



PROSPEROUS HOMES PROSPEROUS LIVES

A Housing Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf



2024-2030

Delivering the priorities of the
Council's Corporate Plan

WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

Mae croeso i chi gyfathrebu â ni yn y Gymraeg

This document is also available in Welsh

You are welcome to communicate with us in Welsh



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rhondda Cynon Taf comprises of a mixture of urban, semi-suburban and rural communities and is home to over 237,000 people (Census 2021). It covers an area of 424 square kilometres, stretching from Bannau Brycheiniog in the North to the outskirts of Cardiff in the South of the borough.

The most popular housing tenure in RCT is owner occupation at 68%, followed by private rented at 18%, and social rent at 14%.

Within RCT there are large disparities between affluent communities and some of the most deprived communities in Wales. RCT is ranked as the 4th most deprived local authority area in Wales. The poor quality of some of the housing in these communities coupled with a high level of empty properties has had an adverse effect on the supply of good quality affordable homes.

This Housing Strategy sets out how, over the next 5 years, the Council will work with partners to shape and deliver safe, quality, affordable housing and housing services. With the reduction of available public sector resources, this Strategy relies upon creativity, innovation and partnership working, focusing on inward investment with a robust strategic direction.

In recognition of this, our vision is to ensure that:

The housing market in RCT offers our residents access to good quality, affordable homes, in the right place at the right time.

To deliver this vision, we have identified the following objectives:

- 1. TO ENABLE...**
a functional housing market that meets the needs of our communities.
- 2. TO PROMOTE...**
sustainable communities and create homes that are safe, warm and healthy by improving housing conditions and investing in community regeneration.
- 3. TO ENABLE...**
access to all types of suitable and affordable housing that meets the needs of residents.
- 4. TO CREATE...**
prosperous communities by ensuring residents have access to housing advice and support that meets their needs.



INTRODUCTION

Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) is unique in that it comprises a mixture of urban, semi-suburban and rural communities and encompasses a number of principal towns, such as Pontypridd, Aberdare, Mountain Ash and Treorchy.

RCT is home to over 237,000 people (Census 2021) and covers an area of 424 square kilometres, stretching from Bannau Brycheiniog in the North to the outskirts of Cardiff in the South of the borough. The most popular housing tenure in RCT is owner occupation at 68%, followed by private rented at 18%, social rent at 14%.

The coal mining industry that once dominated RCT has left some lasting effects with large disparities between affluent communities and some of the most deprived communities in Wales. RCT is ranked as the 4th most deprived local authority area in Wales with 17.5% of lower super output areas being in the top 10% of deprived areas and 71.4% of areas being in the top 50% (Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation). The poor quality of some of the housing in these areas coupled with a high level of empty properties has had an adverse effect on the supply of good quality affordable housing.

Good quality housing is key to good health and wellbeing; poor or unsuitable housing can contribute towards ill health which can then lead to greater levels of social care and can have often having a negative impact on education and employment. Housing drives the demand for local services, shops and facilities and contributes towards thriving communities, which can help the development of cultural/social activities and groups whilst also re-vitalising town centres. Therefore, the Council are committed to working with its partners to deliver as many new affordable housing units as possible to contribute towards the gross need identified in the Local Housing Market Assessment (2023-2028), of 1,121 additional affordable housing units per annum over the 5-year period.

OUR VISION...

To ensure that:

The housing market in RCT offers our residents access to good quality, affordable homes, in the right place at the right time.

This RCT Housing Strategy sets out a high-level plan on how the Council and its partners will work collaboratively at a local, regional and national level to respond to RCT's housing needs in order to achieve our vision over the next 5 years.



BACKGROUND

The previous Housing Strategy 'Building on Firm Foundations 2013 – 2018' was launched during the 'double dip' economic recession, restrictions on lending and Central Government austerity measures which led to changes in the housing market and local housing need and demand patterns.

Since the introduction of the Strategy improvements have been made to housing and housing services across RCT, which are shared in the 'key achievements' section. This includes, delivering over 1,500 affordable homes and bringing over 1,500 empty properties back into use, however many challenges still lie ahead.

The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis have further exacerbated local housing need. There has been a significant increase in the number of people accessing housing services, particularly homelessness services and the number of people placed in emergency temporary accommodation. There are economic concerns, such as challenges with supply chains and a lack of skilled contractors that could be a risk to the development of new homes and the ability to make improvements to existing homes. Alongside this, there is an increasing number of older people and people living with a limiting long-term illness who require adaptations to be made to their homes in order for them to live independently.

During this time there have also been changes introduced by the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 and increased interest rates have led to many landlords leaving the private rented sector at a time when this sector plays a fundamental role in meeting our affordable housing need alongside social housing.

Therefore, it is timely that a new Housing Strategy is developed which sets out how, over the next 5 years, the Council will work with partners to shape and deliver safe, quality, affordable housing and housing services.

OUR KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Since the launch of the previous Strategy in 2013, there have been a number of key achievements that have been made through the Council having a strong strategic housing role and working collaboratively with partners which include Welsh Government, Registered Social Landlords, the Private Rented Sector and Third Sector.

WE HAVE...

To enable a functional housing market...

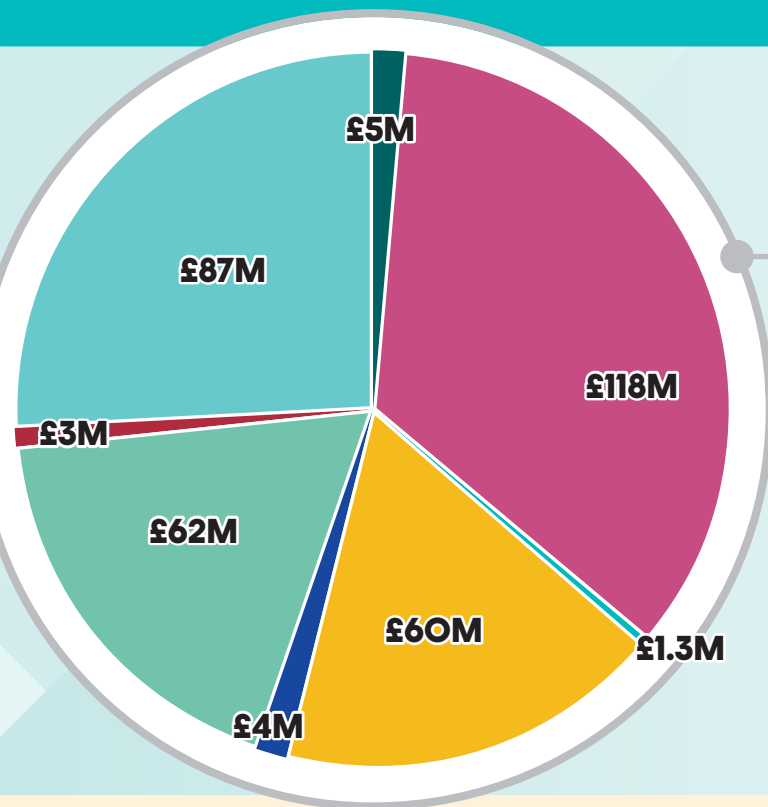
- Establish a Private Developer forum which includes members from private developers, RSLs, representatives from the house building industry, Council officers and a Cabinet member.
- Built 5,000 new residential units in RCT of which almost 3,700 were private market homes and 1,500 from all tenures and types of affordable housing.
- Supported private housing developments to deliver almost 300 affordable dwellings on their sites, or otherwise equivalent contributions, as part of LDP policy requirements (through S106 agreements).
- Supported the delivery of 1,500 affordable homes for social rent across RCT.
- Delivered specialist and supported accommodation for people with a learning disability and neurodivergent people to support independent living in the community.
- Supported the sale of over 160 homes as low cost home ownership as part of Homestep and Homestep Plus helping first time buyers.
- Produced a new Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) 2022/23 – 2027/28 as a robust evidence base for informing strategic planning.
- Created a Prospectus as part of the Social Housing Grant programme evidence base and Local Development Plan process.
- Produced a new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) 2022 to provide a robust assessment of the current and

future need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- Developed a range of 24 hour supported accommodation and secured additional private rented shared homes to alleviate and reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast establishments as temporary accommodation.
- Developed an in-house RCT Social Lettings Agency, which manages over 40 private rented properties on behalf of private landlords and ensure suitable housing allocations of clients in housing need.

To improve housing conditions in communities which promotes safety, health and well being...

- Brought 1,500 empty homes back into use.
- Delivered RCT's Empty Homes Grant Scheme to bring empty homes back into use. Since the launch of the scheme in 2017, £3.84M amount of grant has been processed providing 220 homes across RCT.
- Delivered RCT's Houses into Homes Loans offering a loan to bring privately owned empty homes back into use. Since the launch of the scheme in March 2012, £5M of loans have been processed, providing 248 homes across RCT.
- Led on the Valleys Taskforce Empty Homes Grant Scheme and the National Empty Homes scheme for WG resulting in 270 empty homes being brought back into use in RCT.
- Removed over 2,500 category 1 and 2 hazards making homes safer to live in.
- Supported the installation of over 19,000 energy efficiency measures into homes.



Total Capital housing investment in the borough for the period 2013-2024 £341million as shown below (£millions)

■ Social Housing Grant	■ Capital Grants Programme
■ National Empty Homes Grant	■ VTF Empty Homes Grant
■ Energy Efficiency	■ Welsh Housing Quality Standard
■ WG Housing Loans	■ S106 Contributions

There has been a significant amount of investment into the County Borough from external sources and local partners through housing related activity. This investment has complemented Council resources and provided further opportunities to meet the strategic objectives.

To enable access to suitable affordable housing...

- Created stronger links between housing and health services through the establishment of the Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group, which led to the creation of a Specialist Housing, Mental Health and Substance Misuse Team.
- Delivered the Hospital to Home Support Service in partnership with Health, which has now developed into the Tai Platform with over 100 referrals received.
- Produced the RCT Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022 – 2026, which outlines the Council's approach in continuing to support our most vulnerable residents; those who are at risk of, or experience homelessness.
- Established an RCT Housing Support Grant Planning Board to improve partnership working between Council departments for homelessness, Children Services, Youth Services and Supporting People.
- Produced a Rapid Rehousing Plan 2022 – 2027, outlining a housing led approach for rehousing people who have experienced homelessness.
- Established the Housing First Assertive Outreach project which has been commissioned by RCT to work with homeless people who have complex and high support needs.
- Improved communication with private landlords through the establishment of a landlord database and the continuation of the Private Landlord's Forum and newsletters.
- Started to review the Housing Allocation

Scheme to ensure social housing continues to be allocated in a fair and equal way.

- Completed over 3,000 Disabled Facilities Grants to vulnerable residents in order to support them to live independently in their own home.

People in financial need receive the right advice and support...

- Delivered over 200 owner occupier loans (Houses into Homes loans and Property Appreciation loans), totalling £2.5M of loans to help owner occupiers make their homes warm, safe and secure.
- Supported over 300 homes to receive an RCT Heating Grant with a combined investment of over £850k.
- Supported over 100 homes to received PV Solar Panels with a combined investment of over £120k.
- Developed a new project in partnership with Registered Social Landlords to tackle hoarding for social housing tenants with a total of 135 referrals received.





It has four well-being objectives to help improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Rhondda Cynon Taf; these are:



PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES

Supporting and empowering RCT residents and communities to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.



WORK & BUSINESS

Helping to strengthen and grow RCT's Economy.



NATURE & THE ENVIRONMENT

A green and clean RCT that improves and protects RCT's environment and nature.



CULTURE, HERITAGE & WELSH LANGUAGE

Recognising and celebrating RCT's past, present and future.

THE STRATEGY

This strategy is set firmly within the context of the Council's Corporate Plan 'Working with our Communities 2024 – 2030'.

Within the Corporate Plan there are four well-being objectives to help improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Rhondda Cynon Taf; these are:

■ **PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES**

■ **WORK & BUSINESS**

■ **NATURE & THE ENVIRONMENT**

■ **CULTURE, HERITAGE & WELSH LANGUAGE**

Whilst housing cuts across all four of these strategic priorities it contributes particularly to the 'people and communities' objective by delivering the priority;

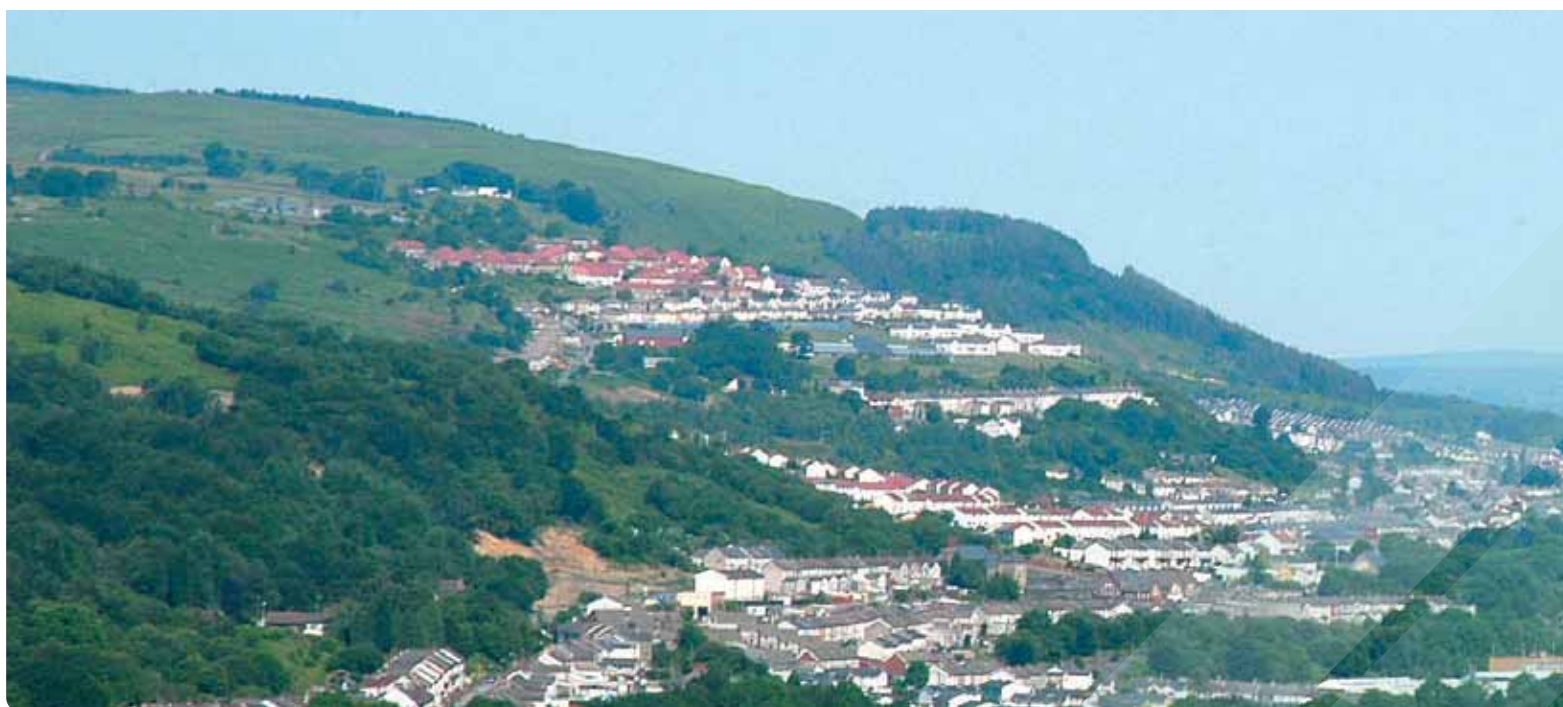
“residents will have access to affordable, good quality and energy efficient homes.”

It is an evidenced based strategy, which reflects local priorities and will respond to the changing needs and circumstances of individual communities over the next 5 years.

The Council's strategic housing role has a strong focus on delivery across all tenures and in doing so many partnerships have been created, which continue to thrive and strengthen. The Council has embraced its enabling role with stakeholders and partners and is well positioned to enable affordable homes making a difference to communities throughout RCT. This new Strategy retains a strong focus on collaborative working at a local, regional and national level.

To achieve our vision, four objectives have been established within the Strategy. These are:

- 1** To enable a functional housing market that meets the needs of our communities.
- 2** To promote sustainable communities and create homes that are safe, warm and healthy by improving housing conditions and investing in community regeneration.
- 3** To enable access to all types of suitable and affordable housing that meets the needs of residents.
- 4** To create prosperous communities by ensuring residents have access to housing advice and support that meets their needs.





WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

RCT'S CORPORATE PLAN 2024-2030

REVISED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022 - 2037



PROSPEROUS HOMES, PROSPEROUS LIVES

RCT HOUSING STRATEGY 2024-2030

OBJECTIVES

1 TO ENABLE...
a functional housing market that meets the needs of our communities.

2 TO PROMOTE...
sustainable communities and create homes that are safe, warm and healthy by improving housing conditions and investing in community regeneration.

3 TO ENABLE...
access to all types of suitable and affordable housing that meets the needs of residents.

4 TO CREATE...
prosperous communities by ensuring residents have access to housing advice and support that meets their needs.

RCT HOUSING ACTION PLAN 2024-2030

Plans/Strategies linked to the Housing Strategy:

Affordable Warmth Strategy
2020 - 2023

Private Rented Sector Strategy
2023 - 2026

Empty Homes Strategy
2022 - 2025

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2022

Housing Support Programme Strategy
2022 - 2026

Accommodation and Support Strategy for Care Leavers

Local Housing Market Assessment
2022/23 - 2027/28

RCT Housing Strategy Mapping Model

The diagram above sets out how each of the different housing plans/ strategies and objectives feed into the overarching RCT Housing Strategy and the Council's Corporate Plan.



OBJECTIVE: TO ENABLE A FUNCTIONAL HOUSING MARKET THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITIES

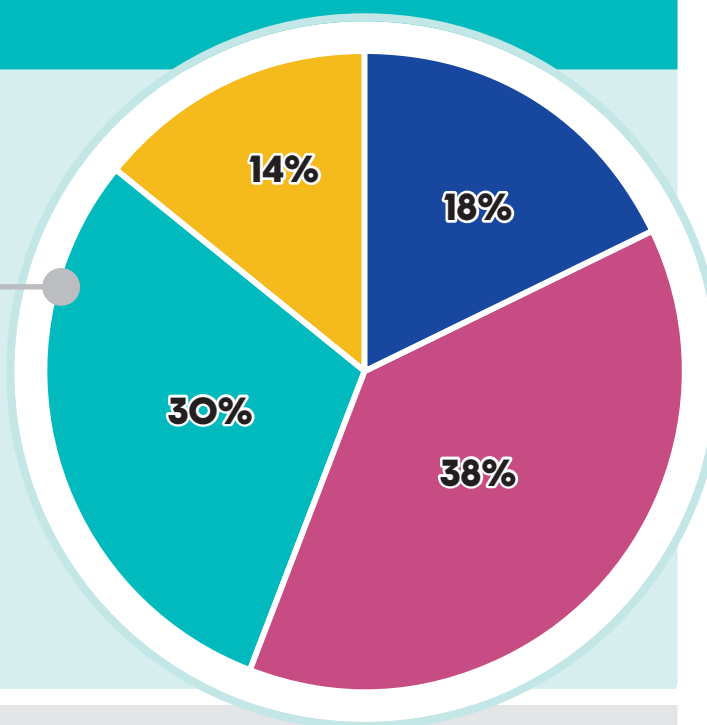
Welsh Government defines a functional housing market as one where, everyone is suitably and affordably housed regardless of income. Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has an enabling role in achieving this by ensuring the housing market is functioning well. The Council has several levers which can be used to influence and shape the housing market which are set out below.

The Strategy is intrinsically linked with the Council's Local Development Plan (LDP). One of the statutory roles of the LDP, is to ensure appropriate and sufficient provision and delivery of housing for the future of the County Borough. The necessary overall housing requirement is identified through the analysis of a range of evidence from National, Regional and Local levels, including Welsh Government and Office for National Statistics data and forecasts.

The LDP also seeks to provide for existing and evolving community housing need and in-migration factors, alongside ensuring that the necessary numbers of houses are deliverable. Alongside this, the Local Housing Market Assessment is used to help determine what is the associated affordable housing delivery requirement that the LDP should seek to achieve.

Breakdown of Tenure

- Owned Outright ■
- Owned with mortgage or loan ■
- Social Rented ■
- Private Rented ■



As such, the WG principal projection indicates that around 8,500 new homes are required in RCT between 2023 and 2036. This will be achieved through current planning permissions, new allocations in the Revised Local Development Plan (RLDP) and future ‘windfall’ (or currently unknown) development sites. A major proportion of these numbers will be dependent on finding the appropriate development sites to accommodate the housing. It is also necessary to evidence that the sites’ location and characteristics would make them deliverable, realistic, and economically viable.

Both the current and future Revised LDP have and will have appropriate statutory planning policies to ensure that all future housing developments are in good, safe, sustainable locations, with access to necessary daily facilities and public transport for all. The continuation of affordable housing contributions (either physical dwellings or other financial contributions) through planning agreements will seek to be ensured and continued through the Revised LDP policy. There is also an opportunity to ensure a higher standard of all new housing through the revision of the LDP policy.

The Local Housing Market Assessment 2022/2023 - 2027/2028 shows that there is a total gross need for 1,121 additional affordable housing units per annum.

Affordable housing is a broad term used to describe housing that is below the cost of market housing. Affordable housing has different price points to ensure the housing market is inclusive for all households. Therefore, whilst this term includes traditional social rented accommodation provided by Registered Social Landlords, it also includes products targeted at the intermediate sector of the housing market. This is because a growing number of households are ‘squeezed’ between social rented accommodation and home ownership and are in need of mid market products such as low-cost home ownership (i.e. discounted properties for sale to first time buyers) or intermediate rent (i.e. sub market rent) properties. A housing market that includes social rent, low-cost home ownership and open market products, promotes aspiration.

By intervening and influencing the housing market, the Council can enable a range of affordable housing options to meet a range of housing needs. A good understanding of the local housing market is essential to enable delivery of the right type and size of accommodation. Although there is an overall need for more affordable housing in the County Borough, evidence shows there is also a mismatch between supply and need/demand in many areas. For example, some areas do not have the appropriate size of accommodation to meet need or demand and other areas have limited choice in terms of the property types available in both market and affordable housing. The valley areas in

OBJECTIVE: 1

TO ENABLE A FUNCTIONAL HOUSING MARKET THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITIES

particular are dominated by traditional terraced properties and these can present challenges for homes that can be lived in for your whole lifetime – in terms of their layout and opportunities for adaptation, but also in relation to providing choice for residents. This mismatch of supply and need/demand could lead to a rise in empty homes in many localities whilst leaving some high need areas without adequate housing provision.

The 2021 census found that in RCT, the highest proportion of household tenure is outright ownership at 38%, which has increased from 37% in 2011. Properties owned and occupied through a mortgage is at 30% falling from 35% in 2011. Social rent has remained static since the 2011 census at 14% but private rent has increased from 14% in 2011 to 18% in 2021.

The private rented sector plays a flexible and important role in the overall local housing market and is a key partner in meeting local housing need. Many private rented properties are located in the most deprived areas across the County Borough. There are also in excess of 500 privately rented properties licensed as 'Houses in Multiple Occupation', which exist predominantly in Treforest and are used as student accommodation.

The Council is always looking at new ways to enable residents to access low-cost home ownership products. Whilst the Council's Homestep scheme supports people to buy a brand new property for 70% of the open market value, the Council will further explore ways in which the same discounts can be applied to existing properties. The main driving factor behind this proposal is the cost of market housing rising to an average of £179k in 2023, 13% above its peak in 2020. This increase is a contributing factor to first time buyers being unable to access home ownership.

The Council continues to promote a comprehensive social housing development programme. The Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant provides funding to develop social housing in the highest areas of need in Rhondda Cynon Taf, which are defined by the recently completed Local Housing Market Assessment.

Enabling a functional and balanced local housing market is fundamental to fostering social inclusion by creating thriving communities that support cultural/social activities, improving health and well being and ensuring robust and prosperous communities within Rhondda Cynon Taf. Delivery of housing can also have the added gain of regenerating communities by bringing empty properties back into use.

The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2022 shows that the estimated additional pitch provision needed for Gypsies and Travellers in Rhondda Cynon Taf for the first 5 years of the GTAA study period to 2027 is 22 pitches, and the need to the end of the revised Local



Development Plan period to 2037 is 27 pitches (an additional 5 pitches).

Rhondda Cynon Taf's housing market relies on all tenures to provide housing for its residents; therefore it is important that the Council's focus is on ensuring that development happens in the right form and in the right places.

Strengthening our partnership working with open market builders, registered social landlords and private rented landlords is a key element of this Strategy to facilitate more housing choices for residents and enable development and prosperity throughout the County Borough.



HOW WILL WE DO THIS...

- Adoption of the Revised Local Development Plan.
- Continue to identify and assess land that is in Council Ownership that may become surplus to our requirements, for its potential suitability for housing development. This would include for housing developers and in particular RSL development opportunities for full, or as a minimum, over 50% affordable housing schemes. This would involve the assembly of the land through multiple Council departments, WG funding opportunities, in partnership with RSLs.
- Conduct a Local Housing Market Assessment every 5 years, with a mid-point review, to monitor and evaluate the whole local market, identifying any gaps for public intervention.
- Conduct a new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment to understand the need for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation.
- Implement RCT's Private Rented Sector Strategy and monitor the Strategy's action plan to ensure actions are complete and outcomes achieved.
- Maximise the Welsh Government Social Housing Grant and any available slippage ensuring it is allocated to schemes that meet housing need.
- Continue with the Developer Forum process which has evolved into a 'Housing Steering Group' for the preparation of the Revised Local Development Plan, which engages local and regional private and Registered Social Landlord partners.
- Support all private and Registered Social Landlord housing developers to bring forward allocated and other housing developments on suitable sites in suitable locations. This would be particularly encouraged on brownfield sites.
- Explore and identify additional funding opportunities for the delivery of suitable affordable housing in order to meet housing need.
- Promote a range of different housing options to meet all tenures, such as Low-Cost Home Ownership and Homes of Multiple Occupation.
- Work with key partners such as Registered Social Landlords and private developers to explore and develop mixed tenure sites.
- Continue to offer the Homestep Scheme to assist first time buyers to access the property ladder.
- Develop a product that offers discounts that can be applied to the purchase of existing properties.
- Work in partnership with Registered Social Landlords to assess and reconfigure the existing social rented stock where appropriate such as supported housing, adapted housing, and in some cases the size of stock.
- Engage with private landlords to support them to increase the supply of good quality affordable private rented accommodation.

OBJECTIVE:

2

TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND CREATE HOMES THAT ARE SAFE, WARM AND HEALTHY BY IMPROVING HOUSING CONDITIONS AND INVESTING IN COMMUNITY REGENERATION.

2.1 ENABLING BETTER QUALITY HOMES

The majority of housing within Rhondda Cynon Taf is of traditional solid stone construction in terraces, which are over 100 years old. Other property types include non-traditional pre-fabricated style housing and cavity wall properties. Many of the older and non-traditional types of properties potentially present more risk to health and safety and are also considered to be some of the 'hardest to treat' and 'hardest to heat'.

68% of homes in the County Borough are owner occupied, with 18% being rented from private landlords and 14% rented from a registered social landlord. Regulations around property conditions and standards exist within both the social and private rented sectors but no similar standard exists for owner occupied homes. With the majority of housing in Rhondda Cynon Taf being owner occupied, coupled with high levels of deprivation and low incomes there is a risk of inadequate housing standards. Many owner occupied homes are now considered to have some of the poorest housing conditions in the County Borough.

The former Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) that ended in December 2021 has generally improved the condition of the social rented sector in Rhondda Cynon Taf, with 100% (including acceptable fails) of all social housing meeting the standard. However, the new WHQS 2023 focuses more on energy performance of homes and decarbonisation of social housing with a requirement to stop installing fossil fuel boilers from 2026. It proposes that all social homes should achieve an Energy Performance Certificate Rating of A with a 'fabric first' approach, and to achieve an Environmental Impact Rating of 92 to support UK and WG Net Zero and Decarbonisation agendas.

The Council has a statutory duty to promote health and safety within homes and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System is used to identify the more severe risk category 1 and category 2 hazards from a total of 29 potential hazards. Over the last few years, the Environmental Health Department of the Council has seen an increase in excess cold hazards and/or damp and mould conditions in private rented homes, which is the most common hazard. This seems to be further exacerbated by the growing number of households in fuel poverty.

Some of the biggest barriers to improving properties are the technical suitability of existing homes, skills shortages in the industry to meet the pace of delivery required and the cost for these improvements. Many owner occupiers and landlords cannot afford these measures which creates a need for externally funded schemes.

The Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Regulations 2018 introduced on 1st April 2020, set a minimum standard for private rented homes to be improved to at least an E rating on the Energy Performance Certificate where works cost less than £3,500 and where landlords are able to secure funding options via Energy





Company Obligation (ECO), local or national Government Grants. If landlords are unable to secure funding to support the costs of the works an exemption can be applied.

The challenges for increasing property standards are multi-faceted and a strategic approach to the improvement of property conditions requires a range of interventions including proactive enforcement and preventative approaches, behavioural advice and/or financial assistance for a person's home to have a positive impact on their lives.

Working with all partners, which can include local business, contractors and builders, is key to housing's contribution to the local economy. These partnerships are key to sharing knowledge and expertise and delivering a holistic cross tenure approach to area-based housing-led regeneration opportunities, which maximises the outcomes and provides added gain for communities, taking full advantage of the Council's enabling role.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS...

- Develop and deliver a new Affordable Warmth Strategy 2024 – 2027.
- Deliver in-house schemes to ensure tighter regulation in the private rented sector to raise housing standards, i.e licensing and accreditation schemes and the Social Lettings Agency.
- Strategically plan, and deliver energy efficiency grant funded schemes that mitigate fuel poverty and promote warmer, safer and more resilient communities through working closely with partners.
- Work with the Local Health Board to ensure vulnerable residents with critical health illnesses are referred to the Councils' Heat & Save team so that they can be supported to access funding to make their home more energy efficient and save money on bills.
- Deliver, monitor, and evaluate the delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grant in order to adapt homes, supporting vulnerable people to stay safe in their homes whilst reducing the need for care packages and admission's to hospital.
- Support homeowners to meet costs of minor repairs or enabling works to their home to maintain or improve warmth and/or energy efficiency by offering grants such as the Minor Heat and Save Assistance grant.
- Work with partners to explore innovative ways of decarbonising all housing stock.
- Deliver, monitor, and evaluate the delivery of the RCT Solar Panel grant in order to make homes more energy efficient and reduce bills for residents.
- Ensure housing enforcement of the private rented sector to improve quality and standard of accommodation is being offered in the County Borough.
- Engage and support Private Landlords to access advice and grant assistance to support their compliance with the Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard Regulations (MEES) 2018.
- Utilise Council funding to attract a range of external investment from public and private sources to complement the Council investment to improve housing standards.
- Provide options to assist 'able to pay' households such as equity release, loan-based models or grant assistance to reduce costs, utilising public and private finance opportunities.
- Increase education/awareness of housing condition issues including potential hazards in the home and signpost households to assistance and support available.



2.2 REGENERATION AREAS AND EMPTY PROPERTIES

Welsh Government's 'Transforming Towns Funding' defines regeneration as

...an integrated set of activities that seek to reverse economic, social, environmental and physical decline to achieve lasting improvement, in areas where market forces will not do this alone without some support from government.'

Where communities are facing multiple problems, a holistic and strategic partnership approach is needed to make improvements.

Housing also has an important role to play in regeneration and can be a catalyst for other regeneration activity in an area. Investing in housing also provides an ongoing stimulus to the local economy by supporting the construction industry and local supply chains. Making available a supply of affordable homes helps improve the prosperity of residents and supports a wide range of households that may not otherwise be able to meet their housing needs in the open market. RCT's Empty Homes Strategy 2022 – 2025 estimates that the average annual cost burden on the owners of empty properties is nearly £8,200 per annum, taking into account the costs of rent, average Council Tax, security, insurance and dilapidation.

Whilst there is a continued need to build new homes, bringing empty properties back into use helps to make use of existing housing stock to regenerate areas, providing much needed affordable housing and increasing housing options for those in need; in some cases it can be more economically viable than a new build.

The delivery of both the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, Empty Homes grant, and strategic housing energy efficiency projects in the County Borough has shown that the benefits of investing in homes extends well beyond the bricks and mortar and can transform communities in many ways, including creating employment and training opportunities, strengthening local supply chains and also strengthening cultural activities/social relationships.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS...

- Work with partners to bring empty homes back into use through the delivery of the Council's Empty Homes Strategy 2022-2025 and monitoring the Empty Homes Action plans.
- Explore opportunities for empty properties to be brought back into use in our town centres through the use of WG Transforming Towns funding.
- Lead, monitor and evaluate the National Empty Homes Grant Scheme, which provides a grant of up to £25,000 to prospective homeowners.
- Deliver, monitor and evaluate the Houses into Homes loan.
- Deliver, monitor and evaluate the Home Improvement Loan to reduce the number of empty properties and bring owner occupied properties up to a warm, safe and secure standard.
- Provide advice and/or enforce the improvement or conversion of empty properties to increase the supply and choice of housing across the County Borough.
- Work in partnership with a range of partners including Registered Social Landlords, the private and voluntary sectors to identify and deliver alternative models of returning empty properties back into use.
- Provide strategic area based multi-tenure schemes by working with partners and the communities utilising investment in housing as a catalyst for other community regeneration approaches such as the Council's Housing and Health Action Area scheme that was delivered in Tylorstown.
- Encourage community engagement in the delivery of all housing led improvement projects by attending community events, consultations, surveys and evaluations.
- Explore external funding opportunities to compliment investment from the Council and its partners while also using this investment as a lever for private and public investment.



3 OBJECTIVE: TO ENABLE ACCESS TO ALL TYPES OF SUITABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS

The most recent Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) 2023 – 2028 has identified that there is a need for further affordable housing in the County Borough. The LHMA has also identified the areas that need affordable housing the most and the specialist types of housing that is required.

It is the ambition of the Council to use the resources available to develop and make available the correct properties for the right areas. It is also appropriate to combine this ambition with the right products to allow all residents access to all forms of affordable housing.

Homelessness provides the biggest challenge in matching people with the correct and suitable homes. There are many complex issues that people suffering from homelessness have to deal with. Poverty, unemployment, mental and physical health challenges are disproportionately impacting homeless people so when housing is planned and provided, these factors need to be taken into consideration. It is therefore the role of the Council to enable access to suitable accommodation such as supported accommodation as well as independent accommodation with floating support.

We recognise RCT's corporate parenting responsibilities for children and young people with care experience, in alignment with Welsh Government's Corporate Parenting Charter, "A Promise for Wales". This commitment includes ensuring a stable, comfortable, and safe home environment both during their time in care and as they transition out of care. Providing a stable environment to live in can improve an individual's socio-economic status, enabling a more independent and prosperous future.

The Local Housing Market Assessment, reports that 32,785 (32%) of households have 1 person with a disability living in them and 10,103 (9%) have 2 people or more. With over a third of households in RCT housing at least one person with a disability it is a priority of the Council to make sure that suitable adapted properties are included in all new social housing developments where possible, so people have access to appropriate housing. When meeting housing needs, it is important to understand both the physical and mental health needs of residents as some houses will require adaptations suitable to the needs of neurodivergent residents and people with learning disabilities.

The Local Housing Market Assessment, states that the Council reports that as of 2022/23, there are 47 people with a learning disability living in residential care. In RCT over the 5 year period from 2022/23, 97 young people will transition to adulthood with a learning disability and potentially require accommodation.

The Local Housing Market Assessment also states that there are approximately 6,000 households where all occupants are aged 66 and over. Therefore, it is important to plan housing, which is suitable for the increase in an ageing population with consideration for those that are likely to remain living in the same area, and even the same home, to those that are likely to move to housing suitable for older people, such as Extra Care.



House prices have been on the rise in Rhondda Cynon Taf in recent times with the median house price being £123,604 as of April 2022 rising from by 29.2% in 2019. With the average income of Rhondda Cynon Taf being £28,313, buying a house at full market value is simply an impossibility for some residents. It is therefore important that access to low-cost home ownership is provided as another housing option to meet the needs of the County Borough.

Although the Council's Social Housing Grant Programme provides investment into social housing, not all of the County Borough's housing needs can be met through this tenure. The Council will need to work in partnership with the Private Rented Sector in meeting the housing need by improving relationships with landlords, that will in turn provide better access to the sector for residents.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS...

- Deliver the correct supply of affordable, supported and adapted housing by ensuring that Social Housing Grant Schemes are aligned to the RCT Prospectus and Local Housing Market Assessment.
- Deliver the correct supply of supported and specialist accommodation for people with care and support needs by utilising funding, such as Housing with Care Fund (HCF), and working closely with the Regional Partnership Board (RPB)
- Review and monitor the Housing Allocation Scheme which promotes choice and accessibility.
- Provide a holistic housing options advice service including the prevention of homelessness.
- Improve partnerships with the private rented sector to alleviate pressure on the Common Housing Register waiting list and increase the supply of affordable private rented accommodation.
- Ensure the most effective use of the existing social housing stock by allocating housing appropriately.
- Ensure that housing services are accessible for all members of society eg. older people, gypsy and travellers.
- Deliver the Homestep scheme to enable access to low-cost homeownership for first time buyers.
- Promote and deliver grants/loans to support vulnerable people to live independently such as the Disabled Facilities Grant and Minor Repairs Assistance Grant.
- Continue to work closely with colleagues in both adult and children's services ensuring new housing developments meet their needs.



4 OBJECTIVE: RESIDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO HOUSING ADVICE AND SUPPORT THAT MEETS THEIR NEEDS



Many people require housing advice at some point in their lives and when they do people need to be able to access this advice in a timely manner. The advice offered needs to be able to assist them in order to help them resolve their housing problems hopefully before their situation reaches crisis point.

The number of people accessing housing advice is increasing each year, which is likely due to the changes in the housing market, such as the shortage of housing across all tenures, the cost-of-living crisis and increase in affordability issues and the impact of Covid.

RCT's Housing Support Programme Strategy (2022 – 2026) highlights that promoting independence through information and advice and support services and extending the choice of housing available for the most vulnerable is essential. Providing the right accommodation and high-quality support to people who are or may become homeless are key principles that are identified within the Strategy. The Housing Support Programme Strategy is delivered collaboratively through a broad range of services and agencies. The strong links that have been formed with strategic groups and partnerships across Cwm Taf Morgannwg have

been further strengthened through the establishment of the Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group (RHSCG). Members of the RHSG connect the Housing Support Plan with other bodies, which includes Cwm Taf Regional Partnership Board (RPB), which strengthens the links between Housing and Health.

Homelessness does not mean living on the streets and applies to anyone who does not have access to an affordable, decent, secure dwelling. A proactive approach to preventing homelessness is vital, some people will need support to enable them to develop their capacity to live independently and remain in their accommodation whilst others who are not ready or able to live independently will require specialist supported accommodation which is commissioned through the Housing Support Grant for people with additional housing related support needs.





In RCT there has been a rapid increase in the number of people in temporary accommodation and a reduction in the availability of the Private Rented Sector, meaning there is an increased pressure to secure new accommodation, particularly single bedroom properties. There is an urgent need to reduce the dependence on bed and breakfast accommodation and develop new temporary and supported accommodation suitable for longer stays. There is a need for improved accessibility for all, from low to complex needs, through a single assessment centre with a 'no wrong door' approach.

The challenges facing households are also becoming more complex and it is essential that support is targeted to those in most need of assistance. An increasing number of households are not just finding themselves in a 'heat or eat' situation but are now deprived of both, as well as still finding themselves in energy debt. All scenarios can make households socially excluded and can have catastrophic impacts upon the health and well-being of residents, hindering people to be independent, healthy, successful and prosperous. The Council will continue to provide this advice working closely with partner organisations in order to meet the growing demand and need.



HOW WILL WE DO THIS...

- Implement and monitor RCT's Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022 – 26 through RCT's HSP Planning Group whose focus is to support adults, children and people with learning disabilities and physical disabilities.
- Offer a range of housing advice services which include managing debt, tenancy rights, illegal eviction, homelessness and includes referral/signposting to other services and agencies.
- Improving assessment and accessibility for single homeless people, reducing reliance on the use of bed and breakfast and consider options to make temporary accommodation more sustainable and suitable for longer stays.
- Explore the opportunity to develop and implement an RCT Transitional Capital Homes Grant to enable RSLs to purchase empty homes off the open market or refurbish strategic voids to be used for temporary accommodation.
- Investigate opportunities to utilise council and RSL strategic voids and available land which could be used and developed to meet temporary accommodation needs.
- Explore the opportunity to increase the Councils capacity to manage additional one-bedroom units as part of the Social Leasing Scheme.
- Review the Houses into Homes Loan to ensure that Private Landlords can access the loan in order to assist the council to discharge it's homelessness duty.
- Develop a Housing Assessment Centre with a multi-disciplinary assessment of need for single homeless people.
- Deliver targeted, strategic area based energy efficiency schemes and grants to those areas in most need such as the Arbed scheme in Penrhiwceiber.
- Identify those in most financial need by working across Council Departments, external agencies and partners to deliver targeted marketing approaches of advice and assistance available to residents.
- Provide targeted energy efficiency behaviour advice for residents and if required make referrals to other agencies such as Social Services, Private Sector Housing Grants and Citizens Advice.
- Ensure support for homeowners through the provision of grants or loans to include the Empty Homes Grant, Home Improvement Loan, Private Sector Grants.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Delivering on our 4 objectives, we will achieve the following outcomes...

1 By enabling a functional housing market that meets the needs of our communities...

...we will achieve the following outcomes:

- Increase the number of affordable homes.
- Increase the number of housing development schemes.
- Full allocation and spend of the Welsh Government Social Housing Grant.
- Existing social housing stock is fit for purpose.

2 By promoting sustainable communities and create homes that are safe, warm and healthy by improving housing conditions and investing in community regeneration...

...we will achieve the following outcomes:

- Increase the number of warmer and more energy efficient homes.
- Increase the number of adapted homes.
- Ensure that the % of vulnerable people that are satisfied with the adaptation they received to their home is above 90%
- Ensure that the % of vulnerable people that are able to do things they couldn't do before and feel more confident and independent following their adaptation to their home is above 90%.
- Ensure that the % of vulnerable people that feel it is now easier for their family/carer to help them with their daily needs following their adaptation to their home is above 90%.
- Ensure the % of vulnerable people that feel that their quality of life has improved following their adaptation to their home is above 90%.
- Improved standards of housing stock.
- Reduce the number of potential hazards in homes.
- Decrease the number of empty homes.
- Increase the number of local contractors used to bring empty homes back into use.



3 By enabling access to all types of suitable housing and affordable housing that meets the needs of residents...

...we will achieve the following outcomes:

- New affordable housing includes both supported and adapted homes.
- Reduce the amount of people in Temporary Accommodation.
- Prevent homelessness.
- Accessible Housing service.
- More Children looked after are placed closer to home.
- Ensure that we respond to the diverse housing needs of people and that all groups of people can access housing services.

4 By enabling residents to have access to housing advice and support that meets their needs...

...we will achieve the following outcomes:

- A range of housing advice services provided.
- Reduce the Council's reliance on use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- Strategic area based energy advice schemes are delivered and reduce energy bills.
- Increased awareness of available grants and loans.
- Effective commissioning of HSG services to ensure the right support is available to prevent and relieve homelessness.



MAKING IT HAPPEN!

This Housing Strategy provides the focus for delivering the housing priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan 'Working with our Communities 2024 – 2030'. The Council will embrace its various roles and responsibilities; both strategic and operational across all housing services and organisations, working collaboratively to deliver the objectives.

The objectives cannot be delivered in isolation and maximum success is gained from a strong strategic housing role and collaborative working. The RCT Housing Leaders Group, consists of partner Registered Social Landlords with over 17,000 homes in RCT and senior officers from the Council. The role of the Housing Leaders group is to oversee the delivery of the aims, objectives and priorities of the Housing Strategy and all partners involved play a key role in the achieving these over the period of the plan.

The Strategy strongly supports the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development approach and the way in which the Strategy has been developed reflects the 'five ways of working' which include:



1. INVOLVEMENT:

With a wide range of internal and external stakeholders being involved in the development of the Strategy and supporting the development of a sense of local ownership.

2. LONG-TERM:

The Strategy provides a long-term sustainable vision for the future of housing in RCT and outlines how this will be achieved through the strategic objectives.

3. PREVENTION:

The Strategy aims to prevent homelessness by providing a framework via which targeted future investment can be focused and coordinated to address current and future challenges.

4. INTEGRATION:

The Strategy is synonymous with both corporate and national priorities including those associated with the delivery of housing (both market and affordable), empty properties, homeless prevention, housing support and fuel poverty. It is important to note that the Strategy provides a framework via which achievement of corporate and national priorities can be achieved at a 'local-level'.

5. COLLABORATION:

The Strategy promotes a collaborative way of working and the way in which the Strategy has been developed reflects the Council's commitment to working with public, private and third sector partners.

Monitoring reports will capture quarterly and annual performance and contribute to national performance indicators and delivery plans. The true measure of success is not only about measuring the number of interventions undertaken but measuring the outcomes and the impact our work has on the lives of people living in RCT.

