

Bridgend County Borough Council
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr

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Bridgend County Borough Council Housing Support Programme Strategy

2022-2026

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1.0 Foreword

We are pleased to present Bridgend County Borough Council's Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022-2026. This strategy outlines the Council's strategic priorities, our objectives and what we, alongside our partners aim to do over the next four years, to tackle homelessness across the county borough.

Since publishing our last homelessness strategy, we have developed and delivered services which have helped to successfully prevent and relieve the homelessness of thousands of households, including safeguarding vulnerable households during the peak of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Our strategy recognises that our services face significant challenges, including the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. In particular, we have seen an exponential rise in the number of households accessing our services and entering temporary accommodation.

As we exit the direct pressure of the pandemic our local communities are now facing a cost-of-living crisis, which is impacting across all areas of society. With the needs of households becoming more complex and time critical, the demand for affordable housing and support services is unprecedented. This strategy sets out how we will work collaboratively with our partners and third sector services to ensure homelessness is rare, brief and unrepeatable.

The scale of the challenge ahead should not be underestimated. However, with the continued commitment to our strategic priorities and with the development of the new Rapid Rehousing approach to homelessness we hope to make a real change within our community.



Councillor Rhys Goode

Cabinet Member Housing, Planning and Regeneration

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of the Strategy

This strategy sets out Bridgend County Borough Council's strategic direction for delivering homelessness and housing related support services for 2022-2026. It encompasses the strategic requirements as set out in Welsh Government's Housing Support Grant Guidance and the statutory requirements for a Homelessness Strategy set out in Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The strategy will have a mid-point review, after 2 years.

This four year strategy replaces the Authority's 'Strategy to Tackle Homelessness in Bridgend County Borough 2018-2022'. It identifies key priorities for Bridgend County Borough Council and its partners, in the delivery of homelessness prevention and other housing related support services. These priorities have been developed following a substantial review of homelessness and housing related support services, the cornerstone of which was a comprehensive needs assessment and stakeholder engagement.

The delivery of the priorities set out in this strategy will support Welsh Government's commitment to making homelessness rare, brief and unrepeatable, with a priority given to homelessness prevention. It supports the ambitions for a transitional shift to a rapid rehousing approach, as specified in Welsh Government's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans. The strategy also sets out how the Local Authority will continue to meet presenting demands as we move through the Covid 19 pandemic.

An action plan and Rapid Rehousing Transitional Plan support the delivery of the strategic priorities set out.

2.2 Legislative and Policy Context

Whilst this strategy sets a single strategic vision for homelessness and housing related support services, it is important that it is considered as part of a wider national and local context.

The development and delivery of this strategy will contribute to the following national legislation and policy:

Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales

The Framework helps organisations that support young people in making their journeys towards leaving care. It sets out five stages organisations should consider, and which care leavers should progress towards living independently.

Ending Homelessness in Wales: A High Level Action Plan 2021-2026

The Action Plan details the work required by the Welsh Government and its partners to end homelessness in Wales. The Action Plan draws on the Welsh Government's Strategy for Preventing and Ending Homelessness and the work of the expert Homelessness Action Group (HAG). The HAG engaged extensively with a wide range of stakeholders, including people who have had personal experiences of homelessness.

Equality Act 2010

This Act legally protects people from discrimination and sets out how all public bodies, including Local Authorities, need to consider discrimination, the needs of people who are disadvantaged or those who suffer inequality when shaping policies, delivering services and within all day-to-day work.

Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and potential future changes relating to 'priority need'

This Act reformed homelessness law and strengthened the duty on Local Authorities to prevent homelessness. The Housing Support Grant links in with Part 2 of the Act as it funds provisions aimed at preventing homelessness and/or supporting those who are homeless.

The ethos of the legislation is prevention, but true prevention starts far earlier than the 56 days set out in the legislation. The homelessness legislation should be seen as the safety net when all other preventative actions have failed.

Housing Support Grant Practice Guidance

The Housing Support Grant (HSG) is an amalgamation of three existing grants - Supporting People Programme, Homelessness Prevention Grant and Rent Smart Wales Enforcement.

The HSG is an early intervention grant designed to support activity which prevents people from becoming homeless, stabilises their housing situation or helps potentially homeless people to find and keep accommodation. The emphasis is on working together to prevent homelessness and where it cannot be prevented ensuring it is rare, brief and un-repeated. To do this we need to tackle the root cause of homelessness and work to enable people to stay in their own homes longer.

It supports vulnerable people to address the, sometimes, multiple problems they face, such as debt, unemployment, tenancy management, substance misuse, violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and mental health issues.

The HSG allows a single costed strategy at local level and ensures a continuum of services to most effectively address local need. Whilst services are commissioned at a local level, Welsh Government will continue to develop national programmes to complement.

National Housing Pathway for Ex-Service Personnel

This Housing Pathway is a response to one of the key concerns of serving personnel on leaving the Armed Forces: finding suitable accommodation and knowing where to find help

It ensures practitioners and stakeholders are aware of their responsibilities under the Armed Forces Covenant and the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. In particular, Part 2 which addresses the duties on Local Authorities to provide preventative homelessness services, and also other relevant frameworks and good practice.

In recognition of their service to their country, the Welsh Government believes that every former member of the Armed Forces should have help, if needed, to find suitable accommodation, whether directly on discharge or later in life.

National pathway for homelessness services to children, young people and adults in the secure estate in Wales

The National Pathway is designed to support Local Authorities, Youth Offending Teams and the Wales Community Rehabilitation Company to carry out their responsibilities in respect of providing services to people due to leave the secure estate. The Pathway offers a significant opportunity to help individuals avoid homelessness on release from custody.

Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016

This Act aims to simplify the process of renting a home in Wales and to provide parties with more information about their rights and obligations, giving tenants more security in their tenancy.

This piece of legislation will have a direct impact on the number of households accessing homelessness services as there have been several changes which will benefit tenants. Landlords will no longer be able to issue retaliation eviction notices, one person leaving a joint tenancy no longer automatically ends the tenancy for all and a new succession right for carers has been created.

Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014

This Act aims to improve the contribution individuals, and their carers, have in the care and support they receive. By making decisions about their care and support, in equal partnership with professionals, the aim is to improve wellbeing.

Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 requires Local Authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation with their relevant partners and others, in relation to adults with needs for care and support, carers and children. The focus on a multi-agency approach will help make sure the principles of voice and control are achieved through the design and operation of services. It also provides Welsh Ministers with regulation making powers in relation to formal partnership arrangements, resources for partnership arrangements (including pooled funds) and partnership boards.

Each local health board, and the local authorities within that local health board area, are required to put in place a partnership arrangement to undertake the population assessment of care and support needs for adults, children and carers.

The Corporate Parent Charter

A shared parenting pledge to provide children with a stable home. In line with the Corporate Parenting Charter, the Local Authority will endeavour to seek out and provide stable places to live that are right for all care-experienced children and young people.

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

The principal objective of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 is to improve the public sector response in Wales to gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Public bodies, including Local Authorities, have a responsibility to improve arrangements to promote awareness of, and prevent, protect and support victims of gender-based violence, domestic abuse, sexual violence and modern slavery.

Welsh Government Strategy to End Homelessness 2019

This sets out the strategic approach Welsh Government are taking to prevent and address homelessness in Wales. The overarching pledge is to make homelessness rare, brief and unrepeatable.

The policy statement highlights the need to shift energy and resources to preventing homelessness from happening in the first place. Welsh Government are clear, homelessness cannot be prevented through housing alone. The strategy advocates a desire to get a range of public services, not simply housing services, working collaboratively to prevent and alleviate homelessness.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the seven well-being goals

The Act requires public bodies, including Local Authorities in Wales, to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

It aims to improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action to ensure current and future generations have a good quality of life. Local Authorities need to think about the long-term impact of their decisions.

Prevention is a key focus of the sustainable development principle and this replicates the central aims of the Housing Support Grant.

Locally the development and delivery of this strategy will contribute to the following policies:

- Bridgend County Borough Council Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Bridgend County Borough Council Corporate Plan 2023-2028
- Bridgend County Borough Council Older Person's Housing, Care and Support Strategy 2022 – 2027
- Bridgend County Borough Council Housing Support Grant Delivery Plan
- Bridgend County Borough Council Social Housing Allocation Policy
- Bridgend County Borough Council Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate Service Delivery Plan 2020-2025
- Bridgend County Borough Council Rapid Rehousing Protocol
- Bridgend County Borough Council Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2021 to 2026
- Bridgend Public Services Board Well-being Plan

- Cwm Taff Morgannwg VAWDASV Strategy 2022-2026
- BCBC Corporate Parenting Strategy and the need to improve joint working across housing and social services, to meet the needs of care experienced children and young people.

2.3 Vision and Principles

This strategy sets out Bridgend County Borough Council's (BCBC) four year vision for the delivery of homelessness and housing related support services. Our vision for the strategy underpins Bridgend's overall vision to act as "one council working together to improve lives".

Our vision for homelessness and housing support services is:

"To work in partnership with stakeholders to prevent homelessness, ensuring that where prevention is not possible, homelessness is rare, brief and unrepeated. Those who access services will be given the support required to live as independently as possible."

Our principles are to:

- Work collaboratively with other agencies and regions to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Ensure our services have a person centred and holistic approach, providing the most effective support for service users
- Build resilience within individuals, enabling them to help resolve their own issues
- Utilise resources efficiently, recognising that housing is a scarce resource

Our aims are to:

- Prioritise the prevention of homelessness, ensuring early intervention
- Continue to improve collaboration between the statutory functions within the Local Authority
- Continue to improve working arrangements between the Local Authority and Registered Social Landlords to facilitate co-operation in line with Section 95 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014
- Ensure that support and accommodation options are accessible and available for all service users

3.0 Needs Assessment

3.1 Needs Assessment Process

The Needs Assessment process undertaken as part of the development of this strategy has involved a comprehensive assessment of a range of data sets, which have informed a Statement of Need.

Our needs assessment and Statement of Need has analysed data sets, including population needs, common housing register waiting lists, homelessness statistics and

Housing Support Grant outcomes. An analysis of these data sets helps us to understand the current and future needs for homelessness and housing related support services.

3.2 Sets out the key findings, from the Statement of Need

The Population

- The population of Bridgend is increasing and the rate of the increase in Bridgend is higher than the overall Welsh population increase. The population of Bridgend grew 4.5% between 2011 and 2021, compared to a national increase of 1.4% over the same period. The Office for National Statistics predicts that the population of Bridgend will grow by at least a further 3% by 2030.
- The population of Bridgend is ageing. Whilst, as highlighted above, there was an increase in population between 2011 and 2021, many of the younger age groups saw a percentage decrease during this period whilst all age groups beyond the age of 50 saw a percentage increase. In 2021 21% of the population of Bridgend were aged 65 or over.

Homelessness Applications

- Since our 2018-2022 Homelessness Strategy, homelessness applications to BCBC have increased significantly. Applications increased from 1,032 applications in 2017/18 to 1,290 in 2021/22, representing a 25% increase.
- The number of applications received in 2020/21 was the highest annual amount BCBC has ever received, peaking at 1,612.
- The average number of homelessness applications BCBC receives has increased from an average of 908 per year between 2014/15 and 2017/28 to an average of 1,363 between 2018/19 and 2021/22. Applications to the Council have therefore increased significantly.
- Applications from single person households accounts for a significant proportion of all applications and this proportion has increased over the last 4 years. In 2018/19 and 2021/22 single person applications accounted for 61-64% of all applications, whilst in 2020/21 and 2021/22 this percentage increased to 68-73%.
- The majority of homelessness applications are from those aged 25 and over, whilst applications from 16 & 17 year olds have decreased. In 2021/22 applications from individuals of these ages accounted for 3% (34 applicants) of all applications, whilst in 2018/19 they accounted for 6% (78 applicants) of all applications.

Temporary Accommodation

- Temporary accommodation placements by the Council have increased significantly. Between the end of March 2019 and the end of January 2023 there was a 251% increase in temporary accommodation placements. At the end of January there were 249 households in temporary accommodation.

- The most significant increase in temporary accommodation was between 2019/20 and 2020/21 i.e. the first year of the Covid 19 pandemic. This period alone saw a percentage increase of 101% in placements (83 placements at the end of 2019/20 to 167 placements at the end of 2020/21).
- To meet the demand, temporary accommodation stock increased 159% between February 2020 and July 2023. The majority of additional units taken on have been from the tourism sector, such as holiday lets and B&B's. Having not routinely been used at all in February 2020, tourism units now make up 51% of the Council's temporary accommodation capacity.
- The cost of the additional units of accommodation is significant and has increased exponentially. The cost of temporary accommodation to the Council increased by 2196% between 2019/20 and 2021/22. Again the most significant increase in cost in the first year of the Covid 19 pandemic. This period alone saw a percentage increase of 1604% in costs (£135,000 in 2019/20 to £2,300,000 in 2020/21).
- Whilst the majority of temporary accommodation placements last under 6 months, the length of time spent in temporary accommodation has increased, with an increase in the number of households spending 6 – 12 months in placements.

Rough Sleepers

- The number of rough sleepers, compared to the number of homelessness presentations is relatively very low. Between November 2020 and December 2022 the average number of rough sleepers identified at the end of each month was 5. Over the same period there was a range of 1 to 13 identified rough sleepers at any one time.

Private Rent Sector

- According to the Office for National Statistics the number of people privately renting in Bridgend has increased from 12.3% of the population in 2011 to 15.3% in 2021.
- A desktop search of available privately rented properties in July 2023 suggests that there are no properties available to rent at Local Housing Allowance or Universal Credit rates.
- The average private rental costs in Bridgend are vastly in excess of Local Housing Allowance or Universal Credit rates. These challenges are particularly acute for larger family homes, with the average rent for 3 and 4 bedroom properties over double the equivalent Local Housing Allowance rates.

Social Housing and the Common Housing Register

- The number of households on the Council's Common Housing Register increased by 212% between March 2020 and February 2023. As of July 2023, there were 2,629 households on the Common Housing Register.
- The majority of households on the Common Housing Register (59%) are waiting for an allocation of a 1 bedroom property.

- There are more households on the Common Housing Register for 4 and 5 bedroom properties, than there are units of social housing stock across the borough. As such even if all of those in 4 and 5 bedroom social housing properties vacated, enabling an allocation to those on the Common Housing Register, there would still not be enough properties to meet this particular need. In the case of 5 bedroom properties the number of households on the Common Housing Register (34 households) is nearly 6 times as much as the number of 5 bedroom social housing units (6).

Housing Support Grant (HSG)

- The number of households being supported by HSG funded services is increasing. Between 2018 and 2021/22 there was an increase of 31% in the number of households accessing services. in 2021/22 2,970 households were supported by HSG funded services.
- Since 2018 the most common support need of those accessing services has been those requiring support to prevent homelessness. Those over the age of 55 and requiring support has consistently been the second highest support need. Households requiring support with mental health, women experiencing domestic abuse and single persons aged 25-54 are also common support needs of those accessing services.
- The majority of households accessing HSG funded services have more than 1 support need (between 58% and 60%). Between 34% and 45% have more than 2 support needs.
- HSG funded services support households across a range of tenures with those in temporary accommodation supported more than any other tenure type.

Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

- BCBC VAWDASV services are supporting more individuals deemed to be 'High Risk', with an increase of 91% in referrals of this nature between 2021 and 2022, alone.

Looked After Children in Bridgend

- Since 2018/19 19.1% of care leavers have made a homelessness application (55 individuals). Of these 55 individuals 56.4% have gone on to make more than 1 homelessness application.
- On average, homelessness applications from care leavers accounted for 2.5% of all homelessness applications between 2020 and 2022 and 11.3% of applications from all 18-24 year olds who presented as homeless or threatened with homelessness over the same time period.
- The average age, at the point of a care leavers first application, was 19 years and 7 months. This suggests that individuals are not presenting as homeless directly after leaving care, but on average within the first 2 years of doing so.

Armed Forces Personnel

- Since 2020, 8 homelessness applications were received as a direct result of the applicant leaving the Armed Forces and having no other suitable accommodation in which to reside.
- 18 applicants reported to have an additional support need as a result of serving in the Armed Forces
- More generally, since 2020, 260 applicants who presented as homeless disclosed to have previously served in the Armed Forces

3.3 Conclusion

➤ Demand for homelessness and housing support services has dramatically increased

All data analysis, including a review of homelessness services, the common housing register and Housing Support Grant funded services, evidences that demand for homelessness and housing support services is increasing. Whilst the population of Bridgend is increasing and at a faster rate than the national average, the level of increase in demand on homelessness and housing related support services is exponential.

Whilst in and around the time of the Covid pandemic we saw an increase in demand for services, it is clear that demands on services are increasing for reasons more broadly, than just the pandemic alone.

Demand was increasing prior to the pandemic and whilst some measures suggest a peak was reached during 2020/21, there remains high demand for services, which significantly outweighs the demands at the time of our last homelessness strategy.

A key demand pressure is from single persons who make up an increasing proportion of all homelessness presentations and demand on the common housing register.

➤ Temporary Accommodation resources are a particular pressure point

The key findings relating to demands on temporary accommodation are stark. A 251% increase in placements, 101% increase in available units and 2196% increase in costs all point to an area of service which is under severe pressure.

The extreme increase in costs can largely be attributed to a new reliance on tourism accommodation units, which now account for 51% of all temporary accommodation stock, having previously not been routinely utilised for this purpose.

The dramatic increase in temporary accommodation demand in 2020/21 appears to be a direct result of the 'All In' approach from the Welsh Government. With temporary changes to legislation now being mainstreamed into primary legislation it is not likely that these demands will decrease.

➤ Support needs of individuals accessing services are significant

The level of demand for housing related support services has increased over recent years, suggesting that generally the need for support to prevent homelessness and live independently is also increasing.

Whilst improvements to gateway processes and increased provision will play a part in increased numbers being supported, the level of support needs are also significant. The majority of households have more than 1 support need, whilst up to 45% of individuals supported have at least 2 support needs.

Households are presenting with housing related support needs, across all tenures of accommodation.

➤ **There is limited availability of affordable accommodation**

Analysis shows that there is limited availability of accommodation in both the private and social rent sectors, with average private rent costs soaring way above Local Housing Allowance rates and social housing stock not being available to meet increasing demands on the Common Housing Register.

A lack of affordable accommodation in itself has likely had an impact on the demand for homelessness and housing support services as households find it harder to resolve situations themselves, before turning to the Council for support. Equally it is harder for those in temporary accommodation settings to move on.

4.0 Stakeholder Engagement Homeless Review

4.1 Stakeholders Engagement Process

A wide range of stakeholders, operating across the County Borough of Bridgend were engaged as a key part of the Homeless Review process and the development of the Council's Homelessness Strategy 2022-2026.

A wide range of semi-structured individual and group interviews were undertaken with; the front line Housing Solutions, Rehousing and Commissioning Teams (who comprise staff delivering the Housing Department's principal functions), with middle tier managers with operational oversight of and responsibility for service delivery and oversight of and responsibility for service review, scrutiny, development and commissioning. Also with senior managers who hold the strategic remit for all housing functions and duties across the Authority and also with a local Elected Member, who is also a Cabinet Member.

These interviews were complimented with face to face and telephone semi-structured interviews with a wider range of operational and strategic partners drawn from other Directorates within BCBC, as well as widely from across the statutory and voluntary sectors. Again these interviewees have ranged from front line support staff, through to project managers and those with key strategic responsibility and oversight for service design, delivery, function and evaluation.

A number of face to face and phone interviews were undertaken with service users who have used BCBC's front line housing services which provided direct feedback and an appraisal of the Housing Department's functions, effectiveness and impact, as viewed from a customer perspective.

Finally, wide reaching feedback was also gathered through use of the Survey Monkey online tool, in which questions were asked of stakeholders operating at a strategic and operational level in organisations drawn from across the statutory and voluntary sectors in Bridgend.

Through at least one of the above methods the following organisations have been engaged with:

- Bridgend County Borough Council Housing Solutions & Housing Strategy Team
- Bridgend County Borough Council Senior Management & Cabinet Member for Well-being and Future Generations
- National Probation Service and members of Bridgend MAPPA planning group
- South Wales Police
- V2C Housing Association
- Linc Cymru Housing Association
- Wales & West Housing Association
- Hafod Housing Association
- Bridgend County Borough Council Social Services (both Adult and Children's Services Teams)
- Bridgend County Borough Council Prevention and Wellbeing Team
- Bridgend County Borough Council Education and Family Support Team
- Members of Bridgend Community Safety Partnership
- Bridgend VAWDASV Partnership and members of Bridgend MARAC
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board
- Individuals with lived experience
- The six service providers commissioned by BCBC through the Housing Support Grant funding programme
- Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations
- Bridgend Citizen's Advice Bureau

4.2 Stakeholder Feedback

The feedback gathered from the stakeholders listed above has been invaluable in adding narrative to the Needs Assessment and ultimately developing the Strategic Priorities set out in this strategy. Key messages from the feedback provided are set out below:

From Service Users:

- More hostels with staff providing support was requested, and a problem with the supply of suitable (temporary and permanent) accommodation was identified as a consistent theme.
- Those leaving prison wanted to see better links between prisons and housing officers, as feedback from service users painted a disjointed picture between key agencies working with those being made or facing homelessness on release from prison. Consistent experiences were of planning around addressing housing needs being left until the day of release.
- Some service users felt that communication between them and Housing Department could be better and that those who had waited longest should be prioritised for housing.
- Some service users felt that the 'homeless to housing' process could be quicker, although none were specific about what a shorter timeline could and should look like. Equally, timescales varied for individuals interviewed, from a couple of weeks in the

application process to a number of months in other cases. The majority of interviewees understood the impact that Covid had on this.

From professionals across the statutory and voluntary sectors:

- Housing Department staff demonstrated a clear motivation and commitment to their jobs, but staff turnover, recruitment issues and the subsequent use of agency staff have added considerable pressure during a period of unprecedented demand on services (during the Covid pandemic).
- Stakeholders recognised the demands placed on the Housing Department throughout the pandemic, but they wanted Housing Solutions advisors to have a broader knowledge and skill set for working with service users with diverse, and complex needs and of the impact of trauma.
- Housing staff and external stakeholders wanted to establish pathways that supported earlier planning and intervention that prevented homelessness and avoided crisis case management. This was most evident for young people leaving care and those leaving the secure estate.
- The new online Jigsaw application system had been invaluable in managing demand throughout the pandemic as housing staff adopted to new ways of working. However, service users, researchers and professionals described difficulties in using the system. Improvements were also needed to ensure Housing Solutions advisors could store and retrieve information with greater ease.
- Stakeholders acknowledged that more traditional methods of engagement, such as face to face work with service users is still needed by some people. However, the pandemic has equally shown that many people prefer more remote and flexible methods of support, such as video-call, text messaging and email.
- Stakeholders described the difficulties that some service users experienced with the application and assessment process being conducted online and over the phone and requested a better balance from Housing Solutions advisors with regard to offering face to face assessments.
- There was recognition that across Directorates within the Authority there is a need to develop a better understanding of each other's priorities, pressures and limitations. This could pave the way for developing better pathways, joint working practices and establishing clear expectations of each other's roles.
- From staff across BCBC there was an acknowledgement that there was a significant opportunity for greater collaboration at a strategic level and the development of a joint commissioning strategy, using joint resources and needs analysis to better inform planning and service development.

- A range of stakeholders felt that more could be done within BCBC Education Services and with the core school curriculum to develop children's wider life skills that contribute to primary prevention and equip and prepare children in identifying and addressing housing related issues that can lead to homelessness.
- A number of stakeholders spoke highly of the amount and variety of supported accommodation available within the Borough, but many felt more was needed to ensure options were available so that service users were placed in suitable accommodation. This was most evident for young people leaving care, those with mental health needs, more complex needs, and for people whose needs were of a more persistent nature requiring longer term and for those requiring assistance from 'wet' accommodation and support.
- Many stakeholders commented on a lack of sufficient mental health provision, both in respect of supported accommodation provision and in relation to access to and provision of statutory mental health services.
- Evidence reviewed illustrates that individuals and households accessing homelessness services are presenting with increasing and often multi-faceted support needs. Co-terminus with this there is developing challenges across the provider sector in meeting demand from, and the needs of, those with substance use issues who present with risk behaviour management issues. Increased models of intensive and longer term supported accommodation, for example a 'wet house' or static type housing first service, are examples of how this need could potentially be met.
- Third Sector providers and agencies operating within the public protection and safeguarding arena described joint working with the Housing Department as very good. However, Housing Department staff consistently noted the need for better provision of information sharing and adoption of risk management procedures from Probation and mental health services, as specific examples.
- Homeless Cell meetings and the multi-agency approach adopted between the assertive outreach service, the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board Complex Needs Outreach Team allied to the range of 'bricks and mortar' accommodation services in meeting the needs of rough sleepers were described as being 'gold standard'.
- The demands on temporary accommodation were noted as presenting a significant challenge, in respect of cost, availability and suitability to the needs of service users. The provision and use of temporary accommodation provision should be reviewed, in line with a Rapid Rehousing Transitional Plan.
- The shift to Rapid Rehousing due to the pandemic was recognised for its effectiveness in driving a coordinated approach to moving people on from temporary accommodation. However, balance was requested to ensure people were also moved

on from supported accommodation, with concerns being raised at the length of a person's stay becoming potentially detrimental to their longer term wellbeing.

- RSLs were keen to establish reciprocal agreements that formalised the flexible way they work with each other. There was recognition of the need to review the Social Housing Allocation Policy in light of the permanent transition to Rapid Rehousing, the Common Housing Register, and in meeting the needs of Housing First service users.
- All stakeholders recognised the limited amount of affordable and suitable accommodation across all sectors. There was broad consensus that increased affordable stock across both the social and private housing sectors is vital in preventing and relieving homelessness.
- The level of voids within and among RSL partners was highlighted as being a serious concern, especially whilst such a significant number of people are currently being accommodated by Bridgend CBC in temporary accommodation.
- There are opportunities to utilise a number of funding streams (Housing Support Grant and Social Housing Grant), to respond to these challenges and to develop varied support models. However, despite recent increases in Social Housing Grant, the multi-faceted nature of capital build programmes continued to present challenges in building new homes. Furthermore, innovative responses are needed to tackle the challenges faced in increasing the supply of private sector properties available to the Authority.
- Support providers value and requested consideration be given to reinstating the Providers Forum, as the move towards the 'new normal' continues, following the Covid 19 pandemic.
- The Homeless Cell and Rapid Rehousing Panel meetings developed as part of Bridgend CBC's homelessness response to the Covid 19 panel are well valued, but there were calls for reviewing the latter in light of the permanent shift towards Rapid Rehousing.
- Partner organisations should ensure steps are taken within their own organisations to support the homelessness agenda, in acknowledgement that homelessness is a cross cutting issue and cannot be tackled by one organisation alone.
- Housing related support services need to continue to be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure the continued provision of high quality services, that there are opportunities to identify gaps in provision, and to develop greater insight as to what works and doesn't work when preventing and relieving homelessness.
- The Housing Department's roles, structure, processes, and training and support should be reviewed to ensure resources, pathways, communication, and consistent wellbeing support to all staff promote more effective and valued service delivery.

- There was broad recognition that there were insufficient opportunities and mechanisms in place to involve people with lived experience in the design, and evaluation of services.
- There is opportunity for the Housing Department to develop and embed a more psychologically informed culture and service offer through embracing the Trauma Informed Practice and Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE 2.0) framework in its commissioning, service delivery and monitoring.
- A common theme from stakeholders was the need to provide more information to the public with regard to the causes, consequences and opportunities to help in tackling homelessness.

Public consultation

Following Cabinet approval of a draft strategy in July 2023 a public consultation was undertaken, between 20th July 2023 and 12th October 2023. 33 responses were received, as well as comments from the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate of the Council.

In addition, the draft strategy was presented to the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 on 25 September 2023 for consideration and comment. As per a recommendation from the Committee, engagement was also subsequently held with the Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer.

All of the comments and recommendations from the above have been considered as part of finalising this Housing Support Programme Strategy.

5.0 Strategic Priorities

The Local Authority has developed the following strategic priorities, which are set with the ambition of delivering our vision for homelessness and housing related support services. These strategic priorities have been developed following the development of our Statement of Need and stakeholder engagement, as well as national and local legislation and policy.

Strategic Priority	Rationale	Objectives
1. Increase the supply of suitable accommodation to meet the housing needs of applicants	<p>The stark shortage of suitable housing is the biggest challenge the Local Authority faces, with demand significantly outweighing supply.</p> <p>Homelessness applications and demand to the Common Housing Register have consistently increased over a period of time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the supply of suitable social housing, which is available to meet local need. • Increase the availability of suitable private rent sector properties. • Promote and encourage the leasing or rental of

	<p>The current supply of social housing through RSL partners is insufficient to meet demands.</p> <p>The availability of affordable private rent sector accommodation is low, with market rents outstripping Local Housing Allowance rates.</p>	<p>private sector properties and the continued engagement of Private Rented Sector landlords.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with RSL partners to ensure the best use of current stock to meet local need.
<p>2. To implement a Rapid Rehousing Transitional Plan</p>	<p>The Welsh Government has set expectations for Local Authorities to develop and implement a Rapid Rehousing Transitional Plan.</p> <p>A Rapid Rehousing model is intended to support prevention and mitigate the impact of homelessness on households. Successful delivery will be key to managing the impact of increasing demands on homelessness services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work in partnership with stakeholders to implement the various elements as set out in the Rapid Rehousing Transitional Plan. • To prevent homelessness and the need for temporary accommodation. • To reduce the need for temporary accommodation and where needed to reduce the length of time households spend in temporary accommodation • To develop a model based on robust data, with clear evidence of need.

<p>3. Provide an accessible, flexible and responsive service to meet needs, through a skilled and valued workforce</p>	<p>There is a need for continuous improvements to be made to the accessibility of services, ensuring a flexible approach to identified need.</p> <p>There is an opportunity for existing Gateway functions to play a greater role in establishing better pathways, monitoring throughput and performance.</p> <p>People with lived experience should have a meaningful and impactful role in the development and monitoring of services.</p> <p>Better communication and promotion of homelessness prevention services could promote engagement at an earlier stage.</p> <p>There is an acknowledgement that through increased demands and complexity of work there are additional pressures on the workforce, which need to be resolved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that services are accessible to all and response to those with additional needs • Extend and enhance the function and impact of the Gateway. • Improve ongoing engagement with those with lived experience. • Provide clear process and pathway information and raise the profile of current homelessness advice and support services, to encourage take up by individuals in housing need • Ensure sufficient capacity within the workforce to meet presenting demand. • Deliver services through a resilient and skilled workforce, which provides high quality provision and promotes staff wellbeing.
<p>4. To improve collaboration with key stakeholders at a strategic level to improve homelessness prevention</p>	<p>Homelessness is not just a housing issue. Collaboration and partnerships with wider stakeholders have a key role to the successful prevention of homelessness.</p> <p>Improved understanding of wider pressures, priorities and limitations can lead to closer joint working and improved outcomes for individuals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in wider stakeholder ownership of homelessness to support upstream prevention. • Increased sharing of data to identify gaps, with the potential for increased jointly commissioned services.

	<p>A culture of joint shared ownership can improve, planning and commissioning, as well as supporting risk management.</p> <p>Better collaboration can improve corporate priorities, such as implementing the national care leavers and accommodation and support framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an organisational culture of enquiry where data analysis and interpretation effectively inform service delivery. • To manage risk through stakeholders coming together to find joint solutions and outcomes • To work with regional partners to explore opportunities for service provision, which meets common needs. • To work with partners, including Social Services colleagues to implement the national care leavers accommodation and support framework. • To explore a range of good quality housing choices for young people and care leavers, which promotes independence, prolonged health and well-being. • Improve joint working across housing and social services, utilising corporate parenting responsibilities to further understand the reasons as to why care leavers present as homeless and what action can be taken to prevent such presentations.
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<p>5. Enhance and increase the services for those with complex needs</p>	<p>The support needs of those presenting as homeless are significant. Often housing alone cannot address underlying issues preventing someone from securing or maintaining accommodation.</p> <p>There are a cohort of individuals who require intensive support models. These cases are often resource intensive to a range of public services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop services that can effectively support people with highly complex and possibly enduring needs. • Take a multi-agency approach to supporting those with complex needs. • Work with partners, including social services to prevent homelessness for those with complex needs and or lifelong conditions, such as learning difficulties, mental health or neurodiverse conditions.
<p>6. Take an assertive, collaborative and multi-disciplined approach to support rough sleepers</p>	<p>Rough sleeping is the sharp end and harshest form of homelessness. The vulnerability and risk posed to rough sleepers is often significant.</p> <p>The reasons as to why people sleep rough are often complex and deep rooted. As such relieving the homelessness of rough sleepers can be challenging and requires resource and multi-agency involvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To keep the number of rough sleepers low and ensure that where rough sleeping does occur it is rare, brief and non-recurring. • To provide assertive outreach to assist in the accurate identification of and support to rough sleepers • To ensure a multi-agency approach to supporting rough sleeping.

6.0 Impact Assessments

6.1 Impact Assessment Process

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed at ‘screening stage’.

6.2 Key Findings

The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the development of this strategy.

As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

7.0 Implementing, Monitoring and Reviewing the Strategy

7.1 Working with Partners

The Local Authority cannot effectively implement the priorities in this Strategy alone. Collaboratively working with key partners such as health, social care and criminal justice is vital in order to deliver and optimise the impact of our priorities outlined within the strategy.

We will work collaboratively to implement our Strategy by:

- Ensuring that work is undertaken to develop and improve approaches to collaborative working across Directorates within Bridgend CBC and to ensure that this approach is matched with similar approaches to collaborative and joint working with stakeholders outside the Authority.
- Making best use of the existing strategic and operational relationships across services and sectors in Bridgend that are well founded, long standing, creative and innovative in nature and responsiveness to need. There is a clear synergy in how services interlink across the sector and dovetail with assisting the Authority in meeting wider strategic initiatives.
- Ensuring at an operational level that the Authority builds on the clear evidence of Housing Department staff making frequent and good use of the expertise and experience from other stakeholders and providers brought in to address complex needs achieving positive outcomes for services users.
- Continuing multi-agency and partnership working at an operational level, which was evidenced as being a clear strength of the Housing Department. This approach and practice provide a template for the Authority to deliver on and optimise the impact of the Homelessness Strategy, through a model of joint working with Social Services, Probation and Mental Health services.
- Ensuring that the working relationship with Health continues, as evidenced in the development of the Regional Complex Needs Outreach Team. Contributing to further work with Health Services that has a broader focus for non-medical/clinical issues. The sharing of budgets and joint commissioning could promote more joined up thinking to address overlapping health and community support issues.
- Considering developing relationships and multi-agency working between the Housing Department and other partners through the co-location of services or expertise in a central Hub.
- Establishing focused and appropriate forums, by considering the purpose, membership, and frequency of all current, past and future meetings to ensure

appropriate stakeholders are engaged in the forum/meetings most relevant to their roles and functions.

7.2 Funding Sources

Our vision and priorities within this strategy will be funded from grant allocations from the Welsh Government (WG), as well as core internal funding sources where appropriate.

The Housing Support Grant (HSG) will be the main funding stream used to meet our priorities as set out in the strategy.

The Housing Support Grant allocation for Bridgend Council is as follows:

2022-23 - £7,833,509.33

2023-24 - £7,833,509.33

2024-25 - £7,833,509.33

Other applicable grants include the Social Housing Grant and the No One Left Out Grant. Our ambition is to work in collaboration with our partners such as Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to ensure we jointly utilise all available funding sources to ensure we deliver on jointly agreed priorities. To meet the significant increase in temporary accommodation costs, identified BCBC core funding has been and will be required to meet ongoing demands.

7.3 Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluation Arrangements

Our strategic priorities will be communicated to partners in order to be implemented effectively. A two pronged, qualitative and quantitative approach to monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan will be adopted.

This will take the form of a RAG traffic light assessment and review process linked up to:

1. BCBC giving due consideration to consulting with stakeholders and partners via an annual update and review using a narrative assessment of performance against priorities and objectives.
2. Consideration being given to engaging with service users through an annual review process, either through existing service user involvement processes utilised by partners and stakeholders, or through the use of an online Survey Monkey style anonymised questionnaire.
3. Identifying tangible KPIs, actions and outputs as detailed in the strategy and/or its action plan and conducting a quantitative assessment conducted at key milestones.

This could be developed into a more comprehensive annual review and report, which again could be disseminated among stakeholders, through existing strategic meeting structures.