



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2018-19

**HEALTH & WELLBEING SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE 6th NOVEMBER 2018**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, PUBLIC
HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY
SERVICES**

Agenda Item No. 4

**REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY
2018-2022**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To allow members to scrutinise and comment on the suitability of the proposed draft, Rhondda Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 2.1 Scrutinise the draft Rhondda Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022 (attached as Appendix 1).
- 2.2 Following scrutiny re. 2.1 above, make recommendations in respect of the draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 New Homelessness legislation in Wales became operational on the 28th April 2015 via Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This Act placed new duties on Local Authorities to help anyone seeking housing advice and assistance, with an emphasis on prevention of homelessness via early intervention to tackle the causes of homelessness in a strategic and co-ordinated way.
- 3.2 Homeless prevention is defined as an intervention on the part of a service that enables a person who is threatened with homelessness to either remain in their current accommodation or to make a planned move to alternative suitable housing which is available for their occupation for at least 6 months.
- 3.3 The Act requires all Welsh Local Authorities to carry out a review of homelessness for it's area and formulate and adopt a Homelessness Strategy by the end of 2018, with a new homelessness strategy every fourth year thereafter.
- 3.4 Welsh Government introduced a national performance indicator that each Local Authority has to report on annually to give some measure of how effective the new legislation is in preventing homelessness across Wales. This PI asks Councils to calculate the percentage of clients (who are confirmed to be at risk of homelessness within the next 56 days) who have their homelessness successfully prevented following advice and assistance from the Council.
- 3.5 In January 2018 the Wales Audit Office issued their report "How Local Government manages demand – Homelessness", which reported on how effectively Local Authorities across Wales had implemented the new legislation that became operational in 2015. This report made 8 recommendations. The Council has produced an Action Plan in response to these recommendations (attached as Appendix 2).

4. REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS IN RCT

- 4.1 The review of our current homelessness services in RCT highlights how the Council has a very well developed multi agency approach, introduced prior to the new homelessness legislation. This includes help to prevent homelessness, ensuring suitable advice and assistance for people who are homeless and that satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless.
- 4.2 RCT provides a comprehensive housing advice and information service through our Housing Solutions Team, ensuring preventative, person centred and an outcome focused approach to those who contact the service. This includes a key worker support service to help clients remain at home or find alternative accommodation.
- 4.3 The Council has seen a steady improvement in it's prevention success rate when reporting the annual PI in data returns to Welsh Government, with a 75% success rate noted in 17/18 (Section 66 cases). This placed the Council in second place compared to the rest of Wales.

- 4.4 There are specialist Mental Health workers co-located with the Housing Solutions team to provide support to clients with a mental health need and deliver services to co-ordinate housing advice in The Royal Glamorgan hospital Mental Health Unit.
- 4.5 The Council's Supporting People Team leads on commissioning all support services and ensures services are focused on early intervention and prevention as well as helping people live independently in their own homes and communities.
- 4.6 The Council through Supporting People commissions 93 units of accommodation for a range of client groups, including young people and those with a substance misuse and mental health need.
- 4.7 Rough sleeper numbers in RCT are very low and the Street Smart service commissioned by the Council in partnership with Adref assists any rough sleepers with access to essential facilities and advice.
- 4.8 The Council has reviewed the Housing Allocation scheme for access to social housing and along with Homefinder partners have implemented the Choice Based Lettings process to allow applicants for social housing to bid for properties, giving more choice and transparency when allocating social housing to those in greatest housing need .
- 4.9 The review highlighted the causes of homelessness are varied and complex but the three main reasons for being accepted as homeless in RCT over the last three years are:
- I. Loss of rented or tied accommodation;
 - II. Parents unwilling to accommodate;
 - III. Breakdown of relationship due to violence.
- 4.10 The review also highlighted that although there are a wide range of prevention services across RCT that are working well, there are areas where more work is required to address need:
- There are limited services for male victims of domestic abuse;
 - A high proportion of clients who present as homeless have complex needs with substance misuse and mental health problems increasing;
 - Bed and breakfast accommodation is still used to place young people and those with a mental health need;
 - There is a shortage of single person accommodation across RCT;
 - Access to suitable affordable housing is difficult, particularly one bed single person accommodation;
 - Demand for social housing is very high;
 - There is a need to make better use of the private rented sector;
 - A lack of specialist accommodation with support for young people;
 - There are concerns about Welfare Reform and the impact that will have on homelessness presentations and other services;
 - There are difficulties for ex –offenders to access accommodation.

5. CONSULTATION

5.1 A public consultation was undertaken between 1st and 29th October, a period of 4 weeks.

The consultation process undertaken was as follows:

- On line via the Council website;
- Consultation with partners (Housing and Support providers);
- Consultation with staff and service users via questionnaire.

5.2 The full Consultation feedback report will be made available at the meeting.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 From 1st April 2018, Councils have received funding to address homelessness via the Revenue Support Grant which helps fund a range of initiatives to help prevent homelessness. Welsh Government Homeless Prevention grant is also available as is Supporting People funding which contributes to various schemes and support projects.

7. CONCLUSION AND STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

7.1 The Homelessness Strategy has three key objectives:

- Objective 1 – Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness from occurring, wherever possible, therefore reducing homelessness;
- Objective 2 – Ensuring that appropriate support and accommodation, including temporary and emergency accommodation, is available to meet the needs of homeless and potentially homeless people;
- Objective 3 - Ensuring people with housing support needs have these fully assessed and have access to services to maintain independent living.

7.2 The Homeless review found that our existing strategic aims and prevention activity have helped deliver effective results in the face of increasing demands on services. It is anticipated there will be further increasing demands on Housing Advice, Homelessness and Supporting People services.

7.3 Should the recommendation to approve the Homelessness Strategy be supported, the key objectives will allow the Council to meet it's statutory obligations in accordance with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and build on the good work already in progress.

Appendix 1.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Draft for Consultation
Rhondda Cynon Taf
Homelessness Strategy
2018 - 2022

Foreword

DRAFT

Foreword.....

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1. INTRODUCTION

This strategy sets out Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's approach to preventing and tackling homelessness. As required by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 it has been shaped by the findings of a review of homelessness in the Borough and developed within the national legislative and local policy context, and takes account of the current positive and effective practice in Wales and beyond.

The Housing (Wales) 2014 has changed how local authorities in Wales respond to homelessness, and places a greater emphasis on prevention of homelessness and early intervention and tackling the causes of homelessness in a strategic and co-ordinated way.

The Act requires all Welsh local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness for its area, and formulate and adopt a homelessness strategy by 2018 with a new homelessness strategy every fourth year.

The review should identify current and future levels of homelessness, services currently available to homeless and potentially homeless people and the resources put into homelessness in the County Borough. The strategy should focus on preventing and tackling homelessness, not just on the effective assessment of homeless applications.

The development of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy draws on the collective experience and achievements to date. It is an important aspect of the Council's vision in addressing the causes of homelessness and the improvement of services for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Strategy will exist within the context of an uncertain economic climate, reductions in public sector funding and changes to welfare benefits. There are significant challenges arising from recent housing and welfare changes, and public expenditure cuts that will require working even harder in collaboration with partners; to ensure we can find sustainable solutions for those threatened with homelessness and other households in housing need in the Borough. Partnership working and early intervention underpin the delivery of the aims and priorities in this strategy.

The strategy sets out a response with respect to homelessness to the above challenges. Reducing homelessness remains a key priority for Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council. The outcome of the recent review highlights that preventative services have helped in preventing homelessness and high levels of rough sleeping in the borough over the past three years.

2. THE COUNCIL'S VISION

The Council's Corporate Plan 2016 /2020 sets out the following vision:

“For a County Borough that has high aspirations, is confident and promotes opportunity for all “

The Council's Purpose and Priorities:

The Council's purpose and the reason why it exists are: to provide strong community leadership and effective services for the people of Rhondda Cynon Taf to enable them to fulfil their potential and prosper.

The Council is focused on the following three priorities:

- 1. People – Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone.**
- 2. Place – Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work.**
- 3. Economy – Building a strong economy.**

In order to meet our purpose in delivering these priorities, and respond to the significant financial challenges we face, the Council has to operate in a different way. The following priorities will apply to everything we do.

- **Provide essential services well:** our role is to make sure that local people get good quality outcomes from their services.
- **Helping people and their communities help themselves:** The council is at its most effective when it is helping people to live successful lives as independently as possible and when it is helping communities to help themselves. We want to work closely with RCT's voluntary and community sector to stimulate innovation and encourage communities to step forward and take on new roles in providing local services and solutions.

This will include better timed and co-ordinated delivery of targeted services that deliver better results, reduce demand and release resources for early intervention and other universal services.

Early intervention and prevention services not only provide a safety net but also help people to maintain their independence.

3.THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Key policies and strategies have undergone significant change as a result of new legislation and welfare reform. The homelessness strategy supports the vision, aims and objectives of a number of high level partnerships and strategies these include:

- The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- The Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014
- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015
- Cwm Taf VADWDASV Strategy 2017 -21
- The Welfare Reform Act (2012)
- The Housing (Wales) Act 2014
- The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016
- The Welsh Assembly Government 10 year Homelessness Plan 2009-19
- Supporting People Programme Practice Guidance 2018
- Code of Guidance to Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2016.
- Working Together to Reduce Harm Substance Misuse Strategy for Wales 2008 - 2018.
- RCT Working Together to Reduce Harm Delivery Plan 2016 -18.

4. BACKGROUND

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

New homelessness Legislation in Wales was implemented on the 28th April 2015 through Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This Act places new duties on local authorities to help anyone seeking housing advice and assistance.

The new duties under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 fall under the following stages

Section66 - Duty to provide advice and assistance which prescribes help to prevent duties relating to applicants found to be threatened with homelessness?

Section73 - Duty to prevent homelessness which prescribes help to secure accommodation duties for those found to be homeless (including cases where an applicant threatened with homelessness under Section 66 proves unsuccessful)

Section 75 Duty to secure accommodation which prescribes the duty to secure accommodation for applicants assessed as un-intentionally homeless and in priority need and for whom efforts to relieve their housing situation have proved unsuccessful.

In terms of developing the strategy and interpreting any of the monitoring data for the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 at both a national and local level. It must be noted complexity arises from the fact an applicant may be recorded under more than one of the above duties.

This would apply to those entitled to assistance under Section66 who may if their case was unsuccessfully prevented appear as qualifying for help under Section 73. They may then appear under the S.75 duty if efforts to secure accommodation have also been unsuccessful.

It is therefore possible for a household to be counted up to three times if they are subject to assistance under all three duties. This means there is scope for double counting which may not provide an accurate picture of need and demand.

Source: Homelessness Monitor Wales 2014

5. DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

For the purpose of developing the strategy, the definition of homelessness has been agreed and adopted from Section 55 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

1. A person is homeless if he or she has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere which is available for his or her occupation and which that person has a legal right to occupy.
2. A person will also be homeless where they have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it or where they have accommodation that is a moveable structure, such as a caravan or houseboat and there is no place where it can be placed in order to provide accommodation.
3. A person who has accommodation is to be treated as homeless where it would not be reasonable for them to continue to occupy it.
4. Where a person lacks accommodation

Examples of this definition will include:

- *Sleeping rough*
- *Living in insecure / temporary housing(excluding assured short hold tenants).*
- *Moving frequently between friends and family*
- *Squatting*
- *Unable to remain in , or return to housing due to poor conditions including overcrowding , affordability problems, domestic abuse , harassment, mental , physical and or sexual abuse.*
- *Threatened with losing their home and without suitable accommodation for any reason, e.g. domestic abuse.*
- *Leaving hospitals, Police custody, Prisons, the Armed Forces and other institutions or supported housing without a home to go to.*
- *Required to leave by family or friends or due to relationship breakdown.*
- *Within 56 days of the end of tenancy, facing possession proceedings or threat of eviction*

6. ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Our understanding of homelessness has changed. This change in understanding has influenced the design of services and the objectives for strategic responses to homelessness. We recognise homelessness is complex and is not just about housing those to whom it has a statutory duty to accommodate. As a consequence, we work collaboratively with a significant number of key partners to address health, training, and support needs.

These require work at a strategic and operational level to co-ordinate and provide a wide range of services, and ensuring there are robust joint working arrangements in place to meet the needs of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Council has a very well developed multi agency approach, introduced prior to the implementation of the new homelessness legislation, which has been in place for a number of years. This includes help to prevent homelessness, ensuring suitable advice and assistance for people who are homeless and that satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless.

This approach has continued with our homelessness prevention agenda to help people to stay in their existing homes or to find a new home before they become homeless.

Our strong partnership approach to tackling homelessness is increasingly contributing to wider social priorities around helping people and families to live independently in their communities. The Council has made considerable progress in developing services and partnerships to tackle homelessness prior to and following the introduction of the new homelessness legislation April 2015.

As a consequence of an ongoing review of the factors which contribute to homelessness in the borough, including measuring trends and outcomes, we have developed services to try and meet the needs of homeless people by intervening in trends and patterns to help reduce the long term levels of homelessness.

The 2018 – 2022 Homelessness Strategy describes the progress that has already been made towards the vision and the current challenges faced in driving down levels of homelessness in the borough.

A number of key achievements for improving services for homeless people in RCT to date are summarised below:

Improving our Homelessness Services and Providing Enhanced Housing Options.

- We provide a comprehensive housing advice and information service through our Housing Solutions Team, ensuring preventative, person centred and outcome focused approach to those who contact our service.

- We Implemented a new “homelessness It system to improve case recording and management.
- Introduced key worker support service to all persons to whom we have a legal duty to assist under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This ensures that all households including single people and families have access to a dedicated worker providing 121 housing support.
- Provision of specialist Mental Health Housing Advice workers, who are co –located with the Housing Solutions Team, also provide support to those with a mental health need and deliver services in the Royal Glamorgan Hospital, Mental Health Unit.
- Developed pathways and close working arrangements with a wide range of partners, including those funded by Supporting People Grant, to deliver housing related services, hostels and other supported accommodation for vulnerable people.

Preventing Homelessness and Reducing the Use of Temporary Accommodation.

- Continue to review services and implement interventions to prevent homelessness.
- Develop pathways with our hostel and refuge providers to ensure seamless services in and out of provision for service users.
- Built awareness of prevention strategies with key partners and service users.
- Utilised homelessness prevention funding to prevent homelessness in conjunction with the key reasons for people presenting as homeless.
- Commissioned a 10 bedroom hostel for young people aged 16 -21(The Grange)

Improving Support to People who are Vulnerable

- The Council’s Supporting People Team leads on commissioning of all support services and has reviewed all of its support provision over the past three years. This ensures services are focused on early intervention and prevention, as well as helping people to live independently in their own homes and local communities.
- A pathway has been developed with the Housing Solutions Team and Women’s Aid RCT to minimise time spent in refuge and ensure all women have access to a wide range of housing options
- Commissioned a specialist mental health worker who works closely with women in refuge. This ensures a responsive service to deal with any mental issues they may face personally and help them to leave refuge in a planned way.

- Piloted multiple needs tenancy related support services to minimise voids, reduce waiting lists and provide support on demand services for a wider client group.
- Commissioned a 5 bedroom supported housing project for care leavers and homeless young people aged 16 – 21.

Tackling the Wider Causes of Homelessness.

- Established a Welfare Reform Working Group to understand the local impact of welfare reform and develop the appropriate interventions.
- Reviewed our E learning Domestic Abuse arrangements with Learning Industries and our housing association partners, to provide awareness of domestic abuse and offer advice and guidance to front line staff in dealing with a disclosure of domestic abuse.
- Increased focus on homelessness prevention including the development of target hardening arrangements to allow people experiencing domestic abuse the option of remaining within their own home.
- Implemented a shared holistic assessment framework for young people and their families for the Family Resilience model including action planning and support to meet needs.
- Commissioned emotional support services to respond to the complex needs of people experiencing domestic abuse including group work and therapeutic support.
- Set up GRAMO, a pre-tenancy course, to provide advice on setting up a new home for young people and those living in hostel provision and supported accommodation.

Providing More Settled Homes

- Provided more affordable homes
- Provided financial assistance to help households access the private rented sector
- Reviewed our Allocation Scheme to ensure sufficient priority is given to those moving on from supported accommodation, leaving institutional care and those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Implemented Choice Based Lettings in partnership with our Home finder partners to enable people to bid on line for properties in the social housing sector allowing for more choice.

7. HOMELESSNESS IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Main Causes of Homelessness in RCT

The Councils Housing Solutions Team based at Sardis House, Pontypridd are responsible for investigating homelessness applications and the provision of advice and assistance to assisting all persons who present as homeless or threatened with homeless in line with the Council's duties under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Due to our prevention agenda more people are offered advice and assistance at the time of presenting as homeless as well as being referred to preventative services.

Breakdown of Homelessness Applications

| <u>Section 66 Duty</u> | <u>2015 /16</u> | <u>2016 /17</u> | <u>2017/18</u> |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Households threatened with Homelessness in 56 days | 755 | 567 | 764 |
| Households threatened with Homelessness in 56 days rate per 10,000 household | 72% | 55% | |
| Homelessness prevented | 357 (49%) | 357 (63%) | 571 (75%) |
| <u>Section 73</u> | | | |
| Households assessed as homeless and owed a duty to secure | 375 | 504 | 572 |
| Households successfully relived from homelessness. | 153 (41%) | 249 (50%) | 307 (54%) |
| <u>Section 75</u> | | | |
| Households unintentionally homeless and in priority need - Number (Section | 60 | 78 | 75 |
| Households positively discharged - Number (Section 75) | 57 (93%) | 66 (85%) | 61 (81%) |
| Total Households | 1,190 | 1,149 | 1,411 |

Source: Stats Wales – Welsh Government

Priority Need Categories

The below table provides a breakdown of accepted homeless households under the **Section 75** duty by priority need category **The demographics are broadly similar prior to the introduction of the Act with the main households accepted under the Section 75 duty being single person households (male) and households with dependent children** with a mental health need have been the primary reason for priority need decision in 2015 /16, 2016 /17 and 2017 /18.

| Priority need categories | 2015 /16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Households homeless in an emergency | | 1 | 0 |
| 16 or 17 year old | 14 | 9 | 8 |
| Fleeing domestic violence | 10 | 8 | 17 |
| Former Prisoner | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Mental Illness | 12 | 18 | 14 |
| Vulnerable old age | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Vulnerable other | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Vulnerable physical disability | 4 | 8 | 18 |
| Care leaver or an 18 – 21 year old at risk of exploitation | 3 | 0 | 4 |
| Household where a member is pregnant | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Household with dependent child(ren) | 16 | 30 | 9 |
| Total | 61 | 79 | 75 |

The other significant groups accepted were

- Households with 1 and 2 dependent children

These figures help to demonstrate the varying support needs of whom the Council has a legal duty to assist under the homelessness legislation and the challenges faced in securing temporary and affordable permanent accommodation for single person households.

The CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS 2015 /16, 2016/17 & 2017/18

| | <u>2015 /16</u> | <u>2016/17</u> | <u>2017/18</u> |
|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Current property unaffordable | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Homeless in an emergency | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Illegal eviction | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| In institutional care | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Loss of rented or tied accommodation | 12 | 30 | 15 |
| Mortgage arrears | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Breakdown of relationship – non violent | 1 | 6 | 5 |
| Breakdown of relationship – Violent | 11 | 12 | 17 |
| Other forms of violence and harassment. | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| Family / friends unable to accommodate | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Parents unwilling to accommodate | 19 | 13 | 9 |
| Prison Leaver | 3 | 3 | 7 |
| Property unsuitable other | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Racially motivated violence or harassment | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Rent arrears – social sector | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Rent arrears – private sector | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Returned from abroad | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Sleeping rough | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 61 | 79 | 75 |

The causes for homelessness acceptances are varied and complex with the primary three reasons for being accepted as homeless in RCT during 2015 /16 and 2016 /17 are as followed:

- 1) **Breakdown of relationship due to violence.**
- 2) **Loss of rented or tied accommodation**
- 3) **Parents unwilling to accommodate**

1. BREAKDOWN OF RELATIONSHIP - VIOLENT (DOMESTIC ABUSE)

Loss of home due to breakdown of relationship is the third highest reason for homelessness in the borough.

Prevention Services to assist victims of Domestic Abuse

Victims of domestic abuse are referred to the Council's funded Oasis Centre, which provides a one stop shop service offering specialist advice and support to both male and female individuals. However, we recognise victims of domestic abuse are often at most risk when they are no longer living with the perpetrator. In order to promote the safety of victims where they wish to remain in their own homes we offer target hardening arrangements and support in their own homes from the IDVA service and Women's Aid RCT.

Client reported outcomes and reduction in abuse were very positive

In 2016/ 17 at exit from the Oasis Centre (85%) of clients felt that they were safer with (82%) reporting an improved quality of life and (93%) had the confidence to access support. The proportions of clients with positive outcomes in terms of safety, quality of life and confidence increased in all three positive outcome measures from 2015

Women's Aid RCT

Women's Aid RCT are commissioned to provide refuge provision to vulnerable women and children in need of emergency accommodation and floating support services to both female and male victims living in their own home

RCTCBC - Supporting People Funded Domestic Abuse Services - commissioned 2017 – 2018

| Code | Provider | Project | Spaces |
|-------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| W1 | Women's Aid RCT | Floating support | 25 |
| W2 | Women's Aid RCT | Refuge | 22 |
| | Women's Aid RCT | Safe | |

145 women were supported in refuge in Rhondda Cynon Taff in **2017 /18**

In recognition of the increasing number of women presenting with mental health, substance misuse and an offending background a complex need is located within the refuge with the aim of

- Increasing opportunities to mental health support
- Increasing well-being
- Increasing engagement with services
- Increasing ability to maintain tenancy

The project is delivered by a specialist support worker with the skills, knowledge and experience to deliver effective interventions. Meeting with women within the first few days of their stay in refuge, enables the specialist worker to learn more about the individuals needs, and being an earlier intervention, reducing the potential for crisis mental health intervention.

| Complex Needs Worker | 2017/18 |
|---|----------------|
| Number of referrals received | 91 |
| Number of referrals supported | 91 |
| Number of referrals not accepting support | 0 |
| Reasons for not accepting support | n/a |
| <u>Support Needs</u> | |
| Mental Health (Diagnosed) | 42 |
| Mental Health (Un diagnosed) | 49 |

In the first year **91 women** have been directly supported by the project. Support needs have included - PTSD, anxiety, depression, paranoid thoughts, panic attacks, childhood trauma, multiple trauma, suicidal ideation, personality disorders, insomnia, flashbacks and intrusive thoughts.

A range of tools have been used to support those requiring additional support for their mental health including; well-being plans, stress reduction techniques, advocacy, GP support, meditation, one to one support, referrals into support services, CBT, use of motivational techniques to support attendance and engagement in mental health and substance support services

Floating support

The project will provide a floating support scheme to support individuals in their own home or tenancy. They will support individuals:

- Women who are experiencing or have experienced Domestic Abuse.

The project will support the person who is eligible and want or need housing related support to avoid homelessness and to prevent the loss of accommodation, or the risk to return to their previous home or to secure alternative housing such as supported housing, shared accommodation or general needs accommodation in the private or social rented sector.

The project will support up to 25 people with 77 people supported throughout the financial year 2017/2018.

The project will provide all service users with one to one support to help identify their needs, expectations and aspirations.

The Safe Project

Identifying domestic abuse at the earliest opportunity is key to keeping people safe. The SAFE project provides an accessible service based within the local community to support those who have experienced or are currently experiencing domestic violence and

are identified through risk assessment or Public Protection Notices (PPN) as low to medium risk. The project aims to increase the opportunities available to victims of domestic violence by implementing early intervention and prevention strategies. The services provided by the project build capacity by increasing the service user's skills to identify the early warning signs of abusive behaviours within current or future relationships, increase their confidence and self-esteem and reduce isolation.

The project delivers this in a variety of ways including;

One to one support / advocacy (short term)

- Life skills sessions including domestic abuse awareness programme and confidence building.
- Direct referral pathways to other support agencies.
- Access to legal advice and debt management surgeries.

The Recovery Toolkit

The Recovery Toolkit aims to assist women who have experienced domestic abuse and are in a position to take part in a group designed to assist in looking at ways to develop positive lifestyle coping strategies to move forward with their life.

The Freedom Programme

The Freedom programme aims to help women understand the beliefs held by an abusive partner and in doing so, recognise which of these beliefs they have shared. The course illustrates the effects of domestic violence on children and aims to support women to gain self-esteem and the confidence to improve the quality of their lives and that of their children.

Perpetrator Programme

In recognition of the need to work with perpetrators to change behaviour, innovative approaches are being piloted including the DRIVE project operating in Cwm Taf. A Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programme (DVPP) located at the Oasis Centre and funded via the Home Office to offer counselling work on a one to one basis or through group work sessions. Further work is being undertaken to consider joint commissioning opportunities with Children Services, to develop a corporate approach for the delivery of a DVPP and work with couples experiencing domestic abuse with outcomes linked to Child Protection arrangements and re-uniting families.

2. LOSS OF RENTED ACCOMMODATION

The loss of private rented accommodation is the highest reason for homelessness in RCT which is attributable to affordability and the impact of Local Housing Allowance particularly in the Taff area. Households are facing growing challenges to access and sustain accommodation as pressure builds on household budgets.

The government's welfare reform changes have placed further pressure to those with the least financial resources. Whilst shortfalls of rents for those on benefits can in some cases be covered by discretionary housing payments, housing in some parts of the

borough remain unaffordable, particularly for those on low incomes and in receipt of housing benefit.

A key area of concern is the impact of debt upon the incidence of homelessness. Tight households finances raises the prospect of households not being able to afford rent payments or other essential household bills, including fuel. It is anticipated that these pressures may be further compounded by the introduction of Universal Credit which is to be fully rolled out in Rhondda Cynon Taff in November 2018.

.We recognise the critical role played by the rented sector in preventing homelessness and will continue to work proactively with the sector to provide a package of financial incentives and offer continuing support for tenants.

It is increasingly important to provide support for working and non-working households, to find ways to maximise their incomes. This has implications for the delivery of support services and service redesign may be necessary to provide the necessary protections to offer early financial support

Prevention Services

The Financial Project developed with Pontypridd Citizens Advice Bureau funded by WAG Homelessness Prevention Grant offers specialist support to help with benefit maximisation PIP appeals and other welfare benefit issues. Referrals to this service are made by the Housing Solutions Team and individuals in receipt of a Supporting People funded housing related support service. The project in its first three months (April – June 2018) has assisted 59 individuals with a range of matters relating to debt, benefits, tax credits and Universal Credit.

The Step by Step Project is based within the local authority's Housing Solutions Team and provides key worker support delivered on an individual basis to offer housing assistance to single person homeless households to help secure a successful outcome including helping to access a range of housing and support options

The majority of single people accessing the Step by Step Project are men aged over 25 years, who are not owed the full homelessness duty and who have been assisted to access private rented sector accommodation

3. PARENTS UNWILLING TO ACCOMMODATE

The second highest reason for homelessness in Rhondda Cynon Taff is relationship breakdown with parents.

The Council has a particular responsibility for vulnerable 16 – 17 year olds and care leavers. We want to ensure that our young people have the best start in life and are able to develop well so that they can have the best start in life and are able to develop well so that they can fulfil their potential and their aspirations.

Prevention Services

Prevention will focus on supporting young people to remain at home with their family or wider family networks. We believe that it is in the best interests of 16 and 17 year olds to

live in the family home unless it would be unsafe or unsuitable for them to do so because they would be at risk of violence or abuse. Continuing to commission effective homelessness prevention services for 16 and 17 year olds will prevent short term risk and safe guard young people from becoming homeless.

The Council in partnership with Llamau, runs a long standing Youth Mediation Service which helps young people to reconcile their differences and enables them to return home even on a temporary basis until they can make a planned move with ongoing support.

115 (75%) of young people presenting as homeless in 2015 /16 were helped to return to the parental home.

In consideration of the likely future levels of homelessness for young people presenting as homeless, greater focus is to be placed on working with Children Services and Education Services and engaging with young people and their parents before a relationship breakdown has occurred and before problems escalate to the point of homelessness.

The Positive Pathway Project provides an advice and support service that will enable young people to avoid homelessness and remain or help them return to their home environment. The project is delivered by Llamau and funded by WAG Homelessness Prevention Grant to offer interventions through early targeted help, including helping educate and provide information and advice for young people and their families and other agencies about the realities of youth homelessness / welfare reforms impacts etc

The project worker role is based with the RCT Resilient Supporting Families Programme and Engagement in Education and training (SEET) team to identify, and offer support to young people and to those families which are specifically at risk of their young people presenting as homeless.

The outcomes for the Project include:

- Fewer Homelessness presentations from 16-24 age group. (again could be 14+)
- The number of Children and Young People able to remain at home with ongoing support.
- The number engaging in WTE
- Number of young people who have a better level of self-management, taking responsibility for their own actions / understanding potential consequences for the young person.
- Number of young people who recognise the right time to ask for help to prevent a crisis for both the young person and caregiver.
- Number of young people who are aware of who to contact if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Number of schools attended in RCT to promote awareness of homelessness in order to raise awareness about the housing options and the reality and risk of homelessness.

Despite our interventions and range of preventative services to address the reasons for homelessness in the borough, we recognise that there is small high need, high cost group of homeless people whose needs are not being fully met by existing services, whose homelessness is sustained or recurrent and who often make expensive use of publicly funded services. These include people with high and complex needs, entrenched rough sleepers and homeless people with recurrent and sustained experience of homelessness.

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8. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

What is homelessness prevention?

*A homelessness prevention is an intervention on the part of a service that enables a person who is threatened with homelessness **to either remain in their current accommodation or to make a planned move** to alternative suitable housing which is available for their occupation for at least 6 months.*

This strategy will focus on maximising homelessness prevention outcomes through supporting initiatives that the Council either provides or commissions.

Homelessness Prevention Tools.

There is evidence to demonstrate that there is a wide range of housing and support options

Preventative interventions in place in Rhondda Cynon Taff are effective and cost effective. These include

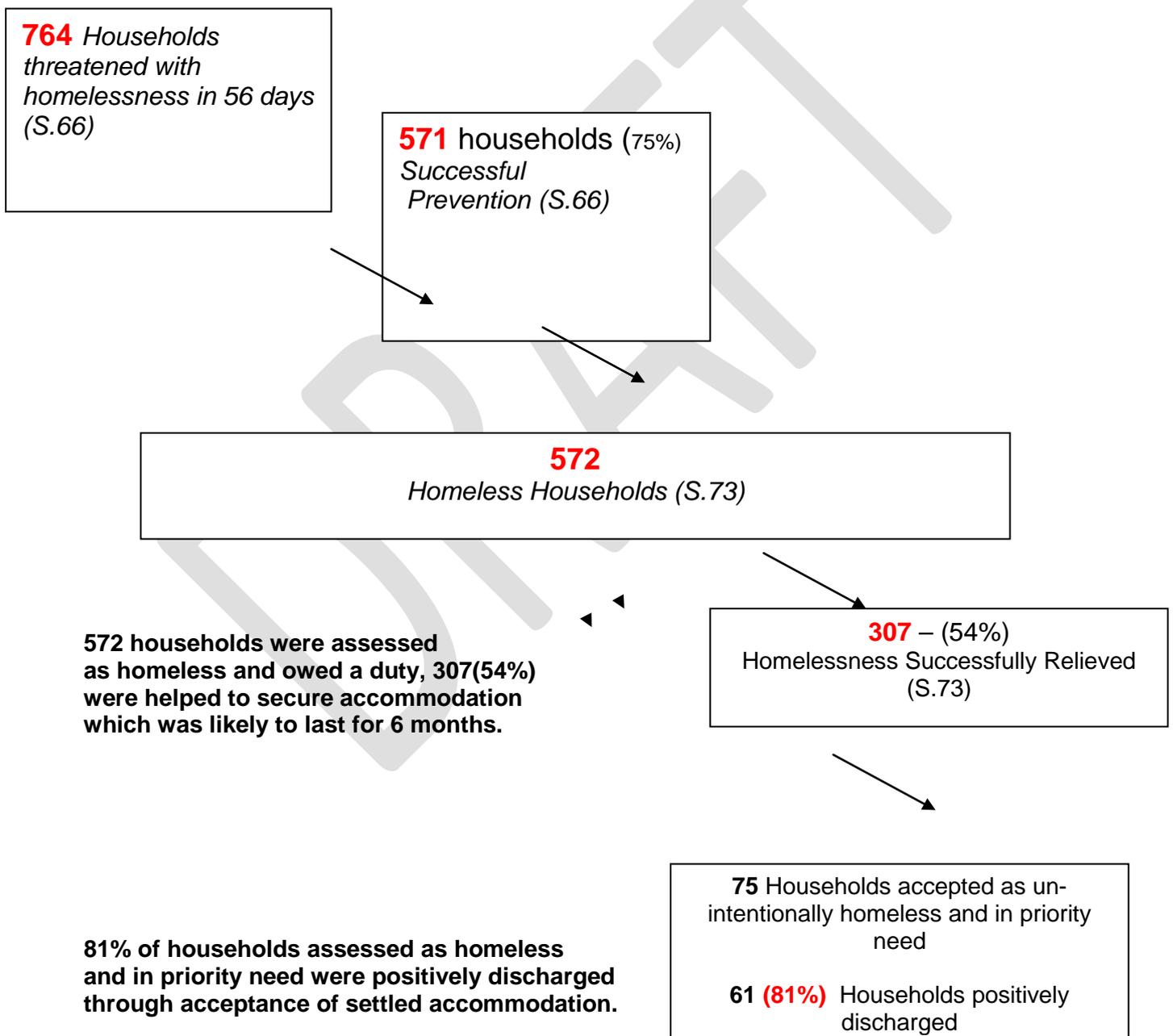
The most effective interventions in 2016/17 included:

- Early Intervention and Prevention projects
- Financial assistance to access the private rented sector and or prevent loss of accommodation and or to access the private rented sector
- Key worker support at the point of being threatened with homelessness.
- Placement in supported accommodation

RCT HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION DATA

The data below focuses on activity during 2017/18. The data indicates the total number of cases in 2017/18 where homelessness was prevented or relieved by the Housing Solutions Team and or partner organisations.

These show that 764 were assessed as threatened with homelessness in 56 days and 571 (75%) households had their homelessness successfully prevented for at least 6 months thereafter.



PREVENTION - TENANCY SUSTAINMENT

The Rhondda Cynon Taf Supporting People Local Commissioning Plan is responsible for identifying the level of support needs and outlines the Supporting People Grant (SPG) funded projects including the priorities for the funding of SPG services. A review of Supporting People Services has been undertaken to ensure they are meet the homelessness prevention agenda.

The Councils Supporting People Team operates a Single Point of Access and processed over 2,000 applications for support services in 2016 /17.

Number of people who received a housing related support service

| Support required | 2015/2016 | 2016/2017 |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Supported Accommodation | 177 | 178 |
| Floating Support | 1,638 | 1,778 |

Service User Feedback (RCT Supporting People Services)

- *Support has helped me from becoming homeless.*
- *My support worker has helped me to motivate me to do more for myself.*
- *I would have been homeless without the support and am very grateful to my support worker for all the hard work.*
- *I am due to come off scheme but would like to know that I can ring my support worker at any time if I need help and they can come back to work with me rather than someone I do not know.*
- *I would like ongoing support with the same worker rather than a referral to another provider.*
- *My quality of life is better as a result of receiving support just wished I had received it sooner.*
- *Some people do not realise how vital support is to each individual. It saved my life. I am now in a position when I can open my mail and not worry about what it is.*

Lack of appropriate support can severely affect a person's ability to sustain a tenancy leading to loss of accommodation and repeat cases of homelessness. In consideration of the high number of referrals received for tenancy related support services in RCT, this has led to long waiting lists for support, particularly for some lead need groups particularly those with a mental health need.

Floating Support Projects.

In consideration of the high service demand, we consulted with our service users to help with review and redesign of our floating support provision. In addition we piloted multiple need projects to help us consider new and innovative ways of working. The review also explored how we provide services for some of our most vulnerable clients particularly those with challenging behaviours and backgrounds that are currently falling through the net as they are passed between providers and services.

Our new proposed floating support model will aim to provide a seamless transition, between each level of support and the interventions required based on an individual's level of presenting housing and support needs. This will aim to ensure households can access support as and when required and are able to live independently and be supported within their local communities. For residents this approach will mean easier access to support and the services they need without having to negotiate with different agencies.

The new service will adopt a trauma based approach to working with vulnerable individuals, including an understanding of any barriers to how we currently try to support them. This will ensure our housing officers and support workers are fully trained in delivering trauma based interviewing techniques in consideration of the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) agenda.

Static Provision

The Council commissions **93 units of static accommodation** for a range of client groups including young people and for those with a mental health and substance misuse need.

We supported **183 individuals in 2017 /18** to help them develop the necessary skills to live independently in their own homes.

The opening of the Old Bakery Project in 2017 enabled 6 young people with high support needs including those leaving care, to access supported accommodation to help develop independent living skills in their own self contained accommodation.

In recognition of the high demand for young person's 24/7 accommodation, a review of Supporting People Grant funding has enabled monies to be released which following the approval of the Supporting People Planning Group. The funding will be used to ensure all young persons supported accommodation can offer 24/ 7 provision by the end of 2018 to meet all levels of young people's presenting support needs.

Other Prevention Interventions

Complex Needs Worker In order to reduce the number of single homeless people, with high and complex support needs, being asked to leave our hostels for non compliance with rules, and in recognition of the levels of abandonment, a Complex needs worker has been commissioned to offer support to residents placed in the Grange and Mill Street Hostel, to help effectively manage and support individuals leaving services without their homelessness ever being resolved, resulting in a revolving door of service use and homelessness. The worker also co-ordinates referrals to other services including, health, mental health and social care. The worker will also be co-located in one of our accommodation based project to help provide specialist support provision.

The **Residential Resilience Pilot Project** is collaboration between Merthyr and the Valleys Mind and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. The Project aims to build and improve emotional reliance and promote good health through psycho-education and wellbeing interventions. This will offer one-to-one case work to vulnerable tenants using Mind's Resilience products which focus on self-directed support and provide group psycho-educational which focuses on individual and community resilience in partnership with Adref, Gwalia and Cynon Taf Community Housing Group to the following projects:

- **Mill Street Hostel**
- **The Grange**
- **Martins Close**
- **Early Intervention and Prevention Project**
- **Gwalia - Multiple needs Housing Related Support Project**
- **Adref - Multiple Needs Housing Related Support Project**

Performance measures for the project include individual outcomes and using relevant outcome measures together with the projects wider impact. It is hoped additional external funding will help with the roll out of the project to all Supporting People Grant funded static projects. This will provide service users with help to access a range of other services including opportunities for volunteering, training and employment and to refer those who exhibit emotional distress into sessional counselling and Talking Treatment provision offered by Mind and other specialist services.

Housing First

In consideration of the increasing number of single homeless people, particularly those with an offending background and contact with the criminal justice system who present as homeless, a wider system response was required to assist those with high and complex needs.

The Wisdom Housing Project has been developed in consideration of this response and based principles of Housing First which offers housing and support to individuals who are part of the Wisdom cohort in RCT.

The delivery of the project is through multi agency working arrangements including Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Trivallis, Gwalia, South Wales Police and

the Probation Service and aims to provide a sustainable exit from homelessness. This includes an offender having rapid access to an independent social housing tenancy and providing intensive flexible support arrangements from both a dedicated housing management and a housing related support worker as long as needed to sustain a tenancy.

It is early days and the project is still very much in its infancy in respect of learning and understanding of the next steps and in consideration of a wider roll out of the Housing First model and principles. We recognise Housing First is not designed for all forms of homelessness and needs to form part of a range of services including preventative services and lower –intensity support services for homeless people with less complex needs.

However the project outcomes to date have been positive, including one client with a serious offending history who has fully engaged with the project and successfully maintained his tenancy.

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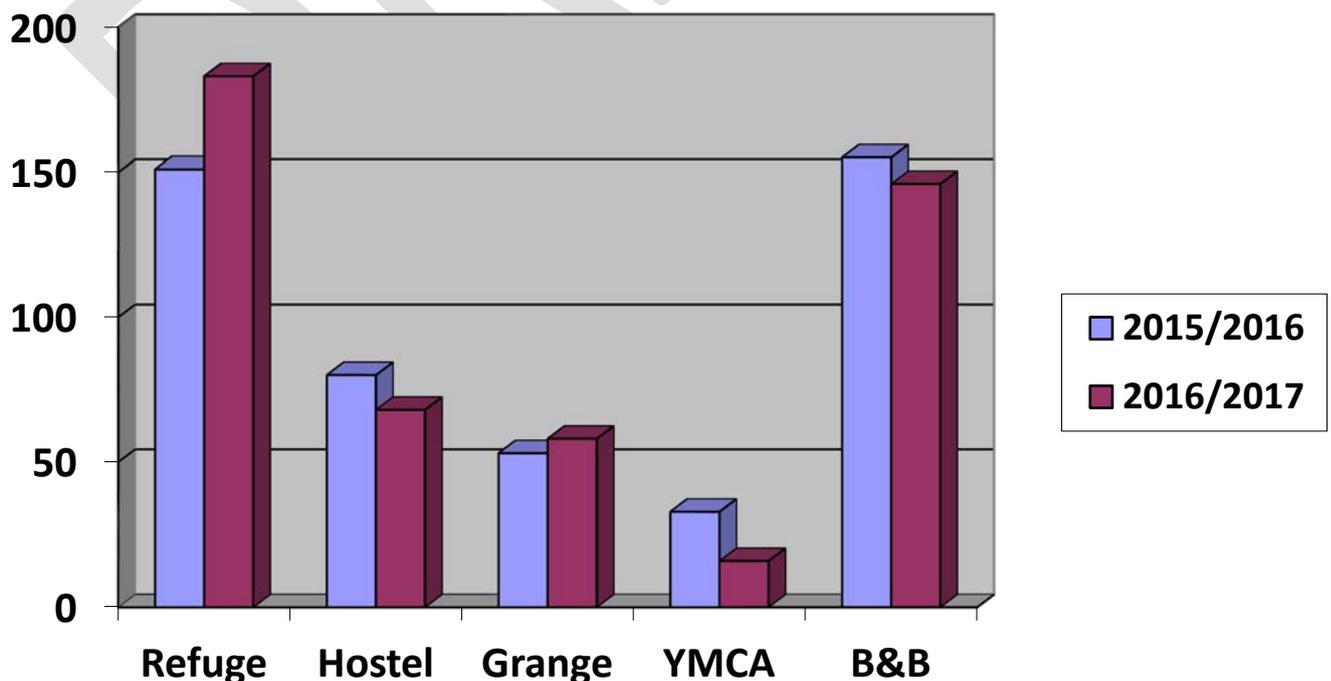
9. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

There is a statutory duty to provide accommodation for an applicant, if they are considered homeless and in one of the priority need categories. Other Council departments also have accommodation duties, normally where the housing department does not have a duty to accommodate. This includes people who have no recourse to public funds due to their immigration status.

Temporary Accommodation in RCT is accessed via referrals from the Housing Solutions Team, when an individual presents as homeless. A Housing Solutions Officer makes a referral to the Temporary Accommodation officer who then allocates the appropriate accommodation.

In order to fulfil its legal obligation to accommodate people the Council has procured a variety of alternative forms of temporary accommodation which include hostel bed spaces, refuge accommodation, RSL and Private Sector leased self contained units and emergency provision for young vulnerable individuals.

- The chart illustrates the number of people placed in Emergency Accommodation throughout 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. The highest placements were for Refuge; B+B's and hostels with the highest increase in placement for the Grange and refuge provision.



Bed and Breakfast Accommodation.

RCTCBC regularly makes use of four premises for B+B provision, two of which have been used for a number of years by the Council to house homeless households. Each B+B is assessed to determine that it meets the needs of the client being placed, having regard in particular to the other clients and users of that hotel, and this leads to certain client groups being placed predominantly in a particular B+B.

In addition to the above, B+B is used by other Council departments which places further pressure on the availability of accommodation. The placement of 16 and 17 year old in B+B accommodation is not suitable desirable outcome, however there may be instances where an emergency accommodation placements in a B+B is necessary by Children's Services.

On occasions Out of Borough is used when there is no availability in the above premises. The Code of Guidance for Local authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness (2016) states that where accommodation is made available outside of the LA area, the placing LA must by law notify the host LA with the location and details of the individual or household placed within 14 days of the placement as set out in Section 91 Housing (Wales) Act 2014. However the Welsh Government strongly recommends where accommodation is being made available in another local authority area, the placing LA should contact the host area before placement to assist with ensuring the placement is safe and suitable. The Welsh Government encourages the development of an out of area placement protocols to help manage this type of scenario.

Temporary Leasing Scheme.

Private Sector Leasing Schemes include properties that are either leased from a private landlord or provided by a housing association for a contracted period of time.

Rhondda Cynon Taf's leasing scheme is managed by Cartrefi Hafod and offers a total of 23 units of which 11 are leased from a private landlord and 12 of which are Hafod's own stock.

REASONS FOR PLACEMENT IN BED and BREAKFAST

The Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2016 states that Local Authorities are encouraged to reduce the usage of Bed and Breakfast accommodation wherever possible and should only be used on an exceptional basis and for a limited period of time. B+ B accommodation is not regarded as suitable for families with children, pregnant women and 16 and 17 year olds and should only be used for these client groups in an emergency.

B+B's have limited facilities for applicants and where used Local Authorities should ensure that households have the use of rooms during the day and access to cooking facilities.

By law, local authorities must consider whether the temporary accommodation is affordable, however the cost of TA can exceed the cost of living in settled accommodation particularly where there are no cooking facilities and where residents have to vacate the premises for part of the day.

Whilst the prevention approach has worked for many, there are still those we find it difficult to prevent homelessness for because of an unforeseen event or they contact us too late which means we have to use B+B as a necessary means of temporary accommodation in the first instance.

Reasons for placement in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation by Client Group

| <u>Priority need Group</u> | <u>2015/ 16</u> | <u>2016/17</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 16 / 17 year old | 15 | 22 |
| Care Leaver (18-21) | 5 | 4 |
| Household with dependent children | 7 | 0 |
| Domestic abuse (F) | 5 | 17 |
| Domestic abuse (M) | 1 | 1 |
| Old age | 2 | 1 |
| Emergency | 0 | 1 |
| Fleeing violence | 2 | 1 |
| Mental health | 25 | 2 |
| Physical health | 7 | 21 |
| Prison Leaver | 83 | 8 |
| Pregnant | 3 | 8 |
| Vulnerable | 0 | 7 |
| Army discharge | 0 | 0 |
| Out of hours | 0 | 1 |
| Cold Weather Provision | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 156 | 140 |

During **2017/18 (April – December)** three people were placed in B+B on more than one occasion. Two of the placements were homeless and in priority need for the following reasons:

- **Household 1** - *fleeing domestic violence or threatened with violence*
- **Household 2** - *where a member is vulnerable – mental illness.*

Between the period **2015/16 to 2017/18 (April – December)** three households have been placed in B+B accommodation on multiple occasions. Their homelessness priority need reasons are:

- **Household 1** - *Household where a member is vulnerable – mental illness*
- **Household 2** - *Household where a member is vulnerable – mental illness*
- **Household 3** - *Household where a member is vulnerable – physical disability*

TIME SPENT IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

In 2016/17, we also reduced the time spent in B+B for all homeless households, based on our performance targets. This improved performance continued in 2017/18.

The longest number of weeks spent in B+B accommodation is steadily decreasing from 33 weeks in 2015/16, 28 weeks in 2016/17 and 20 weeks for the period April – December 2017/18.. These cases were single males indicating a delay in move on to permanent accommodation for this type.

Despite the reduction in the use of B+B accommodation, we recognise the need more for alternative forms of temporary accommodation to meet service demand, predominantly from single homeless people.

It is also imperative that no 16 and 17 year olds are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, unless it is an emergency, and no alternative accommodation can be found. If used for an emergency, there is a commitment from both Housing Services and Children's Services that it should be used for the shortest time possible and support is offered during their stay. Young people placed in B+B indefinitely can lead to consequences such as increased emotion and mental health problems, further estrangement from family members and possible exposure to the use of drugs and alcohol. .

A review of temporary accommodation arrangements has been undertaken with the aim of further reducing the use of B+B provision. This included analysing the demand for temporary accommodation, to inform decisions relating to supply and exploring alternative options such as the expansion of the current leasing scheme and developing other private rented sector options in the form of shared properties.

10. ROUGH SLEEPING in RCT

Definition of Rough Sleeping

People who are sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air, people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation.

This definition will include for example, people sleeping on the streets in doorways, in parks, in bus shelters or buildings not designated for habitation, such as barns, sheds, car parks, derelict boats, stations, squats, tents or make shift shelters.

Welsh Assembly Government

Whilst there has been an undisputed rise in rough sleeping in Wales, the numbers in consideration of the above definition within Rhondda Cynon Taff have continued to remain static over the last three years.

There is a perception of increased rough sleeping in the borough particularly in locations such as Pontypridd and Aberdare. This is mostly linked to increased visibility of single people in shop doorways, who are of no fixed abode gravitating to the town centre locations. There is also some evidence of street begging from individuals who are not local to the area.

The annual rough sleeper count undertaken in Rhondda Cynon Taff in November 2016 and 2017 identified only two people sleeping rough on the night. This is consistent with figures from night counts undertaken in previous years.

In order to ensure services are available to anyone who is faced with the prospect of rough sleeping, the Street-Smart Project has been commissioned by the Council in partnership with Adef to offer:

- Support with housing issues, access to private rented and/or social housing, negotiating DHP payments etc.
- Referrals to Supporting People
- Access to a laundry, showers, hot and cold food and beverages.
- Provision of sleeping bags, survival blankets and gender specific essential items packs
- A 'care of' address and a point of contact for other services e.g. probation, substance misuse, mental health.

The service will be available to people directly accessing the hostel and through referral from the Housing Solutions Team and other agencies. The Council has developed a Severe Weather Plan and during periods of extreme weather all persons identified as rough sleeping will be offered temporary accommodation through financial support made available by the Council. All persons placed are offered support to help understand their reasons for needing to sleep rough and help provide the best housing options to meet their housing and support needs.

The data from the Street-Smart project, the night count and the questionnaires completed by the Housing Solutions Team for people claiming to be sleeping rough are regularly analysed to help provide a better understanding of the needs and aspirations of people sleeping rough in the borough.

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11. FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Local authorities have received Transitional Housing Funding from the Welsh Assembly Government over the past three years to help with the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

In Rhondda Cynon Taff this has assisted with a number of areas, including the purchase of a new IT system and additional staffing resources to ensure we are fully meeting the legal requirements of the Act. In addition the fund has enabled the payment of financial incentives to landlords to help provide access to the private rented sector, prevented the loss of accommodation by helping with the payment of debts including rent arrears and the purchase of furniture packs. Target hardening measures also offer security equipment to be provided to support victims of domestic abuse who wish to remain in their own homes.

As from the 1st April 2018 the Transitional Housing Fund will no longer be received as a specific grant made available from Welsh Government. Councils have instead received additional financial resources for homelessness via their Revenue Support Grant (RSG) which will also include funding for temporary accommodation arrangements. In addition to the RSG monies provision of WAG annual Homelessness Prevention Grant Funding is made available through a separate application process in consideration of specific client criteria.

Funding Flexibility

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council is one of seven pathfinder local authorities testing out a single grant approach in 2018/19 which allows greater financial freedom and flexibility to work across 10 grant programmes including:

- Supporting People
- Flying Start
- Families First
- Legacy Fund
- Promoting positive Engagement for
- Young People
- Homelessness Prevention
- Rent Smart Wales
- St David's Day Fund
- Communities for Work Plus

The Flexible Funding Project aims to improve access and availability of services, reduce service gaps and improving pathways. As well having a greater understanding of need and demand to support and promote joint planning and commissioning making more effective use of funding.

The greater financial freedom and flexibility this would facilitate is expected to enable local authorities to work differently giving more scope to support the Government's drive for more preventative long term approaches.

Supporting People Grant (SPG)

The Council receives Supporting People Grant (SPG) funding annually of over 9 million.

This is used to fund housing related support services including static and tenancy related projects and preventative services for vulnerable client groups.

These include

- Those fleeing domestic abuse,
- People with mental health needs
- People with a substance misuse and or offending history
- Older people,
- Vulnerable families
- Care leavers
- Young people.

A strategic review of our Supporting People funding and services has ensured alignment between Supporting People services and the homelessness prevention agenda. Through remodelling, decommissioning and re-commissioning of services, Supporting People Grant is used effectively to provide early intervention and preventative homelessness support services as followed:

- ✓ **Homelessness Intervention Project (HIP)** offers key worker support for all persons who present to the Council as homeless or threatened with homelessness by supporting an applicant with their reasonable steps.
- ✓ **Get Ready and Move On (GRAMO)**, a pre tenancy project providing care leavers and residents in our hostels supported accommodation and those stepping down from specialist Adult Care placements with information on all aspects of having a tenancy and being a good tenant.

External Funding

Funding secured from the Oak Foundation over the last three years has supported the development of the Step by Step Project, which is a successful partnership with Merthyr and the Valley Mind Cymru. The project provides a proactive response to the housing and support needs of single homeless people with the support workers co-located within the Housing Solutions Team

An evaluation report produced by the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care (University of South Wales and Cardiff University) highlighted the high success rate of the project in achieving positive outcomes. This included helping single person households to secure accommodation in the private rented sector.

The Step by Step project is now funded by directly by RCTCBC through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) in recognition of the projects success and the outcomes achieved in preventing homelessness and securing accommodation particularly for single homeless people.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

The Council has a strong track record in utilising DHP to prevent homelessness and has effective joint working arrangements between the Housing Solutions Team and Housing Benefit Teams. A Housing Benefit Officer is funded to offer a dedicated role for HB referrals made in respect of persons who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This helps with the processing time for applications helping to prevent homelessness or help access accommodation. DHP's are also helping to assist private tenants affected by Local Housing Allowance restrictions and others in need of assistance with meeting their shortfall in rental costs

The delivery of the actions set out in this strategy will rely upon the resources of the Council and partners. To maximise combined resources, it will be important to work together, sharing expertise, good practice and avoiding duplication, identifying and meeting gaps in provision, jointly funding or procuring projects and making joint bids for any available funding streams to secure additional resources to help tackle homelessness in the borough.

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12. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS- HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

The review looked at the patterns of homelessness in Rhondda Cynon Taff to help understand the nature of homelessness in the borough and the reasons why people become susceptible to it.

The homeless review found that our existing strategic aims and prevention activity have helped to deliver effective results in the face of increasing demands on services.

It is recognised we are entering difficult times as far as the wider economy and its impact on household budgets and the housing market are concerned. It is anticipated there will be further increasing demands on housing advice, homelessness and Supporting People Services. The introduction of Universal Credit may also have an impact as households face further financial challenges.

Service users included families and single people users were contacted as part of the review and asked about:

- their reason(s) for homelessness
- what, if anything, could have prevented homelessness occurring
- their experience of the service they accessed
- their views on improvements that could be made
- any other issues they wanted to raise.

Summary of the Review Findings.

- There are a wide of range of prevention services in RCT.
- There are limited services for male victims of domestic abuse. Victims of violence and abuse need to be more aware of the services that are available so they can access information, advice and assistance when they need it.
- A high proportion of people who present as homeless or request support via the Single Point of Access (SPA) have complex needs. These include mental health needs and this is often an underlying cause of their homelessness stemming from events experienced in early life. In addition debt and money issues were a source of emotional problems and family conflict.
- The use of bed and breakfast accommodation is still used to place vulnerable young single persons and those with a mental health need.
- There is a mismatch between the profile of those presenting as homeless and the accommodation available to re-house them, in particular a shortage of single person's accommodation in the more popular areas of the County Borough.

- Access to affordable housing in some parts of the borough is challenging. Demand for social housing is high particularly 1 bedroom single person accommodation.
- A lack of specialist accommodation with support for young people including those with complex needs particularly for those leaving care
- Substance misuse is becoming an increasing problem within Rhondda Cynon Taff which has a significant impact on the wider community.
- A high percentage of people presenting as homeless have a mental health need, with a long wait to access therapeutic and counselling services.
- The need to make better use of the private rented sector, as an alternative to social housing in the areas, where little is available.
- Concerns about the impact of Universal Credit and the impact this will have on the ability to sustain current accommodation.
- Difficulties for ex-offenders accessing permanent accommodation
- The majority found the service provided by the Housing Solutions service to be accessible. A few users commented the service is usually very busy and sometimes there is a long wait to be seen. The provision of information in the reception was welcomed although some users felt that the reception and interview rooms could be bigger to allow for more privacy.

13. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This last section of the strategy sets out in summary how the three objectives of the homelessness strategy will be implemented.

Objective 1-

Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness from occurring, wherever possible, therefore reducing homelessness.

Objective 2.-

Ensuring that appropriate support and accommodation, including temporary and emergency accommodation, is available to meet the needs of homeless and potentially homeless people

Objective 3-

Ensuring people with housing support needs have these fully assessed and have access to services to help sustain independent living

**Actions -Objective One:
Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness from occurring
wherever possible, therefore reducing homelessness.**

1. Continue to secure financial resources to ensure we are able to operate homelessness services and assist with access to the private rented sector and other prevention activity.
2. Improve the monitoring and recording of prevention work so that we are clear about what interventions are effective. This will include considering moving investment towards more effective interventions and decommission less successful measures.
3. We will continue to identify the underlying causes of homelessness, ensuring everyone gets advice at the earliest possible stage to prevent them from experiencing homelessness.
4. We will give particular focus to young people and their families and the reasons for family breakdown. This will involve much earlier work with families to reduce the rate of family exclusions and do more to raise awareness of housing options
5. We will continue to implement a positive youth accommodation pathway for those who cannot remain at home or are leaving care. This will be supported by the Councils wider corporate agenda, such as aiming to raise education and training opportunities and improve health and well being.
6. Work with Children's Services to help implement the recommendations of the "Accommodation and Review Strategy for Young People 16 + Years of Age Leaving Care."
7. Ensuring early engagement with drug and alcohol services will remain critical for identifying and helping those at risk of homelessness
8. Support a multi agency approach to preventing homelessness including the development of clear housing pathways for each specific client group such as those leaving prison, hospital or adult social care placement that includes appropriate accommodation and support
9. Provide services to help divert and prevent perpetrators of domestic abuse re-offending.
10. To continue to improve service user involvement to ensure they are able to have their say in service design, development and delivery.

**Actions - Objective Two:
Ensuring that appropriate support and accommodation, including temporary and emergency accommodation, is available to meet the needs of homeless and potentially homeless people**

1. Reducing the use of temporary accommodation will be an ongoing priority
2. We will continue to keep the use of bed and breakfast, at the lowest levels possible and ensure we do not place any young persons aged 16 and 17 in such accommodation or place families in bed and breakfast for longer than 6 weeks.
3. We will complete a review of our temporary accommodation arrangements to ensure we are providing a range of options which meet the needs of all our vulnerable client groups.
4. Further develop independent living solutions utilising the principles of the Housing First Model and investigate the feasibility of adopting the full model.
5. We will continue to develop links with the private rented sector through the development of our own in house lettings service
6. Adopt trauma and psychologically informed approaches to supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
7. We will work with our housing provider partners on new investment and funding models to ensure affordable housing delivery is maintained
8. Develop partnerships with private landlords and ensure a good supply of affordable accommodation to homeless people.

**Actions - Objective Three:
Ensuring people with housing support needs, have these fully
assessed and have access to services to help sustain independent
living.**

1. Review our floating support projects to ensure we are providing wider community support, by helping people to remain in their own home and feel in control of their lives. This will include the provision of support on demand, early intervention and prevention activity, including financial and debt advice, signposting and advocacy for other services and social opportunities.
2. Whilst effective partnership arrangements have been key to achieving our prevention agenda, we recognise we cannot stand still and we look forward to working closely with many of our colleagues in other Council departments, particularly around the proposed pathfinder flexibilities funding model.
3. Work with our Health colleagues to re-prioritise the development, review and implementation of the standards for improving the Health and Wellbeing of homeless people and vulnerable client groups, including the HaVGHAPS.
4. Work with our partners including Health, Adult Social Care and Children's Services, to ensure homelessness is addressed when planning services in consideration of the outcomes of the population needs assessment.
5. Share appropriate information to improve assessment of needs and access to health and support services and support planning.
6. Develop links with the Local Mental Health and Substance misuse Area Planning Board (APB) regional teams.
7. To continue our work with Adult Social Care colleagues to help find housing solutions for people who are ready to step down and leave residential care settings.
8. To work with partners to reduce drug related deaths for homeless people.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken of the draft homelessness strategy to ensure there are no adverse effects for any particular client group. The Strategy itself sets out the strategic priorities to be delivered to prevent homelessness and to respond to those in housing need. As the overarching aim of the strategy is to prevent homelessness and to support vulnerable people, the delivery of the objectives identified will have a positive impact for vulnerable people including young people and women fleeing domestic abuse who are amongst those at risk of homelessness

MONITORING and REVIEWING THE STRATEGY

Monitoring

It is important to develop effective performance monitoring arrangements to help inform the local profile of homelessness. The regular review of statistical data can also help identify where service pressures are likely to arise and help provide the intelligence to inform the allocation of resources and future shaping of services.

Proposed indicators are:

1. Number of people assisted under each of the duties i.e.
 - Section 66
 - Section 73
 - Section 75
2. Number of repeat homelessness presentations
3. Number of households in bed and breakfast by client group
4. Number of families placed in bed and breakfast for longer than 6 weeks.
5. Length of time spent in bed and breakfast for all client groups
6. Number of repeat temporary accommodation placements
7. Number of tenancies breaking down within 6 months of letting after a homeless acceptance

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF SERVICE USERS.

In order to ensure we are identifying and providing services which meet the needs of service users. We will ensure we develop appropriate mechanisms to consult with service users, who actively use the services and have the skills and expertise, to help shape our services and are provided in accordance with their needs.

REVIEWING THE STRATEGY

The requirement of the Welsh Assembly is that the homelessness strategy is fully reviewed at least every four years.

It has become apparent throughout the development of this strategy that there are changes on the horizon, including changes to government policy and the financial landscape.

In view of this the strategy aims to be a flexible document and although the vision will remain the same it is likely that the strategic objectives and the action plan will change and will be reviewed every year to ensure that the tasks remain relevant and are revised where appropriate

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|---|--|---|---|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| WAO recommendations contained in ‘How Local Government Manages Demand - Homelessness’ | | Update & Action to Date | Next Steps | Delivery Date | Responsible Member/ Officer |
| WAO HLR1 | Local authorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure their staff are sufficiently skilled to deal with the new demands of mediating, problem solving, negotiating and influencing with homeless people; and • review and reconfigure their services to engage more effectively with homeless and potentially homeless people to prevent homelessness | The role of the Housing Solutions Officers (HSO) is to assess all people who present as homeless and threatened with homelessness. The outcome of the assessment is to develop a housing and support plan for all clients which clearly set out the actions to be followed to prevent or relieve homelessness. | Carry out an audit with the Housing Solutions Officers to identify any ongoing training needs. | Jan-19 | Ian Jones |
| | | All HSOs have received significant training on the new Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and current procedures reflect the changes in legislation. . | Develop a continuing professional development and training plan for Housing Solutions staff | Mar-19 | Ian Jones |
| | | The Team are also supported by other agencies to help with their work. This includes a mediation Officer (Llamau) and Housing Advice Workers (Gofal Cymru) for people who present with a mental health need. The homelessness service has been reviewed and reconfigured to work closely with the “ Step by Step ” Project and the Homelessness Intervention Project (HIP) funded via the Homelessness Prevention Grant and Supporting People Grant. Both projects work closely with the Housing Solutions Team to provide a link officer to support homeless people. | Review performance and outcomes of all the co-located key worker support projects | Mar-19 | Cheryl Emery |
| | | | Improve opportunities for clients to feed back their experience and expectations of service delivery to ensure the Council is providing an efficient person centred service, where client views contribute to continuous service improvement. | Apr-19 | Ian Jones |

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| WAO HLR2 | Local authorities review their funding of homelessness services to ensure that they can continue to provide the widest possible preventative approach needed. Reviews should consider use of Supporting People as well as General Council fund monies to support delivery of the authority’s homelessness duties. | <p>In 2017-18, a funding review was undertaken for all homeless funding including the RSG, Homelessness Prevention Grant and Supporting People Grant. This review identified the ongoing revenue support requirements for the homelessness prevention service and has enabled new resources to be made available including additional staffing for the Housing Solutions team.</p> <p>Supporting People services have also been reviewed to ensure people being referred for support are assessed as early as possible to help the preventative agenda. This includes a review of floating support projects and the development of an Early Intervention and Prevention model. A Project Officer has also been placed in each of the hostels i.e. Mill Street and the Grange and Women’s Aid RCT Refuge to work with complex needs clients to help prevent episodes of future homelessness.</p> <p>Merthyr and the Valleys Mind are providing mental health and wellbeing support in hostels and supported accommodation.</p> | Consider the impact of the new projects on the prevention agenda through monitoring and performance data which will influence decisions on distribution of future funding. | Dec-18 | Louise Davies & Cheryl Emery |
| WAO HLR3 | Local authorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> design services to ensure there is early contact with service users; | The Housing Advice team currently operate a drop in service from 9am until 5pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday with a service for | Explore options to introduce a more detailed triage assessment on first contact to see if this will | Jan-19 | Ian Jones |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use ‘triage’ approaches to identify and filter individuals seeking help to determine the most appropriate response to address their needs; and • test the effectiveness of first point of contact services to ensure they are fit for purpose. | <p>‘emergency homeless on the day’ cases only on a Thursday.</p> <p>Demand means clients can arrive at the office and sometimes have a relatively long wait if there are a number of people ahead of them waiting for a full Housing assessment by a Housing Solutions Officer.</p> <p>On occasion clients are sometimes asked to return the following day if they present to the office and their circumstances are not urgent and the interview diary is full for the day and staff schedules are up to interview capacity when taking account of the number of clients waiting.</p> <p>Clients are currently triaged if they need help with an application to join the Common Housing Register and are not threatened with homelessness. These clients are seen by a Homefinder Officer to free up Housing Officer interview time.</p> | <p>streamline the process for some clients and filter emergency or priority cases for urgent action.</p> <p>Explore closer joint working opportunities with other services e.g. Probation , Health, Social Services to carry out pre-arranged Housing assessments at their offices in one joint appointment with hard to engage</p> <p>Explore how Housing Officers specialising in specific areas (such as Domestic Abuse, or with offenders) would improve joint working and prevention outcomes in this client group.</p> <p>Continually monitor the first point of contact services to identify any pressure on resources as demand for services changes.</p> <p>Explore opportunities to improve data collection about handling of</p> | <p>Mar-19</p> <p>Mar-19</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Jun-19</p> | <p>Ian Jones</p> <p>Ian Jones</p> <p>Ian Jones</p> <p>Ian Jones</p> |

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| | | first point of contact telephone calls to the service/ website searches and their resolution | | | |
| WAO HLR4 | <p>Local authorities publish service standards that clearly set out what their responsibilities are and how they will provide services to ensure people know what they are entitled to receive and what they must do for themselves. Service standards should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be written in plain accessible language; • be precise about what applicants can and cannot expect, and when they can expect resolution; • clearly set out the applicant’s role in the process and how they can help the process go more smoothly and quickly; • be produced collaboratively with subject experts and include the involvement of people who use the service(s); • effectively integrate with the single assessment process; | <p>The Council already provide a booklet to all clients who receive a housing assessment. ‘Here to Help: your guide to homelessness services’ is written in easy to understand language and explains the process and what applicants can expect to happen. It also includes information about how to seek a review of a decision taken by the Council appeals but needs to include additional complaints procedure information.</p> <p>Personal Housing Plans are written for each client in easy to understand language and clearly sets out what the Council will do, and what the client must do to work with the Council to prevent homelessness.</p> <p>Clients receive written confirmation of any decisions made and the Council’s duty owed which is specific to their individual circumstances in accordance with the legislation.</p> | <p>Review information available to clients and determine if in addition to complaints procedure information, any further improvements are required.</p> <p>Consider developing service standards as per WAO recommendation</p> <p>Review the website content to ensure online advice is easy to understand Include advice about the formal review process in respect of homelessness decisions.</p> | <p>Feb-19</p> <p>Apr-19</p> <p>Apr-19</p> | <p>Ian Jones</p> <p>Ian Jones</p> <p>Ian Jones</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> offer viable alternatives to the authority’s services; and set out the appeals and complaints processes. These should be based on fairness and equity for all involved and available to all. | | | | |
| WAO HLR5 | <p>Local authorities make better use of their websites to help manage demand by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> testing the usability and effectiveness of current website information using our lines of enquiry set out in Appendix 5; increasing and improving the range, quality and coverage of web based information; making better use of online applications; linking more effectively to information from specialist providers’ and advice specialists, such as Citizens Advice. | <p>Council website gives basic Housing Advice and Homelessness information.</p> <p>Applications for social housing via the Common Housing Register is via our HomefinderRCT website and an online application process.</p> <p>Engagement with Homelessness clients after assessment is being tested via text messaging to improve communication and this is planned to be rolled out to all by December.</p> <p>Customer satisfaction survey being developed with will ask client view on ease of engagement, service accessibility etc.</p> <p>Pontypridd Citizens Advice Bureau have been commissioned to offer direct financial support to all persons who present as homeless or who are in receipt of a Supporting People funded project.</p> | <p>Review website content to check its usability for clients.</p> <p>Identify and implement any required improvements to the website including increased use of online application processes for homelessness prevention services</p> <p>Complete the introduction of text message service to homeless clients</p> <p>Finalise and introduce customer satisfaction survey</p> <p>Monitor the effectiveness of the service commissioned from Pontypridd Citizens Advice</p> | <p>Dec-19</p> <p>Apr-19</p> <p>Jan-19</p> <p>Jan-19</p> <p>Mar-19</p> | <p>Ian Jones</p> <p>Ian Jones</p> <p>Ian Jones</p> <p>Ian Jones</p> <p>Cheryl Emery</p> |

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| | | | Service | | |
| WAO HLR6 | Local authorities set out and agree their expectations of partners identifying how they will work together to alleviate homelessness. The agreement should be reviewed regularly and all partners’ performance reviewed to identify areas for improvement. | <p>The authority has operated a common Housing Register and allocation scheme for a number of years in partnership with 6 local housing associations. Agreements are in place to monitor this arrangement through the established Steering and Operational Groups which oversee working arrangements.</p> <p>The authority also works with some housing associations to deliver specific projects for vulnerable people including high risk offenders. All projects are regularly reviewed through performance data and contract monitor to ensure effective outcomes or areas for improvement.</p> | Continue to monitor partners performance via current arrangements | On going | Ian Jones |
| WAO HLR7 | Local authorities address weaknesses in their equalities monitoring, and ensure that their homelessness service accurately records and evaluates appropriate data to demonstrate equality of access for all service users that the local authority has a duty towards. | Equalities information is captured as part of the Housing Assessment where clients are threatened with homelessness, and via Homefinder when applications are made to join the Common Housing Register to access social housing. The information is subject to regular monitoring and analysis. | Review how this information is reported and monitored to identify any improvements which will improve equality of access for all service users | Jun-19 | Ian Jones |

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| WAO LHR8 | Local authorities use the checklist set out in Appendix 10 to undertake a self-assessment on services to help identify options to improve how they can help manage demand. | Self-Assessment has been completed using the recommended checklist to inform the development of this action plan. Review and repeat the self-assessment process when actions completed | To continually improve housing services, using the checklist as an ongoing tool for self-assessment of service standards. | Complete | Louise Davies |

