agree and implement the recommendations from each of the above reviews

ensuring people access timely and effective support

A reduction in the risk or negative impact on these individuals' and families' health, wellbeing and social exclusion

<p>Identify good practice focusing on relationship breakdown, rent arrears and tied accommodation</p>	<p>The range of commissioned prevention services meet the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent and prevents them from having to access statutory services</p>	<p>December 2022</p>	<p>Team Manager- Housing Solutions and Compliance</p>
<p>Carry out a review of rough sleeping and demand for emergency accommodation and direct access hostels within Blaenau Gwent</p>	<p>Reduction in rough sleeping by improving the availability and access to emergency accommodation provision to address rough sleeping within Blaenau Gwent</p>	<p>Annually</p>	<p>Team Manager- Housing Solutions and Compliance</p>
<p>Explore models of delivering Housing First for rough sleepers</p>	<p>Reduction in rough sleeping by developing independent accommodation based projects aimed at addressing the needs of rough sleepers and 'hard to house' clients</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Team Manager- Housing Solutions and Compliance</p>

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<p>user input and relevant legislation in relation to young people</p>				
<p>Develop a greater understanding of all the services provided for vulnerable households, what services are delivered and how they are funded, including the voluntary and third sector</p>	<p>to minimise support and services available to vulnerable individuals and households in need by enhancing the work of voluntary groups and services across Blaenau Gwent and the region that is provided to vulnerable households</p>	<p>Ongoing sea</p>	<p>F Team Manager- Housing Solutions and Compliance</p>	
<p>Review current provision and access arrangements to debt and money management services, agree and implement the recommendations</p>	<p>A reduction in poq d—m</p>			

Identify and arrange training on wider Housing Support issues				
Review Blaenau Gwent C.B.C.'s adverse weather policy in partnership with key stakeholders and amend as needed	Reduction in rough sleeping in inclement weather by ensuring Extreme Weather Plans are reviewed and fit for purpose	Spring 2022	Team Manager- Housing Solutions and Compliance	
Review homelessness prevention and housing support procedures and processes to ensure legal compliance Implement revisions and provide appropriate training with an annual review as required	Relevant legislation is fully integrated and applied in housing support and homelessness prevention assessment policies and procedures, ensuring services are legally compliant	July 2022/Annually	Team Manager- Housing Solutions and Compliance	

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

sustained with key strategic groups across the locality and region				
Promote career opportunities within the housing support sector with the Sector through the provision of a Regional virtual Open Day	Recruitment and retention of staff into the sector is increased	Feb 2022 and on going	Gwent Regional Development Co ordinator	
Identify joint funding arrangements with partners for the commissioning and delivery of housing support services commencing with establishing funding opportunities for prescribing places in relation to the Substance Misuse Outreach Services	A holistic substance misuse service is commissioned which also provides access to prescribing places to better meet the needs of the people accessing the service	Ongoing	Supporting People Manager	
Develop local information sharing arrangements in line with GDPR in order to aid greater joint working and integration of services and outcomes Examine models of co working/co funding to deliver services more effectively Review the case recording system, datab	To create greater connectivity and integration between the range of support and preventative interventions, increasing the effectiveness of services overall	Ongoing	Team Managers - Housing Solutions and Compliance and Supporting People	

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



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

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

Local Authorities - Strategic Lead Officer representatives	Blaina/Gwent	Alyson Hoskins (Social Services)
	Caerphilly	Viv Daye (Social Services)
	Monmouthshire	Sharon Lloyd (Partnerships)
	Newport	Chris Humphrey (Social Services)
	Torfaen	Simon Rose (Housing)
Local Authorities - HSP Lead Officers	Blaina/Gwent	Michelle Church
	Caerphilly	Shelly Jones
	Monmouthshire	Lyn Webber
	Newport	Ngel Stannard
	Torfaen	Rachael Lewis

Appendix 2 Gwent Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022



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

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

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

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

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

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- **Improving access to services and ensuring people get the support and treatment when**