

**SAFER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**26<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

**REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

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**1. Area Affected**

1.1 County Borough Wide and the Gwent Region.

**2. Purpose of Report**

2.1 To update Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee members on the progress which has been made in developing a local homelessness review and regional homelessness strategy and appraise them of the work that has been carried out by the Housing Solutions Service to meet the proposals of the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) report; [How Local Government manages demand - Homelessness](#)

**3. Suggested scrutiny activity**

3.1 The Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been asked to:

- Consider the approach taken for developing the local homelessness review and regional homelessness strategy, and to feedback accordingly.
- Review the progress that has been made in meeting the WAO recommendations for addressing homelessness.

**4. Background**

4.1 The introduction of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 placed a statutory duty on all local authorities in Wales to carry out a local homelessness review and formulate a homelessness strategy.

4.2 As a result of this legislation, Welsh Government (WG) issued a Code of Guidance 'for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness'. Chapter 5 of this guidance provides more detailed information about the planning of homelessness services under Sections 50 to 52 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The Guidance goes on to state that:

*The intention of this part of the legislation is to ensure that Local Authorities work systematically with partners to assess the nature and extent of homelessness in their areas and to plan service provision to prevent and relieve homelessness.*

4.3 The most recent version of the full Code of Guidance can be found within the following linked web page:

[Welsh Government Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness March 2016](#)

- 4.4 Section 50 of the Code of Guidance states that local authorities must carry out a homelessness review of its areas and formulate and adopt a homelessness strategy to be in place by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018.
- 4.5 Following the publication of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, the Welsh Audit Office carried out a review of homelessness services in Wales, assessing whether local authorities and their partners were addressing homelessness demand through the development of appropriate and effective prevention approaches. The review concluded that more needs to be done by local authorities in Wales to prevent homelessness.
- 4.6 This report will review the approach that has been taken so far to develop a draft review and draft homelessness strategy and how effectively Torfaen is working towards meeting the recommendations of the WAO review.

**5. Progress in developing a Homeless Strategy**

- 5.1 The Torfaen Housing Service has a history of positive and productive partnership working relationships with its neighbouring housing authorities in the Gwent area. In recognition of this, and alongside the understanding that service users do not merely reside, present or need support and accommodation within single county boundaries, the five local authorities, (Torfaen County Borough Council, Newport City Council, Monmouthshire County Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council) agreed to collectively pool knowledge and resources to develop the local reviews and a homelessness strategy.
- 5.2 Through dialogue with Welsh Government Officers, it was agreed that five local reviews would be undertaken (as per the Act requirements), but these separate reviews would be merged, also informing a single regional homelessness strategy.
- 5.3 By working collaboratively it was felt that a number of opportunities exist:
- to better understand homelessness across the region and enable comparison locally
  - to more comprehensively consider service user needs, the supply of services and resources available alongside variances/inconsistencies across the region
  - to afford a greater ability to factor in service user transience and migration
  - and to identify/share pockets of good practice and further partnership working opportunities
- 5.4 To undertake this essential and important piece of work, the Gwent local authorities established an Officer Working Group, with representatives from each local authority, with Torfaen CBC acting as the lead authority. The group determined that the most effective approach for carrying out the reviews and development of a regional strategy, would be through the appointment of a single, dedicated Regional Research Officer, hosted by Torfaen, who would work across localities and the region. This approach was approved by Welsh

Government and a Regional Research Officer was appointed in November 2017 for a period of circa 7 months.

- 5.5 Reporting back to the Officer Group, the Regional Research Officer undertook research in each local authority area, gathering the necessary data to formulate 5 local reviews, and carried out consultation across the region with key stakeholders and service users.
- 5.6 The reviews focused on a number of key issues including those factors that contribute to homelessness, patterns and likely future levels of homelessness, possible means to forestall or intervene these patterns and the planning/co-ordination of the resources that are available to address homelessness.
- 5.7 A Project Start Up document was developed and can be found as **appendix 1**, which outlines how the project was broken down into five key phases of work.
- 5.8 At the end of the seven months period, the Regional Research Officer had developed:
- a detailed review identifying levels of homelessness and key causes across each Local Authority area.
  - a draft Gwent Regional Homelessness Strategy (**appendix 2**).
  - a comprehensive evidence base that has been used to develop tailored action plans to address current and future levels of homelessness on both a local and regional basis.
  - consulted with 218 service users and held a stakeholder engagement event with 140 delegates, representing organisations from across Gwent

## **6. Progress in meeting the recommendation of the WAO Report**

- 6.1 The WAO recommendations stipulated that staff should be sufficiently skilled to meet demand, that services be reviewed and reconfigured to more effectively engage with homeless households; redesigning where necessary and that funding be reviewed to ensure that they can continue to provide the widest possible preventative approach needed. In addition, effective use of websites, the publishing of service standards, addressing weaknesses in equality monitoring and setting out agreed expectations with partners were also recommended, to ensure greater transparency and partnership working.

- 6.2 *R1 - Ensure staff are sufficiently skilled to deal with the new demands of mediating, problem solving, negotiating and influencing with homeless people*

The Housing Solutions Service continues to ensure the ongoing development of its staff by regularly reviewing training needs, through the completion of an annual Training Needs Analysis and Worksmart review. Officers are also encouraged to attend relevant training courses, recent examples include NOW medical training which was held jointly with neighboring local authorities, Adverse Childhood Experiences training and Shelter Cymru best practice events. The team also take part in multi-agency meetings to ensure that they are fully conversant with complex cases and have the ability to effectively negotiate and problem solve.

- 6.3 *Review and reconfigure services to engage more effectively with homeless and*

### *potentially homeless people to prevent homelessness*

Following a review of the Housing Solutions Service in 2017, surgeries were introduced at all customer care centres around the Borough to increase the opportunities for members of the public to speak to an officer about their housing situation. These surgeries continue to be successful and well attended, averaging about 10 enquiries a day, and work is now in progress to improve collaboration and joint working between Housing Solutions Officers and support workers, through the collocation of Housing Solutions Officer and crisis support workers to provide joint support to service users. Effective use is also being made of communication techniques, with greater use of email and text messaging being employed by officers; in conjunction with the use of letters, to encourage more effective engagement with service users. The use of text messaging has proved so successful that it is now being extended across the Housing Service to include the Supporting People Gateway and the Temporary Accommodation service.

In addition to the weekly surgeries, through the WG Supporting People Programme, the Supporting People Team are commissioning a weekly drop in service, provided by the Pobl Group, which is open to anyone seeking advice or information about housing and housing related support. The aim of the “drop in” service is to offer flexibility for people to access support at a suitable time and venue and to actively seek support by themselves, should they need it, or as directed by professionals throughout Torfaen. In the first 3 months, the service was used 179 times and the three main reasons for seeking assistance were:

- Housing Advice
- Homeseeker advice / application
- Benefits advice

Work is also ongoing to consider the effectiveness of the Housing Solutions Service in dealing with demand and to explore options for greater preventative approaches, such as earlier referrals for housing related support at the initial point of contact. Comparisons are being carried out between Torfaen and other local authorities in Wales to see how the authority is performing against other councils which are experiencing high levels of demand. This work will help to identify examples of best practice and highlight any approaches that can be adopted locally to improve service delivery in Torfaen.

#### 6.4 *R2 - Review the funding of homelessness services to ensure that they can continue to provide the widest possible preventative approach needed*

Budget pressures remain an issue in Torfaen, with year on year savings impacting on front line delivery. The Housing Service has made effective use of WG Homeless Prevention Grant Funding to assist households who are at risk of homelessness and to increase the amount of temporary accommodation stock available, for use by the local authority. Effective use has also been made of the Supporting People Programme Grant to deliver greater levels of support and reduce the risk of households becoming homeless. This has included the funding of a dedicated Young Person Housing Officer, a Mental Health Liaison Officer, and a Financial Inclusion Service; to assist households that are struggling to maintain or access accommodation due to financial hardship.

Utilising the grant in this way has helped to reduce the pressure on the core Housing budget and implement changes, such as better provision of temporary accommodation, which will benefit the service long term. However, it is important to note, that without Homeless Prevention Grant and Supporting People Programme Grant, the Housing Solutions Service would not be able to deliver the level of homelessness prevention, assistance and advice that it does currently. So whilst Torfaen continues to review the funding of its homelessness services and identify opportunities to lever in additional financial support where possible, to ensure that they can continue to provide the widest possible preventative approach needed, any changes to the budget or to grant funding will drastically impact on service delivery.

- 6.5 *R3 - Design services to ensure there is early contact with service users; use 'triage' approaches to identify and filter individuals seeking help to determine the most appropriate response to address their needs; and test the effectiveness of first point of contact services to ensure they are fit for purpose.*

The introduction of weekly surgeries at the Job Centre and Torfaen Customer Care Centres has enabled the Housing Solutions Service to make early contact with service users and direct them to the most appropriate services and support. Following colocation of Housing Officers and Support Officers in the Torfaen Voluntary Alliance office, provision will be further improved, helping to ensure that service users receive the best possible assistance, before their situation deteriorates further.

- 6.6 *R4 - Publish service standards that clearly set out what their responsibilities are and how they will provide services to ensure people know what they are entitled to receive and what they must do for themselves.*

A statement regarding homelessness is published on the Council's website and is reviewed periodically. This helps to explain the assistance, service users may reasonably expect, including homelessness legislation and the Housing Solutions services provided, including; a personal housing plan, out of hours contact details and other housing related support services (**appendix 3**).

Due to the complexity of Homeless law, the Housing Solutions service has developed a guide and leaflet following publication of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and WG Code of Guidance, to assist stakeholders in understanding their rights and obligations (**appendix 4**). Housing Solutions Officers also signpost to Shelter Cymru (who are able to provide legal support and advice) and other services (ranging from third sector to statutory) that may independently advise, support or advocate on behalf of service users as appropriate. This helps to ensure that service users are fully aware of the assistance that is available to them and the support they are entitled to receive.

- 6.7 *R5 - Make better use of websites to help manage demand*

Torfaen continues to ensure that all current information about housing is available on the Council's Corporate website, whilst the Housing Service continues to promote housing options through its dedicated housing website; Torfaen Homes. The website is regularly promoted at events throughout Torfaen, most recently at the Cwmbran Big Event, Blaenavon Heritage Day and Pontypool

Party in the Park. Extensive use is also made of social media, to ensure that housing information is widely disseminated and easily accessible.

6.9 *R6 - Set out and agree expectations of partners identifying how they will work together to alleviate homelessness*

Torfaen works well with its partners and continues to identify ways in which more collaborative approaches can be adopted to help alleviate homelessness. Through the Homeseeker Steering Group and Homeseeker Operational Group, Torfaen and its Registered Social Landlord partner's regularly review access to social housing in Torfaen, identifying potential barriers and working to reduce these to limit the threat of homelessness. Similarly the Torfaen Supporting People and Homelessness Inclusive Forum meets regularly to discuss and debate key initiatives with a view to mitigating homelessness.

Located within Torfaen Housing Service, the Supporting People Gateway helps ensure that access to support services delivered by partners is efficient and effective, so that people in need of urgent assistance are referred to the most appropriate service in a quick and efficient manner. Gateway Officers regularly review the referrals and meet with service providers to ensure staff are sufficiently trained and fully conversant in the requirements of the Gateway process, setting out the expectations of the Supporting People programme.

As a shared Social Care & Housing Service there is also excellent partnership working with Social Care colleagues and a collaborative infrastructure in place. Housing Solutions Officers work closely with Social Care and RSL colleagues both at an operational case by case level to prevent and cater for homelessness, and also at a strategic, service design level, with a view to mitigating and preventing homelessness across the borough.

6.10 *R7 - Address weaknesses in their equalities monitoring*

Equalities data is routinely captured as part of the homeless application process and information submitted to Welsh Government via quarterly statistical returns. Equalities data is also collected via the Homeseeker application process and via service user satisfaction questionnaires, which are reported on a quarterly basis to the Homeseeker Steering Group. Further equalities data is also collected via the Supporting People Programme. The collection of this wide range of data enables the Housing Service to effectively monitor equalities and ensure that services are effectively meeting the needs of all members of the community.

The Homelessness Review takes specific account of vulnerable groups and protected characteristics, ensuring that they were involved in the consultation process during the development of the review and that their needs and requirements were identified.

6.11 *R8 - Undertake a self-assessment of services, to help identify options to improve how they can help manage demand.*

To effectively deliver services and meet demand, the Housing Solutions Service regularly reviews its processes and seeks to identify areas for improvement. The 2017 internal review of the Housing Solutions Service, identified a need for

greater levels of front line provision, which led to the introduction of surgeries and home visits, to further improve the management of housing need and demand. The effectiveness of these changes are still being monitored, but to date the surgeries are proving to be very successful, whilst the locating of Housing Solutions Officers into frontline offices has not only allowed service users greater access to the Housing Service, but it has led to better working relationships with colleagues and helped to increase their knowledge and understanding of the work that the Housing Solutions Service does. Now that these surgeries have move to the Job Centre and Torfaen Voluntary Alliance offices, it is anticipated that these same benefits will be achieved, leading to greater joined up working across all sectors.

Consideration is also being given to the role of the Supporting People Programme in assisting the Housing Solutions Service to meet demand. In particular, the role that support providers can play in addressing low level housing support needs at an early stage, will help to prevent situations deteriorating and reduce the number of households contacting the Housing Solutions Service, enabling them to focus on the alleviation of homelessness for more complex cases.

Whilst the homelessness review provides a comprehensive and robust insight into the assessment of both the Housing Solutions Service and wider services operating within the locality and across the region that help prevent and alleviate homelessness.

## **7. Decisions to be made**

- 7.1 The Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been asked to:
- Consider the draft local homelessness review and draft regional homelessness strategy, and to feedback accordingly.
  - Consider the progress made in meeting the requirements of the WAO report.

## **8. Expected outcomes**

- 8.1 Scrutiny Members to identify opportunities for ensuring that the strategy effectively supports the prevention of homelessness locally and regionally, and ensure that the needs of households at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, are proactively and more suitably met through a range of service provision.
- 8.2 Scrutiny Members to consider the progress made in meeting the WAO report recommendations and provide feedback.

## **9. Issues and Findings**

- 9.1 The development of a local homelessness review and homelessness strategy is now a statutory duty on all local authorities in Wales and it is important that these are carried out in the most robust, transparent, efficient and effective manner, to reduce duplication and save time and resources.
- 9.2 Torfaen experiences many similar pressures to its neighbours when seeking to

address homelessness, with each local authority often having the same priorities and objectives. So it was considered practical to pool both time and resources, by carrying out reviews in tandem and developing a regional homelessness strategy.

9.3 Following extensive consultation and regular meetings with the project working group, the Regional Research Officer has successfully developed a comprehensive draft review of each local authority area and a draft regional homelessness strategy, which informed the development of a regional action plan and local action plan for delivering homelessness services across Gwent. Some of the key findings from the Review included:

- Social housing is becoming much harder to access in Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen, leading to increased reliance on other types of housing such as the private rented sector.
- Torfaen had the fourth highest use of foodbanks across Wales in 2017. Local authorities working with social and private landlords throughout Gwent is absolutely imperative, especially to prevent tenancies ending in the first place.
- Improving systems and support for households moving on from temporary and supported housing should be a key focus.
- Proportionally 16 to 24 year olds, single person households and males, are over-represented when accessing homelessness services and are likely to require additional support moving forward.
- People experiencing repeat homelessness are less likely to be living in stable long-term housing.
- Councils should consider how they can further record and evidence the preventative work that is undertaken to stop homelessness (including in connection with homelessness and related services, such as Supporting People funded services)
- During the consultation process, users of homelessness services in Torfaen identified relationship breakdown or parents no longer willing to accommodate them as the most common reason for homelessness.

These findings have been factored into the strategic objectives of the draft Homelessness Strategy, which have been used to develop the Regional and Local Action Plans.

9.4 After the development of the draft Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness Strategy, the Regional Officer Working Group met together to start to develop a draft Regional Action Plan, identifying those issues that occurred in more than one local authority area and deciding on a possible regional approach for addressing them. The draft Regional Action Plan is complimented by the development of Local Action Plans, which set out how Torfaen (and respective local authorities separately) will seek to address those issues that are specific to the borough, such as the limited amount of provision for rough sleepers. The success of the Regional Working Group has been the ability to explore options for pooling resources and influence to deliver outcomes that could not be achieved by one local authority in isolation, such as seeking to establish a regional 'Discharge from Hospital' protocol with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, and working collaboratively to provide mutual assistance in respect of providing temporary accommodation. Through the

development of the draft Regional Action Plan, it is anticipated that some of these issues may now be addressed, benefitting both Torfaen and its partners in neighbouring authorities.

9.5 Local authorities have a duty under section 62 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, to carry out an assessment of any person who has applied for assistance in retaining or obtaining accommodation due to homelessness or the risk of homelessness. Following the section 62 assessment, the local authority must determine the level of assistance required to best meet the applicant’s needs and inform the applicant what duties, if any, are owed under this Section. The duties that the Council may have are:

- Section 60 - Duty to provide advice and assistance
- Section 62 - Duty to carry out an assessment
- Section 66 - Duty to help to prevent homelessness
- Section 68 - Duty to provide temporary accommodation
- Section 73 – Duty to help to secure suitable accommodation
- Section 75 – Duty to provide settled accommodation

9.6 The following table provides details of the number of people who have contacted the local authority for assistance over the last 3 years and the level of assistance that they received:

<b>Homeless Duty</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
<b>Section 60/62</b>	N/A *	877**	517
<b>Section 66</b> ( <i>duty ended at this stage</i> )	333	432	427
<b>Section 73</b> ( <i>duty ended at this stage</i> )	147	315	395
<b>Section 75</b> ( <i>duty ended at this stage</i> )	69	66	42

\* Local authorities not required to record via Welsh Government WHO12 returns until 2016/17.

\*\* Total number of households assessed in 2016/17.

9.7 The number of people contacting the service is a useful indication of levels of demand and can provide some understanding of the effectiveness of the service in meeting housing needs. However, depending on the circumstances of the individuals, there will be situations where it is not possible to alleviate homelessness despite the concerted efforts of the officers.

9.8 In 2017/18, 427 households were assisted at Section 66 (duty to help prevent homelessness), but only 246 were successfully prevented from becoming homeless. However, only 74 of the 427 were actually unsuccessful cases, many of the other cases were closed as a result of the applicant not co-operating with the Housing Solutions Service or because their application for assistance was withdrawn due to loss of contact, circumstances which were beyond the control of the Housing Service. Applicants that were unsuccessfully prevented from becoming homeless, were often those whose situation could not be resolved, despite the best efforts of the Housing Solutions Service. Some common examples include the failure of mediation between interested parties or landlords serving a Section 21 notice. Section 21 notices allow a landlord to reclaim their property from a tenant, regardless of whether any tenancy breach exists. In these cases, therefore, it is very difficult to prevent homelessness.

9.9 So when evaluating the effectiveness of the Housing Solutions Service and its

ability to prevent homelessness, it is important to take an holistic approach and give consideration to other factors, to determine how effectively the service is working, such as customer feedback, the support provided and the interventions used to prevent homelessness. The Housing Solutions Service currently employ a wide range of interventions to alleviate homelessness wherever possible. These have included referrals for support, rent in advance, bonds, payments of rent arrears, income maximisation (via the Financial Inclusion service) and negotiations with landlords, family and friends to identify options for enabling a person to remain in their current home.

- 9.10 One of the greatest challenges for preventing homelessness and meeting the aims of the strategy is the lack of suitable affordable housing and adequate support for those with complex needs. More people are relying on assistance from the local authority to address their housing needs, whereas previously many were able to meet their housing needs through alternative routes. Accessing the private rented sector remains a challenge with high deposits and rents, making the sector unaffordable for many. House prices have placed owner occupation beyond the reach of many households and high mortgage costs has increased the risk of homelessness to those already on the property ladder. It is not surprising, therefore, that demand for financial inclusion services in Torfaen remains high.
- 9.11 Greater levels of complex need is also affecting demand for housing services, with more people in need of support to live independently or to resolve their housing situation. Demand for support services in Torfaen remain high, with the Supporting Gateway receiving **1160** referrals between January and June 2018.
- 9.12 With more complex cases presenting to the Housing Solutions Service for assistance, there are significant resource implication which are creating a challenge for the service. Case work is more demanding, with officers having to spend a greater amount of time liaising with a wide range of services to ensure that the needs of the service user are being adequately met. The introduction of the Young Person Housing Officer and the Mental Health Liaison Officer, both of whom work with homeless households, has eased some of the pressure on the Housing Solutions Service, but these posts are funded through Supporting People Grant and are subject to the continuation of this grant programme. Should funding cease, it would not be possible to fund these posts through core budget.
- 9.13 To mitigate against the risks of not meeting service demand, the Housing Solutions Service have sought to make innovative use of WG Homeless Prevention Grant, to ensure the sufficient supply of temporary accommodation. This has resulted in less use of expensive Bed and Breakfast accommodation and led to an overall reduction in the amount the Local Authority spends on temporary accommodation, as evidenced in the table below. The difference between the amount spent on temporary accommodation in 2012/13 and 2017/18 was £200,000.

**Temporary Accommodation Costs**

2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
562,719.15	526,520.48	410,718.65	377,792.35	399,678.25	362,601.23

Torfaen is also working closely with its partners to ensure that an adequate

supply of housing is available for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, through close monitoring of the Homeseeker register, to guarantee an equitable allocation of homes to households in various levels of housing need. Negotiations continue between housing, planning and local developers to ensure that new sites deliver a range of homes across different tenures to meet the needs of a variety of residents, helping to further reduce demand for affordable housing and alleviate pressure on front line services.

9.14 The Housing Service is committed to ensuring that information about available services in Torfaen are well publicised and accessible. The Torfaen Homes website is regularly promoted via social media and community events and between April 2017 and March 2018, the 4 most visited pages on Torfaen Homes were;

- Private Rented Sector
- Waiting Time Calculator (for social housing)
- Help2Own Plus
- Finding Accommodation

Torfaen Homes was developed to act as a self-help tool and these figures suggests that many visitors are using it for that purpose, to explore the various options that currently exist and to resolve their housing needs by themselves. However, when it comes to homelessness, Torfaen Homes is utilised less frequently, with the page dedicated to homelessness, ranking as the 20<sup>th</sup> most popular page on the website.

9.15 Instead, the Council's corporate website seems to be the most popular place to acquire information about what to do when someone is at risk of homelessness, The homelessness page was the 3<sup>rd</sup> most visited page within the Housing section between April 2017 and March 2018 (after Homeseeker and the general housing page).

9.16 Addressing homelessness cannot be achieved solely by the local authority and requires the assistance of key partners' across the housing sector, as identified in Section 95 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Torfaen continues to ensure that its partners take an active role in alleviating homelessness and through the Homeseeker Steering Group, Homeseeker Operational Group, MARAC, MAPPA and other multiagency fora, it is possible to monitor performance of the partners and identify areas for improvement.

## **10. Consultation**

10.1 Throughout the development process, ongoing consultation has taken place with:

- Newport City Council; Monmouthshire County Council; Caerphilly County Borough Council and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Homelessness Managers.
- TCBC Housing Solutions Manager
- TCBC Supporting People Team Leader
- TCBC Group Manager Housing
- TCBC Head of Housing, Commissioning & Service Transformation
- TCBC Social Care & Housing Senior Management Team
- TCBC Chief Officer Social Care & Housing

- Welsh Government Housing Directorate
- Gwent Service Providers (associated with homelessness)
- Gwent users of homeless services (past and present)
- Tai Pawb, Cymorth Cymru, Shelter Cymru.
- Registered Social Landlords operating in Gwent

## **11. Implications**

- 11.1 There are a number of risks associated with not having a robust review and homelessness strategy in Torfaen:
- 11.1.1 Policy – without the review of homelessness services, which has identified levels of demand, it will be difficult to effectively forward plan and ensure that resources are in place to meet future housing and homelessness needs.
- 11.1.2 Legal – The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a statutory duty on every Local Authority in Wales to carry out a review and develop a homelessness strategy by 2018. Local Authorities also have a statutory duty to proactively prevent homelessness.
- 11.1.3 Financial – Failure to effectively plan for future service demand and implement preventative measures is likely to result in increased levels of homelessness, which will place additional financial pressures on the local authority.
- 11.1.4 Communication – The draft Homelessness Strategy and subsequent actions will provide a clear vision of how the Gwent local authorities will seek to address homelessness and raise awareness of the support services available to assist people who are at risk of homeless.
- 11.1.5 Personnel – The appointment of the Regional Research Officer, which was jointly commissioned by the five local authorities, significantly reduced the pressure on existing services to carry out a review and develop a draft strategy.
- 11.1.6 Social Inclusion and Equalities – The draft review and draft homelessness strategy has identified levels of demand for homelessness services and those issues which are affecting access to and the retention of a home. This will assist local authorities to plan service to ensure that residents, especially those that are vulnerable, can access the necessary assistance that they require and eradicate social exclusion.
- 11.1.7 Partners and service users – Consultation took place with key partners and service users, to facilitate the opportunity to effectively influence the development of the strategy, and to ensure that it adequately addresses concerns and is robust enough to effectively address homelessness
- 11.1.8 Business community – If the draft homelessness strategy fails to address homelessness, this will lead to an increased level of demand for services and greater pressure on the public purse. However, if demand is more effectively measured and addressed, then better coordinated commissioning of services and greater partnership working can be achieved, which will bring benefits to the business community.

- 10.1.9 Sustainability – The draft Homelessness Strategy will ensure that services in Gwent are more fit for purpose, to effectively address homelessness and create greater sustainability of tenancies and homes.
- 10.1.10 Crime and disorder – The draft review and homelessness strategy will cater for vulnerable groups at risk and those with a history of offending including MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) and MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) arrangements at both a local and Gwent-wide level.

## **11. Risks**

- 11.1 Risks – Failure to develop a clear and effective homelessness strategy and action plan, which sets out how homelessness prevention and housing needs will be met in the next four years will limit the ability of each local authority to improve the delivery of homelessness services and vital opportunities to work regionally to address homelessness will be missed.

## **12. Actions to be taken following consideration by the scrutiny committee**

- 12.1 The draft Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy will be submitted to Welsh Government by December 2018.

## **13. Monitoring and evaluation**

- 13.1 The Gwent Officer Working Group will finalise, implement and monitor progress of the regional action plan, which identifies opportunities for joint working and collaboration. The Group will continue to meet regularly to review progress against the action plan and develop services on a joint or regional basis as applicable.
- 13.2 Torfaen is currently develop its own Local Homelessness Action Plan, identifying specific pressures and opportunities to address homeless and setting out how these will be achieved. This action plan will be complete by December 2018 and reviewed on a 6 monthly basis.

## **14. Conclusion/summary**

- 14.1 The draft Local Homelessness Review and Regional Homelessness Strategy has provided Torfaen with a valuable cache of evidence that will enable the local authority to assess levels of service demand, the availability of resources and effectively plan future homelessness prevention service delivery on both a local and regional basis.

Torfaen Housing Service has been proactive in addressing the recommendations from the Wales Audit Office review and progress against these also link to the overarching strategy and regional/local actions.

## **15. Suggested scrutiny activity**

The Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been asked to:

- Consider the approach taken for developing the local homelessness review and regional homelessness strategy, and to feedback accordingly.
- Review the progress that has been made in meeting the WAO recommendations for addressing homelessness.

<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix 1 - Project Start Up Document Appendix 2 - Draft Homelessness Strategy Appendix 3 - <a href="#">Homeless Statement on TCBC website</a> Appendix 4 - Housing Solutions Service Leaflet
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<b>Background Papers</b>	<p><b>Note: Members of the public are entitled, under the Local Government Act 1972, to inspect background papers to reports. The following is a list of the background papers used in the production of this report.</b></p> <p>Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (Welsh Government)          Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales 2009 (Welsh Government)          Code of Guidance to Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2016 (Welsh Government)          Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014          Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015          Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016</p>
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<p><b>For a copy of the background papers or for further information about this report, please telephone:</b></p> <p>Fiona Silverthorn, Service Transformation Officer, <a href="mailto:Fiona.Silverthorn@torfaen.gov.uk">Fiona.Silverthorn@torfaen.gov.uk</a>          01495 766876 or</p> <p>Elke Winton, Group Manager Housing, <a href="mailto:Elke.Winton@torfaen.gov.uk">Elke.Winton@torfaen.gov.uk</a> 01495 766176</p>
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## Appendix 1



# Project Start Up Document

<b>Name of Project</b>	Regional Homelessness Review and Strategy - 2018 to 2022	<b>Date Last Updated</b>	25/05/2018
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<b>Project Manager</b>	Chris York
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<b>Project Sponsor</b>	Elke Winton
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## 1. BACKGROUND AND BUSINESS CASE

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 took effect from 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015. The Act placed new duties on local duties in respect of homelessness. Key duties include:

- To help anyone threatened with homelessness within the next 56 days.
- To help provide help to any homeless person to help them secure a suitable home.
- New powers for Local Authorities to discharge their homelessness duty into the private rented sector.

**The Act also requires all local authorities in Wales to undertake a Homelessness Review and produce a Homelessness Strategy from that review.**

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 expects every local authority to work with service users and key local, statutory and voluntary organisations to carry out the review. The Homelessness Strategy should then be published and homelessness reviewed every four years thereafter.

Torfaen County Borough Council; Newport City Council; Monmouthshire County Council; Caerphilly County Borough Council and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council have all pooled their resources to take a regional approach to developing a strategy that encompasses all five authorities. The Welsh Government's Code of Guidance to Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2016 supports regional working.

A Regional Research Officer (RRO) position was created as a dedicated resource for six months (01 November 2017 to 30 April 2018) to undertake the work. Out of the approved strategy each local authority will be required to produce their own Homelessness Action Plans, directly influenced and cascading from the strategy.

Taking a regional approach has enabled the five partners to share the cost of the RRO position.

## 2. KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

- Produce a Homelessness Review (approved by all members of the project team) within the specified timescale – which provides a basis for a strategy to tackle and prevent homelessness and build upon the work already being undertaken in each of the five local authorities.
- Provide the Homelessness Leads with a draft Homelessness Strategy to present to their respective Cabinets/Council for approval, outlining the key themes to focus on to: prevent, accommodate and support people who are or may become homeless, over the next four years (with each partners' individual Homelessness Action Plans providing specific tasks/detail).
- Develop an understanding of the accessibility of homelessness services for service users in the five local authorities and the homelessness resources that are available.
- Engage with individuals who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to produce the Review, so that their experiences and expectations inform the work directly and in-turn, influence the strategy.
- To ensure that appropriate local authority officers and external stakeholders and service providers are able to channel their expertise effectively into the development of the Review and Strategy.
- Along with qualitative data, analyse quantitative homelessness data to develop the Review and again influence the strategy.
- Develop the Review and Strategy in line with Welsh government legislation and guidelines e.g. consider the current levels and likely future levels of homelessness, within the next four years.
- Produce a draft Strategy that is succinct, accessible and a working document, with the review acting as evidence to fully inform the Strategy.
- Explore opportunities for further partnership working in relation to homelessness going forward (amongst the five local authorities) and make recommendations for improvements to future service delivery.

## 3. PHASES

### Phase 1

- Desktop research, including analysing available quantitative data (e.g. WHO12) and planning the project. Analyse past and likely future levels of homelessness. Consider equality and diversity. RRO will attend key forums, meetings and events e.g. Homeless Network, Supporting People Information Network, Gwent Regional Collaborative Committee, local meetings (Supporting People and Homelessness Inclusive Forum etc).
- Create start-up document and project plan – approved by Regional Project Team.
- Agree Communication Plan (including Welsh Language implications) and Consultation Plan and sign-off with Regional Project Team.
- Regional Project Team to agree draft mission, vision and value statements for the project – RRO to draft using Welsh Government direction.
- Engage with staff at Regional Partner Organisations: RRO to visit each one to undertake focus groups to carry out SWOT/PESTL analyses and also capture recommendations to develop service delivery going forward (see Communication Plan to see who will be involved).

### Phase 2

- Engage with service users: using semi-structured interviews and SNAP software

(utilising links with service providers to accomplish). Factor in equality and diversity.

- Engage with external stakeholders and providers: one consultation event. Review/audit the services aimed at preventing, accommodating and supporting people who are or may become homeless (again, utilising links with service providers to accomplish).
- To help anchor phase 2, careful consideration will be given to: What do we want to know? Why do we want to know it? What's the best way to find out?

#### Phase 3

- Analyse the quantitative and qualitative review data and draw out strategic objectives /conclusions/recommendations - to inform strategic action plans.
- Draft Homelessness Review Report and circulate to Project Team, for sign off.

#### Phase 4

- Draft 'one page' Homelessness Strategy/Strategic Objectives and RRO to circulate to Project Team (including setting goals that convert strategic objectives into specific performance targets)
- RRO to hand over implementation to the Project Team Leads.

#### Phase 5

- Designated Officer to circulate 'one page strategy' amongst all stakeholder leads involved in the review, inviting further comments (would also include the mission, vision and value statements for the strategy), before finalising and Project Team Leads taking forward for approval with their respective Cabinets/Councils). Leads to arrange to also take forward staff/stakeholder training, organise communication and roll-out of the strategy; the setting of specific actions (with task owners and timescales) for each local authority to secure the strategic goals; the development of performance indicators and ongoing management of strategic actions/goals.

## 4. PROJECT TEAM

### **Members:**

Elke Winton (Torfaen County Borough Council)  
Sheryl Thomas (Torfaen County Borough Council)  
Chris York (Torfaen County Borough Council)  
Suzanne Cousins (Caerphilly County Borough Council)  
Mark Congreve (Blaenau Gwent)  
Simon Rose (Newport City Council)  
Stephen Griffiths (Monmouthshire County Council)

## 5. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Will be managed within the health and safety systems operated by Torfaen County Borough Council.

## 6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

Access to homelessness support/services will play a key part of the review. Consideration will be given to services from a homeless person's point of view, particularly in relation to the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 and to the vulnerable groups contained within Section 70 of the Housing (Wales) 2014 Act. RRO will engage with independent representative organisations as applicable e.g. Tai Pawb/SEWREC, to complete the project.

## **7. IT IMPLICATIONS**

None are anticipated during completion of this project. Recommendations from the homelessness review may have IT implications if taken forward though e.g. sharing services. Technology will be used to communicate the project and its progress to stakeholders, partners, providers, service users and the wider public as appropriate.

## **8. RISK ANALYSIS AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

Medium risk in relation to delivering the project. There is significant financial risk to all five local authorities, if their homelessness services perform poorly going forward, especially if there is an unanticipated surge in homelessness demand.

## **9. RESOURCES**

The RRO will co-ordinate and deliver the majority of the project plan tasks (post funded equally be each local authority through the Homelessness Prevention Grant). The stakeholder event will be funded through the same grant as will Welsh translation services.

Any additional support needed to complete the project will be delivered by Regional Partner Leads and co-opted staff/partners as required.

No additional resources are expected to be needed to deliver this project.

## **10. COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION**

Communication and Consultation plans will be created by the RRO and signed off by the Regional Project Team. Technology will be used to raise awareness of the project and encourage participation as appropriate e.g. email, blogs, social media and partners' websites. Teams/Partners affected by the review will be updated via meetings. Communications will be a rolling agenda item for Project Team meetings.

## **11. QUALITY CONTROL**

The draft review will be circulated to the Regional Leads for comments before sending to stakeholders, partners and providers to invite further comments. The final report will be approved and signed off by the Regional Homelessness Leads. The strategy will require approval by each of the five local authorities' Cabinets.

## **12. TIMESCALES**

Phase 1 – completed by 14.01.18.

Phase 2 – completed by 28.02.18.

Phase 3 – completed by 31.03.18.

Phase 4 - completed by 30.04.18.

Phase 5 - Welsh Government have confirmed that the regional homelessness strategy needs to be operational by 31.12.18.

# Gwent Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2022



**VISION:** Everyone in Gwent has a home to live in and the right support if they need it, to lead a fulfilling life.



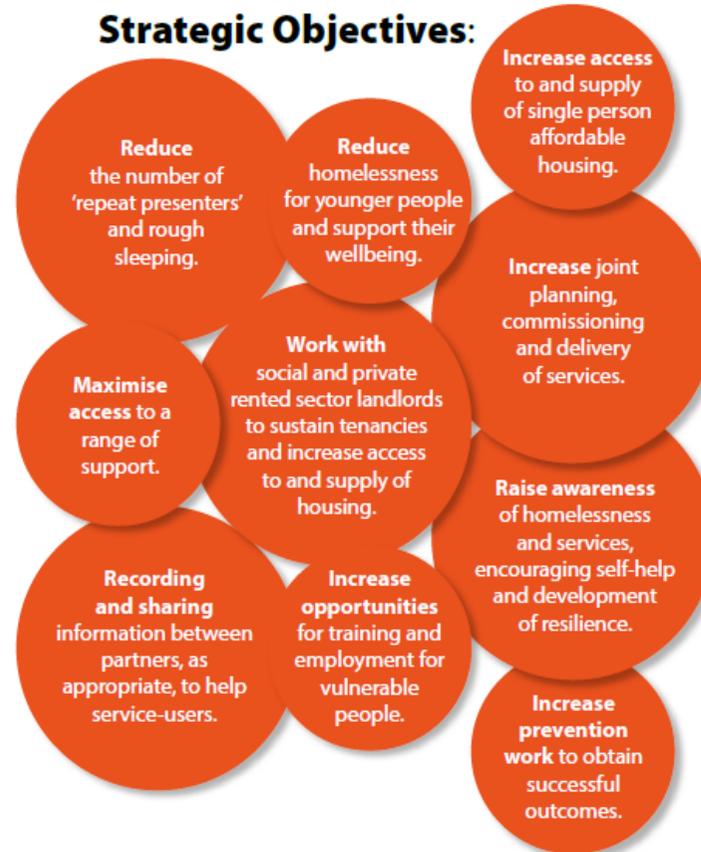
**MISSION:** Work together to overcome homelessness in Gwent.



**VALUES:** Listening; Collaborative; Innovative and Accountable.



## Strategic Objectives:



**Appendix 3 - [Homeless Statement on TCBC website](#)**

**Appendix 4 – Housing Solutions Service Leaflet below**