

**TORFAEN
COUNTY
BOROUGH**



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TORFAEN**

Housing Support Programme Strategy

2022 - 2026



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Foreword



I am pleased to present Torfaen's first Housing Support Programme Strategy, which sets out the Council's vision for addressing both Homelessness and Housing Support needs within the borough.

It has long been acknowledged that addressing homelessness and its root causes requires an holistic and coordinated approach, working with a range of partners to develop suitable solutions.

This Strategy will build upon the existing good practice that takes place in Torfaen and further enhances the work of the Housing sector to provide positive, long-term outcomes for some of our borough's most vulnerable residents.

Through the use of more innovative approaches for addressing housing needs and the ongoing commissioning of vital support services, we can continue to mitigate the devastating effects that homelessness can have on our residents and ensure that we are providing the right services, at the right time, to ensure that everyone can access and maintain good quality affordable housing in Torfaen.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Daniels".

Executive Member for Communities, Housing and Anti-Poverty

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Strategy

The Torfaen Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy has been developed to provide a clear and coherent approach for addressing the housing and support needs of the local community, to prevent homelessness and promote greater sustainability of accommodation through a range of interventions and support services.

The strategy sets out the single strategic direction for the delivery of homelessness prevention and housing related support services in Torfaen over the next four years (2022 – 2026), providing a unified approach to meeting current and future demands.

The vision, principles and key priorities for the local authority and its partners are contained within this strategy, as well as the regional housing related support strategic objectives, as agreed by the partners and Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group.

These priorities have been developed following a thorough assessment of local need, extensive consultation with stakeholders and service users on a local and regional basis, as well as reference to existing legislation, current policy and relevant research.

In developing the strategic direction, it was important to ensure an holistic approach was taken, with services complimenting each other and working together to deliver a coordinated and cohesive approach, providing suitable provision for addressing both homelessness and housing related support needs.

The 2018 Gwent Homeless Strategy has been reviewed as part of this process to ensure that any existing needs have been reflected in the new strategic priorities, as well as any emerging needs, enabling Torfaen to meet both the existing statutory requirements for a homelessness strategy under Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and the requirements of the Housing Support programme.

1.2 Legislative and policy context

National Context

The requirements within existing legislation and policy have informed and shaped the development of this strategy.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

This sets out the legal requirements for delivering housing services across Wales, including a duty on local authorities to periodically carry out a homeless review and develop a homeless strategy. This HSP strategy will provide an integrated approach that meets both the statutory requirements for a homelessness strategy and the delivery of the Housing Support Programme, by supporting the local authority to prevent or alleviate homelessness through available resources and support mechanisms.

Strategy for Preventing and Ending Homelessness and Action Plan

The strategy sets out the Welsh Government approach for addressing homelessness in Wales. The strategy is underpinned by a number of key principles and delivery will be supported by an annual action plan. The strategy supports the Welsh Government's aims to ensure that homelessness remains rare, brief and unrepeatable, through the implementation of earlier preventative measures and the adoption of rapid rehousing approaches.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Act seeks to implement long-term and sustainable social, environmental and economic improvements across Wales and limit the negative impacts for future generations. Explicit links exist between homelessness and the principles of the Well-being Act. The Act aims to deliver sustainable long-term outcomes and this principle underpins the HSP Strategy, which will provide sustainable housing solutions and suitable support provision for households experiencing difficulties within Torfaen.

Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016

This Act aims to improve and regulate renting in Wales, by providing greater protection and more security of tenure. Improving the sector will help local authorities to discharge their homeless duties across different rented sectors, assist in preventing homelessness and support the long-term needs of service users; for whom the provision of good quality affordable housing remains vital.

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

Councils and local health boards are required to work together to assess people's care and support needs, taking into consideration a wide range of themes including housing, support and health. These themes form an integral part of the HSP programme and detailed consideration has been given to them within the Needs Assessment, to identify current levels of demand, available provision, gaps and future trends, which has informed the development of this strategy and its vision.

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

Local authorities and health boards must deliver local strategies that support the themes of this Act; prevention, protection and support. Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) is an area of concern within Torfaen, with a high number of incidents recorded in recent years and often contributing towards levels of homelessness in the borough. In developing this

strategy, due consideration has been given to how it can support and compliment the work of the Act in addressing the needs of households affected by VAWDASV.

Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019 – 2022

This plan sets out the priority areas that the Welsh Government will focus on, to reduce the harms associated with substance misuse, ensure that people are aware of the impact of substance misuse and that anyone who needs it, can access information, help and support. The HSP Strategy will work to ensure that the aims of this Plan are being delivered locally, through ongoing monitoring of demand and regular service reviews.

Together for Mental Health: A Strategy for Mental Health and Wellbeing in Wales

Together for Mental Health sets out the goals of the Welsh Government for improving mental health and mental health services across Wales, promoting mental wellbeing and helping people with mental health problems to get the support they require. Mental health has been identified as an area of significant need within Torfaen and strengthening and advocating access to mental health support provision is one of the strategic priorities within this strategy

Equality Act 2010

Protection from discrimination is at the heart of the Housing Support programme and this strategy seeks to empower individuals to take an active role in society and promote greater independence, through the provision of dedicated support services. An equality impact assessment has been carried out as part of the strategy development and services are regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure that service users with protected characteristics are not directly or indirectly discriminated from accessing services.

Housing Support Grant Guidance

The HSP guidance underpins the delivery of the Housing Support Programme, setting out the purpose, eligibility criteria and delivery criteria that the local authority must satisfy in relation to its strategic planning, needs assessments and service monitoring. Due consideration has been given to the guidance when developing this strategy, to ensure that it satisfies the requirements for planning and delivering HSP services.

Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2016

The Code sets out clear guidance for local authorities discharging their duties in relation to the allocation of accommodation and homelessness. In developing the priorities of this strategy, the requirements of the Code and the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 were reviewed, to ensure that the strategy supported and complimented the local authority's delivery of its statutory duties.

Local/Regional context

Homes Matter - Local Housing Strategy 2018 - 2021

The Local Housing Strategy (LHS) recognised that there were 4 key issues that influenced someone's ability to access housing:

- People – the specific needs and requirements of the individual
- Place – the communities where people lived or aspired to live
- Policy – the policies underpinning housing delivery and allocation

- Provision – the availability of housing and services

It was important to consider each of these issues separately when delivering the Local Housing Strategy and determine the most suitable housing solutions.

The LHS has informed the development of the HSP Strategy, by highlighting the importance of placing people at the heart of services and promoting an holistic approach for delivering tangible solutions. The HSP Strategy directly supports the aims of the LHS, taking into account the individual needs and requirements of the people accessing services, their current and future demands, where provision is most needed and the policies that will support and influence the delivery of these services.

Torfaen Corporate Plan 2016-2021

Torfaen's third Corporate Plan sets out how the council intends to create an improved, more equal and sustainable future. The plan contains 3 priorities:

- A clean and green Torfaen,
- Raising educational attainment and
- Support for Torfaen's most vulnerable residents.

The HSP Strategy compliments and supports all three corporate priorities, but with a particular emphasis on assisting residents who are vulnerable and in greatest need.

Well-being Plan for Torfaen 2018 - 2023

This Plan is an essential reference document for public services operating in Torfaen. It identifies 7 objectives; based on the findings of a wellbeing assessment, which seek to improve the long-term wellbeing of residents and deal with complex issues that require all partners to work together across both public bodies and private organisations. Findings from the wellbeing assessment have informed the HSP Needs Assessment and development of this HSP Strategy.

Phase II Homeless Plan

The Phase II Plan sets out how Torfaen will reshape service delivery to best support homeless households to access permanent accommodation solutions. The plan details some specific approaches that will be taken by the local authority in the next few years and has informed the development and delivery of this strategy, especially the provision of accommodation needs and requirements both now and in the future.

Torfaen Financial Inclusion Strategy

This strategy follows the principles of the Local Housing Strategy, by focusing on People, Place, Policy and Provision, as the key drivers for identifying those most at risk, delivering a range of provisions and ensuring that policies dovetail. The HSP programme directly contributes to the delivery of this strategy through the provision of financial inclusion services.

1.3 Vision and Principles

Vision

Everyone who lives in Torfaen has a home that meets their needs and the necessary support and assistance to lead a fulfilling life.

Principles

The following principles will be followed to help deliver this vision:

- We will work to ensure that every person in Torfaen has fair and equal access to good quality affordable housing, housing related support and housing advice, at the earliest possible opportunity, in order to prevent homelessness and / or maintain independent living.
- We will maximise the delivery of support services through collaboration and joint working with our partners, identifying opportunities to develop services that will reduce homelessness and maximise positive outcomes.
- Where homelessness cannot be prevented, we will work to ensure that it remains brief and unrepeatable.
- We will continue to review services and consult regularly with our service users and stakeholders to maintain a good knowledge of housing needs and demands in the borough.

The vision and principles of this strategy will directly support and compliment the delivery of the Torfaen Wellbeing Plan and its objectives, which seek to make Torfaen a great place to live, work and visit, where children have the best start in life and where people have the opportunity to work, learn and live healthier and prosperous lives.

Through the successful implementation of this strategy, the Housing Support Programme and the housing service, in conjunction with its key partners, will work to ensure that people can access the housing and housing related support they require to live fulfilled lives, experience a greater sense of wellbeing and achieve more positive outcomes.

2. Needs Assessment

The needs assessment analysed a wide range of data from different sources, to determine the levels of homelessness, housing need and support provision within Torfaen, whilst extensive consultation was carried out with service users and stakeholders to better understand their concerns and priorities. The findings were used to identify current trends, areas of growth and gaps in provision, which have helped to shape the strategic priorities of this strategy and the Statement of Need.

A copy of the Needs Assessment can be found in **Appendix 1**.

2.1 Needs Assessment process

The Needs Assessment was carried out using a variety of data sources including national statistics, regional data and local intelligence, to provide quantitative data about the levels of need within Torfaen. This was then complimented with qualitative information from service users, stakeholders and other key partners, who had direct experience of either providing or accessing these services locally.

The intelligence collected through the assessment process provided a comprehensive understanding of existing provision; including levels of need and demand, current challenges, gaps in provision and areas of priority; both now and in the future.

2.2 Key findings

The following sources of information were used when carrying out the assessment:

- Office of National Statistics (ONS)
- Food Bank usage and Free School Meals
- Torfaen Well - being Assessment
- Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)
- Gwent Population Needs Assessment 2018
- Local Homelessness and Housing data
- Housing Support Programme Gateway and Outcomes data
- 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: Torfaen Delivery Plan (2015 to 2023)
 - Gwent Homeless Strategy 2018
 - Phase II Homelessness Plans

Some of the main themes which emerged from the Needs Assessment and which have helped to shape the strategic priorities of this strategy include:

Accommodation and a lack of supported / semi supported accommodation

One of the most significant gaps in Torfaen is the lack of affordable housing. There are unprecedented levels of demand for housing across the UK and Torfaen is no exception. Single person accommodation is particularly limited and waiting lists for housing are growing. There is a particular need for more supported and semi supported accommodation options, to assist households who have multiple support needs and to ensure that tenancies are sustainable and can succeed.

Delivering more accommodation will be a considerable challenge and requires a multiagency approach, but through the realigning of existing services and by working closely with partners in both planning and housing strategy, Torfaen will work to develop policies that will promote the creation of better housing solutions in the future.

Increased levels of demand

Housing support and homelessness services have both experienced a significant increase in demand in recent years, coupled with more service users being supported for longer periods of time. This has led to additional pressures, so the service continues to review and where necessary, increase access to these services to better meet these needs and ensure that the local authority is prepared for any future demands which are likely to emerge.

Complex and multiple needs

More households with complex or multiple needs are contacting the housing service for assistance, which makes finding suitable solutions more difficult. Stakeholder feedback strongly emphasised the importance of developing and commissioning more dedicated support services to address identified levels of need, as well as the importance of collaboration and more coordinated multiagency approaches.

Disengagement and barriers to support

Homelessness statistics and HSP referral data has identified a significant number of service users who do not engage with the services offered to them. This is a particularly serious problem for temporary accommodation, with households losing their emergency accommodation and, as a result, failing to secure suitable long-term housing provision.

Early intervention and prevention

Evidence has shown that where preventative approaches have been used, they were very successful in reducing levels of acute need. Working together with households who were at risk of homelessness has proved to be extremely beneficial, with the local authority having a higher rate of success for preventing homelessness than for relieving it. Focussing more resources on early intervention approaches, therefore, will ensure that situations are addressed quickly and do not deteriorate into crisis.

Existing provision and future demand

Torfaen continues to provide a wide range of services, both locally and on a regional basis, ranging from high level intensive residential support through to low level activity groups, enabling a broad range of needs to be met. Feedback regarding existing provision has been extremely positive from both service users and stakeholders, which helps to reaffirm that current provision is meeting a need. However, continual monitoring of services to meet new and emerging needs will remain a priority throughout this strategy.

Some gaps and areas of concern were identified during the assessment, including an increased demand for accommodation, a rise in mental health amongst service users and households experiencing complex or multiple needs.

Engagement with stakeholders has also highlighted some emerging areas of support. The use of the internet has led to more online abuse, the needs of the LGBTQ+ community are still underrepresented and the rise in hoarding are just some examples of where more support provision and intervention may be required over the next few years.

Areas of deprivation

Some of the wider pressures being experienced by residents within the local authority are impacting on the housing service, highlighting the importance of collaborative and multi-agency approaches for addressing need.

Economic inactivity, widening inequality and pockets of deprivation across Torfaen present many challenges, with an increased demand for financial inclusion services, a lack of affordable housing options leading to greater reliance on social housing and in some cases, increased homelessness and rough sleeping.

Housing cannot mitigate these pressures alone, but is a key partner in the delivery of the Torfaen Wellbeing plan and through collaboration with other service areas, can support the delivery of long term, viable solutions, which will enable people to achieve more positive outcomes.

2.3 Conclusion

The Statement of Need clearly showed that there were some key areas of demand and some common themes, which the local authority will need to address. There are also some new areas of need emerging, which will require further monitoring and possible support provision in the future.

The need for more housing provision locally; to better meet both current and emerging demands, was clearly highlighted within the need's assessment. Therefore, the development of more supported housing provision locally has been identified as one of the key priorities within this strategy.

The increased levels of demand for services, the importance of early intervention and the complex needs of some households, has also been highlighted as areas of pressure. When developing the priorities within this strategy, it was important that

these issues were reflected within the strategic priorities and suitable actions put in place to mitigate against them, including strengthening access to mental health provision and VAWDASV provision, enhancing early intervention and assertive outreach services; which are key tools for addressing homelessness and helping to ensure that any occurrences are both rare and brief, as well as working collaboratively and constructively with partners to embed a rapid rehousing approach locally.

Further priorities which emerged from the Statement of Need, were in relation to the importance of continually monitoring and reviewing demand for services and ensuring that services are both visible and accessible. Existing data has shown that levels of disengagement for some services are higher than would be hoped and that there may be barriers which are making access difficult. It is also important that the Housing Support Programme continues to review and adapt its services as new trends emerge, to ensure that services remain fit for purpose.

Finally, the pressures around workforce development have come through very strongly from stakeholder engagement, with many providers experiencing difficulty in retaining or recruiting a sustainable workforce. So, a priority of this strategy will be to continue supporting and assisting providers to address this particular area of concern. The ability to successfully meet these needs and deliver appropriate solutions remains challenging and cannot always be achieved by one service area. However, with better collaboration and more joined up service delivery, this strategy will work to meet both the current and future demands identified.

3. Strategic Priorities

3.1 Local housing related support strategic objectives and priorities

1. Reviewing and developing our supported accommodation offering to meet the accommodation and support needs of vulnerable individuals within our community.

Demand for accommodation was clearly identified as an area of need within the assessment, especially for single person households. The number of single person households presenting as homeless, entering temporary accommodation, sleeping rough or unable to access accommodation due to limited supply and rising costs (especially as a result of welfare benefit reforms), has made this a matter of extreme urgency, with many stakeholders identifying accommodation as a key priority.

This strategic priority will be delivered by the realignment of existing accommodation services and a partnership approach across a range of agencies and providers. Additional accommodation will also be made available through existing supported housing projects, alongside other dispersed accommodation units provided by Torfaen County Borough Council through its statutory provision.

The key actions to deliver this priority are:

- We will understand the needs and demands of our communities to develop accommodation and support options to meet emerging needs and demand.
- We will increase the supply of single unit supported accommodation provision to support single people who are experiencing homelessness access and sustain their accommodation.
- We will develop a network of dispersed emergency bed provision to assist with the supply and management of emergency accommodation to those presenting as homeless.
- We will ensure that all individuals accommodated in temporary accommodation are able to access support.
- We will develop and pilot innovative approaches to emerging challenges and complex needs via a grant initiative to allow the development of new ways of working.

2. Strengthen access to mental health support provision to meet the increase in demand

The assessment identified an increase in the number of people with complex needs requiring access to mental health support provision. Mental Health was the second highest need amongst service users of Housing Support Programme services and the number of Local Primary Mental Health Support Services (LPMHSS) assessments across the Aneurin Bevan Health Board remains high.

To meet this continued level of demand, the authority will undertake a comprehensive review of current provision and work with key partners to ensure effective services are delivered to meet future need.

The key actions to deliver this priority are:

- We will work with a range of partners to review the provision of mental health services to understand the gaps in existing service provision and progress the development of housing support solutions.
- We will ensure that mental health housing support services are accessible through the provision of a range of service options.
- We will ensure that support workers are able to access basic mental health training to effectively support individuals with a mental health need.

3. Enhance early intervention and assertive outreach services to minimise the negative impact of homelessness.

Early intervention and assertive outreach services have been identified as the most effective way for reducing homelessness and its associated risks and Torfaen has had some success in preventing homelessness locally, through preventative approaches.

Torfaen will deliver this priority by further developing its prevention toolkit and building upon the existing good practice that already takes place, to ensure that levels of homelessness are further minimised.

The key actions to deliver this priority are:

- We will promote housing support services and available early intervention initiatives to enable residents to access housing advice and support in a timely way.
- We will enable access to timely financial advice and support to enable sustainment of accommodation.
- We will sustain a triage mechanism to ensure that individuals are accessing the most suitable support provision for their needs in a timely manner.
- We will ensure that assertive outreach provision is available to support individuals who are at risk of rough sleeping.
- Working with key stakeholders (RSL's and wider partners) to progress the zero evictions agenda.

4. Strengthen access to VAWDASV support provision to meet the increase in demand

Data gathered through the Needs Assessment has shown that VAWDASV related services are in high demand. Torfaen has had the highest rate of sexual offences per 1000 people in Gwent in recent years, whilst support for women experiencing domestic abuse remains one of the top reasons for service users accessing the Housing Support Programme. The Gwent VAWDASV needs assessment also highlighted a need for service support which extends across local authority boundaries.

To deliver this priority, it will be necessary to continue aligning with regional and national services to guarantee that services are being delivered effectively and opportunities to work collaboratively are explored.

The key actions to deliver this priority are:

- We will continue to engage with the VAWDASV fora at a local, regional and national level to develop and align strategic priorities and commissioning plans.
- We will ensure that accessible services are available through the provision of a range of service options to support victims of VAWDASV to feel safe in their own homes, identify patterns of abusive behaviours and to achieve independent living as far as possible within their community.
- We will ensure that vulnerable women (including those with dependent children) with complex needs who are fleeing their home due to VAWDASV issues are able to access a range of refuge provision options to meet their needs and circumstances.
- We will support access to Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA), Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA) and Freedom Programme or equivalent services.
- We will ensure that services for victims of Domestic Abuse are available to all individuals with a housing related support need.
- We will proactively identify the barriers of engagement within community-based support services to ensure equality of access and equity of treatment.

5. Embed a Rapid Rehousing approach to ensure that where homelessness is experienced it's brief and unrepeatable.

Providing homeless households with emergency accommodation has been a key focus of the local authority, providing safe and secure interim housing whilst they wait for a long-term solution.

However, households can remain in temporary accommodation for a significant amount of time, which can have a negative impact on their wellbeing and could have been mitigated if a move to more settled accommodation had occurred sooner. In addition, the needs assessment identified a significant number of households in Torfaen who were offered temporary accommodation, but who failed or ceased to occupy it.

The benefits of adopting a Rapid Rehousing approach are that it will seek to offer people long term housing as quickly as possible, whilst also providing them with

additional support and assistance to enable them to retain this accommodation, removing the need for a potentially lengthy stay in interim housing.

To deliver this priority, the local authority will develop and adopt a Rapid Rehousing transition Plan, setting out how it intends to achieve this priority.

The key actions to deliver this priority are:

- We will progress the development of Rapid Rehousing approaches to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and not repeated.
- We will review policies, procedures and pathways to enable the adoption of a rapid rehousing approach.
- We will work with partners and stakeholders to develop and communicate the rapid rehousing approach and plan.

6. Continue to monitor and assess levels of demand for housing related support, reviewing and adapting services to meet current trends and requirements for people who are or may become homeless.

The needs assessment, and in particular service user feedback, highlighted that the current provision of services was extremely positive and already meeting many identified needs.

However, some issues emerged which will require further monitoring, to determine their long-term impact on service delivery; for instance, levels of non-engagement and disengagement, the number of service users being supported for longer and the potential impacts of an ageing population.

To deliver this priority the service will continue to gather intelligence that will enable a thorough understanding to be maintained of service demand and emerging requirements.

The key actions to deliver this priority are:

- We will work with our providers and stakeholders to review and monitor service provision to ensure that services remain responsive and relevant.
- We will engage with service users to develop and improve our support offer.
- We will continue to work with the provider community to respond to and adapt to emerging trends and issues.
- We will review the capacity of provision regularly via our Gateway service and respond to any emergent needs and demands.

7. Strengthening and building collaborative approaches and constructive partnerships to improve outcomes for homeless households

The importance of working collaboratively and building upon existing good practice has been identified through the needs assessment and via stakeholder consultation, as an important step in providing an holistic service that will effectively address a range of multiple and complex needs.

This will be achieved by developing a better understanding of existing provision and reviewing how these services can best meet the needs of those accessing them.

The key actions to deliver this priority are:

- We will continue to engage with Gwent regional colleagues to develop jointly commissioned services and share knowledge and resources (where appropriate) to best meet the emergent needs and demands within the Gwent region.
- We will continue to engage with multiagency fora to progress collaborative solutions to the challenges we are facing.
- Strengthen the role of the Gateway to ensure access to services are coordinated and streamlined.
- Engaging with the Area Planning Board (APB) to develop seamless substance misuse provisions and pathways.
- We will work with Children's services to implement a pathway for young people who may also be care leavers.
- We will work in collaboration with regional colleagues to explore responses to complex needs and Hospital Discharge pathways to prevent homelessness.

8. Strengthen accessibility of services and increase awareness to ensure that housing provision is visible within our communities.

The needs assessment clearly highlighted that where early intervention work was carried out, the results were often more successful than those instances where assistance was provided later.

However, consultation with service users and stakeholders identified that an knowledge of the housing service and HSP services was often limited and that awareness raising remains an important priority.

Raising the profile of the services available will be achieved using a wide range of communication mechanisms, in conjunction with our key partners, and by careful targeting to ensure that as broad a cross section of the population as possible are aware of the assistance that is available.

The key actions to deliver this priority are:

- We will continue to promote housing and housing support services and available early intervention initiatives with stakeholders.
- We will promote services via a range of different communication methods to ensure that all members of the community can access services in a timely manner.
- Develop a communications plan exploring the most appropriate methods of engagement and awareness raising.
- We will proactively engage with people with lived experience and wider stakeholders to understand the barriers to accessing and engaging with support.

9. Invest in workforce development to ensure a highly skilled, responsive and sustainable workforce.

Consultation and ongoing discussions with service providers has highlighted that they are struggling to recruit and retain staff, which is having an impact on the Housing Support Programme and the ability to commission and deliver services.

To deliver this priority we will work with service providers to identify areas of pressure and implement appropriate actions to resolve them.

The key actions to deliver this priority are:

- Continue to support the provider community to develop different methods of promoting recruitment to the support sector.
- We will ensure that support workers are able to access the appropriate and necessary basic training to effectively support individuals with a range of complex needs.
- Making sure commissioning and procurement practices contribute to the development of a sustainable workforce.

3.2 Regional housing related support strategic objectives

There are some needs which are common across the region and which can be more effectively met through the implementation of a collaborative approach.

The following objectives have been developed and agreed with partners and the Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group for delivery on a regional basis:

- Deliver high quality, effective and responsive services
- Expand our reach by collaborating and working in partnership
- Strengthen engagement and accessibility

Deliver high quality, effective and responsive services

It has been identified during the development of this strategy, that service providers; many of whom work across the region, are currently struggling to recruit and retain staff, so adopting a regional response to this pressure has been identified as a more effective way of addressing this problem.

To achieve this objective, the following initiatives will be implemented:

- Promote and increase training opportunities for staff
- Develop an on-line virtual HSP platform and use it to run an e-open day event

Expand our reach by collaborating & working in partnership

The Gwent region has for many years worked together in partnership to expand the range of services it provides. Jointly commissioning services in this way has been an effective and efficient way of delivering bespoke services to the community. Continuing to work in this way remains one of the priorities for the Gwent region and it will be achieved through the following initiatives:

- Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group will work as a forum to connect and improve service delivery across the following four areas: VAWDASV, Substance Misuse, Mental Health and Offenders
- Housing Support Grant Teams will work together to take forward Gwent's strategic & inclusive needs planning framework

Strengthen engagement and accessibility

Engaging effectively with service users and partners has long been recognised as an important process in the monitoring and delivery of services, to ensure that those with first-hand experience of the services have an opportunity to voice their opinions. Coupled with this, is the importance of accessibility and ensuring that people can readily access the assistance they require. Through regular engagement activities, the importance of accessible has been highlighted as an area of concern, especially in relation to digital inclusion. To successfully address this issue, the following initiatives will be implemented:

- Improve digital inclusion skills across our service user community
- Increase the number of ways for people delivering and receiving services to get involved

4. Stakeholder engagement

Engagement and consultation form an integral part of service delivery within Torfaen, and service users and stakeholder are regularly given an opportunity to provide their views and opinions. Engagement is vital to the development of the annual HSP delivery plan, whilst also assisting with the continual improvement of the HSP service, both on a local and regional level.

When undertaking engagement, it was important to have regard to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 five ways of working, to ensure that the methods which were adopted and the results, lead to sustainable outcomes both now and in the future.

Torfaen carries out regular, ongoing engagement with service users and stakeholders, as well undertaking an annual consultation in partnership with the other Gwent local authorities. This has meant that a long-term, collaborative approach to engagement is undertaken and that key partners and service users from a wide range of organisations are regularly consulted and involved.

Through continuous engagement and ongoing collaboration, the HSP service can better anticipate areas of pressure and take a preventative approach to meeting emerging needs. It has also enabled greater involvement from the people most affected by Housing and HSP services and has allowed them to take an active role in the shaping of services. In addition, by working in partnership with the other Gwent authorities, it has been possible to identify regional as well as local opportunities to meet existing needs and to work in collaboration to achieve them.

4.1 Stakeholders

In 2020, the Gwent local authorities undertook their annual engagement with stakeholders, to identify areas of pressure and demand, current and future priorities and gaps in provision. This was then repeated in 2021, building on earlier feedback.

In previous years, both face to face and online engagement methods were used, but due to restrictions in 2020 and 2021, face to face events were not feasible, so online approaches were adopted. Online surveys were disseminated to all stakeholders and an online event was carried out for local providers and key partners.

The following are a list of the stakeholders who were invited to take part:

- People who use HSP services
- Carers and families of people who use HSP services
- Health
- Social Services
- Probation
- Police
- VAWDASV Partnership Boards
- Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards
- Children and Communities Grant
- HSP Providers
- Landlords

Service User Survey

In 2020, an online survey was developed and published on the Gwent HSP website specifically for service users. Details were also circulated to service providers, encouraging them to support their service users to complete it.

The survey asked about their experiences of accessing HSP services and would assist the local authority to identify areas of concern, potential gaps in provision and any changes or improvements that service users would like to see in the future.

A follow up survey was disseminated in 2021, building upon the previous feedback received, with a particular focus on the use of technology and digital inclusion, which had been clearly identified as an area of concern, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

Stakeholder Survey

A separate survey was developed for key partners, asking them to identify any gaps or priorities for the HSP and Housing services and to make any recommendations for further improving partnership working and the delivery of services.

The 2021 survey revisited these same themes, asking stakeholders to expand on concerns since the previous consultation, with a particular focus on Rapid Rehousing and the impacts, opportunities and priorities for implementing this approach.

Local Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to the online surveys, Torfaen engaged with its local providers via a Microsoft Teams event. The event was an opportunity for discussions to take place between the different service providers and the local authority, providing an opportunity to share experiences and identify common themes.

Small breakout groups were established, which provided more opportunity for the providers to share their views and opinions. Those unable to attend the event were sent details of the consultation questions and invited to provide feedback separately, helping to ensure that as wide a cross section as possible were consulted.

Ongoing engagement

In addition to these specific engagement events, service users are regularly consulted about their experiences. Surveys are sent out each month to clients accessing the housing solutions service and regular survey work is undertaken as part of the HSP tendering process, whilst service users and providers are interviewed when services are monitored and reviewed.

Torfaen also meets regularly with its service providers through a multiagency forum, to provide updates and information on any changes or developments that may be taking place within the sector. This helps to maintain good levels of ongoing communication and helps to foster better involvement and collaboration, improving the ability of the HSP and Housing service to meet long term needs, implement preventative approaches and achieve better integration. It also ensures that service providers are fully involved in the delivery of Housing and HSP services.

The approach that has been taken for engaging with stakeholders supports the 5 ways of working, by involving a broad a range of people to identify priorities, working collaboratively with stakeholders and local authority partners, delivering long term

outcomes and ensuring that preventative approaches can be implemented to address emerging needs before situations escalate. Torfaen achieves this through continuous and integrated engagement with its stakeholders, that enables it to maintain a good understanding of emerging needs and identify any gaps in provision as they arise.

4.2 Feedback

The feedback received from these different engagement opportunities was extremely positive and some robust and detailed information was collected, which has reaffirmed and shaped our understanding of the needs and pressures that are being experienced by both those receiving and providing support, helping to shape the strategic priorities. Some key themes to emerge from the engagement included:

Lack of accommodation

The need for more accommodation and different accommodation options has been frequently identified through the engagement process and remains a long-term challenge within Torfaen.

Improved collaboration and partnership working

There are some positive examples of existing partnership working and collaboration, but further work is needed to ensure that all services are working together effectively and gaps in provision are being met.

Complex Needs

Feedback has shown that there are now more service users with complex or multiple needs which cannot be met by one service area alone, further supporting the need for more collaborative approaches. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic also emerged during the engagement process, with mental health provision an area of significant concern, as well as access to VAWDASV services

Awareness Raising

Service user feedback in particular, highlighted that knowledge of services is not always consistent and it remains an important priority to continually promote and raise awareness of Housing and the Housing Support Programme.

Recruitment, Training and Retention

The recruitment of staff has been identified throughout the consultation process as an area of pressure for service providers, which has had a knock-on effect for service delivery.

The evidence and information received from service users and other stakeholders has directly shaped the strategic priorities of this strategy and Torfaen will work closely with its colleagues to optimise the impact of the strategy through continued integration and communication, whilst exploring opportunities for further collaboration, aligning strategic priorities with those of partners and jointly commissioned services where appropriate.

5. Impact Assessments

5a Impact assessment process

A comprehensive impact assessment exercise has been carried by the housing service to assess the impact of the 9 strategic priorities.

The assessments were conducted by members of the HSP service, using templates from Torfaen Council and Welsh Government.

Torfaen Council have developed an integrated Impact Assessment that takes into consideration the impact that a particular project or proposal will have on the ability of the council to fulfil its wider legislative requirements, including the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Equalities Act 2010 (Wales).

The Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) was conducted using a Welsh Government template, which looked at the impact of the priorities on children's rights and how the strategy can support and promote these rights.

5b Key findings

Equality Impact Assessment

The impact assessment considered the 9 strategic priorities of the HSP strategy against each of the protected characters contained in the Equality Act.

In each case, the assessment identified that the priorities would bring positive impacts to individuals with these characteristics, especially individuals who are considered vulnerable due to their age or sexual orientation, where specific services are currently being provided to address their needs.

An area where implementation of the strategy may also bring some significant improvements is in relation to the availability of suitable accommodation for individuals with a disability. The needs assessment has highlighted that accommodation in general remains a priority in Torfaen and the delivery of more accommodation has been identified as a strategic priority. Through positive partnership working, Torfaen will work to provide more housing solutions, which will include options for individuals with a disability, bringing a number of positive impacts.

The impact assessment did consider whether residents may be indirectly affected due to race, with some residents of different races also having different cultural or language requirements, which may pose a barrier to accessing services. However, the Housing service continues to make provision to address these issues wherever possible, through the use of translation services and the availability of information in alternative languages or formats. This will continue to be monitored through the life of the strategy, to ensure that services adapt to any changes in provision that may impact on a particular group.

Welsh Language Assessment

The assessment considered whether the strategic priorities and delivery of the HSP strategy would impact on a person's ability to access and use services through the medium of Welsh.

The assessment concluded that there is currently sufficient provision in place across the local authority and its partners to enable service users to access services in their preferred language and the implementation of this strategy will not negatively impact on the Welsh Language Measure.

However, it was acknowledged that due to the limited number of requests for Welsh medium services in Torfaen, it is vital that services are continually monitored to ensure that they remain accessible through the medium of Welsh at all time, so that no one accessing help through Housing or HSP services is placed at a disadvantage because of their language preference

Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA)

The HSP strategy will bring several positive impacts for children:

- Reduced time in temporary accommodation
- Improved accommodation options for households
- Raising awareness of the support available for households that are struggling
- Improved support provision for households

Whilst the HSP programme does not directly support children, the priorities identified in this strategy will result in a number of positive impacts for households, which will improve the experiences of children contained within them.

6. Implementing, monitoring and reviewing the Strategy

6a Working with partners

We will regularly review the governance of our local planning groups and we will proactively seek to ensure that key partners are represented at all relevant forums, ensuring that they are fully engaged in these positive discussions.

We will work with partners at an operational and strategic level thereby creating opportunities to collaborate across boundaries and sectors to optimise resources and capacity.

We will continue to promote the Housing and Housing Support Programme locally, through ongoing engagement and consultation with stakeholders, making full use of the various communication channels available.

Through the use of the regional collaborative mechanisms that are currently in place, we will continue to foster productive relationships at all levels with key partners such as health, care and criminal justice in order to deliver and optimise the impact of the strategy.

Key partners include:

- Health
- Social Services
- Probation
- Police
- Local Registered Social Landlords
- Local Private Sector Landlords
- HSP Providers
- Third Sector Networks

6b Funding sources

The HSP Strategy will be delivered using the following funding sources:

- HSP Grant Allocation
- Local Authority Core Funding
- Capital Funding (Social Housing Grant)
- Other available grant funding (when available)

A copy of the HSP Grant Allocation spend can be found in **Appendix 2**.

6c Monitoring, reviewing and evaluation arrangements

This Strategy will be monitored and reviewed by the Housing Support Planning Group (HSPG), which includes representation from across, housing and social care and which meets on a quarterly basis. The HSPG will meet to consider the progress that has been made against each of the actions contained within the action plan and they will also take into consideration key performance measures, service reviews, and feedback from key stakeholder events such as Provider and stakeholder forums.

Regional priorities will then be reviewed at the Regional Housing Supporting Collaborative Group, which meets on a quarterly basis.

Performance Measures

The following statutory performance measures will form part of the monitoring and evaluation arrangements of the strategy:

- Households successfully prevented from Homelessness (%) (Section 66)
- Households successfully relieved from Homelessness (%) (Section 73)
- Total number of people supported with an outcome during the period (HSP)
- Total number of people who achieved an outcome during the period (HSP)
- Total number of service users who disengaged with support (HSP)

Service Reviews

HSP commissioned services are monitored regularly by the Commissioning Team, to establish if a project is meeting its objectives and remains a strategically relevant service. The reviews involve an analysis of case files and key statistics, as well as interviews with service users and support providers.

The evaluation process helps to validate the quality and cost effectiveness of services, to look at emerging levels of demand, examples of best practice and identify any changes that are necessary to improve the delivery of services.

Engagement

The Housing service regularly consults with its stakeholders through reviews and an annual engagement exercise, which enables the local authority to better understand the effect and impact of services. This approach will continue over the life of the strategy, to ensure that the strategic priorities are being delivered and that services are meeting the needs of local people.

Action Plan

The action plan will form the basis for delivery of the HSP strategy and a quarterly review of the action plan will be carried out to monitor progress and evaluate the levels of success in achieving the actions.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Needs Assessment – Available on request

Appendix 2: HSP Grant Allocation Spend – Available on request

Annex A – Action Plan

Priority	Action required to deliver the priority	Timescales/ By When	Lead person	Progress & Outcome
1. Reviewing and developing our supported accommodation offering to meet the accommodation and support needs of vulnerable individuals within our community.	We will understand the needs and demands of our communities to develop accommodation and support options to the meet the emerging needs and demand.	Ongoing	HSP Lead	
	We will increase the supply of single unit supported accommodation provision to support single people who are experiencing homelessness to access and sustain their accommodation.	March 2024	HSP Lead	
	We will develop a network of dispersed emergency bed provision to assist with the supply and management of emergency accommodation to those presenting as homeless.	March 2023	TA / HSP Lead	
	We will ensure that all individuals accommodated in temporary accommodation are able to access support.	March 2023	TA Lead	
	We will develop and pilot innovative approaches to emerging challenges and complex needs via a grant initiative to allow the development of new ways of working.	Annual	HSP Lead	
2. Strengthen access to mental health support provision to meet the increase in demand	We will work with a range of partners to review the provision of mental health services to understand the gaps in existing service provision and progress the development of housing support solutions.	Ongoing	Housing	

	We will ensure that mental health support services are accessible through the provision of a range of service options.	Ongoing	HSP Lead	
	We will ensure that support workers are able to access basic mental health training to effectively support individuals with a mental health need.	Ongoing	Support Providers / HSP Lead	
3. Enhance early intervention and assertive outreach services to minimise the negative impact of homelessness.	We will promote housing support services and available early intervention initiatives to enable residents to access housing advice and support in a timely way.	On-going	Gateway	
	We will enable access to timely financial advice and support to enable sustainment of accommodation	On-going	Gateway / Financial Inclusion Team	
	We will sustain a triage mechanism to ensure that individuals are accessing the most suitable support provision for their needs in a timely manner.	2022/2023	Housing Solutions	
	We will ensure that assertive outreach provision is available to support individuals who are at risk of rough sleeping.			
	Working with key stakeholders (RSL's and wider partners) to progress the zero evictions agenda.	2023	Housing Managers	
4. Strengthen access to VAWDASV support provision to meet the increase in demand	We will continue to engage with the VAWDASV fora at a local, regional and national level to develop and align strategic priorities and commissioning plans.	On-going	HSP Lead	
	We will ensure that accessible services are available through the provision of a range of service options to support victims of VAWDASV to feel safe in their own homes, identify patterns of abusive behaviours and to achieve independent living as far as possible within their community.	On-going	HSP / Providers	

	We will ensure that vulnerable women (including those with dependent children) with complex needs who are fleeing their home due to VAWDASV issues are able to access a range of refuge provision options to meet their needs and circumstances.	On-going	HSP Lead / Service Provider	
	We will support access to Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA), Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA) and Freedom Programme or equivalent services.	On-going	HSP / Gwent VAWDASV networks Providers	
	We will ensure that services for victims of Domestic Abuse are available to all individuals with a housing related support need			
	We will proactively identify the barriers of engagement within community-based support services to ensure equality of access and equity of treatment			
5. Embed a Rapid Rehousing approach to ensure that where homelessness is experienced it's brief and unrepeated.	We will progress the development of Rapid Rehousing approaches to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and not repeated.	Linked to transitional arrangements within the RRH plan	Local Authority Housing Managers	
	We will review policies, procedures and pathways to enable the adoption of a rapid rehousing approach.	Linked to transitional arrangements within the RRH plan	Local Authority Housing Managers	
	We will work with partners and stakeholders to develop and communicate the rapid rehousing approach and plan.	Linked to transitional arrangements within the RRH plan	Local Authority Housing Managers	
6. Continue to monitor and assess levels of demand for housing related support, reviewing and adapting	We will work with our providers and stakeholders to review and monitor service provision to ensure that services remain responsive and relevant.	On going	HSP Lead	

services to meet current trends and requirements for people who are or may become homeless.	We will engage with service users to develop and improve our support offer.	On going	HSP Leads / Providers	
	We will continue to work with the provider community to respond to and adapt to emerging trends and issues.	On going	HSP Lead	
	We will review the capacity of provision regularly via our Gateway service and respond to any emergent needs and demands	On going	HSP Lead / Gateway	
7. Strengthening and building collaborative approaches and constructive partnerships to improve outcomes for homeless households	We will continue to engage with Gwent regional colleagues to develop jointly commissioned services and share knowledge and resources (where appropriate) to best meet the emergent needs and demands within the Gwent region	On going	Housing Managers	
	We will continue to engage with multiagency fora to progress solutions to the challenges we are facing	On going	Housing Managers	
	Strengthen the role of the Gateway to ensure access to services are coordinated and streamlined	2023	HSP Gateway	
	Engaging with the Area Planning Board (APB) to develop seamless substance misuse provisions and pathways			
	We will work with Children's services to implement a pathway for young people who may also be care leavers.			
	We will work in collaboration with regional colleagues to explore responses to complex needs and Hospital Discharge pathways to prevent homelessness			
8. Strengthen accessibility of services and increase awareness to ensure that housing provision is visible within our communities.	We will continue to promote housing support services and available early intervention initiatives with stakeholders	On going	Housing Manager	
	We will promote services via a range of different communication methods to ensure	On going	Housing Manager	

	that all members of the community can access services in a timely manner			
	Develop a communications plan exploring the most appropriate methods of engagement and awareness raising	March 2023	Housing Manager	
	We will proactively engage with people with lived experience and wider stakeholders to understand the barriers to accessing and engaging with support			
9. Invest in workforce development to ensure a highly skilled, responsive and sustainable workforce.	Continue to support the provider community to develop different methods of promoting recruitment to the support sector.	On going	HSG Lead / Housing Managers / Providers	
	We will ensure that support workers are able to access the appropriate and necessary basic training to effectively support individuals with a range of complex needs.	On going	HSP Lead / Providers	
	Making sure commissioning and procurement practices contribute to the development of a sustainable workforce	On going	Local Authority Housing & Commissioning Managers	