



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Draft
Rhondda Cynon Taf
Homelessness Strategy
2018 - 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

This new strategy sets out Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's approach to preventing and tackling homelessness across the borough. 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.

It is important that our efforts to reduce homelessness are part of a wider agenda which includes tackling the causes of social and economic exclusion and improving access to health and social care services. To achieve this in the current economic climate requires greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention through multi agency working including, sharing of resources and continuously looking for creative and innovative solutions. The reduction in homelessness will require a co-ordinated, whole council response and effective engagement with our partners.

The Housing (Wales) 2014 has changed how local authorities in Wales respond to homelessness by placing 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 each Wales local authority to carry out a review of homelessness for its area, and formulate and adopt a homelessness strategy by the end of 2018 with a new homelessness strategy every fourth year.

The development of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy draws on collective experience and achievements to date and focuses on preventing and tackling homelessness, not just on the effective assessment of homeless applications. 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 sector 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.

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

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 national legislative changes, including welfare reform and devolved legislation in Wales. The Homelessness Strategy supports the vision, aims and objectives of a number of high level partnerships and strategies these include:

The Welsh Assembly Government 10 year Homelessness Plan 2009-19

In 2009 the Welsh Government published its 10 Year Homelessness Plan for Wales. The 10 year plan sets out some guiding principles for the development and delivery of homelessness services. The strategic aims underlying this plan are:

- Preventing homelessness where possible
- Working across organisational and policy boundaries
- Placing the service user at the centre of service delivery
- Ensuring social inclusion and equality of access to services.
- Making the best use of resources.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Part two of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 created multiple changes in the duties that local authorities owe to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. These changes include:

- New duties for local authorities to help prevent homelessness for anyone who asks for help.
- Involving people in designing their own solutions by jointly developing a personal housing plan to help address the underlying issues
- Intervening early – within 56 days of homelessness to prevent problems escalating.
- Removing automatic priority need for prison leavers
- Placing new duties on housing associations to co-operate in homelessness prevention.
- Allowing local authorities to discharge homelessness duties with an offer of private accommodation.

The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies to carry out their functions in a sustainable way which improves the economic, social, environmental and cultural well being of the population– in practice, this means delivering preventative services considering both short term and long term needs and working in collaboration with partners to deliver better outcomes and avoid duplication.

The Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014

This Act provides the legal framework for improving the well being of people who need care and support and for carers who need support and for transforming social services in Wales. The Act changes the way people's needs are assessed and the way services are delivered, giving people more say in the care and support they receive.

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

On 29th April 2015 Welsh Government enacted the Violence against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act. The legislation aims to improve the public sector response in Wales to abuse and sexual violence.

Working Together to Reduce Harm Substance Misuse Strategy for Wales 2008 - 2018.

'Working together to Reduce Harm' recognises that housing and homelessness prevention services have a vital role to play in helping substance mis-users to access the accommodation they need. Housing must be seen as a core element of wrap around services and be reflected in the planning mechanisms.

The RCT Working Together to Reduce Harm Delivery Plan 2016 -18 sets out the vision for the delivery of integrated substance misuse services in RCT.

The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016

The Renting Homes (Wales) Act aims to make it simpler and easier to rent a home replacing various complex pieces of existing legislation with one clear framework.

At the heart of the Act are the new occupation contracts which, with a limited number of exceptions, replaces all current tenancies and licenses with just two types of occupation contract.

- Secure contract – modelled on the current secure tenancy.
- Standard contract – modelled on the current assured short hold tenancy used mainly in the private rented sector.

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4. BACKGROUND

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

The 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

Section 66 - Duty to provide advice and assistance which prescribes help to prevent duties relating to applicants found to be threatened with homelessness?

Section 73 - 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.

Section 95 – Duty to Co-operate gives Housing Associations a legal responsibility to co-operate with local authorities to help discharge homelessness duties

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 that 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 Section 66 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 always provide an accurate picture of need and demand. Improving how effectively the Council gather and interpret homelessness data is a key priority going forward to inform and guide strategic policy decisions going forward.

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.*
- *Unable to remain as a result of emergency due to fire / flood damage or structural danger.*
- *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 the Council 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 which was introduced prior to the implementation of the new homelessness legislation and 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 helped 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 that aim to meet the needs of homeless people by identifying 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 a preventative, person centred and outcome focused approach to those who contact our service.
- We introduced a new “Homelessness ICT” 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 for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Provision of specialist Mental Health Housing Advice workers, who are co –located with the Housing Solutions Team. We 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.

- Continually review of services and implement interventions to prevent homelessness.
- Developed 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 associated with the key reasons for people presenting as homeless.
- Commissioned a 10 bedroom hostel for young people aged 16 -21.

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 on demand support services for a wider client group.

- Commissioned a 5 bedroom supported housing project for care leavers and homeless young people aged 16 – 21.
- Reviewed our Allocation Policy to ensure priority is given to ex service personnel making an application for social housing, including families who have to leave their accommodation because their husband, wife or civil partner died in service .We also ensure help and support is available to help veterans and their families in partnership where appropriate with the Royal British Legion and SSAFA to help them maintain their accommodation.

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 the GRAMO (Get Ready and Move On) project, 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 Council's 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.

Table 1: 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	74
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 relieved from homelessness.	153 (41%)	249 (50%)	307 (54%)
<u>Section 75</u>			
Households unintentionally homeless and in priority need - Number (Section 75)	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

We have made good progress over the past three years following the implementation of the new legislation with a steady improvement year on year on our prevention performance indicator for Section 66 and Section 73 cases.

Early prevention on **Section 66** cases in particular sees a raise from **49%** in 15/16 to **75%** in 17/18 – a result which places the Council in 2nd place across Wales in 17/18 (when the top prevention rate in Wales was 76%) and ahead of the all Wales average prevention rate of 66%.

A Section73 prevention rate of 54% puts the Council in the top quartile across Wales in 17/18 and ahead of the all Wales result of 41%

Our performance in positively discharging our Section 75 duty in 17/18 was at 81% and is ahead of the Wales average of 78%.

Clients who are not recorded as a successful prevention case have in many cases found accommodation themselves, but fail to engage with the council further and their case is closed through lack of contact.

Table 2: 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) with a mental health need, fleeing domestic abuse and households with dependent children being the primary reason for a 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 vulnerable due to a physical disability.

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.

Table 3: 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, 2016 /17 and 2017/18 as follows:

- 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 with the number of applications accepted as homeless increasing year in year since 2015 /16.

Victims of domestic abuse are referred to the Council funded Oasis Centre, which provides a one stop shop service offering specialist advice and support to both male and female individuals. 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 Care and Repair Cymru, 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

Table 4: 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

280 referrals were made to Women's Aid RCT for refuge provision with **169** 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 Worker 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.

Table 5: Complex Needs Worker Caseload 2017/18

<u>Complex Needs Worker</u>	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 floating support scheme provided by Women's Aid RCT provided support to 49 women who are experiencing or have experienced Domestic Abuse. in 2017 /18 in their own home or tenancy which is a 32% increase on women supported in 2016/17.

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 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.

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 is able 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 Rhondda Cynon Taff which is mainly attributable to affordability and the impact of the Local Housing Allowance particularly in the Taff area. Households are facing growing challenges to access and sustain accommodation, particularly where they are expected to meet rent shortfalls putting pressure on tight household budgets.

The Government's welfare reform changes have placed further pressure on 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 household finances raise the prospect of households not being able to afford rent payments or other essential household bills, including heating fuel. It is anticipated that these pressures may be further compounded by the introduction of Universal Credit which is to be rolled out to new applicants in Rhondda Cynon Taf from November 2018.

The Council has a Private Rented Sector Officer who has built links with local landlords and runs a well attended Landlords Forum to help engage with our Housing Advice service and assist in sourcing private rented accommodation.

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

3. PARENTS UNWILLING TO ACCOMMODATE

The second highest reason for homelessness in Rhondda Cynon Taf 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 fulfil their potential and their aspirations.

Prevention is focused on supporting young people to remain at home with their family or wider family networks. We believe 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.

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.

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8. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

What is homelessness prevention?

*A homeless prevention is an intervention on the part of a service that enables a person who is threatened with homeless **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.

We have a wide has range of preventative interventions in place in Rhondda Cynon Taf that are effective and cost effective to assist people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and ensure we are meeting our statutory duties.

These include resources to meet duties to help take reasonable steps, help to prevent homelessness occurring and access housing. (See Appendix 1)

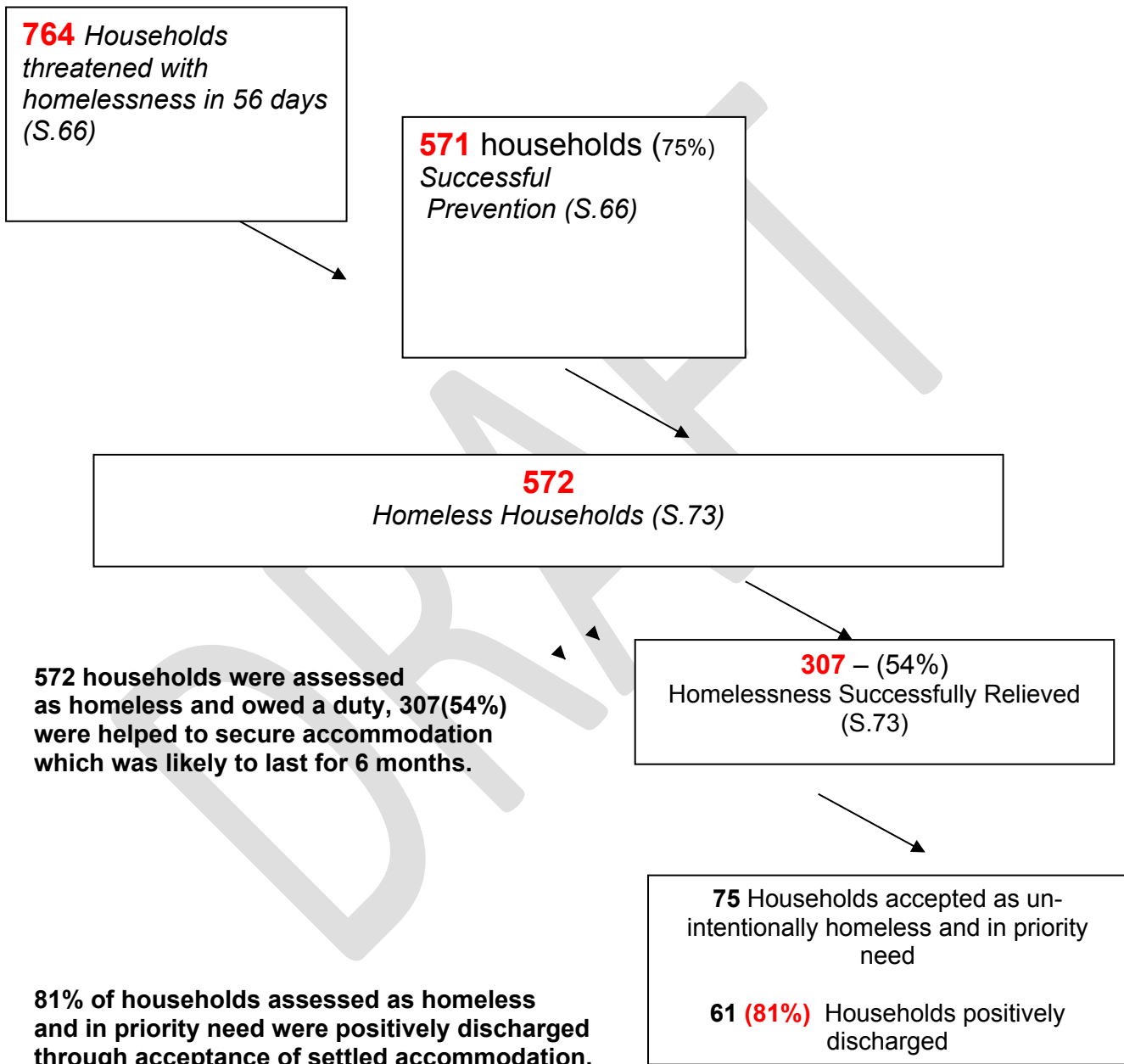
The most effective interventions in 2017/18 included:

- 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

Losing a home can have a devastating effect on a household but 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.

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 – Supporting People Services

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 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.

Table 6: Number of People Who Received a Housing Related Support Service

Support required	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017 /18
Supported Accommodation	177	178	192
Floating Support	1,638	1,778	1,854

Service User Feedback 2018 (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 proposed new floating support model aims 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. This approach will mean easier access to support and services 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.

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 following the approval of the Supporting People Planning Group. The funding will be used to ensure all young people's supported accommodation can offer 24/ 7 provision by the end of 2018 to meet all levels of young people presenting with support needs.

Housing First

Housing First is an international model providing accommodation and intensive support to homeless people with complex needs.

In recognition of the increasing number of single homeless people with an offending background, who have contact with the Criminal Justice System and who present as homeless or make repeat homelessness applications, the Wisdom Housing Project has been developed in consideration of this response and is based on the principles of Housing First offering 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 with 5 high risk offenders accepted onto the project.

A key focus will be to further embed the Housing First approach and ensure all partners are committed to the model and provide appropriate support and housing for complex individuals.

The council has secured funding under the WAG Housing First Trail Blazer Programme 2019/ 20 to develop an assertive outreach service for individuals with complex needs. The worker will aim to connect with those who are excluded from support services and the Common Housing Register due to behaviour and high risk to build trust and help them to engage with services in the longer term.

The worker will link with the Wisdom Housing Project Support Team to provide a holistic support service to individuals with challenging and complex needs. Links have also been made Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Supporting People Team to explore regional opportunities for a Housing First approach.

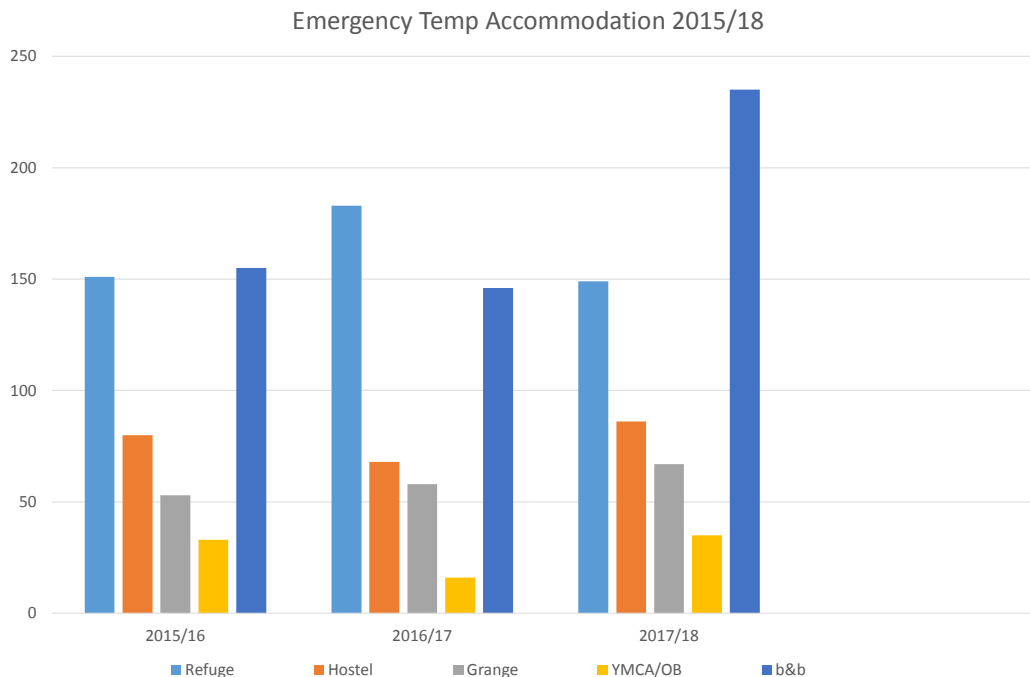
9. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

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 service 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 ,2016/2017 and 2017 /18 .The highest placements were for Refuge; B+B's and hostels with the highest increase in placement for the Grange and Refuge.



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 Taff'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.

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.

In addition to the above, B+B is used by other Council departments which places further pressure on the availability of accommodation. We are committed to stopping the use of Bed and Breakfast to place 16 and 17 year olds and recognise it is not a suitable or desirable outcome. However there may be instances where an emergency accommodation placement in a B+B is necessary but in such cases placements will be monitored to ensure young people are moved on as quickly as possible to more suitable accommodation.

On occasions out of borough accommodation 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.

a) Reasons for Placement in B + B

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 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.

Numbers of placements in Bed and Breakfast increased from 140 in 2016/17 to 235 in 2017/18 as we include placements under our severe weather plan for the first time. It is noted that numbers are increasing further in the first half of 2018/19 as more and more residents with a priority need find themselves in an emergency homeless situation.

Table 7: Reasons for placement in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation by Client Group

<u>Priority need Group</u>	<u>2015/ 16</u>	<u>2016/17</u>	<u>2017/18</u>
16 / 17 year old	15	22	14
Care Leaver (18-21)	5	4	13
Household with dependent children	7	0	12
Domestic abuse (F)	5	17	32
Domestic abuse (M)	1	1	0
Old age	2	1	1
Emergency	0	1	1
Fleeing violence	2	2	0
Mental health	25	47	43
Physical health	7	21	42
Prison Leaver	83	8	8
Pregnant	3	8	7
Vulnerable	1	7	18
Army discharge	0	0	0
Out of hours*	0	1	8
Cold weather provision	Not recorded	Not recorded	36
Total	156	140	235

*This figure for Out of Hours placements relates only to clients who did not subsequently have a priority need following full assessment.

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*

b) Time spent in Temporary Accommodation

In 2016/17, we 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 16 and 17 year olds are not 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 is being 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 Taf 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 with the 2018 night count finding no rough sleepers.

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 is 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. PARTNERSHIPS – WORKING TOGETHER

Co-operation between local authorities and their partners is a core theme of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The Act strengthens the duty to co-operate on specified public bodies. In addition to this particular change, the statutory framework is predicated upon highly developed collaboration between local authorities and their partners to achieve its objectives on early intervention and assistance to find the best available solution as quickly as possible.

Rhondda Cynon Taf has a strong record of working in partnership with other statutory and voluntary Sector Organisations in the delivery of its homelessness and support services.

Working with Registered Social Landlords.

S.95 of the Act places a duty on Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) to co-operate with the Local Authority in exercising their homelessness duties.

The Registered Social landlords operating in RCT play a vital role in helping to prevent and alleviate homelessness and in supporting the Council in the delivery of its strategic housing role.

This includes being key partners in the development of our Common Housing Register "Homefinder" which provides access to over 15,000 rented homes in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We also operate common allocation policy for the allocation of social housing. Each of the housing associations play an active role in the operation of our multi agency 'Move on' and Eligibility Panels which assess the needs of vulnerable applicants seeking housing.

We also work closely with our RSL partners to ensure new homes are as affordable as possible and available in range of sizes, types and tenure to meet a range of housing needs and support mixed balanced and sustainable communities

12. 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 ICT 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.

Housing Support Grant

As from the 1st April 2019 the Flexible Funding Grant will be replaced by a new two grant approach i.e. the Children and Communities Grant and the Housing and Support Grant. The latter will create a ring fenced grant incorporating Supporting People, Homelessness Prevention Grant and Rent Smart Wales Enforcement funding.

This new funding approach is still in the early stages of implementation but will align with other local strategies including the Housing (Wales) Act 2015, local Well being plans, Public Service Board priorities and the goals of the Well – being of future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

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 linked with the Housing Solutions Team.

External Funding

The Council has worked with its partners to bring in new money to support continuous improvement and will seek to capitalise on any additional opportunities to draw down funding to support homelessness and related services including supporting our voluntary sector partners to seek funding from sources that may be exclusively available to them.

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 directly by the Council 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.

Additional 3 year funding from the Oak Foundation confirmed from the 1st January 2019 has been approved for the roll out of the Merthyr and Valley Mind Resilience Project to all Supporting People funded supported accommodation refuge and hostel projects in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

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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13. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS- HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

We have carried out a review of the homelessness services we provide and looked at the patterns of homelessness in Rhondda Cynon Taf to help understand the nature of homelessness in the borough and the reasons why people become susceptible to it.

This included the current levels of homelessness and numbers of people at risk of becoming homeless and the increasing demand for help and assistance going forward in 2018/19. The review also highlighted the level of resources and services available across the County Borough to support effective prevention of homelessness.

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.

We recognise 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 will also have an impact as households face further financial challenges.

Service users including 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, supported by strong partnership arrangements. (See Appendix1)
- 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 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.
- There is a lack of specialist accommodation with support for young people including those with complex needs and those leaving care
- Substance misuse is becoming an increasing problem within Rhondda Cynon Taf 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.
- There is a need to make better use of the private rented sector, as an alternative to social housing in the areas where little is available.
- There are concerns about the impact of Universal Credit and the impact this will have on people's ability to sustain current accommodation.
- There are difficulties for ex-offenders accessing permanent accommodation,
- The majority of clients surveyed 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.

14. 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. We will continuously strive to improve the delivery of our homelessness services and will deliver the action plan developed in response to the recommendations of the National Wales Audit Office Report on homelessness services in Wales - (8th January 2018).
2. We will 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.
3. We need to improve the monitoring and recording of prevention work including the homelessness services we provide to ensure we are clear about what interventions work and are effective. This will ensure we are reviewing services and that investment is targeted at the right interventions in consideration of the cause and effect
4. 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.
5. The council will work to improve its data collection and reporting mechanisms for service users particularly for equalities information. This will help identify the causes of homelessness for all client groups and allow for early planning of prevention focused work ensuring that no one is discriminated against.
6. We will give particular focus to young people and their families and the reasons for family breakdown.
7. We will continue to work closely with Children's Services to assist with the implementation of a positive youth pathway and assist in the implementation of the "Accommodation and Review Strategy for Young People 16 + Years of Age 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 for this client group.
8. Ensuring early engagement with drug and alcohol services will remain critical for identifying and helping those at risk of homelessness
9. Support for 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
10. Provide services to help divert and prevent perpetrators of domestic abuse re-offending.

11. We will continue to improve service user involvement to ensure they are able to have their say in service design, development and delivery.
12. Review the pathway from prison to accommodation to develop stronger links with Probation services and Prisons to plan earlier for residents who will be homeless on release from prison.

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**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 by ensuring support staff are sufficiently trained to deliver psychologically informed services in consideration of Adverse Childhood Experiences.(ACE's)
7. We will work with our housing provider partners on new investment and funding models to develop a range of housing option and ensure affordable housing delivery is maintained
8. Develop partnerships with private landlords to ensure a good supply of affordable accommodation including the development of a cohesive Private Rented Sector Strategy.
9. Work with housing partners to develop a pre-action protocol agreement before any possession proceedings commence to reduce stress and legal costs and improve the possibility of homeless prevention.
- 10 Review our equality data to help us better understand the cultural and the linguistic needs of the different communities in RCT including understanding of the barriers faced by some groups in accessing homelessness and support services.
- 11 Ensure ex- service personnel are easily identified by housing and other agencies and offered bespoke advice, including a clear pathway for housing and support.

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

1. Commission our new locality floating support service (1st April 2019) to ensure we are providing wider community support, by helping people to remain in their own home and feel in control of their lives. The new service will offer support on demand and include early intervention and prevention activity, financial advice, signposting and advocacy for other services including social opportunities.
2. Whilst effective partnership arrangements have been key to achieving our prevention agenda. We recognise we cannot stand still and will continue to working closely with other partners including our housing and support providers and our colleagues in other Council departments i.e. Children Services and Adult Social Care to develop services.
3. Work with our Health colleagues to re-prioritise the development, review and implementation of the homeless and vulnerable group service standards for improving the Health and Wellbeing of homeless people and vulnerable client groups to include the increasing number of people who self neglect and self harm and are prone to hoarding.
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 and Substance misuse Area Planning Board (APB) regional teams to develop protocols and services for our front line homelessness and support services who are working with individuals who have chronic substance misuse and mental health needs.
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 institutional settings residential care settings.
8. Roll out the Merthyr and Valleys Mind Resilience Project to all supported accommodation and hostel provision to help service users to build and improve emotional reliance and promote good health through psycho-education and wellbeing interventions.

15. GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY OF THE STRATEGY

EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

The Homelessness Strategy aims to prevent homelessness support and have a positive impact on all service user groups, particularly those who present as homeless. However, it is acknowledged that there is insufficient evidence to decide if some groups would receive a positive benefit these include

- Black and minority ethnic groups
- People with a learning disability
- All groups within the sexuality strands
- All groups within the religious strand

Therefore actions will need to be undertaken to improve our monitoring to include:

1. Undertake additional equality monitoring for all people seeking housing advice, through to a homelessness application, securing temporary accommodation, applications to the Common Housing Register to allocation of permanent accommodation.
2. Ensure officers receive training and are aware of equality and diversity issues particularly in relation to housing services.

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 on a regular basis. The feedback we receive will help shape our services in accordance with their needs.

Some examples of service user feedback in 2018 via our client questionnaire (24 responses):

- “very helpful at Sardis House”
- “no problems, got my key worker”
- “no barriers (to services) as of now”
- “long waiting time to be seen”
- “helped me a lot ,bidding for properties was easy”
- “to be honest all worked well”
- “personal issues discussed on reception”
- “helpful staff explained options well so I understood”
- “more contact from Housing Officer needed as situation is stressful”
- “more supported accommodation needed”
- “More affordable housing”
- “what works – support worker”

MONITORING and REVIEWING THE STRATEGY

The ultimate responsibility for driving through this strategy and ensuring it delivers its key objectives rests with the Director Public Health, Protection and Community Services supported by a range of colleagues from other council departments and agencies.

The strategy has been developed in partnership with others including service users and stakeholders and they will continue to be involved in the ongoing review and delivery of the objectives and delivery plan.

The RCT Homelessness Forum will be re established and made up of colleagues from statutory and voluntary agencies across the borough who will take the lead in monitoring delivery against targets and measuring outcomes.

a) 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 monitoring includes:

1. Number of people assisted under each of the duties and prevention data i.e.
 - Section 66
 - Section 73
 - Section 75
2. The number of repeat homelessness presentations
3. Understanding the main causes of homelessness
4. Number of households in bed and breakfast by client group
5. Reasons for the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
6. Number of 16 and 17 year placed in bed and breakfast
7. Number of families placed in bed and breakfast for longer than 6 weeks.
8. Length of time spent in bed and breakfast for all client groups
9. Number of repeat temporary accommodation placements
10. Number of tenancies breaking down within 6 months of letting after a homeless acceptance

b) Review

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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Appendix 1

Homelessness Prevention Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf

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 as well as referrals for individuals who are in receipt of a Supporting People funded housing related support service.

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 Homelessness Intervention Project (HIP) is managed by Rhondda Housing Association and offers key worker support for all persons who present to the council as homeless or threatened with homelessness by supporting an applicant with their short term needs and helping with their reasonable steps and delivery of actions outlined in their personal Housing and Support Plans

Get Ready and Move On (GRAMO) is a pre tenancy project, funded by Supporting People Grant delivered in partnership with Trivallis who also financially contribute to the project. The project works with care leavers and residents placed in our hostels, supported accommodation and those stepping down from specialist adult care placements providing information on all aspects of having a tenancy and being a good tenant. This is delivered through group work and one to one sessions which also link back to support plans where a client is deemed to need more support.

The Resilience Project is a 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**

Complex Needs Worker In order to reduce the number of single homeless people who present as homeless with high and complex support need who are asked to leave our hostel and supported accommodation for non compliance with rules, a Complex needs worker has been commissioned to offer support to residents in hostel and supported accommodation provision to help effectively manage and support individuals leaving

services without their homelessness ever being resolved or 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 projects to help provide specialist support provision.

Gofal Cymru This comprises a team of three workers based within the Housing Solutions Team who provide a seamless service for those who have a mental health need and experiencing housing difficulties. The service also links with the Royal Glamorgan Hospital Mental Health unit to provide advice and assistance to anyone placed on ward in housing need.

Mediation. The Mediation Project is managed by Llamau with a Homeless Mediation Officer in RCT located within the Housing Solutions Team who works with young people aged 16 -21 who present as homeless as a consequence of parental breakdown. Where possible the officer works with each family to attempt reconciliation and to make plans for the young person to return home in the short or long term.

The Emphasis 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 Families Service and Engagement in Education and Training (SEET) team to identify, and offers 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.

Street-smart Project. The aim of the service is to provide a flexible, innovative outreach service for rough sleepers in RCT to include:

- Help move people from the streets to safe and secure accommodation if that is what they require.
- help people who are homeless / rough sleeping access health services
- collect information on rough sleeping and consult with people who use the service to identify gaps in provision and help direct the service.
- Identify where there are gaps in support and offer up effective solutions.
- to complete the rough sleeper questionnaires throughout the Project to inform the end of year report and rough sleeping statistical data collections and information to inform local strategy and commissioning arrangements.
- Consult with staff teams and clients to seek ideas and involve them any new service approach.

Care and Repair Cymru The scheme is delivered in partnership with Care and Repair Cymru and aims to reduce homelessness by enabling victims of domestic abuse, where safe and appropriate to do so to remain in their homes by providing security measures to help them and their families feel safe and secure. The scheme is open to all victims of domestic abuse with referrals made by through the Oasis Centre. As part of this referral process a range of housing options will be discussed and offered to enable the client to make an informed decision about the options that best suits their needs and circumstances.

Equipment is provided free of charge and in some cases and if the victim is living in social housing ,security works may aslo be supplemented by equipment provided by their landlord.

Security measures can include the provision of equipment as well as some works to the property. The following is a guide to the equipment and works available.

- Change of window and door locks
- Window and door alarms
- Door jammers/chains
- Personal Alarms
- CCTV
- Security lighting with
- Fire safety equipment including extinguishers/fire blankets/fireproof letter boxes
- External Letterboxes

Appendix 2

ALL WALES LOCAL AUTHORITY COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE DATA 2017/18