

Appendix 3



**Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough
Council Housing Support Programme
Statement of Need**

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Introduction

The Statement of Need uses the findings of the Needs Assessment to identify the key issues for the Housing Support Programme Strategy, RCT's statutory duties to prevent and alleviate homelessness and in the context of its wider strategic objectives.

Rhondda Cynon Taf

RCT has an increasing older population and features some of the most deprived areas in Wales. However, the pattern of deprivation across RCT is uneven and is concentrated areas, in large part concentrated along the Cynon Valley in communities such as Penrhiwceiber and Pen-y-waun, and along the Rhondda Valley in communities such as Tylorstown and Treherbert.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the numbers of vulnerable people now owed a homelessness duty, and the range of complex needs that need support.

It has led to a rapid increase in the numbers of people in temporary accommodation and reduction in availability in the Private Rented Sector.

The pandemic has also highlighted their need for system partners such as Housing, Health and Probation to work better together and improve their data sharing.

Below are the key areas for consideration in the strategy.

Prevention and timely intervention in homelessness

Understanding Need and Sharing Data

Housing Support services exist to help prevent homelessness, social exclusion, isolation, and institutionalisation. The Welsh legal and policy framework makes it clear that early intervention reduces undue escalation and avoids a crisis, with knock-on impacts to health, inclusion, and independence.

The Needs Assessment shows clearly that demand for housing outstrips supply, despite the best efforts of the Council to create new options for temporary accommodation, supported accommodation and permanent housing. This makes the role of prevention even more urgent and the need to support people to maintain their existing accommodation.

Understanding the activity of system partners such as Health, Probation and Education and having access to the information they have on people's needs is vital to effectively plan services and provide support early before crises develop.

The Resilient Families programme was cited by stakeholders as supporting the prevention agenda, and could be built upon, HSG funded initiatives such as Council Housing Officers were also mentioned as having a significant role in prevention.

However, the Needs Assessment highlights Population Assessment findings, Council reviews and stakeholder feedback that indicates that data and intelligence sharing does not happen well enough currently and where several agencies are involved, information sharing arrangements between partners should be improved, and aligned with agreed national frameworks to better inform future service planning.

Stakeholders stated prevention and early intervention initiatives across RCT need to be strategically and operationally aligned.

Mental health and Substance Misuse

The Needs Assessment identified that a key challenge is meeting the needs of people with mental health conditions, substance misuse and where the two co-occur.

RCT has amongst the highest reported incidences of substance misuse, mental illness, and poor well-being in Wales.

The most common reason for priority housing need in RCT is mental health and housing problems are frequently given as a reason for a person being admitted or re-admitted to inpatient mental health care. People with mental illness are far more likely to live in rented accommodation and their mental ill-health is often given as a major reason for tenancy breakdown.

There are high numbers of people requiring HSG services that have co-occurring mental health and substance misuse issues. These are particularly challenging for support services to get NHS mental health and substance misuse treatment services involved. Services are dealing with an increased complexity of needs since the COVID-19 pandemic and following everyone having priority need for homelessness services, temporary accommodation also has increased complexity of needs. Floating Support services also report referrals having higher complexity of needs.

Services need to adapt to meet increased levels of need and risk. A new specialist regional service for co-occurring needs is now in place, but it is too early to fully evaluate.

Young People

Single people aged 16-25 are the highest proportion of homelessness applications to the Council.

Many of these young people will be 'care-experienced'. Break down in relationships with families is still one of the prominent reasons young people present as homeless in RCT.

All Welsh Councils including RCTCBC have recently been tasked by Welsh Government to examine their corporate parenting response in relation to care experienced children and young people (CYP) and their future accommodation needs. Specifically, it requests that council's respond to the need for:

- An active identification process to ensure care experienced young people presenting as homeless can access all the support they are entitled to in cooperation with children's services.
- Multi-agency reviews to be undertaken to identify any gaps within the system or interventions that could have taken place to ensure future similar cases are prevented for care experienced young people presenting as homeless
- Granting 'local connection' status for care experienced young people who are placed out-of-county, when moving on
- Extending Personal Adviser support up to the age of 25.

Future corporate joint working and commissioning will need to reflect a more joined up corporate parenting approach to preventing future homelessness.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

Increasing numbers of referrals are unable to be accepted by Refuge services in RCT because of levels of need and/or risk – this is largely due to co-existing challenges such as history of trauma, substance misuse and mental health challenges.

Whilst homelessness applications for those fleeing domestic abuse are not high there is a need for service development particularly in respect of enhancing domestic abuse perpetrator Programmes in Cwm Taf Morgannwg.

There is a regional Strategy and Delivery Plan with key aims that need to be considered when developing services.

Homelessness Relief & Providing Suitable Accommodation

RCT has a statutory duty to relieve homelessness as well as prevent it. Its ability to fulfil its duties is currently challenged by the increase of people presenting with complex, co-occurring substance misuse and mental health needs. The current accommodation and support options available are not designed or commissioned to meet the increasing needs of this group. This often leads to being

accommodated in the wrong project leading to an eventual exclusion. Specifically, the needs assessment highlighted the need to have:

- Flexible and semi-permanent (where required) options for more complex serially excluded people with chronic substance misuse and mental health challenges.
- More options that ensure 16–25-year-olds and in particular 'care-experienced' young people are placed in age-appropriate accommodation.
- More options to ensure women who are accommodated via an offender's pathway route who often have a history experiencing domestic violence route are not inadvertently placed alongside men with a history of perpetrating domestic violence.

Fundamental to the Housing Support Programme is helping people live independently in the community. This includes not just access but assessing and influencing supply and suitable accommodation.

Housing First has been implemented in RCT to support those with the most complex needs, in particular ex-offenders, and young people. The services provide accommodation and support that works with high levels of risk and complex needs using assertive outreach and rapid response approaches. Rapid Rehousing is a vital part of Welsh Government policy and Housing First in RCT provides a robust foundation for this to move forward.

Stakeholders wanted to see Housing First extended for people with more complex needs.

Single People

The needs assessment shows that single person households have consistently accounted for the majority of cases where the Council have provided assistance to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Single male applicants are the largest proportion of applications made by those who have been homeless within the last two years. The proportion of single male applicants has risen from 46% of the total in 2017 to 58% in 2021.

Single male applicants account for more placements into temporary accommodation than all other households combined, with single female applicants accounting for the second highest number of placements.

40% of the people placed in temporary accommodation had been placed multiple times, and the number of people requiring temporary accommodation has significantly increased.

One bedroom housing is the highest need across all allocation bands, 91.25% of applicants for housing are assessed as having a low or no housing need.

Temporary accommodation is mostly via private owned bed and breakfast accommodation. 524 individuals, families and groups have been placed in temporary accommodation in 2020/2021 (as of the end of March). 40% of the 524 were placed in temporary accommodation multiple times, leading to a total of 852 placements in 2020/2021.

There is an urgent need to reduce the dependence on bed and breakfast accommodation and develop new temporary and supported accommodation options suitable for longer stays.

Stakeholder engagement called for improved accessibility consistently for all from low to complex needs through a one door / single assessment centre approach with a 'no wrong door' philosophy.

A single assessment approach, with multi-disciplinary assessment of need for single homeless people may help reduce recidivism by recognising and responding to the complexity of homeless peoples' challenges.

Private Rented Sector

The Needs Assessment highlights a lack of accommodation for people to move into or to move on from supported or temporary accommodation. A key part of the move on accommodation market is the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

Since the pandemic and the increase in house values in RCT, many private landlords now no longer want to work with Council referred clients, preferring to find private tenants.

The Council have secured funding from Welsh Government to set up the Social Lettings Agency. This is improving access to the private rented sector, but its impact is slower than was hoped because of the current challenges engaging private landlords. Work needs to continue to engage private landlords and develop more PRS options for single people.

Planning and building

Planning and building of new homes is urgently needed, in particular one bedroom accommodation. These developments need to address the urgency of the housing shortage whilst also respecting the needs and uniqueness of the local communities in RCT.

People with physical difficulties apply for rehousing from hospital, often with very short timescales. In these situations, the Council need more data and notice at an earlier stage. There is a need to find short term solutions whilst move on is adapted or built. Two Integrated Care Fund funded properties are in place for this purpose and the Council are also looking at the use of Extra Care Respite. Going

forward this needs a multiagency approach signed up to by all partners.

Providing high quality support

The Council recognises that the timeliness and suitability of support is something that service users depend upon.

Supported Accommodation and Floating Support

After being mostly unchanged for a number of years, referrals increased significantly in 2019/20 for a number of needs:

- Mental Health
- Homeless or needs to prevent Homelessness
- Older Vulnerable People
- Physical Disability
- Domestic Abuse
- Vulnerable Family

This trend continued in 2020/21 for those who were homeless, needed to prevent homelessness and vulnerable families, but for all other needs there were significantly lower referrals. This can reasonably be attributed to the disruption of the pandemic with additional funding to respond to homelessness and the closure of schools leading to additional need for support for families.

As described above, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the numbers of vulnerable people now owed a homelessness duty, and the range of complex needs that need support.

Stakeholders raised concerns about how the pandemic has caused the need for support to be 'saved up' during lockdown and expect a significant increase in demand for 2021/22 and beyond. They also talked about the higher levels of need and risk they now support and that some people need permanent living options within a supported housing environment. They felt Housing Related Support responses for the most complex and hard to engage with need to be rapid.

The existing National Outcomes Framework provides information on how people are progressing but does not give sufficient insight into what has been effective in the support provided to achieve those outcomes. Work is underway in Welsh Government to introduce a Single Outcome Framework across both HSG and CCG, which has been delayed as a result of the pandemic. This comes with an expectation that departments will demonstrate that all projects are developed with integration and collaboration at the forefront, looking at co-commissioning where possible and integration amongst the grants to deliver the best outcomes for the service user in the most efficient way.

Housing Support Grant funding is used as part of the integrated approach in Children's Services.

However, there is insufficient data on support outcomes from Supported Lodgings for young people to understand their effectiveness. Arrangements are in place with Children's Service to start to develop and effectively monitor the effectiveness of this housing option for young people leaving care.

Adult Social Services also utilise HSG funding for Physical Disability, Learning Disability and Specialist Mental Health Placements. There is insufficient data on support outcomes achieved by these services to be able to draw conclusions on their effectiveness.

Work is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of HSG funded services in light of increasing needs and risks, to better meet the requirements of the post-pandemic landscape.

Multi-agency Working

There are high numbers of people requiring HSG services that have co-occurring mental health and substance misuse issues. These are particularly challenging for support services to get NHS mental health and substance misuse treatment services involved.

Stakeholders frequently commented on the challenges in getting support from NHS and Probation colleagues. They highlighted the urgency of having a better multi-agency operational response to inclusion with the express aim of agreeing a consensus on how to collectively work with homeless people with complex needs or individuals at risk of losing their accommodation.

It was clear from the Needs Assessment process that effective multiagency working at regional, strategic, and operational levels is vital to provide the right integrated support.

Substantial work is needed to develop joint working practices at all levels and with all system partners in RCT.