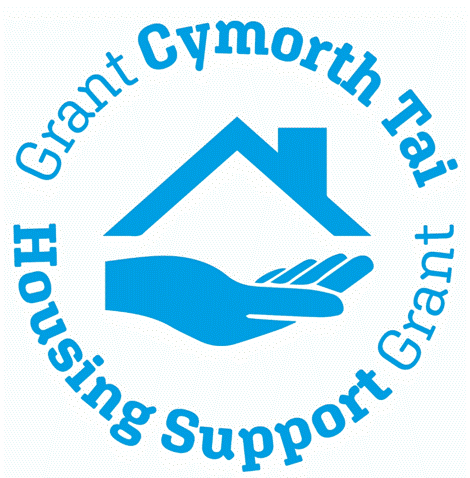


**Housing Support Grant**

**(HSG)**

**3 Year Delivery Plan for**

**2022-25**

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Contents

[**1. Introduction** 3](#_Toc106271692)

[**2. Needs Assessment** 4](#_Toc106271693)

[**2a. Needs assessment process** 4](#_Toc106271694)

[**2b. Key findings** 4](#_Toc106271695)

[**2.3** **Conclusion** 6](#_Toc106271696)

[**3. Delivery priorities** 7](#_Toc106271697)

[**4. Stakeholder engagement** 18](#_Toc106271698)

[**Service User Survey** 20](#_Toc106271699)

[**Stakeholder Survey** 22](#_Toc106271700)

[**Local Stakeholder Engagement** 22](#_Toc106271701)

[**Ongoing engagement** 22](#_Toc106271702)

[**4a. Stakeholder feedback** 22](#_Toc106271703)

[**4b. Partnership working** 23](#_Toc106271704)

[Annex A – Impact Assessments 24](#_Toc106271705)

[Annex B – Spend Plan 24](#_Toc106271706)

[Annex C – Commissioning Plan 24](#_Toc106271707)

[Annex D – Homelessness Statutory Duties 24](#_Toc106271708)

# **1. Introduction**

2021 has continued to be a difficult and unusual time with the ongoing impact of Covid-19, which has of course made a significant impact on services and will continue to impact the way in which the Housing Support Grant (HSG) is delivered over the next three years.

Despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, delivery of the HSG programme has been well maintained. Through supporting the continuation of positive partnerships and continual monitoring and adaptations of services to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community, we have been able to effectively respond to the increased levels of demand that we have been presented with.

As we continue to move forward, we are now in a position where, as set out in the HSG Guidance, local authorities are required to have a three-year HSG Delivery plan in place. This Delivery plan will set out how Blaenau Gwent intends to deliver on its strategic priorities and ongoing HSG delivery requirements over the next three years. It also sets out the spending and commissioning intentions of the HSG over the next three years and summarises the needs assessment and stakeholder engagement findings which have informed the HSG strategic priorities and ongoing HSG delivery priorities.

|  |
| --- |
| **Strategic Priorities** |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Priority 1 | Help improve access to timely, suitable and affordable housing | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Priority 2 | Further enhance the delivery of high quality, innovative, effective and responsive housing related support services | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Priority 3 | Minimise homelessness and prevent it through early intervention | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Priority 4 | Ensure fair, equal and person-centred homelessness and housing related support services | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Priority 5 | Further strengthen collaboration with our partners in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services | |

# **2. Needs Assessment**

As set out in the HSG Guidance, local authorities are required to undertake a comprehensive needs assessment every four years, with a light touch review every two years to inform development of their HSP Strategy. The needs assessment analysed a wide range of data from different sources, to determine the levels of homelessness, housing need and support provision within Blaenau Gwent, whilst extensive consultation was carried out with service users and stakeholders to better understand their concerns and priorities. The findings were used to identify current trends, areas of growth and gaps in provision, which have helped to shape the Statement of Need



## **2a. Needs assessment process**

The Needs Assessment was carried out using a variety of data sources including national statistics, regional data and local intelligence, to provide quantitative data about the levels of need within Blaenau Gwent. This was then complimented with qualitative information from service users, stakeholders, and other key partners, who had direct experience of either providing or accessing these services locally.

The intelligence collected through the assessment process provided a comprehensive understanding of existing provision; including levels of need and demand, current challenges, gaps in provision and areas of priority; both now and in the future.

## **2b. Key findings**

**Increased levels of demand, including complex and multiple needs**

Demand for services is currently high and is likely to increase further in the short term, due to the pressures created as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, such as the level of homelessness, poor mental health and financial pressures.

Despite the success of some preventative approaches, levels of homelessness are still a concern, placing significant pressure on the housing service, whilst service users accessing support often have more complex needs, resulting in an increase of support extensions by 55%.

Regular reviews of existing provision will be required to ensure that services are fit for purpose, forward planning and meet both existing and emerging need. Preventative approaches and multi-agency working will be vital for effectively addressing some of the needs identified, as well as building on existing good practice and further enhancing and developing mechanisms and support services.

**Widening inequalities and deprivation**

Blaenau Gwent has become a place of mixed and diverse need, containing areas of relative affluence often near to areas of significant poverty and deprivation. The assessment helped to identify the location of the most deprived communities in Blaenau Gwent and confirmed existing knowledge that people in these areas will often experience multiple difficulties.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD, 2019) evidences Blaenau Gwent has having a high percentage of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the 20%, 30% and 50% most deprived in Wales. It has a claimant count rate (number of people claiming benefit principally for the reason of being unemployed) of 6.3% - the second highest in Wales.

The HSP programme will need to continue supporting these identified groups and focus on the delivery of those services that will best support and empower them to improve their situation. This includes addressing financial inclusion, food bank usage, delivering more affordable housing options, especially to young single households and who are particularly vulnerable.

**Supply and a lack of suitable accommodation**

Supply of housing remains one of the biggest challenges for addressing housing need and whilst Blaenau Gwent has had significant success at preventing homelessness, the ability to relieve it remains a much harder challenge, due to the limited amount of accommodation available.

This is particularly significant for single person households, as evidenced by the increased levels of single people who are sleeping rough, presenting as homeless to the local authority, living in temporary accommodation or seeking housing via the common housing register. Unless more is done to address the lack of accommodation, this is an area of demand that is set to continue in the future.

House prices and rental values make access unaffordable in some parts of the borough. In addition, the effects of welfare benefit reform have further impacted on access to the social rented sector, especially for younger renters, making a previously affordable tenure more difficult to access and sustain.

Delivery of suitable accommodation can only be achieved through a concerted and collective approach with all key partners working together to explore and deliver new models of accommodation.

**Multi agency approaches & limited resources**

More service users are requiring support for longer and that some key support needs are in greater demand than others, placing increased pressure on available resources. Some of these needs can be addressed by the Housing and HSP service, but other more complex needs require a multiagency approach.

Responding to the needs of looked after children in Blaenau Gwent is still a priority. There is a commitment to work with partners across the youth justice system, social services, health and education.

Commissioning of specialist VAWDASV services in Gwent was identified as complex, provided by multiple parties, with risk of duplication, gaps in support and potentially not meeting the needs or ensuring the safety of those accessing support.

The importance of developing joined up service provision has been made clear throughout this assessment and via engagement with stakeholders and partners. There is consensus that partner agencies and services will need to work together seamlessly; not only improving people’s outcomes, but leading to more efficient and effective provision.

**Vulnerable groups and high demand areas**

Data indicates certain types of service users have a higher or more complex level of need than others:

* Single person households, particularly impacted by sufficient supply of suitable and affordable accommodation options
* Those with mental health issues, requiring both skills and capacity across support services to address presenting needs
* Young people leaving care or other forms of institution is one the main reasons for youth homelessness, and young people are more likely to experience deprivation than other age groups
* VAWDASV related abuse remains high, not aided by variation in provision across local authorities, as well as a need to improve data capture and quality
* Common across many local authorities, an increasing proportion of older people impacts complexity and volume of need, coupled with a need for multi-agency co-ordination

## **2.3 Conclusion**

From the comprehensive needs assessments, service user and stakeholder engagement, there are some recurring and evident needs which will need to be addressed over the coming four years. These include a need to:

* Improve the range of affordable housing and suitable accommodation options
* Intervene early to avoid issues escalating to a point of crisis or more profound need, including reducing homelessness and rough sleeping
* Understand and respond to the needs of service users who have more complex needs or issues
* Reduce the gaps between service providers, enhancing joined-up services and support through multi-agency planning, provision and information exchange
* Enhance the means to develop more person-centred solutions, recognising that support is likely to be more effective when it boosts personal resilience and is targeted to address identified personal needs
* Capitalise on the innovations that have come about through the COVID-19 pandemic, being sure to develop digital inclusion, still provide a range of methods to receive support and ensure no one gets left behind

Through the implementation of its Phase II Homeless Plan and the HSP strategy, Blaenau Gwent will continue to work to meet the statutory needs of households requiring assistance from the local authority.

The plan initially seeks to increase intervention services to prevent homelessness from occurring. Where this is not possible, we will aim to deliver more arrangements to reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation, whilst linking to support services to address the needs of individuals, supporting the principles of rapid rehousing.

The strategy sets out some specific priorities which will support the provision of statutory needs, building on the preventative approaches already in place and encouraging: the development of more accommodation provision; development of a rapid rehousing plan; and increasing and developing the range of targeted homeless prevention services.

Blaenau Gwent has already developed a number of effective partnerships on both a local and regional basis that deliver bespoke services where a specific need has been identified. It will be important to continue with these collaborative approaches, and to continue linking with wider agencies. We will further develop our partnership working and make the best use of available resources when developing the Delivery Plan and working to meet current and future demands.

# **3. Delivery priorities**

The Delivery Priorities for 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 have been carefully considered, to take into account the overarching priorities of the HSG, whilst also seeking to align the Housing Support Grant priorities with those of the Regional Homeless Strategy. The priorities in the delivery of HSG are presented below:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **SP1 - Priority 1 Help improve access to timely, suitable and affordable housing** | | | | |
| **Action Required** | **Outcome/Outputs** | **By when/timescale** | **Lead** |  |
| Develop and implement a Rapid Rehousing Plan | Develop and adopt a rapid rehousing approach | 2023 | Housing Solutions and Supporting People Managers |  |
| Review and repurpose the current Move On Panel to improve access to move on accommodation for people living in supported accommodation | Timely move on from supported accommodation so people are able to live independently within their own home in the community | 2022/23 | Housing Solutions and Supporting People Managers |  |
| Review the suitability of current temporary accommodation to ensure it meets demand needs | A reduction in the use of B&B accommodation by co-ordinating access to more temporary accommodation in the region | August 2022 | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Continue to develop a database of private rented landlords that assist with the local authority meeting its statutory duty  Further develop a landlord offer tailored to Blaenau Gwent | An increase in the supply of good quality affordable private rented sector accommodation, increasing housing options for households faced with homelessness | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Continue to work with our social and private landlords to increase the supply of accommodation for our Housing First service | An increase in supply will increase the housing options for people with complex needs | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Consider new and innovative models of housing and support for people with learning difficulties by reviewing the current provision and access arrangements.  Consider the outcomes of the review and implement recommendations | A range of innovative housing and support models are available for people with learning disabilities, enabling them to live independently in their own home | 2022/2023 | Supporting People Team Manager |  |
| **SP2 Priority 2 Further enhance the delivery of high quality, innovative, effective and responsive housing related support services** | | | | |
| **Action Required** | **Outcome/Outputs** | **By when/timescale** | **Lead** |  |
| Further raise awareness of HSG services by developing an effective communication and marketing plan with partners. Consult with service users and former services users and partners over the information provided, to produce new revised information and to determine the most appropriate methods of communication | Effective communications and information for households seeking accommodation, with clear information on Housing Support services, HSP prevention initiatives, access to accommodation and access to services | Spring 2022 | HSP Planning Group |  |
| Determine the impact Covid has had on current services and plan for how we can deliver housing related support services to meet the needs post Covid.  Monitor the change in needs of people accessing services and the demand for services (for example the economic impact of furlough ending is impacting on demand) | Effective housing related support services are commissioned and delivered which are meeting the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent | 2022/23 | Supporting People Manager |  |
| Develop a greater understanding of all local services being delivered by forming links with the newly developed Community Locality Hubs.  Provide training to the staff within the Hubs to ensure they have an understanding and awareness of housing related support services and their referral pathways | Staff will be better informed regarding housing related support services and will have increased local knowledge.  People contacting the hubs will have access to a greater range of services. | April 2022 | Supporting People Contract Officers |  |
| Review and map current provision and access arrangements to support services for individuals experiencing:   * mental health issues * drug and alcohol issues * fleeing from domestic abuse/ VAWDASV (including male victims) * discharge from remand/custody * a risk of homelessness or sleeping rough * older people at risk of homelessness or in need of housing support * pregnancy and families in need of housing support   Agree and implement the recommendations from each of the above reviews | A suitable range of appropriate support is strengthened and expanded to vulnerable individuals and households with each of these issues. Clear pathways are in place for the services ensuring people access timely and effective support.  A reduction in the risk or negative impact on these individuals’ and families’ health, wellbeing and social exclusion.  A reduction in the level of need, complexity or frequency of presenting to HSP services or other statutory services from this group, which resulted from unmet housing needs. | August 2022 | Housing Solutions and Supporting People Teams |  |
| Review, map, benchmark and compare crisis response work and housing related support services  Identify good practice focusing on relationship breakdown, rent arrears and tied accommodation | The approach to crisis response meets the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent and prevents them from having to access statutory services | December 2022 | Team Managers - Housing Solutions and Compliance and Supporting People |  |
| Review how we have embraced technology and provided services differently during the COVID-19 pandemic.  Learn from our new ways of working to modernise how we deliver services going forward to ensure they are more accessible responsive and inclusive | Support is delivered in a variety of ways and methods (e.g. face-to-face, virtual and remote), ensuring support is more accessible, engaging and timely, meeting the needs of the people using services | Spring 2022 | Supporting People Contracts Officer |  |
| **SP 3 Priority 3 Minimise homelessness and prevent it through early intervention** | | | | |
| **Action Required** | **Outcome/Outputs** | **By when/timescale** | **Lead** |  |
| Review, map, benchmark and compare prevention approach work by each local authority and housing related support services. | The range of commissioned prevention services meet the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent and prevents them from having to access statutory services | December 2022 | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Identify good practice focusing on relationship breakdown, rent arrears and tied accommodation | The range of commissioned prevention services meet the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent and prevents them from having to access statutory services | December 2022 | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Carry out a review of rough sleeping and demand for emergency accommodation and direct access hostels within Blaenau Gwent | Reduction in rough sleeping by improving the availability and access to emergency accommodation provision, to address rough sleeping within Blaenau Gwent | Annually | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Explore models of delivering Housing First project to meet the needs of rough sleepers and ‘hard to house’ clients | Reduction in rough sleeping by developing independent accommodation-based projects aimed at addressing the needs of rough sleepers and ‘hard to house’ clients | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Research repeat presentations and identify local trends and issues | Ensure equality of access to services and improve service quality and outcomes by enabling services to respond to the identified issues | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Review existing provision across each Local Authority area regarding education packages and information for young people around housing and homelessness  Develop an education package and engage with education services to implement this within schools and other educational settings in each local authority area | Greater awareness in young people of contributing factors that lead to housing issues and homelessness, with awareness about their rights and responsibilities  Reduction in youth homelessness through the Youth Pathway model by developing education packages and information for young people around housing and homelessness | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Review existing processes and procedures, considering guidance, best practice, service user input and relevant legislation in relation to young people | Reduction in homelessness in young people leaving care, by developing clear pathways | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Develop a greater understanding of all local services provided for vulnerable households, what services are delivered and how they are funded, including the voluntary and third sector | To maximise the support and services available to vulnerable individuals and households in need by enhancing the work of voluntary groups and services across Blaenau Gwent and the region that is provided to vulnerable households | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Develop a greater strategic understanding of the Mental Health Crisis Intervention Service (Homelessness Prevention Grant service which is transferred into the Housing Support Programme from 22/23) | Maximise the support and services available to people across Blaenau Gwent | Autumn 2022 | Team Managers – Housing Solutions and Supporting People |  |
| Review current provision and access arrangements to debt and money management services; agree and implement the recommendations | A reduction in poverty, hardship and homelessness by improving access to debt and money management services | Annually | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Examine current provision in training, education and employment to reduce poverty and increase the financial capacity of households and establish the gaps in services alongside opportunities for further development  Develop local partnerships to increase capacity and to increase opportunities | Enhanced opportunities for training and employment for the most vulnerable in society including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, resulting in decreased social exclusion and increased independent living | June 2022 | Supporting People Manager |  |
| The demand for substance misuse services has seen a steep increase which appears to be a continuing trend. Services will be monitored to ensure they continue to take up training opportunities available which will enhance staff professional development, embed best practice and provide opportunities to collaborate with key partners and stakeholders to tackle all forms of substance misuse for citizens across Gwent and Blaenau Gwent   * Develop specific communication materials to promote substance misuse training to the HSG and Homelessness workforce * Deliver on an annual basis via a digital platform; Level 1 Substance Misuse training and refresher programme to all HSG staff and commissioned services * HSG and GDAS teams will review the training needs of HSG commissioned services annually | * Annually 95% of staff complete the e-learning Level 1 substance misuse programme * Staff confidence increases and this is monitored through an evaluation survey * Staff confidence increased to engage and sign post individuals with substance misuse appropriately and this is monitored though an evaluation survey   *This is the proposal for generic level 1 training, consideration to be given to an additional action for frontline staff to be offered level 2 training- as sourced by providers based on local need but to include substances and drug trends, complex needs including dual diagnosis etc – to be discussed at Regional HSG Lead Officer meeting*  *If agreed:*  *Additional Outcomes*   * *Annually 70% of staff engaged with Level 2 substance misuse training.* * *Staff confidence increased to engage and sign post individuals with substance misuse appropriately and this is monitored though an evaluation survey* | Annually | Supporting People Manager |  |
| **SP 4 Priority 4 Ensure fair, equal and person centred homelessness and housing related support services** | | | | |
| **Action Required** | **Outcome/Outputs** | **By when/timescale** | **Lead** |  |
| Assess existing structure within Blaenau Gwent  Review existing options and provide recommendations for implementation of changes with key services  Implement agreed changes  Identify and arrange training on wider Housing Support issues | Front line services are responsive and co-ordinated to meet the needs of service users, extending options for preventative activities | June 2022 | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Review Blaenau Gwent C.B.C.’s adverse weather policy in partnership with key stakeholders and amend as needed | Reduction in rough sleeping in inclement weather by ensuring Extreme Weather Plans are reviewed and fit for purpose | Spring 2022 | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Review homelessness prevention and housing support procedures and processes to ensure legal compliance  Implement revisions and provide appropriate training, with an annual review as required | Relevant legislation is fully integrated and applied in housing support and homelessness prevention assessment policies and procedures, ensuring services are legally compliant | July 2022/Annually | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Training, updates and briefings to staff and providers to keep abreast of service developments, good practice, innovation and new practices via joint training sessions, HSP Planning Group, and local, regional and national fora | Increased knowledge and awareness to ensure effective and innovative housing related support services are commissioned and delivered | On going | Supporting People Manager and Chair of the HSP Planning Group |  |
| Develop and strengthen the support offered to Gypsy and Travellers residing in the borough, with particular focus on providing access to training and employment for young people of the Gypsy and Traveller community | A range of training, skills development and employment opportunities which are accepted and taken up by this group  An improvement in financial independence and social inclusion | June 2022 | Supporting People Manager |  |
| Develop digital inclusion skills across services as well as the people we are supporting – linking into to Digital Communities Wales and the Corporate Digital Transformation Team | Both staff and people in the community are able to engage digitally and actively get their needs met through these methods | On going | Supporting People Contracts Officer |  |
| **SP 5 Priority 5 Further strengthen collaboration with our partners in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services** | | | | |
| **Action Required** | **Outcome/Outputs** | **By when/timescale** | **Lead** |  |
| Continue to build upon the strategic relationships with Probation and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board through the HSP Planning Group regarding homelessness prevention | Increased partnership working and improved access to housing support and homelessness prevention services by building relationships with health, probation, social services and RSLs and jointly reviewing and developing working practices and processes with key partner agencies. Outcomes will be evident through reduced tenancy failure from Social Housing, reduced homelessness and reduced community risk | Ongoing | HSP Planning Group |  |
| Develop agreements with RSL (Registered Social Landlord) partners around homelessness prevention and associated activities linked to securing accommodation |
| Develop agreements with Probation around homelessness prevention, assessment and interventions for individuals leaving the secure estate in line with the National Offender Pathway |  |
| Establish regular meetings and reporting mechanisms and oversight/ scrutiny with Executive Members | Working relationships are established between Housing Solutions and Executive Members to raise the profile of Housing Support services politically within the local area | On-going | Team Managers - Housing Solutions and Compliance and Supporting People |  |
| Deliver specific training throughout Blaenau Gwent on processes, service access and signposting to homelessness prevention services | More joined up, consistent and connected services that meet the needs of service users by deliver joint training around homelessness prevention and housing support services across a range of partner agencies | On going | Team Manager - Housing Solutions and Compliance |  |
| Consider securing dedicated resource to project manage, co-ordinate and oversee delivery against the HSP strategy | Project Manager in post | April 2022 |  |  |
| Increase joint planning, commissioning and delivery of services through Blaenau Gwent’s HSP Planning Group.  Mandate the Group to provide a strategic steer of the programme and ensure links are sustained with key strategic groups across the locality and region | Effective HSP services are commissioned and delivered meeting the needs of the people who access our services | On going | HSP Planning Group Chair |  |
| Promote career opportunities within the housing support sector with the Sector through the provision of a Regional virtual Open Day | Recruitment and retention of staff into the sector is increased | Feb 2022 and on going | Gwent Regional Development Co-ordinator |  |
| Identify joint funding arrangements with partners for the commissioning and delivery of housing support services commencing with establishing funding opportunities for prescribing places in relation to the Substance Misuse Outreach Services | A holistic substance misuse service is commissioned which also provides access to prescribing places to better meet the needs of the people accessing the service | On going | Supporting People Manager |  |
| Develop local information sharing arrangements in line with GDPR in order to aid greater joint working and integration of services and outcomes  Examine models of co-working/co-funding to deliver services more effectively | To create greater connectivity and integration between the range of support and preventative interventions, increasing the effectiveness of services overall | On going | Team Managers – Housing Solutions and Compliance and Supporting People |  |
| Review the case recording system, database information and reporting systems  Consider outcomes of review and implement recommendations  Work with partners to ensure HSP statistics are recorded in as uniform a way as possible | The data provided, case recording systems and subsequent performance information are:   * robust and accurate * fulfils regulatory obligations * gives an accurate assessment of demand for services * can be used to inform service delivery and shape policy | On going | Team Managers – Housing Solutions and Compliance and Supporting People |  |

# **4. Stakeholder engagement**

Blaenau Gwent, in partnership with its Gwent partners, undertakes regular consultation and engagement with stakeholders to continually review services and identify priorities.

|  |
| --- |
| Recognising that stakeholders and partners are likely to have a range of preferences in how they like to be engaged, we have used several methods for capturing perspectives, feedback and insights.  MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT & FEEDBACK  This includes:   * Gwent Service User Survey Feedback 2020 & 2021 * Gwent Stakeholder Feedback 2020 & 2021 * Blaenau Gwent local workshop with its HSP providers * Regular service review feedback by the HSP Supporting People Commissioning Team * Ongoing service monitoring feedback within Blaenau Gwent, to assess service user experience and outcomes achieved * Ongoing work and consultation with members of Blaenau Gwent’s HSP Planning Group, which includes representation from: * Housing * Children’s and Social Services * Health * Probation services * Children and Community Grant * Landlords * Support Providers (accommodation based) * Support Providers (floating support) * Active shared planning and commissioning across a broader range of partners within Gwent’s Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group (RHSCG), listed in Appendix 1. This includes representation from: * Gwent Police * Substance Misuse Area Planning Board * Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Board * Long- and short-term support providers and social housing landlords * Third sector * Service user representation |

Both our methods of engagement and lines of enquiry are consistent with the ambitions and expectations laid out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, including the Seven Well-being Goals, and Five Ways of Working. The Blaenau Gwent HSP Planning Group has committed to the following principles, very much aligned to the Act:

1. HSP services are efficient and effective and meet the diverse needs of vulnerable people of Blaenau Gwent
2. Co-production and collaboration are at the centre of service development and delivery
3. People who use services are place at the heart of the Housing Support Programme
4. The housing support needs of vulnerable people of Blaenau Gwent are understood and evidenced
5. An inclusive framework for planning and commissioning of HSP services is adopted

Creativity and innovation in the commissioning of HSP services is promoted

### **Service User Survey**

While every attempt is made to configure services to meet the needs of those who use them, it is the people themselves who receive services who bring first-hand insights to the experience of these services. They have lived and experienced them and are in the best position to know what works, what doesn’t, how it supports them through challenges they face and what improvements need to be made.

Blaenau Gwent, in partnership with its Gwent partners, undertakes regular consultation and engagement with stakeholders to continually review services and identify priorities.

The following from the Service User Survey (2020) shows the key issues that people contend with.

**Prioritised view of service user needs based on the Gwent Service User Survey**

Due to COVID-19 restrictions the usual service user engagement event shifted online. A total of 352 questionnaires were completed in 2020 across Gwent, of which 52 lived in Blaenau Gwent, with 182 completing it in 2021. Managing accommodation, managing money and feeling safe were the main support areas identified.

**Barriers to support, non-engagement & marginalised groups**

Feedback has been positive about the new ways of virtual working and service users have commented that they would prefer to keep the virtual support with a combination of support via telephone, mobile apps (e.g. WhatsApp), video calls (e.g. FaceTime) and some face-to-face visits.

While many have appreciated improved means of accessing support, particularly digitally, some individuals remain marginalised and struggle to access or engage with services. Service user’s engagement highlighted that whilst access had been straightforward, knowledge of the services available had been limited. Digital inclusion is an area of increasing need, particularly with more and more services being delivered online. Following the 2021 survey which focused on this area, seven priorities were agreed by the RHSCG to enhance digital inclusion and remove barriers to engaging in consultation.

Beyond consultation and engagement, when it comes to the provision and delivery of support services, face to face remains the preferred method and exploring more digital approaches was not something that many respondents were keen to embrace.

Mental health was identified as a barrier, confirmed by analysis of the data which supported reports that a relatively high number of homeless applicants disengage or could not be contacted before reaching a satisfactory outcome, resulting in referrals for support being rejected.

**Access to support**

The results from the 2021 service user survey highlighted that all respondents in Blaenau Gwent were either Happy or Very Happy with the services that they had received through the HSP programme. Equally, we have picked up a need to improve access to support – from identifying a need, to understanding the support available, and then tailoring the support to meet individual needs:

1. From a service user point of view there was a call for better marketing or awareness raising of the nature of support services available.
2. For service users, increasing capacity and reducing waiting times for support was a priority to emerge from the service user engagement.
3. The number of people who require more specialist levels of support has become an area of additional pressure on services and was clearly highlighted through the stakeholder engagement, with many providers struggling to assist service users to access the specialist support that they require.
4. Once support had been accessed, there is clearly not a one-size-fits-all need. Providing low level support for longer was a suggested area for improvement, as was providing more intensive support and greater levels of contact. Evidently the nature of need, and therefore support will need to vary in duration and intensity – a tailored approach, beyond being prescribed by service thresholds or standardised protocols.

**Widening the range of support**

Picked up through service monitoring to understand the experience of service users, as well as service reviews to ensure services are being delivered effectively, some of the following themes emerged:

* People want flexible and responsive support that is available and accessible outside of traditional hours
* The need for additional emotional support, addressing isolation and managing mental health has been amplified during the pandemic, enhanced by continuity of support workers to establish relationships based on trust
* At the same time, the need for pragmatic insight and knowledge about benefits processes, and accessing more specialist services to address complex or multiple needs – including improved multiagency support.

This focus on access, provision of person-centred services and responsive, multi-agency support flows through to our strategic priorities and objectives.

### **Stakeholder Survey**

A separate survey was developed for key partners, asking them to identify any gaps or priorities for the HSG and Homeless services and to make any recommendations for further improving partnership working and the delivery of services.

### **Local Stakeholder Engagement**

In addition to the online surveys, Blaenau Gwent engaged with its local providers via a Microsoft Teams event. The event was an opportunity for discussions to take place between the different service providers and the local authority, providing an opportunity to share experiences and identify common themes. (Provider Forums quarterly)

### **Ongoing engagement**

In addition to these specific engagement events, service users are regularly consulted about their experiences. Surveys are sent out each month to clients accessing the housing solutions service, regular survey work is undertaken as part of the HSG tendering process and service users are interviewed when services are monitored and reviewed.

Blaenau Gwent also meets regularly with its service providers through a multiagency forum, to provide updates and information on any changes or developments that may be taking place within the sector. This helps to maintain good levels of ongoing communication and helps to foster better involvement and collaboration, improving the ability of the HSG and Housing service to meet long term needs, implement preventative approaches and achieve better integration. It also ensures that service providers are fully involved in the delivery of the HSG programme.

## **4a. Stakeholder feedback**

In addition to engaging with service users, we regularly consult with providers and other key stakeholders about the services which are being provided locally, to determine areas of pressure and demand, gaps in provision and emerging priorities. This is both within Blaenau Gwent and regionally.

Blaenau Gwent held a workshop with its HSP providers to explore their concerns and priorities, especially reflecting on the new challenges that had emerged, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, and how to create better resilience going forward.

Providers have seen an increase of new floating support clients and need, for example through:

* homeowners experiencing financial difficulties due to furlough ceasing
* accentuated needs in mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse
* enabling the younger people aged 16-30 years to access services.

A shift to digital means of support has enabled providers to support more people with less time spent travelling, though as found in the service user feedback, this was not suitable for all, with some vulnerable clients not engaging as well as not being able to undertake visual checks.

Needs particular to Blaenau Gwent providers included:

* A lack of housing options:
* affordable homes
* 1-3 bed accommodation
* step down from supported accommodation for vulnerable people (e.g. mental health needs) to more independent living in the community with/without support
* Housing First priority for complex client groups
* Non-statutory support for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities

Providers themselves faced workforce challenges, for example recruitment, retention and training, impacted by high workloads and reducing their abilities to meet the needs of complex clients who need specialist services.

There was a need for enhanced cross-boundary working:

* more cooperation and collaboration with a wide range of partners, sharing information and data
* promoting and marketing services and their positive impact
* better accessibility and digitally inclusive approaches to identify options and secure support.

These local findings were consistent with Gwent stakeholder feedback, including the need to develop accommodation options, more collaborative multiagency approaches and the ability to address complex needs being highlighted. Specialist services were called for to respond to:

* Complex needs particularly rough sleepers and those with dual diagnosis
* Increasing accommodation and support options for prison leavers
* Developing and expanding the range of mental health services available
* Increasing accommodation and services for those affected by VAWDASV including male victims, the sexually exploited and victims of modern slavery
* Providing a wider range of services for those with disabilities.

Early intervention and preventative approaches were also emphasised, and respondents stressed the importance of services that are client-led, person-centred, and which prioritise the needs of the individual.

These findings flow through into the prioritisation of our strategic objectives.

## **4b. Partnership working**

We will regularly review the governance of our local planning groups and we will proactively seek to ensure that key partners are represented at all relevant forums, ensuring that they are fully engaged in these positive discussions.

We will work with partners at an operational and strategic level thereby creating opportunities to collaborate across boundaries and sectors to optimise resources and capacity.

We will continue to promote the Housing and HSG programme locally, through ongoing engagement and consultation with stakeholders, making full use of the various communication channels available.

Through the use of the regional collaborative mechanisms that are currently in place, we will continue to foster productive relationships at all levels with key partners such as health, care and criminal justice in order to deliver and optimise the impact of the strategy.

# Annex A – Impact Assessments



# Annex B – Spend Plan



# Annex C – Commissioning Plan



# Annex D – Homelessness Statutory Duties

